

ETHNOGRAPHY OF RESISTANCE POETICS

POWER AND AUTHORITY
IN SALALE OROMO FOLKLORE
AND RESISTANCE CULTURE

Ethiopia, Northeast Africa

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Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology
Indiana University

June 2015

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dissertation Defense: May 6, 2015

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Yaa Badhoo kiyya
maal katamaa maashoon boba'u?
Yaa Badhoo kiyya!
ajjeftanii nurra hin deeminaa,
damiin carqii miti hin moofa'uu!

* * *

Oh, Badhoo,
what is up in the town, lamp is lit?
your dream that I knit!
Let them never step over our dead,
not worn out; it clots – our blood that they shed!

For

My father, the late Tefera Dibaba Jini,
and
My mother, Aragash Sambata Tokkon

who sparked my future
in their narratives of
perseverance and aptness:

*Gadaa dabre hin fiigan,
biiftuu jirtu sussukan,
meaning,
Time was, time never is.*

Acknowledgments

I owe gratitude to many people and institutions who encouraged me to be where I am and who contributed a great deal into the completion of this study. First, I am most grateful to my father, the late Tefera Dibaba, and my mother, Aragash Sambata, who kindled my future in their words of perseverance and diligence and shouldered the unbearable burden of educating me from the time I was a herd-boy. Their narratives mediated on the passage of time and the futility of memory, on the idea of the past and future only a heartbeat away, and on the need to work in the present against just this rush of life, which can be so daunting without thoughtful guidance.

My heartfelt thanks go to my dissertation Chair, John McDowell, who constantly supplied the intellectual encounters and provided moral support that sustained my development as a graduate student. Throughout the course of my studies and while working on my dissertation, I have benefited a great deal from his brainstorming ideas and encouragements. Over the years, as my mentor, advisor, and professor, he has been patient enough to provide me with insightful suggestions and opportunities. My warmest indebtedness also goes to my research committee: Beverly Stoeltje, Gregory Schrempp, Marvin Sterling, and Gracia Clark, who read my dissertation in its initial draft and whose comments have been constructive. I have had the good fortune to work with my research committee and this dissertation has been shaped by our consistent discussions. They share no responsibility for any errors I have made. I am deeply grateful to Marvin Sterling for his dedication to read thoroughly the preliminary drafts and revisions and for his thoughtful suggestions. I am fortunate enough also to have had the guidance of Gregory Schrempp for taking an interest in my topic and for his constructive comments which shaped the present dissertation significantly. I would like to thank Gracia Clark who kindly

provided me with valuable resources and for her teaching me the “Life History” method. I am also grateful to Indiana University Graduate School for the generous funding for my dissertation. I am particularly grateful to Dean Yolanda Trivino for her encouragement and considerate support.

This dissertation took its present form through a multitude of discussions and inquiries with scholars of various backgrounds both in the field and in academic settings. I am grateful to Daniel Reed and Christy True who generously offered me moral supports. I am also indebted to Moira Lorraine Marsh for her time and kind suggestions. Outside of the Indiana University other scholars who generously contributed their knowledge and time include Kyle, Ellie Macfarlane, Katharine Stewart, Dan Ben-Amos, Asafa Jalata, Mohammad Hassan, Tewodros Magarsa Gammada and the Oromo Community of Minnesota. I thank the ECC community in Bloomington, IN, for their commitment to stand constantly by my side during hard times: I should like to record my special thanks to Kyle for his tireless help and enthusiasm and Ellie for her time, interest, and patience to read my dissertation meticulously. I am also sincerely thankful to Katharine Stewart for her personal insights and for the liberty I cherished to correspond. I thank Dan Ben-Amos for his kind moral support. I have benefited a special learning experience from our personal discussions and email correspondence with Dan Ben-Amos since 2010. I am indebted to Asafa Jalata and Mohammad Hassan for their profound works, critique and wisdom have been invaluable in Oromo studies. I am grateful to Tedy Magarsa Gammada and the Oromo Community of Minnesota for their unfailing financial and moral support.

I am deeply indebted to the IIE/SRF that rescued me from repeated persecutions and imprisonment in Ethiopia after I was awarded the 2009/2010 Scholars Fellowship. I also remain ever grateful to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) for the Doctoral Scholars Program, which allowed me to attend three annual Institute on Teaching and Mentoring conferences as a SREB Scholar.

I extend my sincere appreciation and gratitude once again to my Salale informants who are my lifetime informal teachers and who greatly contributed their deep knowledge into the present study. For my academic life and future scholarly growth, I owe much to the Salale community. My immense gratefulness also goes to Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, for sponsoring the data collection for the present study which took place in September 2009 to July 2010.

Last but not least, I owe a special debt of thanks to my family here in the US and in Oromia, Ethiopia. I thank Daniel, my youngest brother, also a PhD student in the School of Public Health, IUB, my children Ebba, Doti, Hene, and Hella, and Emanuel, Hanna and Emanu and their family, and Urge Fufa and Daimo, Samuel, Talile, Jije, Subi, Ayantu, and Abdanne Tefera Dibaba, all for their abiding love, constant moral support and thoughts.

Preface

This study is an attempt to provide folklorists, Africanists, and other scholars interested in resistance studies with some idea of grassroots resistance practices in Africa using case examples and ethnographic data obtained from Northeast Africa among the Salale Oromo in Ethiopia. Given the explosion of uneven development of capitalism and its effects, the rapid flow of information and capital, exploitative labor, and destructive technology, which exacerbate conflicts in the region centered on unequal distribution of resources, knowledge, and power, there is a need for critical study of grassroots resistance poetics. The imbalance between uneven development and unequal historical relationships in the region has been marked not only by progression and regression, as well as transgression, resistance, and collaboration but has also been characterized by integration and disintegration/dissociation of communities in the region. Today, any attempt to engage in so interdisciplinary a field as folklore is bound to be engaged, serious, and at the same time cautious about cultural representations of this instability, political irrationality, the divergent trends of the private and individual interest differing from public concern and the lack of common purpose and substantive ends or *kaawo*, and moral rules.

The present project came to my attention seven years back when I was teaching folklore in Addis Ababa University after which I was awarded the 2009/2010 IIE/SRF Scholars Fellowship and relocated to the US in July 2010. While I was teaching I came to be aware that sufficient attention was not paid to important areas of Oromo resistance against domination, and that folklore was overlooked as a vast terrain for this academic endeavour. As time went on I got to know a good many young and adult Salale Oromo who later became part of my present study

and to whom I owe much. The question that resonated with me the most was this one: under what circumstance could the Salale maintain their language, culture, and identity in spite of their long-time interaction with and influence of Abyssinian cultural and political domination? I began to inquire into the Salale historical tradition, religious practices, and folklore practices, and how these were passed down from one generation to another. I discovered that most of these young people, adults, and old men and women value most the places around them, the names and significance of ritual sites, sacred groves, ancestral graveyards, farms, caves, mountains, and rivers and sacred trees. Those names and meanings are marked with unique commemorative purposes in songs, narratives, and ritual performances as part of their “local knowledge,” which constitutes what I refer to as Salale ecopoetic practices and resistance poetics.

The initial motivation was to provide a critical analysis of this resistance poetics and the meaning of place to the Salale. To do so, my strategy in structuring the study has been to let the people speak for themselves, expressing their own meaning of resistance culture, bandit and banditry, sense of place in folkloric, cultural and historical context. Hence, the cultural and folkloric representations of transgression, social invisibility, and hidden injuries presented in this study are not mere rhetorical folkloric/literary depictions but actual political orientations of the Salale Oromo who story, sing and perform it out of their lived experience as part of textual strategy and discursive signification of their historical poetics.

Assefa Tefera Dibaba

ETHNOGRAPHY OF RESISTANCE POETICS

*Power and Authority in Salale Oromo Folklore
and Resistance Culture, Ethiopia, Northeast Africa*

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary folkloristic search for resistance poetics in tradition-oriented folklore of the Salale Oromo in central Ethiopia using both a diachronic and a synchronic approach. The Salale are part of the Tulama branch of the Oromo nation who are engaged in a national liberation struggle. Drawing on critical ethnographic methods, this study provides a folkloristic outline of power and authority in the resistance culture of the people based on the data I collected in Salale in 2009 and 2010 through interviews, focus-group discussions, and participatory observations into the notion of “progressive folklore.”

The data shows that the meaning of Salale resistance poetics transcends the ephemeral common understanding of the resistance concept. Here resistance is not used as shorthand just to refer to social protest, peasant rebellion, or more preferably, banditry; it is rather the poetics of emancipatory act. An emancipatory resistance is not simply a strategic plan to change the status quo, oppositional to social change, or a strategy for temporary material gain. In the Salale social world, an emancipatory resistance is rather a spiritual engagement and necessitates a poetics of making, transforming, and escalating the struggle in spirit as in words and praxis. Its end goal is fundamental human freedom and protection for nonhumans from harm.

Methodologically speaking, the data shows that, the notion of resistance poetics is a locally grounded theoretical stance, namely, strategic traditionalism, social banditry, ecopoetic practices,

ethnic genres knowledge of verbal art, which constitute the “resistance poetics” and can be modeled into a high level analytical significance of critical ethnography to examine unequal power relations. The notion of “hidden resistance,” I argue, which we often read about in resistance studies is simplistic. It is simplistic because it centers exclusively on “deterministic economism” and “pragmatic resignation” of the subordinate to the dominant class.

Tradition is used as a subversive means of contra-posing cultural domination, political exclusion, and economic exploitation, particularly with respect to land and land resources, in a disempowering situation. An alternative Salale history is constructed from a micro-historical perspective in which folklore functions as a supplement to historical facts and to augment the folkloric models.

John McDowell, Ph.D, Chair

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Notes on Transliteration

As a guide in transliteration and pronunciation of Afaan Oromoo (Oromo Language), the following is a key with some examples on *vowels* and *consonants*.

Vowels

a – short –	as /a/ as in <i>lafa</i> /lafa/	=	land
aa – long –	as /a:/ as in <i>laafaa</i> /la:fa:	=	soft, mild
e – short –	as /ɛ/ as in <i>erbee</i> /ɛrbɛ:/	=	patch, hide
ee – long –	as /ɛ:/ as in <i>qeequu</i> /qɛ:qu:/	=	to critique
i – short –	as /i/ as in <i>iftaan</i> /ifta:n/	=	the day after tomorrow
ii – long –	as /i:/ as in <i>siiquu</i> /si:qu:/	=	whistle
o – short –	as /o/ as in <i>ona</i> /ona/	=	abandoned (house)
oo – long –	as /o:/ as in <i>foon</i> /fo:n/	=	beef, meat
u – short –	as /u/ as in <i>dur</i> /dur/	=	ancient
uu – long –	as /u:/ as in <i>duuba</i> /du:ba/	=	back, behind

Note: In Oromo Language, long vowels are doubled orthographically. Vowels cannot change without a pause or a break by an *apostrophe sign* /ʼ/ or a *consonant* between two vowels. Example: “ka’uu,” meaning, “to wake up” or “kora,” “assembly.” The break used can vary with dialects and interlocutor’s preferences. Example, in the Oromo equivalent of “*very, much, many*” the following variations are possible: “**baa’ee**,” “**baayee**,” “**baa’yee**,” as in this example, the apostrophe sign indicates that the vowels are produced independently and not as a diphthong.

Consonants

Glottalized Consonants

In Afaan Oromoo, the glottalized consonants are *c*, *q*, *x*, and *ph*. They can be described as explosive *ch*, *k*, *t*, and *p* sounds, respectively. See these examples.

c-	as /cʼ/ as in <i>cooma</i> /cʼo:ma/	=	fat (as in ‘ <i>fat free</i> ’)
q-	as /kʼ/ as in <i>qaama</i> /kʼa:ma/	=	body
x-	as /tʼ/ as in <i>xaaaxee</i> /tʼa:tʼɛ:/	=	popcorn
ph-	as /pʼ/ as in <i>phaalee</i> /pʼa:lɛ:/	=	hoe (small)

The double letters that count as single consonant sounds are *ph*, *dh*, *ch*, *sh*, and *ny*:

dh-	as /dʼ/ as in <i>dhadhaa</i> /dʼadʼa:/	=	butter
sh-	as /ʃ/ as in <i>shaambo</i> /ʃa:mbo:/	=	gourd (calabash)
ch-	as /tʃ/ as in <i>qoricha</i> /kʼoritʃa/	=	medicine

ny- as /n'/ as in *nyaara* /n'a:ra/ = eye lash

When doubled, consonants are highly stressed or geminated.

Examples:

badaa

hearth; unattractive; lost

qoluu

vying (*e.g. bulls vying for herd control*); throwing

baddaa

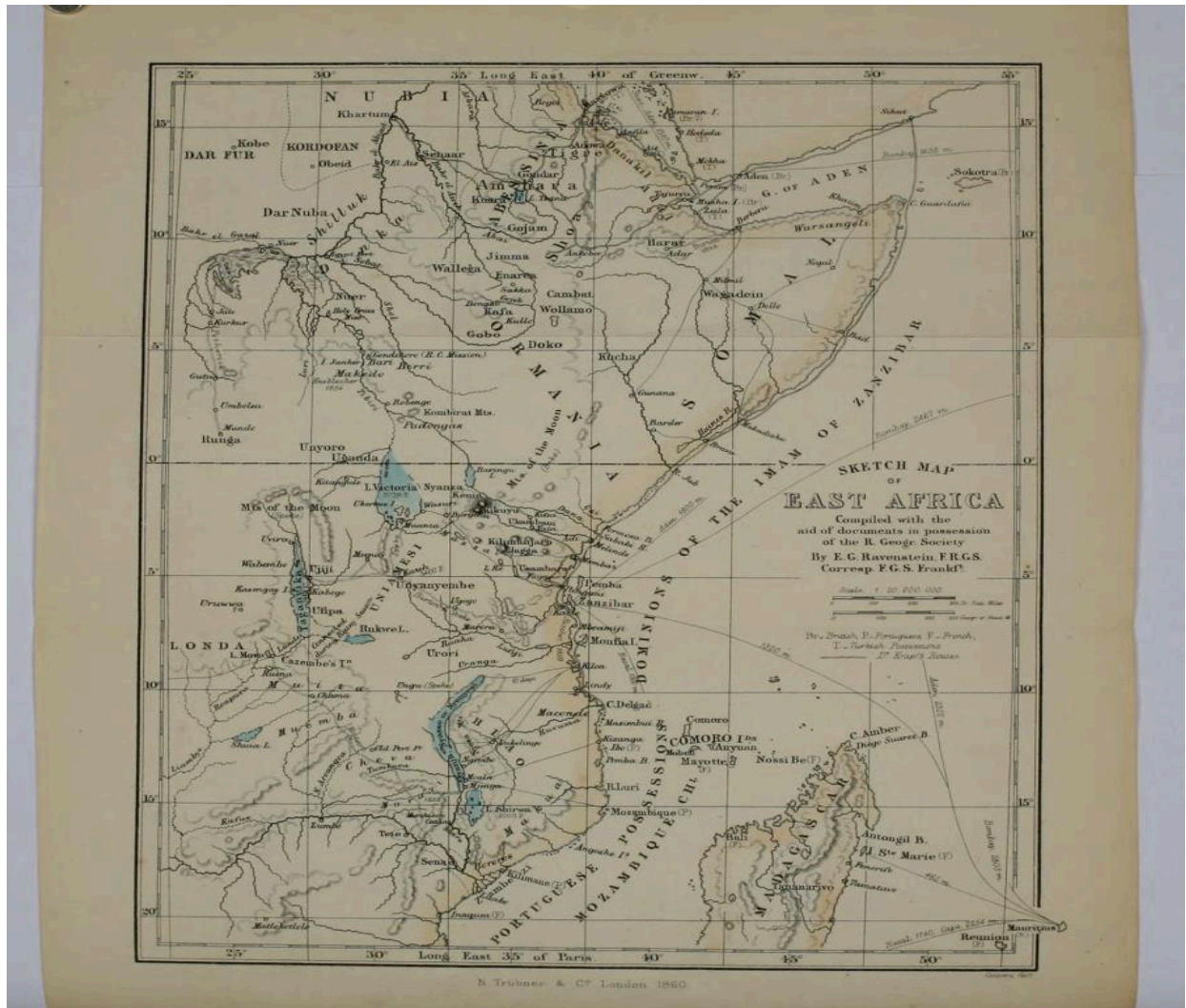
cold central highland (*e.g. Salale*) 3,400 to 2,700 metres

qollaa

hot lowland below 1,800 metres

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Map 1. Ormania (1860) later, Oromia

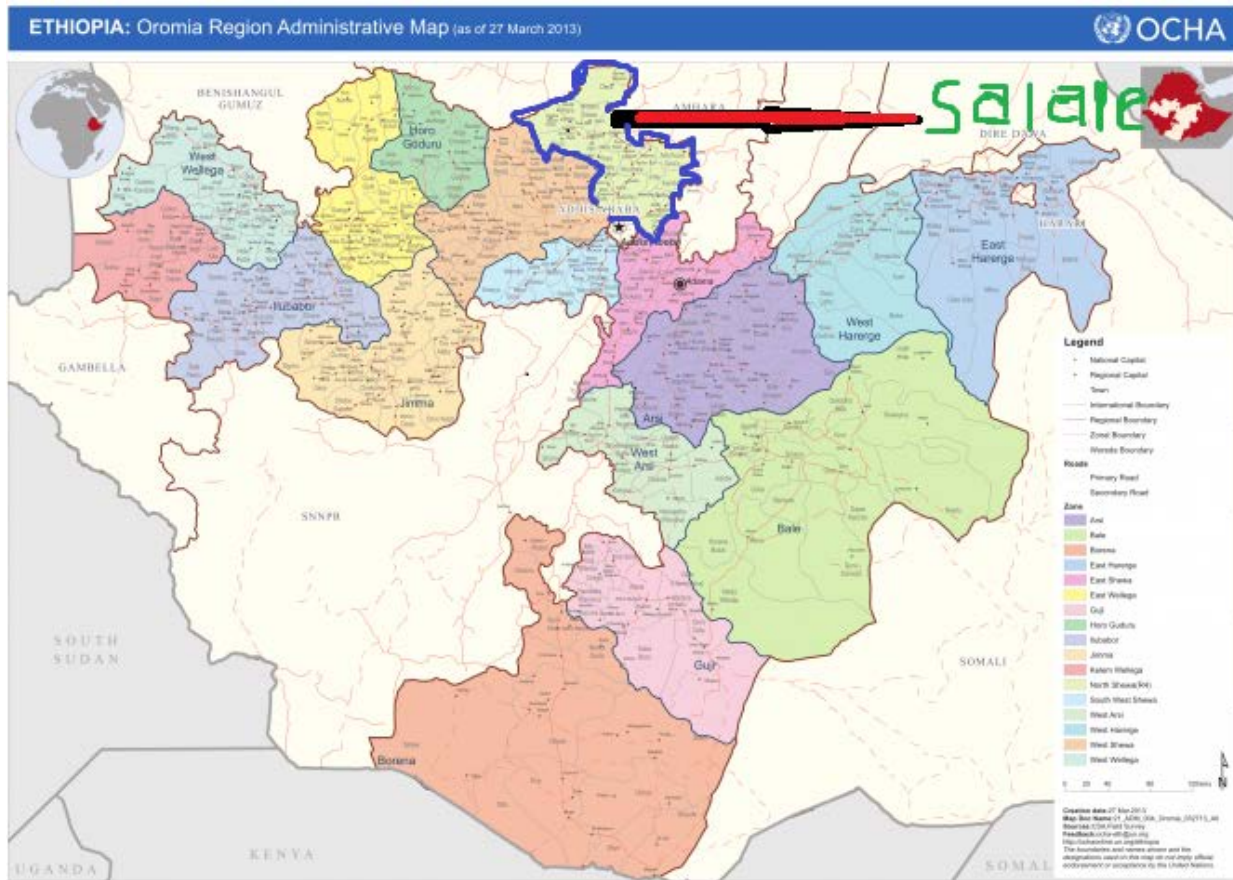
Note: Bas van Heur uses the “spatial imagination” of Oromia in his MA thesis as “shorthand,” i.e. not as a precise analytical category. The reason is that, in Heur’s view, the word “Oromia” does not occur in any texts before 1976. In his view it was in a nationalistic poetry of Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) that it first appeared in 1976. See Bas van Heur, “The Spatial Imagination of Oromia: the Ethiopian State and the Oromo Transnational Politics, 2004.” However, it is a sheer overlook to history since the word “Ormania,” that is, today’s *Oromia*, appeared in the Reverend J. Ludwig Krapf’s work (1860b). Krapf used to refer to the name of the land inhabited by the Oromo northwest of Somalia, south of Abyssinia and Nubia. (See the map above reproduced from Krapf’s *Travels*). In this study I use the word “Oromia,” as Asafa Jalata uses it, “interchangeably with the nation and the geographical location of the Oromo nation in the Horn of Africa.” See Asafa Jalata, 2005, p3. See also Tsega Etefa, 2012, p2ff.



Map 2. Oromia in the Northeast Africa (Horn of Africa)



Map 3. Oromia in present day Ethiopia



Map 4. Present day Oromia

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Salale horsemen

INTRODUCTION

Methods and Perspectives In Critical Resistance Study

*A people forced by fear to obey;
will by fear be forced to rebel*
—Seneca

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the problem and possibilities of folklore-oriented resistance culture among the Salale Oromo, Ethiopia. Thus, there are two goals to attain in this dissertation: first, on the surface, this study provides a first folkloristic outline of Salale Oromo experience set in central Ethiopia, based on the ethnographic data (narratives, folksongs, and rituals) I collected in Salale in 2009 and 2010. Second, a deeper meaning sought throughout this study is to identify and examine closely the sociocultural, economic, and political dynamics in the region using both a diachronic and a synchronic approach to understand the *resistance culture* of the people. Thus, in the present study, I posit, the *Salale resistance culture is not just an oppositional practice to change a status quo, or a strategic action (performance) simply for an immediate material gain, or cynical opposition to social change; rather, it is a continuous emancipatory act of seeking earnestly freedom, justice, and progress.* Toward this end goal, the people use folklore as symbolic performance, a creative resistance used as an alternative means of subversion while, historically, social banditry has been another insurgent practice in Salale resistance culture.

From the Salale Oromo perspective, if resistance is “hidden,” it does not appear to be resistance, hence, social banditry is an alternative means of rebellion; if it is “open,” it is warlike; therefore,

folklore is a safe haven where symbolic performance of subversion is brewed.¹ Despite the marginality and temporary nature of the results, the Salale resisted and/or strategically conformed to the systems to their advantage and to resist the dominant culture. In so doing, they made rational choices among other possible trajectories of action at the grassroots against domination. Thus, the aim of this study is to search for an appropriate interdisciplinary analytical tool to examine the role of Salale folklore performance and explore critically what goes on among the people in the oral context. In so doing, the end-goal of this research will be to provide folklorists and scholars of humanities and social sciences a new perspective on the Salale community to counterpose the mainstream history and dominant culture, and to look underneath the poverty and oppression of present-day rural peoples in Salale.

Background

The present day Ethiopia was created by highland rulers and settler colonizers with the military leadership of enticed Oromo warlords, particularly Ras Gobana, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² Menelik II (reigned, 1889-1913) embarked on his southern march, expansionist campaign, to expand his rule and establish his political and economic conquest from the central highland region of Shawa to the South, West and East of the country. The conquest

¹ James Scott's theory of "everyday forms of peasant resistance" centers on the notion of "deterministic economism" and "pragmatic resignation" of the subordinate to the dominant class. However, an "emancipatory resistance act" is a spiritual engagement, not just a materialistic sabotaging of economic means. It necessitates a poetics of "making," "transforming," and continuing the struggle through "words" and "praxis" to sustain resistance as an emancipatory act. See David Hoy's *Critical Resistance*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p2. See Mathew Gutmann's "Rituals of Resistance: a Critique of the Theory of Everyday Forms of Resistance," *Latin American Perspectives*, 1993/74, pp74-92, p78. See also my "God Speak to Us: Performing Power and Authority in Salale, Ethiopia," in *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 26/3, 2014, pp287-302).

²Brian J. Yates, "Christian Patriot or Oromo Traitor? The Ethiopian State in the Memories of Ras Gobäna Dače," *Northeast African Studies*, Volume 13, Number 2, 2013 (New Series), pp. 25-51; Tsega Etafa, *Integration and Peace in East Africa: a History of the Oromo Nation*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

gave the region the current map of Ethiopia, a country with nearly one hundred different ethnic groups trapped under one imperial rule.

Historically, Virginia Luling reminds us, “from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century the [Oromo] were dominant on their own territories; no people of other cultures were in a position to exercise compulsion over them.”³ In spite of the harsh sociocultural and political domination and economic exploitation since the second half of the 19th century, the Oromo survived brutal oppression under Abyssinian successive rulers and remained distinct with their own linguistic, cultural, and folkloristic features tied to their Cushitic origin.⁴ Like many African societies, the historiography of the Oromo has been revived on the basis of oral traditions.⁵ Available sources show that the Oromo were effectively organized under the *gada* egalitarian system during the 16th and 17th centuries until they were partitioned into Kenya and Ethiopia during the Scramble for Africa and conquered under the Abyssinian monarchic rule of Menilek II.⁶ The Salale Oromo of the Tulama branch in the heartland of Ethiopia suffered most; they endured brutal political suppression and economic exploitation due to geographical proximity and cultural contact with the Orthodox Christian Shewan Amharas, particularly since Sahle Selassie’s rule.⁷

³Virginia Luling, *Government and Social Control among Some Peoples of the Horn of Africa*, (MA thesis, University of London, 1965), cited in Asafa Jalata, 2005, p18.

⁴ Of the Cushitic origin of the Oromo and their presence in the Northeast Africa from antiquity, Tsega Etefa shares the view of Robert Collins and James Burns. They argue that “The first settlement on the coast were made before the Christian era by Cushitic-speaking pastoral people coming from Ethiopia and represented today by the Oromo of southern Ethiopia and the Somali...probably the ‘red men’ described in the *Periplus* as tall, hunters, and keepers of cattle, sheep, and goats.” See Tsega Etefa, *Integration and Peace in East Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p5, citing Robert Collins and James Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁵ Gada Melba, *Oromia: An Introduction to the History of the Oromo People* (Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers, 1999), pp10-13ff.

⁶ Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974*, (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995), p.xv.

⁷ See Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, “Salale Oromo: A History, 1840s to 1936,” an MA thesis (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 2003). Following the disintegration of *gadaa system*, clans were split into multiple sub-clans and local

Today, the new Ethiopian Constitution⁸ assigns supposedly extensive powers to the newly-created regional states divided sub-regionally into zones, districts (*woredas*), and kebeles. Kebeles or literally villages are products of the previous Derg regime overthrown in 1991 and in many ways considered as the fundamental unit and the smallest recognized division of local government having parallel administrative and judicial structures with districts. In practice kebeles serve as the primary level of institutions at local level. Theoretically Regional States in Ethiopia are endowed with self-rule, and almost a “semi-sovereign” status. Regional States have demarcated boundaries, a constitution, a flag, and a regional language used in school, in courts and public administrations.

Oromia is the most populous regional state in Ethiopia and is divided into zones with a total population of 35 million by the 2007 census. It is a region of vast geographical and ecological diversity and covers 141, 699.5mi² (367, 000km²), more than 30% of the country’s total area. Twelve of the twenty largest urban dwellings in Ethiopia are located within Oromia, with Finfinne (Addis Ababa), the capital being, at its center.⁹ The Constitution recognizes nations, nationalities and peoples “unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession” in Article 39. However, the Tigre-led coalition of the ruling party “has remained

chiefs emerged. Svein Ege argues, particularly, “The development of the Salale under Abba Moalle points to another factor of change, the influence of the Shawan state.” For more details, see Svein Ege, *Class, State, and Power in Africa*, (Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), p94.

⁸“Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,” <http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/et/et007en.pdf> Retrieved, May 2015; Cf. “Ethiopian Constitution of 1931,” states in its Article 1 that

“The territory of Ethiopia, in its entirety, is, from one end to the other, subject to the government of His Majesty the Emperor. All the natives of Ethiopia, subjects of the empire, form together the Ethiopian Empire,” p1, in Margery Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia*, (London 1969).

⁹ *Oromia: Facts* (Year Book). (Finfinne: Published by Office of the President, 2010); Central Statistical Agency (CSA) of Ethiopia, 2007.

centralist authoritarian in a manner reminiscent of previous regimes”¹⁰ and is preparing to win the national election this year in May (2015) for the fifth term in power since 1992 despite the promised reforms towards democratic elections and ethnic federalism secular at both federal and state levels.

Thus, in Ethiopia to date, after nearly thirty years of evil days of war, famine, and social crisis that ran through 1991/1992, another round of structured state violence followed and affected the everyday lives of the people. As the data in the present study shows, people express their disenchantments through different means to discharge their feelings of being victims, victims of social invisibility and epidemic poverty (cf. Franz Fanon’s notion of “epidemiology of oppression”), and conflicts resulting from the uneven distribution of resources, knowledge, and power. Available data shows that at the local level the aim of the politics from “below” transcends the immediate needs; it is about human freedom—*freedom from* all kinds of disempowering situations. At the higher level (elite politics) the major aim of the Oromo movement is the restoration of the Oromo democratic tradition (*gada*), liberation of Oromo and Oromia from domination, and the fundamental political and economic transformation of the Oromo to ensure sustainable human freedom—*freedom to* empower the people. To work on Oromo resistance poetics within this framework of “*freedom from*” and “*freedom to*” and to consider the ongoing dialogue it requires “being there,” an ethnographic presence, to root and locate the ongoing poetics at the grassroots level.¹¹

¹⁰Jon Abbink, “Discomfiture of Democracy? The 2005 Election Crisis in Ethiopia and Its Aftermath,” *African Affairs*, 105/419, (2006), pp.173-199.

¹¹ See Edmond Keller, “The Ethnogenesis of the Oromo Nation and Its Implications for Politics in Ethiopia,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 33. 4, (1995), pp621-634, see pp622-623; See “Evil Days: 30 years of war and famine in Ethiopia,” *An Africa Watch Report*, (New York, September 1991).

Salale ethnohistory shows us that set within the border of the Oromia Regional State to the north, the Salale Oromo suffered inequality ever since their encounter with the Amhara rulers of the Shawa state.¹² Consequently, the Amharic language became the official (and court) language and Orthodox Christianity became the dominant state religion in the area. Instead of the traditional egalitarian *gada* system, the hierarchical Shawan supremacy became the rule in the region.¹³

Statement of the Problem

This study focuses on two areas of inquiry: first, the lack of systematic and detailed study into the significance and role of Oromo folklore in the historically unequal power relations, and, equally important, the misrepresentation or uneven selection of data; second, the problem of “resistance” that has not been fully studied yet in relation to Salale Oromo resistance culture,¹⁴ the problem which also arise from two sources: theoretical and thematic in nature.¹⁵

The Lack of Detailed and Systematic Oromo Folklore Study

The first and perhaps the most urgent problem, I argue, is that Oromo folklore studies has endured uneven representativeness in the selection of folklore materials and/or

¹² See Chapter 2 in this study; Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, *ibid*.

¹³ *Ibid*.

¹⁴ There is a lack of clarity in postmodernist thought as to whether resistance (at least in the 21st century) is oppositional or accommodative (or both), liberative and critical or oppressive and reactive. Analytically speaking, there is this lacuna of consistent social theories in resistance studies, including Michel Foucault’s reluctance to take the matter beyond “discipline” and “punish” and James Scott’s theory of “hidden resistance” which seems to limit “everyday resistance” to the materialistic “economic determinism” and “pragmatic resignation.” See David Hoy’s *Critical Resistance*, pp81-82; See in Mathew Gutmann’s “Rituals of Resistance...,” p75 the peasants’ strategic “identification with the authority” in James Scott’s theory of “hidden resistance” and Gluckman’s “rituals of rebellion” which in both cases do not deconstruct/decenter the authoritative “power structure.”

¹⁵ There are different reasons for analytical diversity and a variety of strategies here: the range of the researcher’s commitments, diversity of social settings and attendant contingencies which have an impact on the collection of data, and the aim of the research. In dealing with the data, the researcher makes problems and grounds them in the everyday realities and meanings of social worlds and social actors. Consequently, a distinctive form of analysis stems from the strength of diversity and is “centrally concerned with avoiding a ‘social problem’ perspective” by asking how the people attach meanings to their activities and problems. Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson. *Making sense of qualitative data*. (California: Sage publications, 1996), pp5, 19.

misrepresentation, or scanty representation, if any at all, in African folklore scholarship. Since the Oromo language is the fourth most widely spoken language in Africa, after Arabic, Swahili, and Hausa,¹⁶ it is unfortunate to underrepresent and/or misrepresent Oromo folklore materials in anthologies of folklore collections on the African continent and in encyclopedia entries on African folklore. It will suffice to present here three cases as examples. First, Richard Dorson's edited volume, *African Folklore*,¹⁷ includes essays on multiple genres of folklore in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the introduction titled "Africa and the Folklorist," Dorson presents helpful observations for the articles that follow; he surveys the different approaches of literary scholars, anthropologists, and historians and compares them to those of the folklorist to the study of folklore. Of particular relevance to this study, Dorson states the following: "Folklore can be a unifying and nationalizing factor when utilized by a repressed people seeking to establish their political and cultural identity against an alien ruler."¹⁸ Further, he observes that the impulse behind studying folklore is "part intellectualistic and part nationalistic, and the two impulses often work at cross purposes."¹⁹ In spite of the comprehensive coverage in both the introduction and the essays, "all but the culture areas of Ethiopia and the Eastern Horn/Somali are represented."²⁰ Even though the volume evolved out of an African Folklore Conference and emphasized sub-Saharan Africa, Oromo folklore is not included in the 587 pages of this study, contrary to the objective of the Conference, namely, to bring together the research experiences of African and non-African folklorists, anthropologists, and linguists alike.

¹⁶ Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi, "The Language Situation in Africa Today," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 2(1) (1993), 79–86, see pp79, 84.

¹⁷ Richard M. Dorson, ed. *African Folklore*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p5.

²⁰ Philip M. Peek "African Folklore: Review," in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1974), pp. 103-110, see p103.

This neglect on the part of African and non-African folklorists, linguists, and anthropologists to conduct research on Oromo folklore, language, and culture is a huge setback and has had far-reaching implications for native folklorists who attempt to pursue engaged/critical folklore scholarship because the Oromo, like numerous other African societies, have rich but understudied traditional cultures that nurture folklore and written literature.

Second is Phillip Peek's and Kwesi Yankah's *African Folklore: Encyclopedia*.²¹ In this work, one can observe the "bias toward West African material, and which is not surprising given the editors' fields of expertise";²² it is self-contradictory to claim that "there is no shortage of material on other regions,"²³ which is also vague. In this large encyclopedic account of African folklore, there is no mention of Oromo folklore. Ethiopia, where the dominant Christian Amhara culture and Amharic language override other ethnic groups', is presented briefly as a melting pot of diversified peoples with varied cultures,²⁴ and no adequate representation of its cultural diversity.²⁵

During colonial periods the struggle for independence inspired Africans to use folklore more critically and creatively than ever before and to reexamine their expressive culture and traditions more seriously vis-à-vis the escalating liberation struggle. In her comprehensive study of African folklore, Ruth Finnegan has showed us that folklore is used in different forms of communicative

²¹ Philip M. Peek and Kwesi Yankah, (eds.) *African Folklore: An Encyclopedia*. (New York: Routledge, 2004).

²² Harriet Lyons and Andrew Lyons, "African Folklore: An Encyclopedia: Review" in *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. Vol. 40, No. 3(2006), pp. 569-572, see p570.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., Phillip Peek & Kwesi Yankah, p240.

²⁵In the past, among other factors that contributed to the discrepancies in folklore research in the continent, beyond any pure speculation, the foreign collectors did not have full access to African folklore because of language and they were also in most cases agents of the colonial power structure who favored one ethnic group against another.

culture including public debates, imparting political agendas and oratory, performing ceremonies, festivals and rituals, documenting history through songs, narratives, and secular and religious texts using rhetorical devices.²⁶ To exemplify this claim, Finnegan made repeated reference to the Oromo *geerarsa*, even though she was unaware of or did not notice epic as an African tradition. In *African Folklore*, the authors raise legitimate questions related to the contentious issue of definition: it is not direct and clear if members of the elite create folklore or if folkloric genres are the exclusive domain of the poor and the oppressed and “subordination is an essential part of the subject matter of folklore.”²⁷ Here I make the case that early and modern African folklore scholarship made too many broad generalizations about African cultures in general and folklore in particular, but that does not mean that they were inclusive and paid careful attention to the existence of trans-ethnic and transnational (oral) expressive cultures.

Finally, there is Harold Courlander’s *Treasury of African Folklore*.²⁸ This work of 617 pages is an anthology of previously published materials on African folklore from the 19th century onwards. The anthology does not include Oromo folklore. The 25 pages (pp. 522-547) of analysis under the topic “Ethiopia” covers the Christian (Abyssinian) historical legends dated from the 4th century AD, which is evidence for the *underrepresentation* of the expressive cultures of peoples in Ethiopia in favor of the mainly Christian Abyssinian highlanders (Amhara and Tigre) of Semitic ancestry. I have no problem with Courlander’s eclectic definition of folklore as a *treasury of social values and literary creations* out of human experience. However,

²⁶ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

²⁷ Ibid., Phillip Peek & Kwesi Yankah, “The Study of African Folklore” in “Introduction.” Cf. Lyons & Lyons, “African Folklore: an Encyclopedia: Review,” in *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. Vol. 40, No. 3(2006), pp. 569-572, See p569.

²⁸ Harold Curlander, *Treasury of African Folklore: The Oral Literature, Traditions, Myths, Legends, Epics, Tales, Recollections, Wisdom, Sayings, and Humor of Africa*. (Marlowe & Co., 1995), see “Ethiopia,” pp. 522-547.

the problems of uneven representation and exclusion, I presume, result from the lack of appropriate methodology for collection and selection of folklore materials for such a wide-ranging project.

According to Carolyn Parker, Courlander's purpose in the *Treasury* is to demonstrate the affinities and shared inheritance among Africans and their diverse traditions and also to identify their unique themes and particularized forms in each cultural area.²⁹ I doubt if this goal could be attained fully and judiciously by excluding a largest linguistic group such as the Oromo in Northeast and East Africa. There have been a handful of collections of Oromo folklore in translations into English and other European languages since the 1890s and into the early twentieth century. One typical example is Enrico Cerulli's 1922 massive collections of Oromo folksongs and prose narratives in the Oromo language and in English translation.³⁰ The major criteria for Courlander's selection of such previously published materials is *aesthetic*—"the accent is on what is interesting"—and if the material reveals the life and culture it comes from, and adequacy of translation.³¹ And yet, Parker rightly observes that almost half of the sources for the *Treasury* come from one cultural area, namely, West Africa, and thus "other groups are given brief, varying to passing, attention."³²

Here I should acknowledge, among other African and non-African scholars, Stephen Belcher, a professor of Comparative Literature in Guinea, who did recently a representative scholarly work

²⁹ Carolyn Parker. "A Treasury of African Folklore:... Review" in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Winter, 1977), pp. 369-376. see p373.

³⁰ Enrico Cerulli was a colonial agent of the then Italian Northeast Protectorate, who collected and studied Oromo folk literature in Naples in 1922 from Oromo migrants and later became the governor of Shawa (and Salale) when Italy conquered Ethiopia for five years (1936-1941). See Enrico Cerulli, *The Folk Literature of the [Oromo] of Southern Abyssinia*. (Cambridge: MA, 1922).

³¹ Harold Curlander, p1995:7.

³² Carolyn Parker, *Ibid.* p374.

titled *African Myths of Origin*.³³ In this anthology of 544 pages, Belcher put together a superb collection of myths of origin from different cultures nearly from all four corners of the African continent. In his “The Oromo of Southern Ethiopia,” he presented a creation myth of the Oromo. According to this Oromo origin myth, in the beginning one male (god?) of the sky (*waaqa*) descended and found footprints that ultimately led him to one female (god) and both produced children, which, metaphorically, represents the archetypal mythic union between the sky (*waaqa*) and the earth (*dachi*) in Oromo worldview. The Oromo Earth Song, “Dachi nagaa bultee,” (Good morning, Mother Earth) is a typical motif that resonates widely among the Oromo as part of the morning ritual in farm fields and it embodies the close union between earth and humankind.

The emerging field of Oromo Studies has been doing so far a great deal of research on Oromo culture, history, language, and politics but less focus (or none) on folklore.³⁴ The nature of Oromo folklore related to its resistance culture has received limited theoretical examination in available studies and theses.³⁵ Most of the previous works have been filled with traditional historical explanations aided by folklore data.³⁶ Against such bewilderment, the present research will take an interdisciplinary approach, a constructivist stance, to Oromo folklore and literary scholarship so as to examine closely the folkloric, historical, and anthropological inquiries in the present study.

³³ Stephen Belcher, *African Myths of Origin*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2005).

³⁴ See the *Journal of Oromo Studies*, <http://www.romostudies.org/publications/osa-journal>.

³⁵ Addisu Tolessa, *Geerarsa Folksong as the Oromo National Literature*, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999); Sahlu Kidane, *Borana Folktales: a Contextual Study* (London: Haan Publishers, 2002).

³⁶ Enrico Cerulli, *The Folk Literature of the [Oromo] of Southern Abyssinia* (Cambridge: MA, Harvard African Studies III, Peabody Museum of Harvard University, 1922).

It has been claimed that the subject of Oromo resistance, heroic deeds, and historic narratives has been limited to one specific folkloric genre so far, namely, *geerarsa*, as in Addisu Tolessa's research, but as examples show in Catherine Griefenow-Mewis' study resistance is articulated across folk-genre borders.³⁷ Thus, it is the purpose of the present study to explore among the Salale Oromo how the issues of substantive social injustices are commented upon and how unequal power relations are addressed through various expressive forms or genres and sub-genres. African oral genres, songs, proverbs, eulogies and hymns, and narratives revolve around the content of past political tradition and current practices, social rules and values transmitted orally while commenting on the status quo.³⁸ As part of the longstanding African tradition of folk culture, Oromo oral artistry still wields a remarkable influence on the contemporary life of its society. The role of Oromo oral literature has been, I argue, not just the cultural transmission of knowledge and conventions from generation to generation but also to comment on the negativistic social transformation, namely evictions from their land, as a major problem affecting the lives of millions of rural peasants and their families in their respective environment.³⁹

³⁷ Catherine Griefenow-Mewis, *Oromo Oral Poetry Seen from Within* (Koln: Rudiger Koppe Verlag, 2004), p41; Addisu Tolessa, *Geerarsa Folksona as the Oromo National Literature*, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

³⁸ There is no one folklorist or Africanist to name, I claim, who brought to public attention the political function of folklore and tradition in Sub-Saharan Africa before Ruth Finnegan and to the extent she did. At a time when African folklore study was in its inception, in her subtopic "Topical and Political Songs," she claimed bluntly that in non-literate societies, oral poetry "takes the place of newspapers" to report and critique on current affairs, to express political pressures, and to "reflect and mold public opinion" (p265). With this and her later immense contribution to folklore study, Finnegan prompted debate across the Atlantic with her "notes on epic" claiming that "epic hardly seems to occur in sub-Saharan Africa." The skeptical misrepresentation may be taken as ethnocentric but it also quickly raised debate, which was, in effect, settled ten years later by John Johnson in his research titled "Yes, Virginia, There Is an Epic in Africa." In his article, Johnson underscores that added to the poor collection method, the lack of understanding of the problem of reconstructed texts is also worth mentioning, which he proved in his research on the epic of Sun-Jata (Soundiata) Keyta, the founder of the Malian empire 900 years ago. See John W. Johnson, "Yes, Virginia, There Is an Epic in Africa," *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Special Issue on Genre and Classification in African Folklore (Autumn, 1980), pp. 308-326. (To be discussed in Chapter 3 of the study.)

³⁹ The need to address these divergent trends for the critical study of the role of Oromo folklore vis-à-vis resistance culture is imperative. Towards this goal, the present study focuses on examining critically the nature of Salale Oromo folklore in the context of peasant resistance culture against repressive/ideological state apparatus past and present. The resistance culture involves the acquiescence of some local chiefs and traditional ritual leaders who are placed in a contradictory position that requires them to mediate between the state and the community. In some

The Dilemma of a Western Resistance Model

The second area of the problem motivating this study relates to the nature of “resistance,” an area that has been of only marginal interest to those engaged so far in resistance studies in general and contentious Oromo culture in particular. The problem is intrinsic to resistance culture itself. That is, resistance can be liberative, critical, and participatory, or reactive and controlling.⁴⁰ A cultural group may engage in a liberative resistance, that is, a collective effort to achieve something fundamental through a non-violent action, especially a political or social transformation in the context of poverty and domination. That constitutes critical resistance and, therefore, it is emancipatory in its essence.

The postmodernist perspective is also unclear about the goal of resistance. On the one hand, the postmodernism of resistance is about deconstructing the status quo through deconstructing modernism, whereas, the postmodernism of reaction is about a resurrection of tradition set against modernism. And a strategic traditionalism is its intent while revivalism is its end, as a master plan imposed on a heterogeneous present. Here the challenge is, should tradition deconstruct modernism to deconstruct the status quo? Is that “deconstruction” an emancipatory act—that is, is it liberative in some way? These questions are central to a resistance study informed by critical folkloristics. When Bill Ivey exclaimed at the American Folklore Society conference in 2007 that “antimodernism is a central motivating engine that runs through all

folklore instances they are depicted as paid functionaries, guardians of community’s resources but under the supervision of officials. See Allen Isaacman, “Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa,” *African Studies Review*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Sep., 1990, pp1-120), p41. See also “The Poetics of Nationalism,” oral poetry recitation by Jarso Waqo in P.T.W Baxter et al, *Being and Becoming Oromo* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1996), pp265-290); Gunther Schlee and Abdullahi Shongolo, “Oromo nationalist poetry: Jarso Waaqo’s tape recording about political events in Southern Ethiopia, 1991.” Jarso Waqo’s recitation of the Borana Oromo experience was the subject of my MA thesis first published as *Theorizing the Present* (Addis Ababa: Beranna Publishing, 2004) also published as *Beyond Adversities* (Germany: Dr. Muller, Verlag, 2010), a precursor of my current study of *resistance poetics*.

⁴⁰ See David Hoy, p82ff.

folklore” the claim is as much about folklorists as it is about folklore and its resurgent mission (antimodernism), which gives folklorists “a critical stance, revivalism a path to action and reform.”⁴¹ Revivalism favors the historical importance of vibrant traditions as a representation of new context in the face of domination.⁴² In most of Oromo folklore studies so far, it has not been cautiously assessed which cultural values and subcultures, and beliefs and attitudes, promote or impede progress, social justice, emancipatory acts, and human and ecological solidarity.

Through the knowledge of their tradition which is epitomized in their folklore, people become aware of their situation and their place in their environment, identify as a nation and appear to themselves as being real and historical. In the process of recreating and rationalizing the construction of society and of science and dichotomizing humanity into the universal, rational, modern man vs. the common, traditional, provincial, and non-Western Other, a dichotomy which is based on and perpetuates inequalities, the role of language and tradition has been crucial.⁴³ Although there is no framework provided for how to overcome the reproduction of dominant ideologies, in Richard Bauman’s and Charles Briggs’s study of language ideology and modernity it seems that resistance is a good starting point to deconstruct the dominant language and tradition and the reproduction of ideologies that have maintained relations of social inequality.⁴⁴

In his analysis of “tradition” and the development and practice of “anthropology,” Richard Bauman defines “tradition” as “the element of historical continuity or social inheritance in

⁴¹ Trevor J. Blank & Robert Glenn Howard, eds. *Tradition in the 21st Century: Locating the Role of the Past in the Present*, (Boulder: Utah University Press, 2013), p3.

⁴² See Anna Kearney Guigné, *Folksongs and Folk Revival: The Cultural Politics of Kenneth Peacock’s Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*. (St. John’s: Iser, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 2008).

⁴³ Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language ideology and the politics of inequality*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

culture or social process by which such continuity is achieved.”⁴⁵ Thus, tradition often refers to the “collective social inheritance of people” passed down “through time by successive generations of culture bearers.” The connotation of “past” in “tradition” as “a traditional practice,” “a traditional belief” and “a traditional tale” is thus an epistemological orientation that emphasizes the perspective of the traditional mode of thought perceived purportedly as resistant to or incapable of “routine, rational, reflective, critical, or skeptical stances toward knowledge and belief,” while in another perspective, behavioral correlates may be emphasized as an alternative line of inquiry.⁴⁶

Deborah Kapchan’s Moroccan case is perhaps a typical example of tradition taking shape “as a social process, as ‘invented,’ in the face of rapid change.”⁴⁷ Among the Moroccans, Kapchan notes, tradition, particularly the wedding tradition, is “a western-leaning and fashionable...separate historical process” relying on “imitations and adaptations reaching across class divisions and boundaries of ethnicity.”⁴⁸ The “unselfconscious copying,” the “deliberate eclecticism or bricolage,” according to Kapchan, is “increasingly used to create a new, overarching, and hybrid form,” which makes the wedding tradition in Morocco nontraditional, though the nostalgia for a “real or pure tradition is evident in contemporary ritual life.”⁴⁹ To Fadela, Kapchan’s Moroccan informant, tradition is “‘unspoiled,’ like the virgin bride” but as “there are fewer virgins on the marriage market so are there fewer weddings that do not evidence

⁴⁵Richard Bauman, “Anthropology of Tradition,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. vol. 23. eds. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes, (London: Elsevier, 2001), pp15819-24, see p15819.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Deborah Kapchan, *Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and the Revoicing of Tradition*. (PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p155.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 156.

the Western” influence.”⁵⁰ As a result of social transition and mobility, especially in a pluralistic society such as in Morocco, the informant’s description of tradition as “ideal purity, untainted by foreign influence,” is hard to find in the face of new circumstances. Hence, as Kapchan puts it, in Morocco, “the resultant mix is now called a ““traditional wedding’ ...accessible at some level to all Moroccans, and, in this case, “tradition in practice is an intensely hybrid affair.”⁵¹

Knowledge of how a particular society uses traditional forces such as religion, child-rearing practices, “sacred sites” or “sacred ecology,” rituals, incantations, and narratives that shape social transformation is equally crucial. To critique those values and enhance their positive political, social, and economic impacts, the role of folklore and folklore scholarship to challenge repressive power relations needs careful attention. Regarding promoting human progress, some genre—like some subcultures—are clearly more effective than others.⁵² The present study critically analyzes the themes of Salale Oromo folklore and resistance culture with a focus on narratives and songs, particularly the *faarsa* heroic songs. In so doing, it constitutes a critical analysis of Salale Oromo folklore to present, hypothetically speaking, different kinds of artistic productivity in relation to the resistance culture of the Oromo. Toward this goal, it is equally important to operationalize relevant concepts and terms such as “poetics,” “resistance poetics,” “strategic traditionalism,” “critical ethnography,” and “ecopoetics.”

⁵⁰ Ibid., p156.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² The question of which lived experiences, values, beliefs and attitudes work in favor of a pro-social resistance culture, and how the cultural group foster those experiences towards that end, have not been studied in a strict sense. In studying resistance culture, and in relation to oral culture, James Scott (1990) convincingly points out, “To omit the experience of human agents from the analysis of class relations is to have theory swallow its own tail (p42). This is so because, according to Scott, “people experience deprivation and oppression within a concrete setting [...] and it is the concrete experience that molds their discontent into specific grievances against specific targets” (p42). Thus, what knowledge and experience the Salale Oromo use to spell out the ways they suffer from cultural attributes, unfavorable to development and to overcome obstacles, is another problem that demands careful study.

Methods

The data collecting tools in this research include in-depth individual interviews, focus-group discussions, and participatory observation model. The in-depth individual interview and personal life history interviews were conducted with informants and traditional bearers. While merging those methods and approaches into one, in each there will be a compromise between conceptual precision and authenticity of oral presentation to avoid unnecessary risk of falling into a cumbersome store of far-reaching data. The critical ethnography here helps to probe other possibilities that challenge oppressions, regimes of knowledge, institutions and practices and perturb power that limit choices, constrain meanings, and denigrate identities.

The purpose of a critical ethnographic method is to use available resources to make accessible “the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach.”⁵³ My interest in Salale folklore is rooted in the revivalist tendency the people show by performing rituals, singing songs, telling stories, organizing festivals and observing eco-poetic practices such as tree coronations and sacred grooves, divinations, names, and genealogies to construct identity and maintain both contention and consensus in a disempowering situation. As an activist folklorist and refugee scholar, for me, the present study is a critically engaged research experience. As I confronted the ongoing social injustices through research and publications and subverted openly the unequal development and massive human rights violations the Oromo suffer in Ethiopia, I was repeatedly put in prison, and risked my job and my life until I was relocated to the US in July 2010.⁵⁴ My present research motivation is rooted in Salale and

⁵³ D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. (Sage Publications, 2nd edition, 2011), p5.

⁵⁴ Amnesty International Report 2009 – Ethiopia (UNHCR), <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4a1fadedc.html>

is tied to future eco-poetic local projects that emerge from this commitment to a larger struggle for social and environmental justice for the Oromo and other marginalized peoples. My decision to conduct doctoral research in Salale in 2009 had important political implications for the people as part of the ongoing larger struggle and equally for the government officials who systematically delayed my research permit. In this study, it is to be understood that, by allowing the people I studied, the Salale, to speak for themselves I am not positioning myself at a distance and treating social life as an object to decode it. Rather, I seek to avoid defacing the people's perspectives by limiting my positionality to channeling the communicative events, maintaining dialogical relationships, selecting carefully relevant data, and analyzing what it means to the people from an emic viewpoint without hindering the flow and rhythm of ongoing social interactions during the fieldwork and after.

Through the prism of critical ethnography the ethnographer sees beneath surfaces, penetrates the borders, challenges false-consciousness and unsettles “the status quo, neutrality, and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying obscure operations of power and control.”⁵⁵ In so doing the ethnographer “contributes to emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice” and “resists domestication” imposed by the hegemonic rule. Américo Paredes stresses two important values of the performance approach to critical ethnography: first, “the recognition of the informant as a potential performer, whatever the circumstance,” and, second, a “preoccupation with the varied results of the face-to-face interaction that occurs between informant and fieldworker.”⁵⁶ It is with some degree of seriousness that Paredes views the

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ See also Richard Bauman, ed. *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*, by Américo Paredes. (Austin: Texas University Press, 1993), p84.

informant not only as “a representative member of a group” but also as a “potential artist” with “interest and goal of his own,”⁵⁷ the views which came to be widely practiced in folkloristics.⁵⁸

The concept of community in folklore research in a particular region and its application engages the researcher and the people in continuous collaborative meaning-making and the research findings reflect upon and amplify the people’s life experience. Of those tapes which I collected through interviews in the 8 districts in Salale, about 6 to 8 tapes from each district consist of *songs* (work songs, heroic songs, love songs commonly called *foollee* and *faaruu* (religious songs), dirges, nuptial songs, gnostic (ritual) songs), and *faarsa*; 5 to 7 tapes are *narratives* or personal experience narratives (stories) and life histories. The remaining 5 to 6 tapes collected from each of the 8 districts are *anecdotes* and ritual *incantations*. There are 7 *Fieldnotes* and transcriptions and one *Field Journal* (written in English) in which I kept the log of everyday encounters over the 10 months. There are photographs of informants, landscapes, ritual sites, caves and the massive gorges of Mogor and Jama where Salale bandits took refuge, shrines, sacred groves and trees, stonewalls and cactus fences, Salale life style, and the thatched gateway called *idmo*. I should add that not all these many documents are to be used for the present PhD project without serious ethnographic processing and careful categorization of specific pertinent

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Américo Paredes insists that while doing ethnography among minority groups there are possible “unconscious bias, the fitting of data to preconceived notions and stereotypes,” which is a serious problem that both anthropologists and folklorists encounter during fieldwork. Paredes not only diagnoses the problem but also he suggests a remedy. He recommends considering contemporary methods, particularly, a performance-oriented approach as a remedy, for folklorists working among marginalized groups (like Roger Abrahams, Richard Bauman, Dan Ben-Amos, Dell Hymes and others) “who see the informant as an artist engaged in a creative act.” See also Richard Bauman, ed. *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*, Américo Paredes. (Austin: Texas University Press, 1993), pp73, 74, 83. See also D. Soyini Madison. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. 2nd. edition. (University of North Carolina: Chapel Hill, 2011). See Richard Bauman and Américo Paredes, *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972).

notes. The selections of texts for analysis out of the repertoire the whole data were made based on their historical, cultural, and folkloric values and the artistic mastery.

Research Questions

Using critical ethnography as a constructivist stance, the objective of the present study is to examine critically, from an emic perspective, the following inquiries of folkloric, historical, and anthropological nature: How is critical ethnography possible under dominant cultural hegemony? How can one be critical of the dominant social order and its discourse in oral culture? in what context? What historical, sociocultural, and political forces are at work in the creation, performance, and reception of folksongs and narratives under unequal power relations? What recurrent themes run through folklore as critical expressive acts in Salale? What other limits threaten Oromo tradition and eco-poetic practices in Salale today? How does tradition challenge those competing forces? Who are commemorated, and for what? What traditional resources (expressive cultures) can be delineated as social expression of resistance in Salale? What “public spheres,” “social spaces” are used as strategies (radical or conformist)? How is the local knowledge of place (sacred or secular) addressed (communicated)?

Scope and Limitations

The *scope* of this study is limited to exploring the folklore of Salale Oromo of the Tulama branch, Northwest Shawa, Ethiopia, in relation to the resistance culture of the community in the locale. Oromia is the largest Regional State in Ethiopia, with a population of over 35 million. Hence, it is difficult to cover in the present study the whole region without practical difficulties and constraints. The scope of the present study is limited to the Salale Oromo community given

the relatively longer historical relationship between the people in the area and the Christian Amharas under successive Ethiopian rulers.⁵⁹ By drawing on approaches to borderland cultures,⁶⁰ it is the purpose of this study to explore certain culturally distinct folk thoughts and actions articulated in contentious folklore and to examine what folkloric peculiarities and characteristics identify Salale folklore and resistance culture in those uncharted cultural terrains. This study compares texts of the same period in synchronic perspective in their own context and analyzes texts of different periods to come to definitions and descriptions of the historical development in the course of time in diachronic terms. In this historically oriented folklore study, to focus on one specific system in one historical epoch renders only a scant data. It is therefore more sensible to explore available sources about power and authority in each period of successive systems.⁶¹ During my fieldwork in Salale, as the national election was scheduled for May 2010, it was difficult to travel freely, especially in the countryside, even with research permits to conduct interviews and do participatory observations. The lack of freedom of speech and good governance can hamper research on sensitive topics such as the present one.

⁵⁹ See Tsgaye Zeleke Tufa, 2003, p22ff; Svein Ege 1996, pp88-95; 217-220

⁶⁰ Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958).

⁶¹ Among other forms of cultural expression, this study focuses on folkloric performative practices, i.e., rituals and narratives, stories and songs of social banditry as examples of “resistance culture.” The history of banditry and rebellion has been an underdeveloped field in African historiography in general and the case of the Oromo is no exception. See Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*. (New York: Pantheon, 1981); Donald Crummey, (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*, (London: James Currey, 1996). When written sources are scarce about the lives and deeds of Salale heroes and the history of Salale resistance and social banditry, oral traditions are accessible sources of data. The Salale are well known among other Oromo clans and in Ethiopia at large, for a broad spectrum of contemporary folksongs and performances about banditry and ethnic heroes that cannot be fused into one study without difficulty.

Conceptual Definitions and Perspectives

According to Eric Hobsbawm, “concepts are not part of free-floating philosophical discourse, but socially, historically and locally rooted, and must be explained in terms of these realities.”⁶² Historically, though it has been remedied progressively, the main objective of Western ethnographic research has been the “descriptive account of native culture and the provision of basic reliable information for Western audiences”⁶³ about the so-called “primitive” peoples in Africa or in the Amazon basin or elsewhere. Similarly, commenting on the perennial problem of “Ethiopian Studies” that primarily focus on Amhara and Tigre ethnic groups, Asafa Jalata states that “the lack of critical scholarship [has] inadvertently distorted the human achievements of conquered peoples like the Oromo, including transformations of their social, cultural, and political institutions.”⁶⁴ Thus, this study addresses data from tradition bearers and users in Salale in an attempt to understand the people and their world of power relations. To understand how “resistance poetics” works, operationalizing related concepts is part of the attempt to answer related questions. In what follows I make an attempt to discuss those matters of experience the present study is grounded in. I present some conceptual definitions and perspectives including “resistance,” “resistance culture,” “cultural resistance,” and “strategic primitivism” to lay the groundwork for the study.

⁶²Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalisms since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p9.

⁶³ Maxwell Owusu, “Ethnography of Africa: the Usefulness of the Useless,” *American Anthropologist*, 80:2 (1978), pp310-334, see p312.

⁶⁴ Asafa Jalata, “The Struggle for Knowledge: The Case of Emergent Oromo Studies” *African Studies Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Sep., 1996), pp. 95-123, p96, citing William A. Shack, 1994:642.

Ethnography of Resistance Poetics

In this study, the poetics is understood as a folklore-oriented historical process of a present-day construction of the past. History as a prerequisite engagement for the oppressed is an “ongoing dialogue between the present and the past to understand and plan the future.”⁶⁵ Resistance poetics here interprets and analyzes the collective shared experiences of the people constituted into their local history.

It is important to add that ethnographic history serves as a reference point to direct attention to understanding the features of “resistance from below” against historically unjust power relations. As will be argued, resistance culture has become an important and even contentious part of Salale Oromo identity and also an important part of Oromo narratives of dissidence and collaboration. In rural East Gojjam, for example, while some peasants sing disagreements, opposition, conflict, and bitter grievance against the land redistribution policy, others sang and staged demonstrations in support of the policy and praised state agents and local officials.⁶⁶ This

⁶⁵ The question “whose history?” and “whose perspective?” is pertinent because the “past that is falsely represented influences the present and equally helps in the planning of a false future.” See Lotte Tarkka, *Dynamics of Tradition*, (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2003), p69ff. *Poetics* is a dialogic process, a “communicative and narrative interchange” that involves both contextual and textual components through two dialogical methods: *internal*, i.e. textual strategies or manipulation, e.g. repetition of certain words or phrases, and *external*, e.g. turn-takings, the performer’s control or performer-audience cooperation. See Venla Sykari, *Words as Events* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2011), p64, citing Charles Briggs’s ethnography of verbal arts. Charles Briggs, *Competence in Performance: the Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Arts*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988). By combining earlier folkloristic and anthropological insights, Venla Sykari builds a semantic theory based on the Cretan indigenous theory of meanings of their short communicative rhyming couplets and analyzes the multi-functionality of the song. To do so, Sykari draws on two sources: one is, the dialogism applied by Charles Briggs to interpret the conversational Mexicano genres and, another, “An Indigenous Theory of Meaning,” a semantic theory of the meaning of *mantinanda* (Greek narrative/dialogic recitative song of declamation) built by Michael Herzfeld “based on the commentary and examples given to him in conversations with villagers in Rhodes.” See Michael Herzfeld, “An Indigenous Theory of Meaning and its Elicitation in Performative Context,” *Semiotica*, 34-1/2, (1981a), 113-141. See Venla Sykari, *Words as Event*, pp63, 195. Perhaps in discussing resistance poetics and the concept of *dialogue* and *dialogic*, it is pertinent to add that “people create poems and use them to engage in discourse and to exchange ideas with others.” See Venla Sykari, *Words as Events*, p195ff.

⁶⁶ Getie Gelaye, “Peasant Poetics and State Discourse in Ethiopia: Amharic Oral Poetry as response to the 1996-97 Land Redistribution Policy,” *Northeast African Studies*, vol. 6, no 1-2, (1999), pp171-206. See pp9, 14, 16, 20 for

multivocality in peasant folklore and the competing interpretations of their ethnohistories indicate the disparities not only in the forms of resistance but also in its content. Aligning the “local class relations” into bipolar oppositions as “oppressed/oppressor,” “resistance/complicity,” and “resister/collaborator” is too simplistic because multiple factors determine resistance at a particular time in history. However, an emancipatory resistance involves a more consistent actions reinforced by the *poiesis* of resistance culture, i.e., “making,” “transforming,” and continuing the struggle through “words” and “praxis” to sustain resistance as an emancipatory act.⁶⁷

The concept of resistance poetics in this study develops around cultural resistance – stories, fables, songs and symbols, all poetic practices – “that keeps a culture alive and gives it memory and hope, the means by which a history is spelled out day by day, becoming memory, becoming codes of action,” and handed down, as Jeff Conant claims, not just by “gods, saints, and heroes” but also by the ordinary people—the marginalized group.⁶⁸ In this study it is this aspect of resistance that “roots itself in language and in the symbols of culture, in the hidden meanings of ritual or custom, myths, and daily acts, in the stories and songs and in the dreams of a people” that I theorize as resistance poetics.⁶⁹ The struggle is partly to fit this world of the oppressed into many other such worlds elsewhere through resistance poetics; the ethnographer’s role is to excavate it, analyze and connect it to other uncharted cultural terrains.

peasant poets’ songs of protest and social critique about local officials’ confiscation of land, corruption, land redistribution policy on the one hand and support to the policy on the other.

⁶⁷ Jeff Conant’s idea of “poetics” is the multifaceted *Zapatista* resistance strategies which involve aesthetics and symbols such as masks, dolls, costumes, murals, cultural forms of songs and narratives to communicate a clear message of subversion to the regime and to the world. The news of the participatory bottom-up revolution of the Zapatista movement became widely spread on a global scale through a carefully knitted poetics of resistance, i.e. a careful use of cultural resistance to organize the insurgent and mobilize the sympathizer. See Jeff Conant, *A Poetics of Resistance: the Revolutionary Public Relations of the Zapatista Insurgency*, (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2010), p34.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p37.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Folklore serves as a source of oral discourse to relocate the real historical events and rethink the palace paradigm of definitions of history that, “besides the historian, people still collectively share.”⁷⁰ The basic assumption here is that the subordinate turn to words and performances as emancipatory social praxis when they find themselves indefinitely in unequal historical power relationships. They turn their wretched conditions into folklore, into jokes, stories, myths, songs, festivals and rituals, and dance to all that is overtly incommunicable. The concept of folklore as a conveyer of “antimodernism” can be theorized by the semantic notion of resistance embedded, though implicitly, within the word “folk” (*volk*) as “marginal or subaltern peoples.”⁷¹ Rather than undertaking a mere collection, “the role of folklorists today is to assist people who lack political power in their quest to gain a public voice.”⁷² The Salale performance of traditionalism as cultural resistance reminds us of the power exercised by the least privileged citizens in the reconfiguration of national culture and identity in Ethiopia. The data I collected includes biographical details of ethnic heroes, bandits (and banditry), information on rituals, performances, ancestors and ancestor worship, divinities, life histories, songs, sacred narratives, photographs, and field-notes of my observations.

The people of Salale Oromo in today’s Ethiopia present a seeming paradox. The Salale were subjected to control by Shewan rulers and by consecutive Abyssinian dominant classes who imposed on them Abyssinian culture and institutions.⁷³ However, though the Salale accepted and endured the burden, they never totally succumbed to the Abyssinian “symbolic universe” of Orthodox Christianity and state. Their cultural resistance and traditionalism, I argue, accounted

⁷⁰ Lotte Tarkka, *Dynamic of Tradition*, 2003, p73.

⁷¹ B. Klein, “Folklore” in *Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. by Neil Smelser and Paul Baltes, 5711-5715, vol. 8, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ See Svein Ege, *Class, State, and Power in Africa*, (Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), pp91, 193, for example.

for the continuing retention and coherence of Salale cultural patterns which they enacted as a strategic traditionalism against cultural domination. Oromo folklore scholarship, I argue, is lacking an appropriate and intellectually stimulating interdisciplinary method of analysis. Thus, when considering a critical approach to studying folkloric performance of power and authority as cultural resistance, some constructive strategy must be sought. Those traditional activities were negated by Abyssinians and elites alike as outmoded and old-fashioned but have been revived today among the Salale who connect mythic tradition to living in harmony with nature, especially the symbolically important trees (sycamore, acacia, juniper) preserved for tree coronation and sacred groves. Hence, the ecopoetic stance of folklore here is pertinent.

From the perspective of resistance poetics the meaning of verbal art and rituals transcends the ephemeral common understanding of “resistance” as a concept, that is, mere “opposition.” In this study, “resistance” is not used as shorthand just to refer to “social protest,” “peasant rebellion,” or more preferably, “social banditry.”⁷⁴ Social banditry and bandit are the most common cultural traits in Salale and serve as a wellspring for the repertoire of Salale heroic songs and narratives. To lay ground for a theoretical claim, for the purpose of the present study, I draw on the ethnographic examples, particularly the historically rooted notion of “strategic traditionalism.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Donald Crummey, (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*, (London: James Currey, 1996); See Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*. (London: Liedenfeld and Nicholson, 1969), or Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*. (New York: Pantheon, 1981). For details on “banditry” in Ethiopia, see Teshale Tibebe’s *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*, (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1995), pp36-37.

⁷⁵ See Tadesse Tamrat’s “A Short Note on the Traditions of ‘Pagan’ Resistance to the Expansion of the Ethiopian Church (14th and 15th centuries),” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 10 (1972): 87–117). In this his article, Tadesse chose to categorically withdraw from discussing the role of Salale Oromo tradition in the historical resistance against the expansion of Christianity and traveled extra miles across the Nile to explicate the oral tradition of Gojjam and Agaw. However, as if by an irony of fate, his argument hinges on the Dabra Libanos monastery set in Salale, the center of monasticism and Christian expansion from the 14th century onward in the region, and disregarded the reaction of Salale “pagan” priests and local chiefs.

The notion of “resistance poetics,” I argue, is a locally grounded theoretical stance that can be shaped into a high level analytical model of *critical ethnography*. From a revivalist perspective, a scholarly work is believed to be culture-based and “our approach must be grounded in experience, our own and that of the subject of our study.”⁷⁶ The cultural elements selected for a scholarly study “often have a local or ethnic base and are called traditions,” which form the bases of their assumptions.⁷⁷

The protracted Salale Oromo resistance has continued to this day to abate the economic exploitation and sociocultural domination under one-party rule.⁷⁸ To deny a group the right to cultural expression is to limit its expression of unique perspectives on life and the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another generation. Culture and its traditions have a major role in preventing a loss of identity and serve as a means by which identity is conveyed and preserved. As a consequence of historical events, in any society the suppression of culture, language and tradition of a minority group has been used as a deliberate means of assimilating and diminishing the identity of the minority group.⁷⁹ Of those cultural features, folklore provides a systematic view of the creative activities of the people. At the time when tradition has been unsettled by globalization and its paradoxical consequences (urbanization,

⁷⁶ See Anna Kearney Guigné, *Folksongs and Folk Revival*, p15, citing Doucette, 1993.

⁷⁷ Anna-Leena Siikala, Oleg Ulyashev, *Hidden Rituals and Public Performances*, (Finish Literature Society, 2011), p320. The researchers shed light on how different traditions are favored and transformed in multicultural Russia today.

⁷⁸ Citing the UN Committee against Torture, the US States Department reported its deep concern regarding the ongoing and consistent allegations about the routine use of torture by police, prison officers in Ethiopia, and other members of the security forces against political dissidents and opposition party members, students alleged as terrorists and violent separatist groups. In Ethiopia, under one-party rule, opposition parties have no voice and are subdued by torture. See *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013: Ethiopia*, US Department of State, 2013, p3.

⁷⁹ In his history of state formations, trade, economics and politics in the 19th century Shawa Kingdom, Svein Ege clearly shows the influence of the Abyssinian cultural hegemony on Salale. The king and clergies systematically controlled missionaries and travelers to not document on Oromo culture and tradition. He comments, “For obvious reasons, the contemporary sources do not say much about the Oromo. The travelers had in general little contact with the Oromo except when accompanying the army on one of its brief campaigns.” See Svein Ege, 1996, p66.

industrialization, capital accumulation), the Salale utilize traditional values associated with kinship systems, rituals, deity worship, mediumships, among others, as a way of dealing with the crisis they are experiencing. As will be detailed later in this study, among other contentious issues that induce resistance among the Oromo today are the grabbing of land, urban expansion and industrialization, displacement, unfree and fraudulent national and local elections, and contradictory laws implemented by the regime. Cultural resistance may be slow in coming. However, it can, no doubt, provide an opportunity to rethink alternative ways to resist deprivation and domination but also to showcase the collective experience of the people.

The current land grab around Finfinne, the capital, the contentious master plan to annex the rural lands under Oromia regional state around the capital, and the growing horticulture industry that has been encroaching on fertile land and the urban expansion are some of the factors which is jeopardizing the livelihood of the people. The ordinary people use alternative grassroots actions and performances to articulate and to abate eventually those influences and injustices they suffer in the current political and institutional settings under the one-party rule. When the regime attaches capitalist values to foreign investment, that is, the imperative of capitalist accumulation at the expense of the local population, the displaced households are deprived of the right to live well and to achieve social worth. Thousands of farmers are displaced from their farmlands and the source of their livelihood every year. When they are evicted, the people leave not only their home but also their irreplaceable ritual sites, ancestral graveyards, and sacred trees coroneted for generations as symbols of their identity, which connect them to the past. Folklore is a principal source for setting those expressed goals and serves as a prime source of data for critical folklore

scholarship.⁸⁰ Among several possible functions of folklore and its scholarship is illumination of the re-construction of a society's socio-cultural history, transmitting the religious culture of the people, i.e., symbolizing the secular and religious images of the society, narratives preserving creation stories, and critiquing the existing sociopolitical system.⁸¹ Beverly Stoeltje clearly reveals the value of tradition and narratives used among the Asante of Ghana to connect individuals to institutions and to integrate social life and maintain the indigenous religion and traditional courts.⁸²

Research into resistance is based on details of ethnographic encounters, be it resistance in “deterministic economism and pragmatic resignation to the status quo,”⁸³ or direct and explicit resistance, or the diverse, transitory, and fragmentary power relationships between individuals.⁸⁴ James Scott identifies “hidden transcripts,” which characterize much of “cultural resistance,” and, based on the Gramscian concept of hegemony, he demonstrates subordinates’ resistance in safe cultural spaces while avoiding reprisals by tactically showing loyalty to the dominating

⁸⁰ Gramsci wrote in his *Prison Notes* that folklore is a “conception of life and the world” and it can be precisely located in socio-cultural terms in relation to other “conceptions of the world.” The problem is that when the socio-cultural setting is disconnected systematically from the world by the dominant culture, relocating precisely the “conception of life and the world” is rendered difficult if not impossible. See Antonio Gramsci’s “Observations on Folklore,” in David Forgacs, *The Gramsci Reader: 1916-1935*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp360-62).

⁸¹ Speaking of “narrative imperatives,” Michael Jackson agrees that “stories bestow order and coherence on events” but his concern is about “how such constructions of reality are tied to our need to be more than bit players in our own lives.” See Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling* (Copenhagen: Narayana Press, 2002). Contrary to an over-speculative theorizing and the structural-functionalist approach which focuses on the “function of stabilizing or validating the current order of things,” rather than change, Finnegan shares the view that oral literature, particularly, African oral literature, “had a very practical rather than aesthetic aim.” See Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, (Cambridge: OpenBook Publishers, 2012), p40.

⁸² Beverly Stoeltje, “Asante Traditions and Female Self-Assertion: Sister Abena’s Narrative,” *Research in African Literatures*. (2009). Vol. 40, No. 1, pp27-41.

⁸³ See Mathew Gutmann’s “Rituals of Resistance,” pp74-92, p78

⁸⁴ Eben Barnard, “Review Essay: ‘Cultural resistance’: Can such practices ever have a meaningful political impact?” In Dejan Kršić, 2003; also in Glazer and Ilić, 2005; 141

power.⁸⁵ From a postmodernist view, domination diffuses resistance instead of suppressing it, but purportedly, “to allow such resistance to express itself.”⁸⁶

Resistance

Beyond invoking the concept of resistance in their titles or introductions, most scholars do not clarify their definition of the concept, which is seen as an analytical tool and not an end in itself; they quickly shift their attention to discussing what acts qualify as an act of resistance.⁸⁷ Consequently, the term is so loosely defined that it allows some scholars to see it almost everywhere and others almost nowhere. In their article titled “Conceptualizing Resistance,” the authors remind us that because of these diverse imprecise and seemingly contradictory views of the concept, any attempt to define the term and to develop a typology involves cross-disciplinary literatures.⁸⁸

Resistance takes many forms. For example, among the Tshidi community of the South Africa—Botswana borderland, Jean Comaroff states, historically there are two rituals observed at two

⁸⁵ James Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990). See also James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); “Weapons of the Weak” in Duncombe, S. ed. *Cultural Resistance Reader*, (London, New York: Verso, 2002).

⁸⁶ David Hoy, *Critical Resistance*. (Cambridge: MA, The MIT Press, 2004), p82 citing Michelle Foucault, 1997, p299, p83.

⁸⁷ Hollander and Einwohner, citing other sources, discuss the following possible meanings of “resistance”. Though still defined variously, it will serve the purpose of the present study, i.e., setting *resistance poetics* in folkloristics. For example, resistance involves:

- acting autonomously, in one’s own interest (Gregg 1993:172);
- active efforts to oppose, fight, and refuse to cooperate with or submit to...abusive behavior and control (Profitt 1996:25);
- engaging in behavior despite opposition (Carr 1998:543), or, still,
- questioning and objecting (Modigliani and Rochat 1995:112).

One may infer that it is difficult, if not impossible to pin down the concept and that it would be simpler to explain what it does than to define what it is. See Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner “Conceptualizing Resistance,” *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 19, No. 4. (Dec., 2004), pp. 533-554, p534. See James Scott, *Weapon of the Weak*, p290.

⁸⁸ A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner, *ibid*.

different periods: one was the traditional adolescent initiation ritual of the pre-colonial period accompanied by song, dance, and spirit mediumship, and another, the people's own version of the ritual of Christianity, Zionist or Spirit Churches, used as a broader rebellion, in which a "subtle metaphor bespoke a rejection of domination in all its aspects"⁸⁹ against a general loss of autonomy.⁹⁰ Where the dynamic process of tension, reproduction, and transformation of historical systems become a practice more than mere habitual repetition, "change and resistance themselves often become overt facts."⁹¹ Thus, Comaroff takes note of the methodological constraint of "synchronic models that presuppose the perpetuation or reproduction of existing sociocultural structures."⁹²

The theme of resistance is communicated in folksongs not just through texts but also through a multiplicity of voices, "more than just the voice of the composer/poet ...also the other participants who help to form the work and mediate its meaning and the dynamics through which this occurs."⁹³ This interrelatedness between meaning/text (precursor, contemporary, subsequent texts, i.e., intertextuality), context, and the role of the composer/poet (performer) and participants reflects, as a dynamic discourse, the nexus between the individuals, groups, and classes in society. Jean Comaroff states succinctly that individuals (performers) "in a variety of social roles articulate a commentary upon power relations in society and indeed create knowledge about society."⁹⁴ This focus on the social action of telling a story, singing a song, and performing oratory is a critical reorientation of "folklore as a mode of communicative action" marked by the

⁸⁹ Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p11.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p123

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p6.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p3.

⁹³ Graham Furniss and Liz Gunner, eds. *Power, Marginality, and African Oral Literature* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

concept of performance—“not simply as artful use of language...rather a frame that invites critical reflection on communicative process,” facilitating “the social construction of reality, and reflexivity.”⁹⁵

Some scholars have argued about the continuity and “*direct link*” between the values of the society, the cultural forms, for example, peasant militancy, i.e., banditry,⁹⁶ as early manifestations of resistance to external rule and the modern nationalism thesis.⁹⁷ Put under the imposition of a dominant discourse, the multiplicity of voices and meanings of the two antipodes, “resistance” or “collaboration,” is determined by multiple factors which affect “the social construction of reality and reflexivity.” In the 1960s, during the intensification of African wars of independence, “Resistance and collaboration were now seen as rational, alternative strategies to Africans trying to defend their interests in the face of the imposition of colonialism and capitalism.”⁹⁸ Historians accepted the constriction of historical resistance literature around the two counter-poles (resistance and collaboration) to simplify complexities and, more fundamentally, to lead resistance “inexorably to modern nationalism and decolonization.”⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, “Poetics Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life” in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 19. (1990), pp. 59-88, see p60. In his response to the commentaries on his book, *Verbal Art as Performance* (1984), Bauman describes linguistic reflexivity as “the capacity of language to refer to itself, to treat itself as an object,” (2002:94), and in his previous article (1975) “Verbal Art as Performance,” he presented this notion of linguistic reflexivity as a touchstone of verbal art, i.e., in performance (folkloric action), it is the “use of the devices of the language in such a way that this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon” (p291). See Richard Bauman, “Disciplinary, Reflexivity, and Power in Verbal Art as Performance: A Response,” *Journal of American Folklore*, vol., 115, no. 455, (2002), p92-98, see p94; Richard Bauman, “Verbal Art as Performance,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 77, No. 2 (Jun., 1975), pp. 290-311, see pp290, 291.

⁹⁵ Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance*, (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1984).

⁹⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*. (London: Liedenfeld and Nicholson , 1969).

⁹⁷ Jon Abbink et al., *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History*, (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003), pp.2. See also Allen Isaacman, “Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa,” *African Studies Review*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Sep., 1990), pp. 1-120.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p3.

Modernists view resistance as an oppositional force of the subordinates who defy a dominant power in safe cultural space while they show it a “pragmatic resignation” to avoid reprisals.¹⁰⁰ In postmodernists’ view, power and resistance are not necessarily in binary oppositions but integral parts of each other.¹⁰¹ Unlike the traditional modernist conception that resistance is exerted from outside and that power and resistance are opposite, there are two points worth considering from Foucault’s perspective:¹⁰² First, power and resistance are interrelated terms. That is, resistance is not to be exerted from outside power, but within it—where there is power there is resistance. Second, power is not a top-down, homogenous and monolithic social phenomenon, instead, there are multiple, diverse, heterogeneous forms of power relations interwoven in the social fabric in the form of gender, occupation, class, and age. This “relational character of power relations” or interrelatedness with resistance and the heterogeneous form of resistance “flowing in every direction in the social fabric” also offers “multiple points of resistance.”¹⁰³

From the postmodernist view of power and resistance, two conditions are worth focusing on: one, if the movement is the sum of its parts, and, another, if the movements’ very existence is tied to the existence of its dominator, then arises the question, “what happens to the hole when the cheese is gone?”¹⁰⁴ In those two cases, there is little hope for “resistance,” but it does not rule

¹⁰⁰ See Mathew Gutmann’s “Rituals of Resistance: a Critique of the Theory of Everyday Forms of Resistance,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 1993/74, pp74-92., p78.

¹⁰¹ In folklore scholarship the meaning of discursive production of the idea of the nation, i.e., folklore-based narrative construction of the birth of a nation through cultural representations, the meaning of folk traditions and folklore (social practices, values, and history) is worth investigating: whose meaning is it? Of those whose tradition is being studied, of those who study it, or both? Regarding the tradition/modernity binaries, tradition cannot be represented without modern mediation, that is, without modern epistemological and ontological tools. See Pertti Anttonen, *Tradition Through Modernity: Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship*. (Tampere: Finnish Literature Society, 2005), p17; Michelle Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, Translated from French by A. M. Sheridan Smith. (New York: Pantheon Books).

¹⁰² José Medina, “Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and *Guerrilla Pluralism*,” *Foucault Studies*, No. 12, pp. 9-35, 2011, p10. See also Michel Foucault, 1990, p95.

¹⁰³ José Medina, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁴ Eben Bernard, 2003, p114 citing Bas Kershaw. (1999, p1).

out the possibility of “resistance culture.” Foucault reminds us that “where power is found there resistance will be found as well.”¹⁰⁵ What this means is that, “in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relation at all.”¹⁰⁶ Where domination ceases to exist, power still exists at different levels; “Domination is power, but not all power is domination.”¹⁰⁷

Thus, even without domination, I argue, “resistance culture” (in symbolic or socioeconomic forms, or both) continues to exist as long as social differentiation is present, based on biological, physiological, and sociocultural factors such as class, nationality, race, gender, and age. The following working definition of resistance draws on James Scott’s bi-polar definition (oppressor/oppressed) of what qualifies as an act of resistance and Hollander and Einwohner’s concept of action/opposition and recognition/intention in discussing resistance.¹⁰⁸ To Scott, resistance is a prosaic struggle between the dominant and subordinate classes over material and symbolic resources carried out through individual and small group actions using simple everyday tactics.¹⁰⁹ Hence, by an operational definition of the concept, for our purpose, resistance is understood as words and actions intended to mitigate or deny claims made by the superordinate class or to counterfeit them at an individual or collective level. That is, actions and words that arise from domestic domination by men, and those by women against men, are likely where there

¹⁰⁵ David Hoy, *Critical Resistance*. (Cambridge: MA, The MIT Press, 2004), p82 citing Michelle Foucault, 1997, p299.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p82

¹⁰⁸ James Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); See Jocelyn Hollander and Rachel Einwohner, *ibid.* p534.

¹⁰⁹ James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 290.

is an overruling oppressive social structure, and actions and words frowned on by the dominant law or ideologies in a repressive state structure and may qualify as resistance.¹¹⁰

In African context the resistance actions taken by peasants as legitimate expressions of grievance are different from predatory actions of outlaws (robbers) who prey indiscriminately on the society. However, during the colonial period, such actions were labeled as banditry, not as resistance, “to express contempt for the guerilla tactics resorted to by African political leaders or entire societies.”¹¹¹ Resistance in Africa has been seen as revolts against colonizers, or protest against the pre-colonial polities, or “a mere colonial hangover” present during the post-independence period.¹¹² The question “What to resist?” is equally important. But the answer is not a direct one. Africanists studying resistance agree that in the history of the continent the people have “resisted various forms of rule or domination ...not just limited to colonial rule but extending far back into pre-colonial times and covering most of the post-colonial and contemporary period.”¹¹³ What this means is that in African culture there is a deep-rooted form of wide-ranging conspiratorial networks, secret societies, and a heroic vision of self-help that can be mobilized, albeit parochially, to take charge of political life.

In sum, to define resistance and to pin down the concept, the anthropological, sociological, folkloristic, and literary use of the term can vary. While almost all the articles Hollander and Einwohner discussed include some notions of “action” and “opposition” in their treatment of resistance, the issues of “intention” and “recognition” received varying attention and emphasis in

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Bbink, *ibid.*, p7.

¹¹² Abbink, *Rethinking Resistance*, p6.

¹¹³ Ibid, p9.

the literature. The two terms, namely, recognition and intention, ironically enough leave the concept still undefined. Recognition is whether an act must be recognized by and visible to the superordinate and intention is whether an act must be goal-oriented and therefore conscious, to qualify as an act of resistance. To James Scott, intentions are not inferred directly from the action but from the explanations resisters give for their behavior.¹¹⁴ Those intentions are also veiled in verbal art. The resister does not always mean what she or he says, sings, or stories which complicate the intention. Hollander and Einwohner, citing Scott, agree that “intent is a better indicator of resistance than outcome, because acts of resistance do not always achieve a desired effect.”¹¹⁵ Taking into account the consensual core element and the most significant dimension of variation in the scholarly uses of the term “resistance,” Hollander and Einwohner identify four consistent properties of resistance: its interactional nature, the central role of power, how resistance is socially constructed, and the complex nature of resistance in resistance culture.¹¹⁶

Resistance Culture

Resistance culture, as will be seen in more detail in this study, is a general “antimodernist” notion that gives traditionalism a critical stance and revivalism a path to action and transformation.¹¹⁷ Of the emancipatory efficacy of resistance culture, it should be stressed here that knowledge represented by the “unveiling of false universals can itself be an efficacious means of resisting domination.”¹¹⁸ Thus, based on the observer’s ideology, a culture can be characterized as one of rebellious deviance, resistant to change, or an emancipatory act. Folklore is one typical example of emancipatory resistance culture since the social life of the “folk” is communicatively constituted in performance. That is, to accomplish social

¹¹⁴ James Scott, *Weapon of the Weak*, p290.

¹¹⁵ Hollander and Einwohner, *ibid.*, p542; See also James Scott, 1985.

¹¹⁶ Hollander and Einwohner, “Conceptualizing Resistance,” p549.

¹¹⁷ Trevor J. Blank & Robert Glenn Howard, eds. *Tradition in the 21st Century*....., p3.

¹¹⁸ Hoy, *ibid.*, *Critical Resistance*,....., p138.

life, folklore is “the situated use of particular communicative means.”¹¹⁹ In this respect, folklore scholarship can also serve as “one of the most efficacious means of discovering the mechanism of ideology.”¹²⁰ The notion of folklore as a medium of cultural contestation owes to Gramsci’s observations on folklore that folklore can evoke problematic questions from the subordinate class, from “certain categories of the dominated, but not all of them.”¹²¹ The “folk culture marks the outer limit of the hegemonic culture whose ideological tricks it reveals.”¹²² That is to say, as a source of alternative approaches, folklore addresses “visible dissonant voices, marginalized groups, contrary stands, and unknown perspectives” usually sidelined as “people’s history” or history from below.”¹²³ By contrast, mainstream history is largely concerned with the history of the “leading men” often hailed as “great men” and past actors.

The question, are tradition and modernity misplaced polarities in the process of social change? is not easy to answer. The reason is that the relations between the traditional and the modern societies are not mutually exclusive and traditional societies are not static or not structurally homogenous. In the face of the decline of traditional folk society, Richard Bauman claims, there are two forces of modernity that pushed the “classic folk society to the wall”: “social differentiation” and “centralization.”¹²⁴ By “differentiation” he refers to the ever-increasing subdivision and reorganization of members of society, functionally more specific social

¹¹⁹ See Pertti Anttonen, *Tradition Through Modernity...*, p25.

¹²⁰ Folklore Luigi Lombardi-Satriani, “Folklore as Culture of Contestation,” *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, Vol. 11, No. 1/2, Special Issue: *Folklore Studies in Italy* (Jun. - Aug., 1974), pp. 99-121, p100.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p104.

¹²² *Ibid*, p100.

¹²³ Barbara Henkes and Richard Johnson, “Silences across Disciplines: Folklore Studies, Cultural Studies, and History,” *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 39, Nos. 2 / 3, 2002, p132.

¹²⁴ Richard Bauman, “Folklore and the Forces of Modernity.” Author's note: “This paper represents the introductory section of my presentation in Bloomington, March 4, 1982,” pp153-158, see p155. Source: <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/1874/16%282%29%20153-158.pdf?sequence=1>. Retrieved, May 16, 2015.

relationships, and specialized social symbols maintained by a given system. This notion of “differentiation” had already been developed in Bauman’s earlier work on “differential identity” proposed as a “social base of folklore” against the hitherto persistent “group identity” theory that held “homogeneity” and “shared identity” as central principles of defining the “folk” and folklore as “a function of shared identity.”¹²⁵ By “centralization” Bauman refers to the process of “social interdependency and integration” that grows successively higher as the local structures are progressively incorporated into more and more centralized ones.”¹²⁶

Hence, the question is: if there are no class differences, does resistance cease to *be*? And Foucault’s answer is clear-cut: “where there is power, there is resistance.”¹²⁷ For Foucault, power is not something out there to identify and overthrow; it is everywhere, continuous, anonymous, and plural.¹²⁸ In this study, the idea of “power” relations is mostly perceived by the subordinated people as negative and repressive. It is to be remembered that not all power is about domination and not all domination is about power! In every social differentiation, there exists a certain power relation expressed by cultural means.

In his strategy of nonviolent resistance (satyagraha) Gandhi advocated, first, insistence on the truth against the untruths of the colonizer that power must rest on violence, second, that resistance is not just about getting rid of the colonizer from Indian soil but is also about returning to the traditional Indian culture, a political and spiritual return which I would call in this study as

¹²⁵ Richard Bauman, “Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore,” *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 84, No. 331, See *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore* (Jan. - Mar., 1971), pp. 31-41, see p32ff.

¹²⁶ Richard Bauman, “Folklore and the Forces of Modernity,” *Ibid.* p155.

¹²⁷ Hoy, *ibid*, 2004, p87, citing Michelle Foucault, 1988:95-96.

¹²⁸ José Medina, “Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and *Guerrilla Pluralism*,” *Foucault Studies*, No. 12, pp. 9-35, 2011, p9ff.

“strategic traditionalism.” As radical resistance and national liberation struggle was spread across Africa and Asia in the 1960s and ‘70s, the rejection of foreign culture and elaboration of indigenous tradition was not enough. Frantz Fanon insisted that revolutionary violence would rather serve better to raise the consciousness level of the colonized as it would awaken the attitude of the colonizer to the reality of the inherent brutality, hence, the notion of “violence as purgatory.”¹²⁹ However, both Gandhi and Fanon’s ideologies have one common ground, namely, the “internalized enemy,” that is, the colonizer’s culture, which Albert Memmi better put as “the colonizer within,” that should be fiercely resisted.¹³⁰

Hence, the idea of “resistance culture,” as I will discuss in more detail in this dissertation, is not a “single locus of Great Refusal” but a “plurality of resistance” present everywhere in the power network—the situation which, in Foucault’s sense, is “a multiplicity of points of resistance.”¹³¹ To Foucault power “implies having more than one option open,”¹³² and resistance is not necessarily against positive social transformation or change. For instance, resistance from ecological movements against the narrow technological conceptions of science is not opposing science but is calling for, generating or proposing alternative scientific approaches to save humanity and the environment, which is an example of emancipatory resistance counter to co-optation.¹³³ Unlike “cultural resistance” which is carried in varied, fragmented, transitory genres, and reactive to specific divergent situations through culture as a means of resistance, “resistance culture” is solid, a quality of culture that underlies existing patterns and transmissions of cultural

¹²⁹ Frantz Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington, (New York, Groves Press, 1963), pp35-106.

¹³⁰ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. by Howard Greenfeld, (London: Orion Press, Inc., 1965).

¹³¹ Michel Foucault cited in Medina, *ibid.*

¹³² Hoy, *ibid.*, p84.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

ideas, behaviors, or styles through rituals, symbols or other imitable phenomena. In some examples here, the two concepts, “resistance culture” and “cultural resistance” seem to be used interchangeably.¹³⁴

Cultural Resistance

Cultural resistance includes supportive cultural practices such as what Max Gluckman calls “rituals of rebellion”¹³⁵ used to critique the root cause of inequalities and social injustices and to transform unequal power relations. Through performing rituals as one model of cultural resistance, the weak are not only strong in ritual context but also in secular daily life.¹³⁶ Victor Turner calls this cultural resistance “the power of the weak,” a “temporary travesty of the ruling order,” which later James Scott further discusses in his theory of “weapons of the weak.”¹³⁷ These concepts operate at various levels of the narratives and open new routes for remembering, narrating, and reflecting the past. The Salale efforts to maintain autonomy and a unique Oromo

¹³⁴ Getiye Gelaye’s Gojjam peasants’ songs are typical examples of “cultural resistance.” The peasants used songs as a subversive measure to denounce or to support the land redistribution policy in East Gojjam. Hence, one specific agenda at a time is in focus. Getiye Gelaye, “Peasant Poetics and State Discourse in Ethiopia: Amharic Oral Poetry as response to the 1996-97 Land Redistribution Policy,” *Northeast African Studies*, vol. 6, no 1-2, (1999), pp171-206. Whereas, Jarso Waqo’s recitative oral poetry in Borana is seen as a representative of Oromo national revolutionary literature since his agendas are diverse: resource-based conflict, mediation and peace between pastoralist ethnic groups in and around Borana, and the wider Oromo nationalism under the Tigre-led regime that came to power in 1991. See in “The Poetics of Nationalism,” the oral poetry recited by Jarso Waqo in P.T.W Baxter *et al.*, *Being and Becoming Oromo*, (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1996), pp265-290). Roger Neil Rasnake also uses the notion of “cultural resistance” to cover the wider poetics of resistance in Yura worldview and the revitalization of Andean tradition using the *Kuraqkuna*, Yura elders and indigenous authorities experience. See Roger Neil Rasnake, *Domination and Cultural Resistance: Authority and Power among an Andean People*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988). Also in my another research in Salale I made an attempt to show how Salale elders exercise the power vested in them by tradition and challenge the overriding state discourse through practicing “resistance culture.” See Assefa Tefera Dibaba, “‘God speak to us’: performing power and authority in Salale, Ethiopia,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Volume 26, Issue 3, 2014, pp287-302.

¹³⁵ Max Gluckman, “Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa,” in *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa*, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960, 1954).

¹³⁶ Susanne Schroter, “Rituals of Rebellion—Rebellion as Ritual: a Theory Reconsidered,” in *Toronto Studies in Religion*, 2003), pp41-58, p46. See also Antonio Gramsci. *The Prison Notebooks. Cultural Resistance Reader* (New York: Verso, (2002), pp. 58-67.

¹³⁷ Schroter, *ibid.*; Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1966); James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

identity are forms of “cultural resistance” using symbolic configurations and complex modes of organization as a form of cultural traditionalism. As an essential element in the historical effort, the resistance culture in general, in John Hutchinson’s words, serves “to satisfy the needs and powers of men...Its goal is man’s emancipation from slavery.”¹³⁸ Thus, the issue of power, human agency, and resistance, I will argue, is a positive force of social transformation.

Resistance can take many forms and one is cultural. Members of a society construct and understand their subjective experience of being a part of a subculture and they hold individual and collective meanings of resistance which they express and enact through personal and political methods at micro or macro levels, as a rejection of mainstream political or cultural domination.¹³⁹ John Hutchison asserts that “cultural nationalism” rejects the “invention of tradition” as a “surrogate statist movement aiming at cultural homogeneity”¹⁴⁰ and secularization.

¹³⁸ Padmore Agbemabiese, “Challenging Emancipation and Power through Cultural Resistance,” on Academia.edu.

¹³⁹ Ross Haenfler, “Rethinking Subcultural Resistance: Core Values of the Straight Edge Movement,” in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 2004, 33: 406-36, p408.

¹⁴⁰ John Hutchinson, “Re-Interpreting Cultural Nationalism,” in *Australian Journal of Politics and History*: Volume 45, Issue 3, 1999, pp. 392-407. Departments of History & Government, University of Queensland & Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p393.



Figure 0.1: *Irreecha* thanksgiving prayers and blessings

That is, the practice of performing culture in a disempowering situation and using meanings and symbols to subvert a dominant power is cultural resistance. In the history of Finnish folklore scholarship, the revitalizing of national virtues and denunciation of the threatening “other” is best exemplified by the identification of the Karelian region and landscape, the source of *Kalevala*, with the cultural nationalism in the 19th century during the campaign against Russian political and cultural hegemony.¹⁴¹ Thus, for the Finns, “cultural resistance” is the process that involves delinking the self or the distinction, construction, and presentation of the self against a domineering culture characterized by anarchy and chaos. As territories of resistance, what Karelian is for *Kalevala*, so is Salale for the ethnography of resistance poetics with which this study deals.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Hutchinson, p395.

¹⁴² The comparison here is not an erratic gesture toward making a speculative folklore theory. Ethnographic examples and literature show us that folklore has a national significance on sociopolitical, cultural, and literary bases as this is the case among the Karelian and the Salale Oromo, and literary significance for the world at large. Folklore and folk tradition, as the Karelian *Kalevala* experience shows, is a source for national spirit, identity and heritage. See M.M. Mulokozi, “*Kalevala* and Africa,” *Journal of African Studies*, 1992, 1(2): 71–80.

To discuss cultural resistance as a strategy of subversion, the issues of how a particular resistance phenomenon works, “in what environment, what shared customs, circumstances and patterns of behavior linked the participants, and how the resistance manifested itself, through what medium” are central.¹⁴³ “Cultural resistance,” I claim, is performing cultural nationalism, the view that rejects the Hobsbawmian “invention of tradition” perspective as a “surrogate statist movement.”¹⁴⁴ Toward a “universal” cultural nationalism project, cultural resistance practices and performances mobilize the community to revitalize and “‘rediscover’ a historically-rooted way of life,” which is a primary task of cultural nationalists as moral and social innovators set in the modern world.¹⁴⁵

In the present study “cultural resistance” is to be understood as an integral part of power relationships, passive and active, such as those that the people of Salale have shown for centuries through their life patterns, non-violent expressive acts, and as it happens, banditry, a self-help “assertion of personal honor and violence against the official law and bureaucratic agencies of the central state.”¹⁴⁶ The ceremonial mock stick-fighting among the Salale youth, for example, can be interpreted not only as an example of resistance culture, a management of combatant relationships among individuals, but also can be politicized as a sociocultural context of ritual violence, i.e., a strategic cultural resistance against the repressive system by decrying the local-level authorities who see a stick as a symbol of violence and restrict it. Hence, as one can see in

¹⁴³ Rebecca Raby, “What is Resistance?” *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol 8, № 2.

¹⁴⁴ John Hutchinson, “Re-Interpreting Cultural Nationalism,” p392.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ralph A. Austen, “Social Bandits and Other Heroic Criminals: Western Models of Resistance and their Relevance for Africa,” in Donald Crummey, ed. *Banditry, Rebellion, and Social Protest in Africa*. (London: James Currey, 1986), pp89-108, p91ff; Donald Crummey, “Banditry and Resistance: noble and peasant in 19th century Ethiopia,” *ibid.*, pp133-149; also Crummey’s “Africa Banditry Revisited,” in *Africa: Myths and Realities / Enter Text*, Volume 4 number 2 Winter 2004/5. ed. Paula Bunett.

one Salale folksong, both “cultural resistance” and “resistance culture” can be placed on the same continuum.¹⁴⁷

While not significantly changing social or political relations, the youth subcultures give them a feeling of resistance and sense of belongingness.¹⁴⁸ In Ethiopia the power vested in local officials is immense: they determine eligibility for food assistance, recommend referrals to health care and schools, and provide access to resources like seeds, fertilizers, and other essential agricultural necessities. They also run the community social courts, which deal with minor claims and disputes at the kebele level, and local prisons. For the Salale youth, like the Surma youth’s *sagine* tradition in Southern Ethiopia,¹⁴⁹ which Jon Abbink discusses, the Salale *faccee* institution of a mock stick-fighting with *shimala*, a long, slender pole, represents a political and affine relationship. There is a fear that the youth could turn their stick against the authorities.

The Surma *sagine* represents the symbolic power of persons and communities and also demonstrates strength, physical and mental stamina, showing readiness for marriage and for higher social status.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, as a controlled violent performance among males, the *faccee* dueling ritual in Salale youth sub-culture also signifies social success and reputation as good

¹⁴⁷ The Salale folksong I collected in 2010 during my fieldwork is a typical example of a strategic “cultural resistance”. The following song is a social critique of interventions of local officials in youth culture and banning sticks. As to be discussed in this study, this song recounts the ban and challenges the legitimacy of “official” power as a subversive measure:

daanyaa har’a dabballeen kudhanii,
maaltu hammaannaan shimala keenya gubanii?

local officials, cadres are multiple today,
why they burn our sticks, to limit our foray?

¹⁴⁸ Haenfler, “Rethinking Subcultural Resistance...,” p408.

¹⁴⁹ Jon G. Abbink, “Violence, Ritual, and Reproduction: Culture and Context in Surma Ethnology, vol. 38 no 3, Summer 1999, pp. 227-42.

¹⁵⁰ Abbink, “Violence, Ritual, and ...,” p228.

fighters; hence, *resistance culture* is practiced among the youth as a “ritual of rebellion.” Cultural resistance is a way of resisting and rising above the anarchic, chaotic, and surrogate official politics of the domineering power and it provides an option, a universal standard upon which to base a principle to counteract unjust practices. This is a move towards what I call “strategic traditionalism,” which is a move away from cultural hegemony. In studying resistance, a new framework is needed to understand how individuals are involved and how they express their involvement. As I will broadly explain in this study, in Salale resistance culture adherents express their resistance via individual (personal) strategies and other collective means of rebellion. Salale ethnohistory shows that the initiative of banditry is taken first by an individual rebel based on bitter personal lived experience and then that person is joined by other rebels. For example, Agari Tullu’s banditry or the rebellion led by Mulu Asanu, Tadasa Birru, and, later, by Badhaadha Dilgaasa, can be mentioned. This practice leads us to conceptualize resistance as primarily an individual opposition to domination, as contextual, many layered and not static and uniform. As Ross Haenfler puts it, resistance as an individual opposition to domination, first and foremost, is “‘the politicization of the self and daily life’ in which social actors practice the future they envision”¹⁵¹ through traditional practices.

Strategic Traditionalism

In this study, by “tradition,” or *duudhaa*, I mean what Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin view as “an interpretive process that embodies both continuity and discontinuity,” instead of

¹⁵¹ Haenfler, *ibid.*, p409.

“boundedness, givenness, or essence,” and against the “Western common sense, which presumes that an unchanging core of ideas and customs is always handed down to us from the past.”¹⁵²



Figure 0.2: Tulama Oromo women performing prayers carrying *ulfaa* and *siinqee*, ritual stick.

The Salale concept of “folklore-oriented tradition” such as *bar-kume* and the *faarsa* commemorative songs, and “tradition-oriented folklore,” i.e., pastness of “historical tradition” influencing the present, is relevant to this notion of change and constancy of tradition in the creative process. “Traditionalism” is not an opposite trend to “progressivism.” It is rather a strategic, conscientious, informed looking-back, a “return to the source,” an intentional “primitivism,” an odyssey into the search for the “root” and a move to reawaken both cultural transmission and social transformation in folkloristics.¹⁵³ Since humanity is at the center of our

¹⁵² Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin. “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious,” *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 97, No. 385 (Jul. - Sep., 1984), pp. 273-290, p273.

¹⁵³ In discussing “traditionalism,” the “modern” is seen as a temporal category or as a “doubly asymmetrical” phenomenon. Pertti J. Anttonen, citing Bruno Latour, argues that the “modern” is “doubly asymmetrical: it designates a break in the regular passage of time, and it designates a combat in which there are victors and vanquished” (p27). The combat through “strategic traditionalism” is not against the “break in the regular passage of time,” i.e., a rupture of the present time and the present moment from the past time and the past moment, as

scholarship, I argue, we cannot do otherwise. As folklorists (and humanists), our role should be not just to report on the changing society but also to examine critically from the bottom up if the change is for the better, and for all, and to empathize with the humanity struggling for survival. Salale ethnohistory is characterized by strategic traditionalism. Thus, it is the purpose of this study to explore the trajectories of the primitive ideals that the Salale practice and identify their significance in re-focusing worldviews and re-creating a “new” poetics which I illustrate in this study as “strategic traditionalism,” a move against cultural hegemony. As a general anti-modernism trend, “primitivism” is a belief in the necessity of “return to the source,” reclaiming origin. It is about the superiority of a simple life close to nature, and the material and spiritual advantages of the “primitive” ways of life.¹⁵⁴

“Primitivism” or “traditionalism” was used (or implied) during the decolonization struggles in Africa as an anti-colonial strategy for mobilizing cultural resistance. Allen Isaacman maintains that when peasantry is partially autonomous, they are empowered and placed “in a unique position to remake their traditions and formulate a critique of colonial capitalism” because, as

Anttonen argues. The combat is a manifestation of persistence of earlier social institutions which are more than temporal categories and resist the commodification of folk traditions. The combat here is also against the labels and characterization of “tradition” as “non-modern” or “pre-modern,” “old,” “antique,” “conservative,” “classic,” “primitive,” “feudal,” and “traditional”. See Pertti Anttonen, *Tradition through Modernity*, 2005, p27. Today, Salale folksongs have become a lucrative source of income as popular songs in the West and back home by young Oromo artists, such as Tadala Gamachu from Salale, and others. However, rituals, mediumships, and some sacred performances have not been commercialized yet. It is totally forbidden to record live those ritual processes.

¹⁵⁴ While he recounts other proponents of “primitivism” such as Lao Tze, Rousseau, and Thoreau, and the pre-Socratics, Heinberg is of the view that civilization worsened the destruction of the ecological integrity of the planet as the population increased. As a result, “primitivism has enjoyed a popular resurgence, by way of increasing interest in shamanism, tribal customs, herbalism, radical environmentalism, and natural foods.” He stresses that “civilization has gone too far in its domination of nature, and that in order to survive...we must regain some of the spontaneity and naturalness of our early ancestors.” Heinberg does not deny the benefits of civilization. In his own words, he concludes: “Naturally, ... we would like to preserve civilization's perceived benefits while restraining its destructiveness.” See [Richard Heinberg](#), “The Primitivist Critique of Civilization,” a [paper](#) presented at the 24th annual meeting of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations at Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, June 15, 1995. Retrieved on September 5, 2014 from primitivism.com. Available: <http://primitivism.com/primitivist-critique.htm>.

Isaacman rightly puts it, no one can understand the meaning of exploitation any better than the peasants who experienced it.¹⁵⁵ He adds, of the labor exploitation of Africans on plantations on the continent, “If cotton was the “mother of poverty” it was also the “mother of rural radicalism.”¹⁵⁶ It is debatable, though, whether the oppositional culture constitutes resistance, but contentious as the culture had become, the struggles of decolonization “were taking place at the level of peasant ideology,” as it was in an open political domain. By the time of the decolonization process in Africa, as Franz Fanon seriously comments, the “national culture” itself was put in dilemma.¹⁵⁷ The ways in which the peasant oppositional culture was constructed and maneuvered, and the issue of whether or not resistance culture was continuous, also remain unclear. However, the existence and influence of insurgency was apparent.¹⁵⁸

Today, the primitivist vision and critique focuses on the negative impacts of civilization (modernization) and embodies the deteriorating human conditions characterized by environmental degradation, overpopulation, and conflicts in spite of a claimed quantitative growth. This fear of civilization seen as a social disease lured some people to advocate a “return to the source” and has led to an increased interest in rituals, shamanism, radical environmentalism, or ecopoetic “progressive” folklore, and slow (natural) foods activism.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ See Isaacman, “Peasants and Social Protest...,” 1990, p56.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ The issue of “national culture” was quite pertinent during the decolonization process. Fanon believed that within the offshoots of the political parties, cultured individuals appear, and for these individuals, the demand for a national culture and the affirmation of the existence of such a culture represents a special battle-field”. See Franz Fanon, “On National Culture” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1967), pp36-52, p36.

¹⁵⁸ This is definitely the case with peasants because they are the ones who “reflect on collective experience, speak about how politics can be ordered to bring life rather than death, to bring prosperity rather than hunger, and to bring justice rather than inequity,” and who define the means to achieve those elements of progress drawing upon a “rich variety of past forms of political language...to create new political discourse.” And I contend that political discourse is what I call “resistance poetics” as one possible means of “strategic traditionalism.” See Isaacman, *ibid.*, “Peasants and Social Protest,” pp56-57, citing Comaroff, 1985; Scott, 1985; Watts, 1988.

¹⁵⁹ Where the aspect of the “traditional” has become a global construction of identity and culture through the commodification of traditional music, artifacts, and arts on the global markets of tourism (what folklorists call

National liberation denotes cultural resistance, and a complexity of cultural resistance is also understood in terms of the diverse historical sedimentation of culture, “a treasure box—one containing valuable and not-so-valuable ingredients.”¹⁶⁰ In what follows, I turn to discussing briefly this notion of “strategic traditionalism” by presenting a few examples of studies into subjugated local knowledge.

Those who studied culture among the “primitives” thought it to be merely a matter of “common-sense,” like “witchcraft.” For a Zande potter whose culture Evans-Pritchard studied (Zande witchcraft), as Clifford Geertz notes, a crack in the pot is a work of witchcraft, whereas, for the ethnographer (Evans-Pritchard), who sees the matter from his own common-sense tradition, the potter’s claim, i.e., witchcraft, is nonsense.¹⁶¹ “Like all good ethnographers,” Geertz sarcastically comments, Evans-Pritchard “never seems to learn.”¹⁶² That is, to the potter who claims to have chosen the clay carefully, removed all the pebbles and dirt, and abstained from sexual intercourse the night before, and still the pot broke, by that common-sense (and culture system), it is nothing but witchcraft. In this “primitive” common-sense thought there is room for logic. Culturally

“folkloricization” or “folklorization”), the deterritorialization of the production and consumption of identity and culture becomes real. That is “McDonaldization” of local cultures and identity which heralds “the end of traditions,” “a diffusionistic approach to globalization based on the polarization of change and continuity.” See Pertti Anttonen, *ibid.*, p119-20. To Katherine Hagedon (2001) “folkloricization” is a “process of making folk tradition folkloric” (p1) that involves selection of a form of expression as a representative of the tradition, the community, or the nation and the reappropriation of the commoditized item by the original producer(s). See also John McDowell’s concept of “folklorization” (2010) where he operationalizes the term as a “processing of local traditions for external consumption” in which, he insists, the agency of the producers (participants) is pertinent as they reengage with, reclaim, and adapt their folklorized cultural forms (p205). See Katherine Hagedon, *Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería*. (Washington D.C.: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001); John McDowell, “Rethinking Folklorization in Ecuador: Multivocality in the Expressive Contact Zone,” *Western Folklore*, Vol. 69, No. 2, (2010). In Salale, 40 miles from the capital, Finfinne, the combat against domination and cultural hegemony is not bound within the local or regional spaces; it is with the nation-state and the disempowering discourse.

¹⁶⁰ Fred Dallmayr, “Return to the Source: African Identity (After Cabral)” in *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, No. 88, Identity, Agency and Self, (1996). pp. 1-23; See Amilcar Cabral’s, *Return to the Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral*, (New York and London: Monthly Review Press with Africa Information Service, 1973).

¹⁶¹ Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p78.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

defined, as Geertz, points it out, “ignorance, stupidity, or incompetence, are quite sufficient causes of failure in Zande eyes.”¹⁶³ Hence, skillfully, the potter lists other possible causes for a crack in the pot. Similarly, by the Salale common-sense view of the world, adultery can evoke curse and ruin marriage unless it is revoked, as incest is believed to inflict leprosy among the Zande. Stick-fighting (*faccee*) mentioned earlier as a violent ritual is an emotional encounter for the Salale youth as it is a training ground for the real armed conflicts or self-defense like the *gugsii* (horse-ride) institution which constructs daring ideals of male behavior in order to impress elders, peers, and young women. Salale deity worship, death lore, rituals, and verbal art portray the common view, the lore of the people not only about memories of loved ones passing or deities guarding the land and people on the land, but also about the customs, rituals, beliefs and superstitions deeply rooted in tradition and in place and routed through time for generations.

In his *Domination and Cultural Resistance*, Roger Neil Rasnake, argues bluntly of the Yura’s cultural strategy against the Spaniards’ domination of the Yura that through a strategic “cultural resistance” the Yura retained and reformulated many aspects of the original Andean worldview.¹⁶⁴ The retention is not an “anachronistic throwback to bygone days,” Rasnake argues, or “a result of lack of contact with the wider world.” It is “a cultural strategy, one that is perhaps not consciously chosen or even verbally articulated, but a strategy nonetheless.”¹⁶⁵ Thus, by the same token, as we shall see in the chapters to follow, the Salale are culturally conservative and their pattern of social life draws heavily on the Oromo past to resist Abyssinian domination using different resistance phenomena. The Salale way of life represents the manifestation of “strategic traditionalism” as Oromo solution to an unbearable human condition in violent times.

¹⁶³ Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, p79.

¹⁶⁴ Rasnake, *Domination and Cultural Resistance*, p3.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

The Salale efforts to maintain their identity and autonomy have been made possible through cultural resistance.



Figure 0.3: *Cidha*, Salale wedding tradition

It is part of the broad purpose of this study to explore the trajectories of the traditional ideals that the Salale elders practice and the usefulness of re-focusing worldviews and re-creating a new poetics which I illustrate in this section as strategic traditionalism. As a general anti-modernism trend, “traditionalism” is a belief in the necessity of “return to the source,” return to origin. It is about the superiority of a simple life close to nature, hence, the eco-poetic stance, as anthropologists (Levi-Strauss, Geertz) expressed the material and spiritual advantages of the “primitive” ways of life.¹⁶⁶ “Primitivism” or “traditionalism” was used (or implied) during the decolonization struggles in Africa as an anti-colonial strategy for mobilizing cultural resistance.

¹⁶⁶ Richard Heinberg, “The Primitivist Critique of Civilization”. A paper presented at the 24th annual meeting of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations at Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, June 15, 1995.

In Amilcar Cabral's view, national liberation denotes cultural resistance, and a complexity of cultural resistance is also understood in terms of the diverse historical sedimentation of culture, "a treasure box—one containing valuable and not-so-valuable ingredients."¹⁶⁷ Those thoughts are re-focusing of the cultural ideals (essentials) by which people retain much of their coherence under the disempowering situation and challenge the national and global cultural domination. Thus, tradition as a solid ground for resistance culture is "not a sterile custom,"¹⁶⁸ it is rather a resource that defines the group's power relations and its trajectories continue to traverse with those of the dominant culture because of the longtime cultural border-crossings.

Citing John Barrow's *The Artful Universe*, Gregory Schrempf notes, "Barrow presents a vision of the human place in the cosmos, one dominated by the constraints on human physical and mental makeup imposed by the constants of nature."¹⁶⁹ It is to these effects of cosmic constraints, I posit, that natives perform rituals, prayers, incantations, blessings, songs, and dances and do other eco-poetic practices not only to conform to but also to normalize, harmonize, appease nature and to cohabit, as collective beings, planet earth. I cannot agree enough to the assumption that "humans, according to Barrow, are universally predisposed to artistic representation of landscape," which reminds us of Keith Basso's Western Apache folk-psychology, their "communicative acts of topographic representation." Basso maintains that among the Apache communities, senses of place partake of cultures, of shared bodies of "local

¹⁶⁷ Fred Dallmayr, "Return to the Source: African Identity,....," p6.

¹⁶⁸ Roger Neil Rasnake, p14.

¹⁶⁹ Gregory Schrempf, *The Ancient Mythology of Modern Science* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 2012), pp40-41.

knowledge” “with which persons and whole communities render their places meaningful and endow them with social importance.”¹⁷⁰

Perhaps Thoreau is the first 20th century promoter of eco-poetics, who came early out of the allegorical Cave, and became aware of this indispensable relationship between humans and nature, and labored in Walden to reveal nature as a source of meaning of esoteric knowledge to the initiated. In our era, Bruno Latour’s political philosophy of nature or political epistemology (political ecology) is another attempt to narrow the rift between science, politics, and nature (logos, polis, and physis).¹⁷¹ The Salale oral historical traditions, songs, and rituals are evidences for these complementary experiences and the human-nature interdependencies. Mustafa Kemal Mirzeler clearly demonstrates this interdependency in his *Remembering Nayeche* that Africans have survival strategies to maintain harmony with nature “living in an unpredictable environment where they can become victims of both famine and political uncertainties.”¹⁷² It seems that it is not only by reasoning that we understand nature but also by resigning to it.

Verbal art: Historicity, Functionality

Folksongs and narratives serve a socio-political and topical purpose among a non-literate and oppressed society to actively comment on class and/or power relations, and on the versions of

¹⁷⁰To this Apache folk-psychology, the three mental conditions that facilitate for the development of *igoya'i*, wisdom (*oguma*, among the Oromo) are smoothness of mind, resilience of mind, and steadiness of mind, which facilitate the avoidance of harmful events: “The people pass away; the land looks after us...keeps badness away” (p61). In Schrempp view it seems that John Barrow’s *The Artful Universe* is a testimony to this indispensable connectedness between the “human aesthetic sensibility” and the “rest of the natural world,” which is another aspect of the Latourian politics of humans’/nonhumans’ crucial relationship. This ongoing debate between the fields of the sciences and the humanities is engaging and folkloristic, I believe, has as yet to do a great deal to continue as a critical discipline. Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), p73.

In Salale local knowledge, *Dachi*, Mother Earth, holds a central space and places and place names are symbolic representations of agency and power.

¹⁷¹ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹⁷² Mustafa Kemal Mirzeler, *Remembering Nayeche and the Grey Bull Engiro*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 118.

historical events authorized by the rulers.¹⁷³ In this regard, for the purpose of this study, political folksongs are songs of defiance against oppression inflicted by state (officials) in an undemocratic system. It is also an alternative resistance model to subvert violence imposed by other social inequalities imposed inter-ethnically within a society. Political folksongs are characterized by border-crossings across genres, i.e., through dirges, work songs, lullabies, love songs, and other poetic folk genres such as abusive songs “sometimes directly used as a means of social pressure, enforcing the will of public opinion” and insults, satires and curses.¹⁷⁴

As to be discussed in this study, existing written documents show that a great many Oromo folksongs revolve around the subject of eviction from home, land, farm, and ritual sites.¹⁷⁵ The problems of social injustice and undemocratic practices, political and social power imbalances and inequalities are widely communicated but furtively in every folk genre thought suitable for a given context. For the sake of convenience, the catchphrase ‘*protest folksongs*’ is deemed suitable for this study. Hence, due to the dynamic nature of this genre and its historical transformations, the functions and characteristics of a verbal genre vary.

The new perspective on folklore introduced a reorientation away from folklore as material (text as object to be collected and classified) and towards folklore as a communication act. By this new approach, performance is a speaking mode that conveys two organizing principles of verbal art: artistic action (doing folklore) and artistic situation (event or social context) “involving form, audience, and setting—both action and situation are central to the performance approach to

¹⁷³ Finnegan 1970: 272-298, and 1977; Rogers 1995

¹⁷⁴ Finnegan 1970:277

¹⁷⁵ Enrico Cerulli 1922; Andrzejewski 1978:1-27; 1985; Catherine-Mewis, 2004.

folklore,” based on a wider range of disciplines.¹⁷⁶ In collecting folkloric examples of resistance-oriented Salale verbal art, in this study, I faced difficulties in obtaining empirical data in most natural contexts since, for fear of possible risks, performers evaded serious topics of a political bent. Therefore, I managed to collect most of the *faarsa* heroic commemorative songs with less emphasis on what Richard Bauman calls the “artistic event” (situation, context), but rather, usually, in one-on-one settings of performance, without the benefit of extended events and the presence of audiences, and without a focus on the centrality of performance.

Oral genre, unlike those of the the print medium, normally propels the performer into a face-to-face confrontation with an audience to involve the people in the audience directly, as in a storytelling situation where an opening formula is a common practice or, I would add, as in the Salale Oromo call-and-response style in folksong performances. For Karin Barber, in both oral and written traditions, both the textual forms and the institutional and formal arrangements of texts (into genres) by the people (users) are equally important in the “entextualisation process.” That is, what was preserved and transmitted as oral tradition “was not so much discrete texts but rather the well-defined field of conventions and resources within which the poet-declainers worked”—resources shaped by genres.¹⁷⁷ The significance of context and performance is crucial as “text is differently constituted in different social and historical contexts” and its “meanings vary from one culture to another.”¹⁷⁸ Barber adds that “oral texts are the outcome of a concerted

¹⁷⁶ Richard Bauman, “Verbal Art as Performance,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 77, No. 2 (Jun., 1975), pp. 290-311, see pp290, 291; Richard Bauman, *Verbal Arts as Performance*, (Austin: Texas University Press, 1984).

¹⁷⁷ Karin Barber, *Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p25.

¹⁷⁸ Karin Barber, p67. Cf. Bayo Ogunjimi and Abdul-Rasheed Na’allah. *Introduction to African Oral Literature and Performance*. (Lawrenceville, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005).

effort... a vivid demonstration of the emergent and the improvisatory,”¹⁷⁹ which is a performative act of oral tradition in context.

Historicity

One characteristic feature of protest folksongs are their historicity. Citing M. A. Hinawy about the 19th century Swahili political songs, Finnegan writes, “Songs of insult, challenge, or satirical comment have a long history,” and can function on a personal level and as a politically effective weapon.¹⁸⁰ Historically speaking, Finnegan further confirms that there is not “a complete break in continuity between ‘traditional’ political poetry and that of “modern politics.”¹⁸¹ Thus, both the poetics of history and historical poetics of resistance continue to exist where power exists. The act of performing such folksongs by itself provides the folks with a common identity, a sense of community, of oneness, sharing same experience under pressure by giving them a common voice.¹⁸² The Salale songs of grievances, *quuqqaa*, about land are typical examples of historical songs. By singing such songs as *faarsa* commemorative songs, full of life and ardor, the people share not only history but also a common ground and perspective. Writing of folklore in a historical context, Robert Georges writes, citing Satu Apo, a Finish folklorist, that social criticisms and aggressions expressed are necessarily not reflections of situations at a time; rather they are “manifestations of pressures built up over the centuries by the social hierarchy.”¹⁸³ In historically reconstituting the origin of the nation, *Kalevala* is a narrative historical account of

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Finnegan 1970:273

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Roberts A George et al.. *Folkloristics: an Introduction*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p224.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p163, citing Satu Apo (1989:200-209).

the Finnish people under Sweden and the Russian Tsars.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, comparison about two oppressive conditions in Oromo history, namely, that of the Italian occupation and of the Ethiopia's feudal system constitutes the poetic content of many Oromo folk songs.¹⁸⁵

Functionality

The political and topical functions of African folksongs are best exemplified in Finnegan's Somali, Yoruba, Swahili and Oromo folksongs, among others.¹⁸⁶ Andrzejewski focuses on Somali folksongs.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, in the wider African context, among the reasons why folksongs are sung include "to report and comment on current affairs, for political pressure, for propaganda, and to reflect and mold public opinion."¹⁸⁸ If "one type of poetry always goes with a particular form of society," as Finnegan questions in her *Oral Poetry*, and if certain kinds of poetry may fit well with certain types of social order at a particular stage of society, there may arise the necessity to identify those features.¹⁸⁹ That is, in an attempt to connect a "type of poetry and stage of society," there is little evidence, if any, that oral poetry always occurs in the "changeless" tradition-bound context.¹⁹⁰ Likewise, the *geerarsa / faarsa* song among the Salale Oromo, I claim, under no circumstance remains unchanged to stand as a universal and special

¹⁸⁴ *Kalevala* is a product of centuries of struggle of the Finns (Karelians) for national independence and survival against suppressive forces. *Kalevala* is sharing history through songs, a repository and summing-up of the Finnish collective memory, philosophy and worldview, language, arts and beliefs, as preserved by generations of ordinary peasants in the Finnish countryside. *Kalevala* is a repertoire of common history of the Finns under Swedish and Russian domination for over eight hundred years (from A.D. 1200 to 1809, under Swedish rule, and from 1809-1917 under the Tsarist Russia. Mulokozi argues in his article, "Kalevala and Africa," the Finnish folksong helps Africans to share a politico-cultural spirit from the Finns given similar experience of subjugation and, hence, a quest for freedom, meaningful identity, and nationhood. See M.M. Mulokozi, "Kalevala and Africa," *Journal of African Studies* 1(2): 71-80 (1992); See also Georges 1995:35, 36.

¹⁸⁵ Tesema Ta'a in Katherine Griefenow-Mewis and Tamene Bitima, *Oromo Oral Poetry: Seen From Within*. 2004: 31-36; see Bitima *ibid*, p47.

¹⁸⁶ See Finnegan, 1970; *Oral Poetry*, 1977.

¹⁸⁷ B. W. Andrzejewski, (ed.). *Literatures in African Languages: Theoretical Issues and Sample Surveys*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1985/2010).

¹⁸⁸ Finnegan 1970:272.

¹⁸⁹ Finnegan, *Oral Poetry*, 1977.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*.

oral style. It therefore undergoes some historical transformations in the process of constant sociopolitical and cultural changes as part of the pan-Oromo current situation.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters. The *Introduction* section sets background for the study and sketches the conceptual and methodological route the study will take. In *Chapter 1* I introduce the Salale setting from social and spatial perspective. Here I argue that an ecopoetic examination of place, place names and personal names of places, elaborates a folkloric understanding of the sacred past and the social meaning of past events, and guarantees change and constancy through renovating tradition and creating knowledge not only about the physical space but also about the mental space resonating persistently in collective memory through verbal art and rituals. In *Chapter 2*, I will make an attempt to outline an “alternative Salale Oromo history.” This chapter explores a Salale perspective on “local” history as developed in their expressive culture overtime. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to curve out a narrative frame in which to analyze Salale ethnohistory, an unorthodox, subaltern account of the people’s aspirations of themselves contrary to the Abyssinian imperial historiography. Here the notion of folkloric performance as an “emancipatory act,” i.e. a “progressive folklore,” is at work to show how the people express and comment actively their marginal social space.

In *Chapter 3*, under “Salale verbal art,” I identify and discuss the major expressive forms from the ethnic genres relevant to my thesis, including stories, songs, incantations, personal lived experience narratives, and rituals followed by Chapter 4, the “Salale folksongs.” In *Chapter 4* I identify the repertoire of Salale folksong genres and sub-genres to build the data upon which

analyses of meanings of the verbal art are made. The eco-poetic origin of folksong is also discussed here from a Salale perspective. By drawing on the folk traditions and verbal resources I will try to navigate the complexities of the Salale folklore and resistance culture based on three artists' (*shaayi*) experience presented in Chapter 5. In *Chapter 5*, specific case examples obtained from the three "Salale folk artists" (*shaayi*) feature distinctively their "lived experience." *Chapter 6* provides data for the analysis of narratives and commemorative *faarsa* songs built around Salale bandits and banditry based on the biographies of three "bandits" who lived in three different epochs. The aim is to illustrate the Salale *faarsa* commemorative songs used as an indigenous model to instill resistance through non-violent practices in honor of ethnic heroes. In this chapter, I will feature the commemorative *faarsa* songs about the Salale heroes who, ideally, emerge clearly as figures emblematic of Salale heroic actions and aspirations.

In the *Conclusion* I will make final comment that open up a stage for theoretical claims drawing on indigenous models with the hope that they will pave the way for further interdisciplinary folklore research in Africa in conflict settings and in other cultures. In this section, the "poetics of resistance" and eco-poetics of place will clearly set the trajectories of traditional ideals that the Salale Oromo practice in their daily life. As a general anti-hegemonic trend, folklore as "creative resistance" and "progressive" and "emancipatory" act will be reconsidered as a belief in the necessity of an alternative political agency against hegemony, particularly when the elite politics faces multiple hurdles. The conclusion will also reintegrate the salient features about resistance poetics and the different symbolic performances at play in Salale to exercise power and authority from "below."

SALALE: THE SETTING

No more standing on Enxooxo,
to look down at the pasture below,
no more taking cattle to Finfinne,
to water at the mineral spring.
No more gathering on Tullu Daalattii,
where the Gullalle assembly used to meet.
No more going beyond Gafarsa,
to collect firewood.
No more taking calves,
to the meadow at Hurufa Boombii.
The year the enemy came,
our cattle perished.
Since Mashasha came,
Freedom vanished.

____Gullalle Song of Displacemen

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to offer folkloric perspectives in a modern culture with respect to place-based resistance poetics, i.e., folkloric *ecopoetics*, against domination from a Salale viewpoint. Here I will identify the role of toponymic features and place-related cultural values in the context of contemporary mode of folkloric production in Salale to counterpose every form of injustices, unequal power relations, and the mainstream culture's ethnocentrism and stereotypical images of the people.¹ Using socio-spatial setting in this study, I do not pretend to forge an epistemology of "green politics," but as an aspiring Africanist scholar, I am equally concerned about African indigenous ecopoetic practices, i.e., *environmental folklore*, and the ongoing rapid ecological and social dynamics.² Here I theorize that a thorough study of socio-spatial setting is a key to understanding the people's verbal art, rituals, incantations, spells, mythscape and songs of

¹ Bas Van Heur writes, added to geographical features, "land and the mechanism of control over this land (and the people over it) is a central explanatory paradigm of Ethiopian history." See Bas van Heur Bas Van Heur, "The Spatial Imagination of Oromia: the Ethiopian State and Oromo Transitional Politics," Faculty of Arts of Utrecht University: The Netherlands, 2004, p13.

² Hong-Key Yoon and Edmunds V. Bunkse, "Folklore and the Study of Environmental Attitudes," in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Dec., 1979), pp. 635-639.

places which represent particular settings of events in history. By the same token, the Salale socio-spatial setting is framed within the ecopoetics of the people, which is the intellectual root of traditional ecological knowledge, a symbol of identity, and all in turn, I posit, are rooted in folklore and tradition.³ To place *ecopoetics* on the flaring interdisciplinary avenue of study such as folkloristics, there is no more compelling time than the present when we are encountering the planetary scope of multiple environmental crisis and social injustices that face the earth and when our academic mainstream offers less alternative way, if any, to sustain at least the debilitating “sacred ecology” which should concern us as folklorists and Africanists.⁴ In discussing the “Salale Setting” in this chapter, I use “*eco*” to refer to “nature,” “natural habitat,” “land/space,” or “house/home,” and “*poetics*,” that is, “poesis” or “making.” Hence, “making a house,” where both human and nonhuman inhabit. In so doing, I do not necessarily focus on the “critical” over the “creative” act but I will try to balance both. To make it more explicit, here my intention is that, if *ecocriticism* is an unheeded impetus of a call for action in studies like comparative literature, let *ecopoetics* do the job in folkloristics.

Toward this end, this chapter is divided into four parts. First, *Fieldwork*. In this section, I will briefly highlight the Salale setting, the people and their homeland, based on my observation and available data I obtained from the field to provide a background for the study of Salale folklore

³To subvert the stigma of appropriation, deprivation, and humiliation of being treated as backward and primitive through *resistance poetics* and *ecopoetic* practices the Salale attach the actual meaning of rootedness in the land of their ancestors. Ted Chamberlin succinctly describes the power of stories and songs: they give ordinary people pleasure, strength in times of trouble, or a model of moral behavior to aspire to... “a sense of how important it is to come together in a new understanding of the power and the paradox of stories” (p239). And he goes on to state, “...I tell stories. That’s what we all do there, in ceremonies of belief and disbelief, of wonder and surprise...we sing songs about justice and freedom or chaos and order. And we make up new stories and songs. We call the old ones teaching and the new ones research.” See Edward Chamberlin, *IF this is Your Land, Where are Your Stories?* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2004), pp234, 239.

⁴ Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management*, (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 1999). Interview, Raggaasaa Badhiye, Ilu, 2010, with Seyoum Ayalao, my research assistant.

and resistance culture. The basic question I intend to answer here is not just what the unique defining features of the Salale setting are, but also what those unique defining features mean to the people. Second, *Salale Eco-poetics*. Here I locate the role of the physical setting in Salale folkloric eco-poetics, i.e. their folklore of place and nature (ritual sites—sacred or secular—plants, animals, land and land resource, and celestial bodies), using some ethnographic examples of verbal art and my observations from the field. In so doing, I will try to justify why it is now more important than ever to attend to *eco-poetic* practice aligned with *resistance poetics*. Third, *Socio-spatial Scene*. In this third section, I will trace the genealogy of Salale setting by recounting the “spatial imagination” of the people in some ethnographic examples from the field. The intention here is to make an attempt to constitute a poetics of human-nonhuman relationship through examining the indigenous socio-spatial model and explore the praxis of the relationship through revisiting the thematic emphasis of samples of the data from the people’s viewpoint. Finally, the *Cultural Setting*. Using examples of verbal art, oral traditions, and available sources I will outline the Salale cultural history by examining the socioeconomic and cultural setting to lay ground for understanding Salale folklore and resistance culture.

In tandem, all the subsections to follow will focus on the significance of place and nature in Salale eco-poetics to set a baseline for later discussions in the study and, in so doing, to vitalize the notion of *poetics* in folkloristics. In this eco-poetic description of the Salale (in both their social and physical settings), I problematize *scope* on two methodological bases: first, the *geographical scope* is limited to Salale historically set within the Shawa Kingdom⁵ as a center of the *concentric circle* of Abyssinian expansion, currently, one of the zones in Oromia. Second,

⁵ See Svein Ege, *Class, State, and Power in Africa: a Case Study of the Kingdom of Shawa (Ethiopia) about 1840*. (Aethiopistische Forschungen 46, Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), p48. Cf. Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, “The Oromo of Salale: a History, 1840-1935,” Unpublished MA Thesis, History Department, Addis Ababa University, 2003.

the *temporal scope* takes on the *historical line* which goes beyond the spatial centrality of Salale and represents the most affected locality because of its relative proximity to the Abyssinian ethnic hegemony based in Finfinne (Cf. Chapter 2).

FIELDWORK

To describe the Salale setting here I present the emergent but contingent domain that arises from the examination of my fieldwork experience. To do so I draw on my field-notes and recordings of the interviews as these characterize the locality as I lived in and observed in 2009 to 2010.⁶

The beginning of my research work was neither easy nor simple. I set out for data collection in 2009 to 2010 after repeated preliminary visits in Salale in 2007 and 2008. During my visits first I made contacts with officials from Salale who were suspicious to allow outsiders to contact the people as national election was scheduled for May 2010. However, it was only after a few months' discouraging interruptions from the zonal administration office and local officials that I could establish rapport, in spite of my research permit from the Oromia Regional State office.

Spatial Representation of Salale

Salale is one of the 17 administrative zones of Oromia Regional State in Ethiopia. The Salale share borders with the Amhara Region (Orthodox Christian) to the north and northeast with a distinctive blend of cultures. The regional statistical data shows that about 91% of the population is engaged in agriculture and cattle rearing.⁷ According to the 2007 census, the total population

⁶ See Bas van Heur, "Spatial Representation of Oromia: The Ethiopian State and Oromo Transnational Politics," (MA Thesis, Faculty of Arts of Utrecht University, The Netherlands, 2004).

⁷ *Oromia: Facts* (Year Book). (Finfinne: Published by Office of the President, 2010); Central Statistical Agency (CSA) of Ethiopia, 2007.

of North Shawa Zone is 1,431,305, with 92.43% of the population professing Orthodox Christianity, while 5.34% are Muslims. The Oromo are reported as the largest ethnic group in the zone with 84.33% followed, by Amhara, (14.99%), and 0.68% of other ethnic groups. Historically, Salale, as the North Shawa Zone is generally called, became a seat for Abyssinian princes and princesses, as it is closer to the capital city, Finfinne, the folkloric name that was changed to Addis Ababa following Menilek's rule (1889-1913).⁸ On this land, the last 400 years have been the history of "at times of bloody conflict, at other times of conciliation and assimilation" between the Amhara and the Oromo.⁹ This area is exceptionally fertile and has been a bone of contestation between the native Oromo and descendants of the numerous *naftegnas*, i.e., Amhara musketeers.

Located on an average elevation of about 8,143 feet above sea level, most of the natural vegetation in Salale plateau has been devastated and the landscape is mostly covered with a few open broadleaved deciduous forest. Between Salale and Finfinne, the capital, the Enxoxxo Mountain rises at about 10, 822 feet above sea level and overlooks Finfinne at its foot from the top of the hill surrounded by tall eucalyptus trees, churches, an old palace, and indigenous trees, some deciduous some evergreen, resisting to survive the invasive eucalyptus trees. On the way to Salale farther northwest, it is common to see women and children carrying heavy bundles of firewood and wobbling their way down to the capital. The dense eucalyptus tree on Enxoxxo is a major source of income for hundreds of poor families in the city and its environs. Available

⁸ Finfinne, the settlement of the Oromo clans Abbichu, Galan, Ekka, and Gullalle (Bairu Tafla mentions the first two only), and was renamed as Addis Ababa in 1887, became the capital of Ethiopia connected to other commercial cities and garrison towns, and creating nucleus of the colonial economic system. See Bairu Tafla, 1987a, p874; Asafa Jalata, pp76, 84ff. See the place of Salale in the traditional Shawa state in Alain Gascon's "Shāwa, Ethiopia's Prussia. Its Expansion, Disappearance and Partition," in *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. by Svein Ege, et al. (2009, 85-98), and Crummey, pp173-84.

⁹ Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia, 1896-1974*, (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995), p17.



Figure 1.1: Enxooxo and the chain of Ekka Mountains north of Finfinne (Addis Ababa), the capital.



Figure 1.2: Mogor escarpment viewed from Darro Daannisa (also called Birbirsa Goshu).

sources indicate that, the area near Mt. Enxooxxo was the traditional home of the Metta Suba Oromo.¹⁰

Farther north of Enxooxxo the Gaara Gofu Mountain range forms its center, extended in all directions and falling slowly toward the Jama River, and farther south to the Mogor River forming a sizable basin. The Sululta Oromo south of the Gara Gofu Mountains are probably descendants of the Gullale Oromo who were displaced from Finfinne. The Gombichu live west of the mountains bordering with Obori in the north and Yaya (and Gullalle) in the north-west.

The Mulo Oromo live in the west and southwest of Gofu, while the Salale are settled on the plateau north of the Mogor River up to the Jama escarpments. My first field-work began in Mulo in 2009. On the way to Mulo Faallee, the Alaltu river valley is located southwest of Salale. It is plain up to the bridge on Canco-Darba road. The valley then further narrows down by hills and mountains falling down to Mogor River with the elevation of about 250m. The elevations located to the northwest and east are steep gorges of Mogor and Jama Rivers which drop over 700 meters. The Mogor River, which is an epitome in Salale verbal art is one of the tributaries of the Blue Nile and flows west of Salale in a deeply incised valley, which is at an elevation about 700m deep below sea level. Alaltu is a perennial river which arises from the Enxooxxo Mountain range. Though it is perennial the flow of Alaltu during dry season is scanty; it joins Mogor River to the north of the Darba town.

The settlement pattern of the Salale shows that generally the largest and fertile part of the northern Shawa region has been inhabited by the Tulama branch of the Oromo since the

¹⁰ Svein Ege, p47.

sixteenth century.¹¹ The Salale are the Bacho sub-branch. Their settlement pattern is delineated by genealogy, i.e. based on close kin in one cluster of houses. The tales behind the place names indicate not only ethnic pedigree but also eponymic relations of the past to the present. In some examples, ethnonames coincide with personal names preceded by “warra,” meaning, “family of” (e.g. *warra Gurmu*, *warra Morodaa*). Those residing in the highlands are predominantly Oromo who labor on small household plots of land, while those in the escarpments of Jama valleys near the Warra Jaarso district are a few Amharas and Oromos. Perhaps this may be true in Teshale Tibebu’s words that “many an Amhara in rural Shawa lives under cliffs and gorges, competing with monkeys for space,” but, he concludes, erroneously, that “Salale and Ambo are Gardens of Eden.”¹² The claim is erroneous not because the Salaleland is not cultivable but



Figure 1.3: Tullu Ijaara, 95, with his lactating cows. Kuyyu

¹¹ Oromia Culture & Tourism Bureau / OCTB, *Oromo History to the 16th Century*, (Finfinne, 2004).

¹² Teshale Tibebu’s, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*, p177.

because it is one of the previous colonial divisions inhabited by tribute-paying Oromo clans impoverished on their own ancestral fertile land as they till today small household plots.¹³



Figure 1.4: Livestock, Ejersa Kaawo, Giraar Jaarso.

The climate of the Salale area is characterized by two distinct seasonal weather patterns. The wet season extends from June to September, and contributes about 70% of the annual rainfall which increases by elevation. Rains occur during the spring and summer seasons. The dry season covers the period from October to May. The Salale area is suitable for agriculture, vegetation, and crops such as cereals, pulses, oil seeds, spices, and livestock (cattle, sheep, poultry, and pack animals). However, in the most parts of the zone where I collected my data, the eight localities¹⁴

¹³ Informant, Lieutenant Abbaba M., Muloo Faallee, Interview on history of Salale, particularly, Faallee and the royal family's interest in the region. For example, empress Zewditu was put in confinement in Faallee during *Ij* Iyasu's short time reign. Ras Goobana had a garrison in *Tach Faalle*, which I could visit the site on the hilltop overlooking Mogor valley but no remains to observe. Ruined by time, surrounded by deep gorges, nothing left to view.

¹⁴ The eight Salale (Northwest Shawa) districts where I collected my data in 2009 and 2010 were: *Muloo Faallee*, *Yaaya Gullallee*, *Wucaale*, *Dabra Libaanos*, *Hidhabu Aboote*, *Giraar Jaarsoo*, *Dagam*, and *Kuyyu*.

were not richly stocked with flocks of sheep and goats and do not abound with large herds of cattle. Today household landholding has become limited.

The economy of Salale depends on rain-fed cereals, pulses and oil seeds complimented by rearing livestock and sales of eucalyptus trees, fodder, and cattle, sheep, and chickens to generate income. The soils are moderately fertile sandy loam. Traditionally, wealth is primarily determined by the amount of land cultivated, livestock possessed, and a large household size one had which has become difficult today given the limited household land holdings. In areas like Muloo Faallee, to see eucalyptus trees in the backyard or close to the homestead, like coffee plants in Macca, is common.



Figure 1.5: *Teff* farm. Teff is one of the staple grains in Oromo food culture both for consumption and for income

In spite of experts' and officials' discouraging the practice because of its negative ecological impacts, farmers continued expanding their plantations of eucalyptus trees to generate income; whereas, indigenous vegetation cover, including sacred groves and ritual trees (e.g. *ejersa*, juniper), is deteriorating at an alarming rate.¹⁵ This shows that there is something amiss somewhere: a multiplicity of local or official agents have structural power inequalities, which requires to go beyond discursive approaches to the problem and shift attention towards practices and human agency.



Figure 1.6: Eucalyptus tree on Enxooxo and terraces to protect erosion and recover richness of the soil lost.

¹⁵ Tola Gemechu Ango, "Expansion of Eucalyptus Plantations by Smallholder Farmers amid Natural Forest Depletion: Case Study from Mulo District in Central Oromia," Proceedings from the Congress Held in Addis Ababa, 2010, pp340-343. Among the concerns about eucalyptus tree, even at government level in East Africa, include: its inability to provide quality wood or services such as watershed or soil conservation, wildlife habitats and even recreational or aesthetic functions, its impact on the environment such as heavy use of soil water, its adverse effect of the leaf litter and soil humus, high consumption of soil nutrients, inability to prevent soil erosion, inhibition of growth of other plants in the understory and failure to provide food supplies or adequate habitat for wildlife. See Gessesse Dessie and Teklu Erkosa, "Eucalyptus in East Africa: Socio-economic and Environmental Issues," Working Paper FP46/E FAO, Rome, Italy. (May 2011), p. vi. Also available on: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-am332e.pdf>

Salale is plentifully supplied with tributary streams which feed into Mogor and Jama, the two major tributaries of the Nile and subjects of Salale songs and narratives about bandits and banditry. The Mogor River rises in the lofty mountains. Jama is one of the tributaries of the Nile and it collects almost all of the streams in northeast Salale. Judging by one church observance I witnessed in 2010 at Kurfa, in most Salale heroic songs, the rivers Jama and Mogor are depicted as the most popularized sanctuaries of bandits:

waan nama gootu	see how defiant are
gugurraan Kibbituu	Kibbitu's 'black-eyed' heroes
been Mogor buunaa	let us go to Mogor
yoo aarte malee	(angry young cubs)
dhiirri qe'ee hin jibbituu	no hero leaves home for no good cause! ¹⁶

Along the highway from Finfinne that cuts through Salale up to the Nile, extensive pasturelands stretch before the eye almost entirely destitute of trees and houses. Instead of the invasive eucalyptus tree, which came to replace indigenous trees, and chosen in the locality mainly for its economic asset, it would be ecologically healthier to plant native vegetation on the left and right sides of the Salale highway from Sululta to the Nile basin. The eight districts where I conducted my field research are located in those wider tracts of land east and west of the highway, which were once divided for the two sons of Ras Darge, *dajjach* Tasama and *dajjach* Asfaw.¹⁷ This and

¹⁶ Informant, Shaaroo Lammii, Garba Gurraacha, interview on bandit and banditry. History of Salale rebellion and ethnic heroes. Shaaroo was a rebel and has rich repertoire of resistance songs and narratives to be presented in other chapters.

¹⁷ The eight districts where I did my ethnographic fieldwork are Mulo, Wucaale, Yaaya-Gullalle, Dabra Libanos, Girar Jaarso, Dagam, Hidhabu Abote, and Kuyyu, the lands which were once randomly rationed with the people settled on them among the Shawa rulers, which the Salale contemplate to date with deep-seated remorse to be expressed through songs and stories after well over a century.

See Bairu Tafla, "The Historical Notes of "Liqa-Ṭäbbäbt" Abbäbä Yeräfu" in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 50, No. 2 (1987), pp. 267-300. In this chronicle by Abba Yeräfu of Fiche which Bairu Tafla meticulously translated and edited—but for his insensitivity about the derogatory term "Galla" for Oromo—Bairu notes the random distribution of the Salale land in 1900 to two of Ras Darge's sons, *dajjach* Asfaw and *dajjach* Tasamma Darge. Thus, the right portion, east of the highway, was allotted to *dajjach* Tasamma and the left portion of Salale and Yaya Gullalle, west of the highway, to *dajjach* Asfaw Darge, when Ras Darge died "twenty-nine years after his entry in Salale." Bairu adds, "Later, the whole of Salale and Yaya-Gullalle were given to *dajjach* Tasamma," p292.

other themes of the Salale ethno-history will be discussed in Chapter 2. Next, I explore the folk idea of creative human relationship to setting, which I call Salale eco-poetics for my purpose, through folkloric mediation/meditation into the spatial imagination of Salale resistance culture.

SALALE ECOPOETICS¹⁸

In this section, by revisiting place names as a point of departure in the Gullalle song of displacement I quoted early on in this chapter, I relocate in the present the socio-economic, cultural and political experiences of Salale Oromo, particularly since the 19th century. First, let me explain briefly the notion of *ecopoetics* as a resistance strategy.

Ecopoetic Practices as Resistance Strategies

Since ecocriticism¹⁹ arises out of a literate culture with emphasis on written literature, visual arts, and music, and also not to overemphasize the “critical” over the “creative,” i.e., “poetics” or *poesis* (making), in this study, I propose folkloristic eco-poetics to work toward environmental justice by connecting and balancing both the “creative” and the “critical” folklore scholarship at the grassroots level. Sources indicate that “eco” or *oikos* is a “house,” a “dwelling place,” a “habitation,” and symbolically refers to planet Earth which we share with “collective humans,”

There is also a rumor that Menelik’s high priest on the way to Dabra Libanos monastery with the emperor, baptized the Salale randomly and named those to the east of the highway Wolda Maram, i.e. the son of Saint Mary, for men and Wolatte Maram for women, and those to the west, Gebra Giyorges, meaning, Saint George’s Slave for men and Wolatte Giyorges for women. Informant, Worqu D., Garba Guraacha, interview on Salale history, ethnic heroes (Mulu Asanu and hagarii Tullu, 2010. Informants Sime A., Megersa R., 2010. Cf. Bairu Tafla, 1987b:292.

¹⁸The *poetics* here is about poetic materials and theory, i.e. *environmental folklore* which here I call folkloric *ecopoetics*. The *politics* is about environmental justice and/or heritage protection movement. As an example the 2003 UNESCO Convention emphasized those “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups, and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage,” a heritage that is manifested in various domains, especially the “oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage” and the “performing arts.” See Okpewho, “Introduction” viii). Isidore Okpewho. “Introduction,” *Research in African Literatures* 38.3 (2007): vii-xxi. See also Isidore Okpewho, *African Oral Literature: Background, Character, and Continuity*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.

¹⁹Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*. (New York: Routledge, 2004).

i.e., human and nonhuman beings. By involving the local community and identifying the ritual and ecological processes of labor division at work, the folklorist can work and make a difference, I believe, with “ritual experts who are usually individuals of low social status, or who are members of socially marginal and despised occupational groups” but also who “ostensibly control nonhuman spaces and therefore preserve the environment.”²⁰ In situations such as in Ethiopia where the autochthonous “authority stands in contra-distinction to social elites’ control of local political economy, particularly through land ownership,” and where “human ecology is persistently in conflict with the material differences of political inequality,” there is no better way than ecopoetics working in conjunction with resistance poetics, I submit, to study closely the alter/native social, religious, and ecological intersect and sustain the human and ecological solidarity at grassroots level.²¹

Ecocriticism gained momentum in the humanities in the 1990s as an interdisciplinary literary scholarship and a study of literate culture (literature, visual arts, and music) and sought to engage environmental history, philosophy, sociology, and science studies with ecology. Literary scholars (in US and UK) recognized the unfolding environmental crisis and questioned their role and what the field (literary scholarship) can contribute to handle the environmental predicament. Its theoretical foundations are grounded on closely studying the ideas and structures that govern the interactions between humans and their natural environment and the distinction between the human and the nonhuman, and thus, how cultures construct and are in turn constructed by the non-human world is of central importance to the discipline.

²⁰ Tsehai Berhane-Selassie, “The Socio-politics of Ethiopian Sacred Groves,” in *African Sacred Groves: Ecological Dynamics and Social Change*, eds. Michael J. Sheridan and Celia Nyamweru (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), pp103-116, see p103.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p104.

The term “ecopoetics” has been made current among readers and writers of contemporary American experimental works that bridge creative-critical writings (with emphasis on poetry) and ecology (humans being at the center). Jonathan Skinner and Christopher Arigo, to mention a few, are among those ecocritics and other experimental (eco)poets²² who attempt to connect literary poetics and ecology, hence, *eco-criticism*, and open up alternative perspectives on environmental justice through ecopoetic activism and exploring creative critical edges (ecotone) between writing and ecology. With *ecocriticism* as their general theoretical underpinning, the ecopoets’ role is to produce creative critical writings (nature poems and essays) and organize ecopoetic conferences²³ as put in Jonathan Skinner’s stimulating journal of the same name, *Ecopoetics*, Christopher Arigo’s literary magazine, *Intrim*, and the online journal *How2*.

In Ethiopia, further up and behind the Ekka, Entoto, Wacaca, and Erar mountains surrounding Finfinne, renamed as Addis Ababa, the capital city, creep suburban real estate projects to sweep over the rural lands and to evict peasants from their ancestral lands. Historically, the Tulama Oromo community used the mountains as dominant places of strategic and ritual sites. Traditionally, forests and sacred groves on the hilltops were/are venerated for religious, social, and ecological purposes, and claimed by the people—the “autochthones, firstcomers”—to “invoke ancestral property rights.”²⁴ Today, overtaken by “subsequent comers” and Orthodox Christian Churches built on the top, those places are merely symbols for the local landscape; they are sources of ecopoetic performances and serve as visual cues to ponder environmental

²² Special Feature on “Women and Ecopoetics: Biographies,” *How2*, vol.2, no. 3.

https://www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_2/ecopoetics/biogs.html. Retrieved on May 12, 2015.

²³ Joshua Corey, “Notes from the 2013 Berkeley Ecopoetics Conference,” March 13th, 2013.

<http://arcadiaproject.net/notes-from-the-2013-berkeley-ecopoetics-conference/>. See also future Panels on Ecopoetics Conference: <http://ecopoeticsperpignan.com/call-for-papersappel-a-communications/> (June 2016, France).

²⁴ Tsehai Berhane-Selassie, *Ibid.*, 2008, p103.

questions on daily basis. Those high elevations are dominant sites of unexplored uncertainties where fear and exhilarations meet. In Ethiopia, forests and sacred groves “are often perceived as ‘non-human’ spaces, and people avoid these dangerous areas where wild animals, spirits and deities reside,” and are protected under strict taboos.²⁵ The case presented in this study as a folkloristic ecopoetics turn and resistance poetics to work towards environmental justice will be the focus of my future research, that is, my postdoctoral research project, in which I will study indigenous alter/native practices of sustaining the human and ecological solidarity among marginalized groups, both inside and outside of Ethiopia.

Folklore of “Salale” Etymology

Two challenges are at stake to contemplate for ethnographers doing research in Salale: first, as Svein Ege puts it bluntly “the ethnic map of the Salale is confusing,”²⁶ second, for Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, a historian from Salale himself, how the name Salale came to be applied to the region “is shrouded in mystery.”²⁷ My folkloric ethnography is not to refute or to prove the explorations made by the social historians either; rather, it is to forward some grounded speculations. First I turn to loosen quickly this enigma about the toponymic origin of “Salale,” about which there is no oral tradition or any written evidence so far to verify how the name came to be used to refer to both the locality and to this group of the Tulama Oromo branch.

There is a common understanding among my informants that the place derives its name from Salale Mountain found to the south farther down the Mogor basin but no oral tradition or written account indicate how exactly the name came to be used to name the mountain, the locality, and

²⁵ Ibid., p105.

²⁶ Svein Ege, p48.

²⁷ Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, p16.



Figure 1.7: Salale Mountain seen at a distance, southwest of the village on the hilltop

the people. Tsegaye points further back to the medieval period citing sources to report place names such as “Selalo,” “Salala,” and “Silalesh,” “all of which are closer to the present term “Salale.”²⁸ Tsegaye adds that while Asma Giyorgis indicates “Salala” as a place between “Amonat (the area around Jama and Wancit confluence) and Mogor River,” Taddesse Tamrat points at a medieval church called “Dabra Salala found around the course of the Mogor River.”²⁹ Before I leave this endless quest of etymological exploration about “Salale” as it may,³⁰ I share Tsegaye’s view that “Salale” is the “term with which one cannot identify any particular Oromo

²⁸ Ibid. Cf., Huntingford, *The Historical Geography of Ethiopia from the First Century to 1704*, pp69, 79, 83, 154.

²⁹ Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, p16. Cf. Taddesse Tamrat, “Ethnic Interaction and Integration in Ethiopian History: the Case of Gafat,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*. xxx, ii (1988).

³⁰ Maabre Goofe and Gurmu B., two of my Salale informants narrated a mythic origin of “Salale” by relating to the story of one dislocated family.

group...but a geographical region where “the Tulama Oromo sub-groups live,”³¹ presumably before the time when Emperor Susenyos (r.1606-1632) rebelled “against the central state from 1597-1607, crossed the Jama and settled in the district called Salalo, where he was well received by the Oromo.”³²

*Folkloric Eco-poetics*³³

By *ecopoetics* I mean the creative human connectedness to nature, a folkloric human communication with the nonhuman. This meditative communication involves prayers, composing and singing songs, telling stories, naming totems, idolizing deities and offering tree coronations, summoning and glorifying God at hilltops, sacrifices at river banks, libations in farmyard, visiting graveyards and tabooing sacred groves, symbolizing and dedicating earthling and communicating kind relationships between humankind and nature, which is wrapped up in the notion of the *Irreecha*³⁴ festival. Despite its resistance function to subvert injustices, to counter-pose the mainstream, discourse folklore also mediates between human and nonhuman,

³¹ Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, p16ff. I should add here that traditionally the concept of resistance and nonconformity is embedded in the word “*saldhe*,” the name of an old ragged town near Ejersa Bokku. During the *gada* system, those who did not abide by the *gada* rule were referred to as “*saldhe*,” to mean mutineers and therefore “impolite.” If the Abba Gada of one clan interfered in the internal affairs of another (Oromo) clan outside of his own political boundary, the authority of his *bokku* (scepter) was banned as *saldhe*. This notion of “resistance,” and “rebel” or “dissenter,” as embedded in *saldhe/salale* needs further study to pin down if the concept of “resistance” is rooted in the etymology of the word(s) “*saldhe*” or “*salale*” and to explore resistance culture of the people generally identified as Salale. See Drribi Demissie Bokku, *Oromo Wisdom in Black Civilization*, (Finfinne: s.n., 2011), pp.40, 441.

³² Tsegaye Zeleke, p17. Cf. Bairu Tafla, ed. *Asma Giyorgis and His Work: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Sawa*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1987, pp188-191.

³³ When I interviewed Gurmu B. in 2010 the origin of Salale folksongs, he answered, they were composed in Oda Jila, Mogor valley, or in Haro Calanqo, in Jama gorges. According to Gurmu, for every new-year and new harvest season, traditionally, the folksinger sojourns to Mogor River, climbs the Oda Jila, sacred tree, carefully ties himself up with cord, in case he takes nap, and meditates Ateete, the Oromo “Muse,” covered up in the foliage for days and nights in confinement. After this eco-poetic process of “rites of passage,” the folksinger comes home (*qeye/warra*), a place of both sacred and secular significance, for a continuous group rehearsal. Interview, Gurmu B. Shararo, 2010.

³⁴ Admasu Shunkuri, “Erracha Oromo Tradition in Thanksgiving: Its Assimilation in Ethiopia,” *Ethiopian Review*. 8. 4 (Oct 31, 1998): 42.

and weaves us to nature. Through this eco-poetic mediation, humans learn to struggle to find a place, to claim a home.

Put within the backdrop of the Salale world, the present folkloric eco-poetics is a theory and praxis of deliberate earthlings, conscious life-form close to nature in the locale contrary to or complementary with the dominant Orthodox Christian culture. Conceived as a site, perhaps not as a genre, folkloric ethnopoetics here explores the idea that consciousness and agency are distributed “out there,” amongst the “objects” of the outside world, not in here in the human “subject.”³⁵ This Latourian call for overcoming the Western binary opposition, the anthropocentric thinking that divides between the human “subject” and the nonhuman “object,”



Figure 1.8: Thousands of Oromos gather for *Irreecha* festival at Hora Lake, the last week of September, Birraa.

³⁵ See Bruno Latour, “Politics of nature: East and West Perspectives,” in *Ethics & Global Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2011.



Figure 1.9: Young Oromo girl performing prayers and blessings at Hora Harsadi Lake on *Irreecha* thanksgiving.

and challenging the “culture/nature” divide as anomalous is more legitimate in folkloristics. The reason is that ethnographic examples show that beyond the Western dichotomies between “nature” and “culture,” the division which is the foundation of modernist epistemologies, in folklore and folk ideas, presumably, “culture” and “nature” are “open” categories rather than opposites.³⁶

To maintain a tolerable life against the ecological paralysis which is getting worse in spite of the concerns of pressure groups, non-governmental organizations and environmental ministers’

³⁶ Bruno Latour’s recall of modernity, “we have never been modern” is more relevant here in his short article, titled “The Politics of Nature,” and in his book under the same title. He writes, “...while half of the inhabitants of the Earth have become inhabitants of cities, i.e. city dwellers, this should not hide the fact that we have all become *peasants* again. Yes! We are relearning to be peasants just at a time when we thought we had migrated to cities for good. A farmer, a peasant is not only someone who lives in the countryside, he or she is someone who lives *off* the land.” And he insists, and asks us, “Think about it: in what sense are we less dependent of the land than before?” See Bruno Latour, “Politics of Nature,....,2011,” ...pp.3-4.

summit which Latour calls “the parliament of things,” it requires a radical shift in our conception of the human-nature relationships. That is, the human-nature relationship which Latour conceptualizes as a relationship of collective community, of humans and nonhumans, is not to be maintained merely by political methodologies, policies and hegemonic sciences that are inextricably tied to the objective of protection and management of nature. I claim that the way of tradition is different: traditional societies are not alleged to protect, control, or conquer nature. Rather, the traditional society inhabits it, idolizes it, taboos it, sings and praises it, dances to it of fear or of hope from sunrise to sunset, unlike the Western notion of nature which is a historically situated social representation of the “material world” as opposite to the “human world.”

The folklorist’s role, among others, is to explore symbolic rhythms between nature and culture, to shuttle across boundaries, diverse discourses and disciplines and supplement folkloristics by doing research as resistance, challenging oppressive structures and developing greater familiarity with activist scholarship. To explore humanity’s ethically challenged relations to the nonhuman world, ethnopoetics is a close kin to ecopoetics. Since exploring a creative practical use of language and the social world are among its practices, ethnopoetics can enhance ecopoetics goal.

Ecopoetic Practices

Before proceeding, a quick note on the song I quoted earlier in this chapter and a few ecopoetic representations are presented next. Later in other chapters I will pay a particular attention to the empirical facts and ethnographic examples from Salale and to their interpretations. The folkloric analytical approach to the socio-spatial and historical reality of Salale world is only made possible through prior meditations into the data about the physical scenes. Hence, it would

suffice to take note of this eco-poetic example. The following song is a representative of other folksongs of the Oromo of Gullalle, Ekka, and Galan, who were evicted from their home around Finfinne in 1880s. All the names below were renamed in Amharic: Finfinne (Addis Ababa), Tulluu Daalattii (Arat Kilo), Hurufa Boombii (Jan Meda):

No more standing on Enxooxo,
to look down at the pasture below.
No more taking cattle to Finfinne,
to water at the mineral spring.
No more gathering on Tullu Daalattii,
where the Gullalle assembly used to meet.
No more going beyond Gafarsa,
to chop firewood.
No more taking calves,
to the meadow of Hurufa Boombii.
The year the enemy came,
our cattle were consumed.
Since Mashasha came,
Freedom has vanished.³⁷

In this song the singer meditates on the melancholy of predecessors, the victims of an insatiable human greed yearning for power, for fame and wealth leading its kind into hazardous consequences of displacement, i.e. deprivation, humiliation, poverty, and social crisis, and putting the nature-culture continuum at risk of constant mismatch. The eco-poetic effect of the repetitive phrase “no more” is recurring in time as in place throughout the song in each line and the singer’s interest in the past loss justifies the present obsession with the struggle for

³⁷ Griefenow-Mewis, *Oromo Poetry*,... pp42-43. Dajjach Mashasha is the son of Abeto Sayfu Sahla Selassie (Ras Darge’s half-brother) who is said to have founded Fiche town, the Salale capital, in 1860s. The Oromo version of this song is:

Enxooxo dhaabbatanii,	Hurufa Boombii irratti,
Caffee ilaaluun hafe.	Jabbilee yaasuun hafe.
Finfinnee loon geessanii,	Kooraa Dhagaa Araaraa,
Hora obaasuun hafe.	jaarsummaa taahuun hafe.
Oddoo Daalattii irratti,	bara jarri dhufani,
yaa’iin Gullallee hafee.	loon keenyas in dhumani.
Gafarsatti dabranii	bara Mashashaan dhufe,
qoraan cabsachuun hafe.	Birmadummaan ni hafe.

“freedom,” for the right to “self-determination,” and earnest possessive desire to find a place and to reclaim it “home.” This startling imagery of the important places located in Finfinne, now the capital, “Hurufa Boombii,” “Oddoo Daalattii,” “Enxooxo,” and “Finfinne” the ritual site, now all were renamed and re-placed in Oromo history, defies the strictures of the official history.

The Oromo venerate those places as sublime gifts given by their predecessors, and at some point in history, that transcendent gift was confiscated and became a symbol of the “unknown,” what is “unforeseeable” but “possible” for generations to come and to contemplate “*waan-hafe*,” i.e. “loss.” Once Finfinne was occupied in 1886 and turned into a hatching ground for the Abyssinian rule, and as a result, no more ritual site, grazing-land, and meeting ground for the Oromo, the singer tells us, then Finfinne was dead and there remained “no more room in hell!”³⁸ The Gullalle were exterminated in fierce resistance, or expelled, or assimilated. Salale was not a better safe haven but the closest sanctuary for the Gullalle; hence, internal migration became a survival mode for both, Salale and Gullalle. Such songs do not bring back the dead; they take the singer to the dead in a contemplative melancholy or in an imaginative surge.

It is important at this point to explore the question what is the significance of place in people’s culture. Keith Basso asks, “what do people make of places?” and he notes, before he attempts to offer a direct answer, if there is one, “the question is as old as people and places themselves ...as

³⁸ Today Finfinne is a capital city of Ethiopia. It also hosts other continental and international organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Due to its historical, diplomatic, and political significance to the continent, it is referred to as the “political capital of Africa.” Historically, it was the home of the Gullalle, Ekka, and Galan Oromo clans who were evicted in 1880s by the Shewan ruler, Menilik II. It is located about 20 miles south of Salale. Traditionally, Finfinne served as a ritual site of Sacred Spring, grazing land, meeting ground and horse-riding (*gugsii*) for the Oromo living in a close distance, including Salale. The Salale have had close socio-economic and political ties to Finfinne from the mid-19th century when they were transporting tributes on horseback (grains, butter, and honey) for the Finfinne-based Shawa Amhara land-owners in Salale. Seasonally, the Salale come to Finfinne singing a ritual song called *goobee* to raise money by visiting bars and restaurants house to house in group and to perform the customary new-year rite, *goobe*, in Salale.

the idea of home, of ‘our territory’ as opposed to ‘their territory’ ...and to which they feel they belong.”³⁹ And he adds, “the question is as old as a strong sense of place, and the answer—if there is one—is every bit as complex.” These phrases “the idea of home,” “our territory,” “their territory,” “belonging,” and “strong sense of place” relate to “attachment” and, as Basso puts it rightly, “when these attachments to places are threatened we may feel threatened as well...places are as much part of us as we are part of them.” Based on his research on the lived experience of four Apache communities set in place, he goes on to detail on how “wisdom sits in place,” how members of the local community engage in the geographical landscape. Based on his research experience among the Western Apache community, Basso forwards three ways of how community members involve in place: one is by observing the physical aspects of it; second, by using the landscape and engaging in different physical activities “based on duration and extent;” and third, through “communicative acts of topographic representation” and descriptions in social gatherings, which involves, no doubt, names, stories, songs, beliefs and rituals.⁴⁰

Thus, the Salale sense of place comes not only from the lived experience of individual members of the community but also from their cultural local knowledge. Like the Apache people, the Salale conceptions of morals (*safuu*), wisdom (*oguma*), and personality/manners (*sansakka*) and of their ethnohistory is closely linked to their place and place names, usually named after their respective lineage and renamed. In his *Wisodm Sits in Place*, Basso brings to our attention that “constructions of reality that reflect conception of reality, the meaning of landscapes and acts of speech are personalized manifestations of a shared perspective on the human condition,” which

³⁹ Keith Basso, *Wisodm Sits in Places*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), pp72, 73.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p73.

is corollary with what Basso previously noted as saying, “local understandings of external realities are fashioned from local cultural materials.”⁴¹

It seems to observe this “shared perspective,” namely, nostalgic connection to the land which their ancestors lost back in time to *dajjach* Mashasha Sayfu and Menilek that the Salale *goobee* singers revisit Finfinne once a year. Since there is no more access to those ritual sites, perhaps they return to renew the transcendent experience of historical relationship to the Finfinne sacred water, now overshadowed by the grandeur of the Palace and the Sheraton International Hotel. The Salale *goobee* sing, eat, drink and effervesce door to door in bars and restaurants in the city and satirically mock local authorities and government officials and challenge the traditional social hierarchy—albeit temporarily—and dance to the recognition of the “unknown.”⁴² They solicit money, as tradition obliges, for sacrificial expenses of the annual observance, i.e. the *goobee* festival, back home in Salale. This is, roughly, a “Salale *carnivalsque*,”⁴³ a festival⁴⁴ that represents a historical phenomenon, a certain folkloristic tendency in the history of Oromo folklore study.

⁴¹ Keith Basso, *ibid.* pp. 72, 73.

⁴² For the “Salale *carnivalsque*” performer to sing and to dance is to appease the raging wild spirit, to adjust to the “uncertain,” to subvert all that is official. For the folklorist who practices *ecopoetics* it is not very different. Here I borrow Jonathan Skinner’s description of the “unknown” in situating the *ecopoetic* compass, though out of context (his focus is, I presume, a literate world). He writes, “the unknown can emerge as much from standing one’s ground as from pursuing detours, and some of the poetics in this direction emerges from an explicitly activist stance, literally placing or displacing poetry into public space and other less evidently poetic contexts, such as governmental hearings, farming...” Cf. Jonathan Skinner’s Blog, *Ecopoetics*. “Conceptualizing the Field: Some Compass Points for *Ecopoetics*,” <https://jacket2.org/commentary/conceptualizing-field>. Retrieved, Nov 23, 2014.

⁴³ The notion of “*carnivalsque*” here is modeled on Mikael Bakhtin’s theory of “carnival,” which was transformed into “*carnivalsque*,” a literary form representing the spirit of the traditional social upheaval following the social transformation (or change?) from feudal Europe to capitalism. In Salale cultural history this change is evident.

⁴⁴ Beverly Stoeltje, “A Festival,” in Richard Bauman (ed.), *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 261-271.

Festivals are characterized by reciprocity and shared responsibility among the participants (and the community) to “ensure continuity of and participation in the festival through the distribution of prestige and production.”⁴⁵ As collective phenomena, Stoeltje stresses, festival is rooted in group life, and among its purposes include individual religious devotion, expression of group identity “through ancestor worship or memorialization,” and articulation of group’s heritage.⁴⁶ Among the Oromo, major festivals are *irreecha*, *gumi gaayo assembly*, *ateetee* and *wadaaja* fertility rites and the *goobee* (carnival), typical to the Salale Oromo. As Stoeltje succinctly states “ritual and festival occur separately in modern cultures,” but older religions integrate the two.⁴⁷ The Salale *goobee* is the case in point. On annual *goobee* festival, childless women often pledge for a child to give jars of home-brewed beer, bread, and lamb on the coming *goobee* festival believing that she will celebrate it with her newly born child and offers as she pledged, which is a gift exchange to be met by dances, songs, and festivities. This is a festival communication that involves a shift from the mundane everyday life to “frames that foster transformative, reciprocal, and reflexive dimension of social life,” and “guarantees ... intuition, inversion, risk, and symbolic expression,” through beliefs.⁴⁸

The *goobee* performance or any resistance poetics in general, is liberating indeed if it clears the ground for new ideas to enter into public discourse. In the song above about the unforgettable loss of Finfinne, the singer depicts the close relationship between place and figuration, natural observation, and the call for ethical response to reverse the appropriation of not only land and land resources but also a transcendent “collective” freedom. The role of folklore and tradition

⁴⁵ Beverly Stoeltje, p261.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p262.

⁴⁸ Ibi.d., p263.

has been immense not only to address but also to balance the two equally disturbing human conditions, i.e. the uneven distribution of wealth, resources, knowledge, and power causing bloody conflicts, and the ever deteriorating nature which has been marginalized in folklore scholarship. In Latour's words the assumption that "the turn from politics to the natural realm meant a move from endless conflicts to certainty, from human centered *passions* to object centered *reason*" is "No longer the case."⁴⁹ That is, the "ecopoetic" turn is the "proliferation of scientific controversies," a shift from what he calls "matters of facts," i.e. politics of endless conflicts, to "matters of concern."⁵⁰ It is a concern about the rush move from the 20th century totalitarianism to the 21st century globalization, which refuses humanity to slow down and reflect its fate, its possible future, and instead, simply juxtaposes it to nature as a collective universal entity. Politics is defined by its will of power and authority to reform or change, enlighten, and better humanity and fair relationships or limit, arrest, and deprive the right to life in relation to nature; hence, political irrationality. Nature, to Latour, is a collective community incorporating humans and nonhumans; it is not one segment of the "society/nature" dichotomy.⁵¹

This indispensable connection between humans and nonhumans is age-old, like the historically unfair relationships among some humans, and rooted in complex traditions and rituals around "the entanglement of cosmos and good life" in the history of human civilization.⁵² Thus the connection is not purely religious or secular; it is both. The Marxist view of the connection

⁴⁹In this view the politics of nature is new and old. More emphasis has been on 'politiquing' about "conflicts, power struggles, ideologies, emotions, inequalities, and the [uneven] distribution of resources and wealth," and that as if only quite recently the concern about nature became a serious agenda. What happened recently is, according to Latour, rather, a major shift from what he calls concern with the politics of endless conflict to the natural realm. See Bruno Latour, "Politics of nature: East and West Perspectives," in *Ethics & Global Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2011, pp. 1-10, see p1-2.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p2.

⁵¹ Ibid, p3.

⁵² Ibid.

between the material and social human condition is another example of this unbreakable linkage between the collective human community and nonhumans. To Latour what counts is not if we are religious or secular but if we “protect humans from being defined without the cosmos that provide their life support, and nature from being understood without humans that have collaborated with non-humans for eons.”⁵³

In this part, I presented the folkloric ecopoetic agenda as a pressing issue to understand the poetics of unbreakable close relationship between the human and the nonhuman setting. I argued that it is time that folkloristics should actively engage in the ongoing dialogue between disciplines about the reconfiguration of nature-science-politics. Next, I will try to discuss the Salale socio-spatial setting constantly reconstructed to resist the ongoing territorializing and de-territorializes of the spaces because of the expansionist nature of the state policy of Ethiopia.

SOCIO-SPATIAL SCENE⁵⁴

Since physical setting is the primary source of background of the story told, or symbolism or conflict in the scene, past and present, it is imperative to discuss the relationship between the socio-spatial setting and the verbal art it gives rise to. Salale poses as an important set of challenges and untold stories for a folklorist, a social historian, or anthropologist. Historically, it

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ By “socio-spatial setting” I refer to the contested space which is under a constant construction by social actors. I refer to the appropriation of place and struggle in the setting under study, and to explore those dimensions of space and place in Salale poetics as a conscious dynamics of culture. These concepts of “place” and “space” increasingly play a significant role in *Salale poetics*, i.e., *resistance poetics*, *ecopoetics*, and *world view*. If I understood right my informant’s story, Raggasa Badhiye of Ilu, 95, space is both social and mental. The “social space” is where people belong according to their cultural and historical particularities; “social differentiation;” it is where everyday life happens. The “mental space” is the perceived space, such as the mythic origin of Ilu, Raggasa’s lineage. By other ethnographic examples, in Salale poetics, when “space” is conceived as homogenous and infinitely extended, “place,” to the contrary, is limited in time by boundary, border, and by state policy. Thus, “space” is the collective shared experience, a process in process with time, whereas, “place” is “*qeyee*,” “*warra*,” “home” or “*heimat*” where one belongs, the immediate locale where one’s close kin dwell, and which constitutes the folk idea about the collective “socio-spatial setting” we call Salale.

hosted both traditional belief systems, i.e., deities, ancestral worship, sacred groves, or Oromo spirituality, and the Dabra Libanos monastery from the medieval period to the present.⁵⁵ The specter of famines and wars walked through the land as the Salale people and their heroes and heroines traversed its deep gorges and extensive prairies over the years. European travelers and missionaries hiked through, observed and wrote their eye-witness accounts of the Shawan rulers' expansionist campaigns in the land⁵⁶ and the lifestyle of the people who proudly "applied to themselves no other designation than *Orma, Ilma Orma*, [Oromo], literally, the "sons of men."⁵⁷ As the data from Salale show, verbal art, folksongs in particular, involve "space," i.e., rivers, hills, mountains, trees, animals, rocks and the intense falls below the Jama and the Mogor escarpments. Thus, it might be asked, if verbal art and rituals take much from the physical and social surroundings, how do they impact in turn the surroundings that gave birth to them? That is, how is the reciprocity between the verbal art and the social setting which is not directly linked

⁵⁵Taddesse Tamrat, "A Short Note on the Traditions of Pagan Resistance to the Ethiopian Church (14th and 15th Centuries,)" in *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January 1972), pp.137-150; See also Denis Nosnitsin, "A History that was Found," Warszawa, Nr 4, 2006, pp35-53. The cultural history of religious resistance will be briefly discussed in Chapter 2 of the present study, entitled "Salale Oromo: an Alternative History."

⁵⁶ Svein Ege writes "Expeditions were sent out against the Oromo tribes and Shawan influence extended as far as the Gara Gorfu and Salale," see p31 and footnote no. 58, citing Krapf no. 162, p.17, and Harris (1844), vol. 3, pp36-37. Emphasizing the economic motive behind the expedition campaigns, Ege adds, it led to "rich booty in cattle, slaves and less valuable items," p191ff. Cf. Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, "The Oromo of Salale: a History, 1840-1935," Unpublished MA Thesis, History Department, Addis Ababa University, 2003.

⁵⁷ Samuel Bagster, *The Bible of Every Land*, (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1848), p433. In Salale, their land and its inhabitants were partitioned and treated as "pagan barbarians" renamed as "Gallas" to be baptized as Christians and assimilated against which the Salale rebelled:

Gaallaa jeettee,	you named us "Galla,"
Gaallaan kana qaba!	here is "Galla," we defy you!
itti qabsiisi,	we lit fire to the foe,
xiyitiin akka galabaa!	pile up like a straw!

The origin of the word "Galla" is not known, but it is an offensive term. Asafa Jalata's comment is that the Oromo never called themselves "Galla," but the "Ethiopian and their international counterpart called them by this name." He adds that the name "obtained currency through the writings of Ethiopian religious scholars and colonial agents such as Bahrey," who is probably the first to use it in literature in a book focusing on Oromo "history."

to the events channeled and changes overtime? What determines the relationship between verbal art (and rituals) and the physical and social context that gave rise to them?



Figure 1.10: Dagam Mountain, Dagam, deforested, and eucalyptus trees and a few indigenous plants are seen.

Ecopoetics of Socio-Spatial Continuum

How do verbal art impact in turn the surroundings that gave birth to them? An era, *bara*, in the general Oromo “folk idea,” is expressed not just by the passage of time but by the distinguishing attributes of the time that resonate in daily events and mark, with some meaning, the lived experience of the social actors collectivity set in the space. Verbal art is a living phenomenon which has a folkloristic, historical, and social context within the physical surrounding. The unique names of ritual sites in Salale, such as Goraa Katabaa, Gurura, Ejersa Bokkuu, Dhiiga Boollaa, Cabsa, to mention but a few, are special folkloric contexts that have been received, passed on as images, symbols, and associations in the social memory of the people, not just as uttered words but also as lived experiences that mark Salale Oromo identity. Those are names of

“dominant places” which govern other places of casual events and compete with the churches. By introducing the “spatial turn” in folkloristic ethnography here I hold the view that, as Johann Herder would have it, the nation(-state) is separated by rivers, climate, mountains, seas and desert, as it is distinguished by tradition, ancestry, language, custom, character, taste, lifestyle, worldview and personality, and inclination (poetry, music, folk-life).⁵⁸ And thus we live in a *pluriverse*, a world set in plurality, as it were. The role of space is obvious not only in identity formation but also in its deformation. Thus, folklore oscillates between the marginalized, the majority who suffer the misappropriation of culture, which is the symbol of their identity, and the marginalizing minority who maneuvers the power machinery from the top and imposes cultural hegemony. It sounds ethnocentric to search for the “folk ideas” and their cultural expressions in the local space, as Antonio Gramsci rightly observed in the 1930s that “folklore is close to the ‘provincial’ in all senses,”⁵⁹ which implicates the old notion that folklore is an “exotic” folk-life, resistant to change, among the peasants.

Through spatial inclusion and cultural incorporation (mutual acculturation) the Salale constituted the traditional and social banditry as powerful means of spreading, effectuating, and perpetuating the state of resistance using co-existence as a forthright disguise and “softer” form of domination. During the time of adversities, the Salale sought refuge in the Jama and Mogor deep gorges and set up social banditry as a typical resistance culture, or internally migrated to other places in Oromia, not northward across the Nile into Amhara or Tigre regions. In so doing, they exemplified the dynamics of resistance and demonstrated the transcendent wealth of enduring

⁵⁸ Andrew Hamilton, “Herder’s Theory of the Volksgeist,” in *Counter Current Publishing: Books Against Time*, See <http://www.counter-currents.com/2011/05/herders-theory-of-the-volksgeist/>. Retrieved Nov 12, 2014.

⁵⁹ David Forgacs, “Observation in Folklore,” in *The Gramsci Reader*, (New York: New York U Press, 2000), pp360-362.

evil days through non-violent means. Traditionally local kinship groups determined the social cohesion, land allocation, and peace settlement within the kinship group and with neighbors along the maximal lineage or clan (*gosa*) and major lineages (*balbala guddaa*), minor lineages (*balbala xinnaa*), and minimal lineages (*warra*).⁶⁰

According to Samuel Bagster, prior to the Shawa invasion, compared to those in the Equatorial South (in Kenya), the Oromo around Abyssinia practiced agriculture and livestock; “they believe in Supreme Being,” [Waaqa] and deify deities, they “have adopted many notions and practices from the corrupted Abyssinia Church, and they know the names of many Abyssinian saints,” unlike those living near the equator.⁶¹ Citing Father Balthazar Tellez and the Reverend Johann Krapf, Bagster describes the Oromo as “In bodily and mental endowments they exceed most of the tribes in eastern Africa,”⁶² though a few other European scholars wrote, without a careful look at the course of history, to spell out in vain their depiction of the Oromo as “barbarian hordes” or “crueler scourge,” or simply to dispel this Bagster’s notion of “Oromo: Great African Nation,” as Edward Ullendorff did.⁶³ The power differential which the Salale contemplate and express through folklore transgresses the physical boundaries, overflows onto the neighboring

⁶⁰ Informant Raggaasa Badhiye of Ilu, Dedde Xiggi, in Yaaya Gullalle, 2010, *Field Journal*, p58. Raggaasa told me the narrative of the localized land allocation in the pre-conquest Tulama Oromo history that Ilu chose a small land with dense bush for his goats under the foot of Ilu Mountain and thus he was given a small area. Today the Ilu lineage hold limited mass of land around Ilu unlike Yaaya and Gullalle.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² See Balthazar Tellez, *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia*, (London: J. Knapton, 1710); Johann Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labors*, (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860).

⁶³ Teshale Tibebu maintains that the Portuguese Jesuit Manuel de Almeida who was in Ethiopia during the 17th century called the Oromo the ‘crueler scourge’ ... “sent to punish Christian Ethiopia for its refusal to convert to Catholic faith, resulting in ‘almost the total ruin of that contumacious empire.’” See Teshale Tibebu, 1995, pp16-17. Cf. Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, (London: Oxford U Press, 1960), p76.

If large population size, and religious and ecological diversities can deter development, that may be true to the Oromo. Svein Ege, in his study of the mid-19th century Shawa State, points out that among the three “great population groups” of the dynasty, i.e. the Amhara had state [and religion,] the Muslims had distinct identity because of their religion but “definitely the least numerous group,” and the Oromo “were probably most numerous and occupied extensive territory, but they were divided in a great number of extensive tribes and small splinter groups.” See Svein Ege, *Class, State, and Power in Africa...* p48.

spaces and, reacts to the world outside itself. Those different spatial aspects that make claims to land and land resources are also involved with different types of verbal art that are not only set in the social and physical context but also create them.

Spatial Imagination of the Past

What determines the relationship between verbal art and the physical/social context that gave rise to them? Historically, in the early 1880s Menilik II, the ruler of Shawa moved his capital from Anko-bar in the northeast to Enxooxo, which, Richard Pankhurst and Denis Gerard remind us, Menilik selected Enxooxo “because it had been the capital of the early 16th century Emperor Lebna Dengel.”⁶⁴ Because the mountainous location made it difficult for access to water and wholesome climate, Menilik moved once again to the Finifne plain to the south which, by contrast, had “an equitable climate, fertile, well-watered land,”⁶⁵ where the hot spring gushed out of the ground, hence, the Oromo name, Finfinne, literally, “fountain.”⁶⁶

In the book titled *Ethiopia Photographed*, Pankhurst and Gerard do not pay particular attention to who the inhabitants of the extensive plain below Enxooxo Mountain were. They write, “The settlement which consisted at first of dispersed encampments with herds of cattle, horses, mules, and other livestock in the space between, gradually merged into a more integrated whole.”⁶⁷ The authors push aside the pressing issue of the inhabitants near Enxooxo and around Finfinne and their fate during and after the successive brutal campaigns of expansion over the extensive span.

⁶⁴ Richard Pankhurst and Denis Gerard, *Ethiopia Photographed*, (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996), p94. According to my informant, Maabre Goofee, the mountain called Tullu Ilen near the town of Ambiso, Dagam in Salale, was named after Lebena Dengel’s grandmother, Queen Eleni, one of the four wives of Zara Yacob (1438-68). Eleni was from a Muslim family. The Salale say “Sara-Qum” to mean Zara Yacob, as his name is in Geez.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Catherine Griefenow-Mewis and Tamane Bitima, *Oromo Poetry*,... pp42-43.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Rather, they append photographs of the spaces in-between and label them “absences of houses and trees,” as if only at Menilik’s import of eucalyptus trees from Australia, in the authors’ view, Finfinne, the heartland of Oromia (Oromoland), so desolate land without people and without nature, as it were, now turned into “Eucalyptopolis.”⁶⁸

Tamane Bitima has a different story citing Richard Pankhurst, this time in another source, about Menilik’s conquest of Finfinne and the Oromo near the ritual site, the Holy Water. Tamane recapitulates the story of Menilik’s expansionist agenda as a prophecy made by Sahla Selassie, his grandfather, who once looked at the extensive Oromoland and said, “o land, today you are full of the Gallas [Oromo] but one day my grandson will build here a house and make you a city.”⁶⁹ Once the occupation of Finfinne was concluded, after a continued fierce resistance from the Oromo, particularly the Gullalle clan led by Tufa Muna,⁷⁰ the inhabitants were brutally murdered, displaced, and/or reduced to “*gabbar* (tenants) and serfs.”⁷¹

Toponymic Encounters

This world exists on a deeper and more extended spatial plane as on temporal plane, and its remaking involves a shift not just in the play of power politics but also of the stage on which that play is performed. Names of places, rivers, mountains, valleys, exotic animals such as Menilik bushbuck elsewhere, and caves in Salale, though unsystematically sketched in travel narratives, they have historical significance in constructing Salale *ecopoetics* and *ethnohistory*. In his

⁶⁸ Ibid. The authors acknowledge their borrowing Dr. Merab’s expression of the situation, a Georgian resident.

⁶⁹ Catherine Griefenow-Mewis and Tamane Bitima, *Oromo Poetry Seen from Within* (Koln:Rudiger Koppe Verlag, 2004), pp41-48, see p42-43.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. Cuqqaalaa Buttaa, 91, is from the Gullalle clan also found in Salale to date, and his autobiographical account will be presented later in another chapter as one of the descendants of those displaced natives remembering the past.

geographical memoir, for example, Charles Beke describes Jama River as the longest tributary of the Nile. It receives water from all of Shawa, northeast of Salale and to give away to the Blue Nile while the lands above the Jama valley are so desolate and unfavorable for cultivation without irrigation system. The Jesuit Francisco Alvarez crossed it in 1520, on his way to Shawa.⁷² The Amhara notables, Sayfu Sahla Selassie and Tigu Abisa from Marha-bete and Moret respectively, crossed Jama in the mid-19th century toward Salale proper and encroached on the lowland below the present day Fiche town and later to occupy the Salale upland.⁷³ The names of the two rivers, Mogor and Jama, recur in Salale folksongs and narratives as home to Salale ethnic heroes, common in Hidhabu, Darro, Kuyyu, Gombichu, or Ali Doro.

Since the first encounter with the Christian Amharas in the locality, perhaps in the 14th century when Dabra Libanos monastery was established in Salale,⁷⁴ the social world of Salale, the border between cultures, languages, and religions is not terribly precise or definitive. One can find cultural markers such as belief systems, names (personal and place), funerals, weddings, rites, lifestyle, and customs shared by the two ethnic groups to bond themselves for creative co-existence in contrary to the obvious differences in ethnic origin. However, while place names and personal names are key identity markers, the Shawan rulers changed the original Oromo place names into Amharic and Geez names, and in so doing, to disrupt the native culture and dislocate the “folk ideas.” There is rare chance to find an Amhara individual to bear Oromo name; and what is more, names of notable Oromo converts were dropped and their Christian

⁷² Charles Beke, “On the Nile and its Tributaries,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 17 (1847), pp15, 16. See also Rachel Moffat’s Dissertation titled “Perspectives on Africa in Travel Writing: Representations of Ethiopia, Kenya, Republic of Congo and South Africa, 1930–2000,” PhD thesis. (University of Glasgow, 2010), in which she epitomizes travel narrative as a genre, a means of representing and understanding the “Other.”

⁷³ See Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, “The Oromo of Salale...,” p53.

⁷⁴ See Denis Nosnitsin, “A History that was Found,” 2006, pp35-53. Cf. Taddesse Tamrat, “A Short Note...,” pp.137-150.

names maintained. No doubt, the living bulk of Salale tradition provides with ample information to any ethnographer interested in this pursuit, namely, *implications of names and name changes in the Oromo-Amhara interactions*.

Those names of places and events in Salale history are indispensable contents as old as the land the people have lived on since time immemorial.⁷⁵ In Salale folklore tradition the narrator/performer interprets facts and their meanings by situating them in spatial images and particular “regions” of the events and social interactions among the Salale themselves and between the Salale and the Amharas in the relative time frame of resistance or peaceful co-existence. Thus the time factor is an important element in organizing social memory but not in a linear fashion. People tend to identify more toward their local community, ethnic group or descent group than with a region. This is evident in Salale toponyms, eponyms, and ethnonyms, and genealogical memories they recount in their folklore tradition. In the local history there are places that retained important spatial images in public memory. Those places vary from sacred sites, i.e. groves, trees, rivers (e.g. Malka Ateete in Ilu, Holqa Haroo in Jama, Ejersa Bokkuu near Saldhe, and Odaa Jilaa in Mogor) to centers of deity worship (*warra* Cabsa) and spirit mediumship sites (*Warra Afiuraa*).

⁷⁵ Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa has documented Salale oral tradition that “the ancestors of the Oromo who are found in the region had lived at a place known as Walaabu...which they through the following song:

kan maanguddoo biyyi Walaabu	our forefathers’ country was Walaabu
hin teenyu maalumatti teenya	we cannot live here, (they disposed of our land)
Walaabumatti achi gad deemna	we shall go down to Walaabu.

It is common in Oromia to hear this mythic origin tale of the Oromo summed up in this pithy storyline, *Uume Walaabuu baate*, literally, *Mother Nature* (Uume), like Gaia, *emerged out of Walaabu*.” It is a tale of the origin of Creation in general and *Walaabu* is a place of the origin of the human and nonhuman like the biblical Eden. See Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, p1.

Those sacred sites demarcated as “dominant places” by the social actors, i.e. the people, existed throughout history side by side with churches and monasteries and routinely reconstructed through active interactions in the sustaining of communication. Thus Bas Van Heur describes “setting,” citing Giddens, “not just as a spatial parameter, and physical environment in which interaction ‘occurs;’ it is these elements mobilized as part of the interaction. Features of the setting of interaction, including its spatial and physical aspects, [...] are routinely drawn upon by social actors...”⁷⁶ Setting, to Heur, is affected by various factors such as “environment and politico-economic” situations including “state-policy, warfare, and capitalist restructuring process of the character of this setting.”⁷⁷ However, it is clear that social actors reconstruct the locale (place) they inhabit. In this view, the “dominant locales” seen as “power containers” provide a major structural principles of a society.

In the song below the notion of “place” is reconstructed by selecting carefully elements in it to set a pattern commensurate with the singer’s perspective within that social matrix of eagle/hero/patriot/booty (purpose) vs. vulture/coward/treacherous/carcass:

<p>Hallaattii shanii manna risaa tokkicha wayya, gaarii biyya hormaa manna yartuu biyya ofiii wayya, rumicha du’aa nyaatu goota butaa ‘jjin kaatu....</p>	<p>Not five vultures, better to raise one eagle, not to trust an alien hero, treacherous, better to give heart to a native coward, a vulture feeds on carcasses, a hero lives on purposes.⁷⁸</p>
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Here the singer is engaged in two interrelated ecopoetic projects: first, to interpret human decorum by domesticating the raw natural scene of birds with the human world to critique human folly, i.e., cowardice, greed, and the unbearable lightness of being. This is successful as

⁷⁶ Bas Van Heur, “The Spatial Imagination of Oromia: the Ethiopian State and Oromo Transitional Politics,” Faculty of Arts of Utrecht University: The Netherlands, 2004. See Giddens 1979:206-7, in Heur, page 17.

⁷⁷ Heur, *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Interview, my assistant Magarsa D., with Tadasa Galate of Yayya, 2010, Salale.

indicated in the words “yartuu,” literally, “deserter” (ln. 4) and symbolized by “vulture, compared to the unflinching “goota,” meaning, “hero” (ln.6), designated by “eagle,” which clearly accentuate the singer’s perspective. Second, to attach meaning to the concept of place and to humanize location that is peopled by opposing forces of good and evil, coward and hero, treacherous and loyal, native and alien. In so doing, the aim of the singer is to evoke aspects of subjectivity, belonging and “home.” In this ecopoetic view of setting, the notion of reconstructing place “from below” is an immanent ecopoetic process of attaching meaning to a locale by using elements already there and also a process of place-embedment (rooting) within the larger whole. This discursive view of place is a common practice in Salale folklore.

Of the origin of “Salale” the place name and the name of the inhabitants in the locality, Maabre Goofe and Gurmu B., two of my Salale informants narrated a story of one dislocated family, and set it as a mythic origin of the “Salalle.” According to my informants, here is the story:

...There once lived an extended wealthy family who fell apart by some cause. They moved this way (toward Salale) and moved in different directions. A young woman traveled at night with her cattle toward a mountain near Mogor River, and settled. She ascended at night to the mountain top, lit fire and called her lost family members one by one. Each responded from a distance “si ‘laale, yee!” meaning, “I can see you!” All came with their cattle mewing and bellowing, settled around the mountain which came to be called Mount Salale, from the cry “si ‘laale!,” on the headwaters of Mogor and creating a new society called Salale. Eventually, other Tulama Oromo clans and lineages who joined the group over the years from different places settled in the locality and came to be known as Salale collectively.⁷⁹

From Salale ecopoetic view, such stories and myths justify for the origin of places and clans (lineages), which is equally important to understand the people’s emotional attachment to place.

In his “*Spatial Imagination of Oromia*,” Bas Van Heur argues that emotional attachment is a feeling that emerges out of the desire to claim a place that is their own.⁸⁰ Stories, songs and

⁷⁹ Interview, Gurmu B., and Maabre Goofee, 2010, Salale.

⁸⁰ Bas Van Heur, citing Tuan, underscores the humanizing role stories can play to enhance emotional attachment to place: “...storytelling converts mere objects “out there” into real presences. Myths have this power to an outstanding

rituals enhance the emotional attachment; they humanize the place and make it more homely, i.e. unofficial, which is more than what a mere political and economic lobbying can do. In this section I have made a claim that the socio-spatial foundation of verbal art is a supremely fertile ground for academic discourse in folklore scholarship. We have seen that a close observation of the Salale socio-spatial setting shows that the social actors are not passive; they make creative use of the setting and elements therein to pursue certain goals, to reconstruct spaces and to connect the local politics to the global change through discursive charges.

CULTURAL SETTING

The Salale folk culture is a hybrid of Christian cultural elements and indigenous Oromo practices. Language being the vehicle of culture, the influence of Amharic language and Christianity is vivid. However, the Salale folk culture constitutes the local cultural landscape where traditional practices are performed. The folk culture is created by the local communities and rooted within their belief systems, daily life activities, and the fears and hopes of the ordinary people, e.g. peasants and artisans. Folk culture is dynamic as it is actively created by the people in folksongs, folk dance, storytelling, and rituals but the notion of hybridity or cultural interactivity is crucial. A single genre can be a unique feature of a certain cultural setting while its general purposes can be religious or secular, as in other cultural groups. For example, the Salale *stick fighting* is different from that of Macca Oromo in its aesthetic features and rules, while its purpose the same, namely, to reinforce courage and heroism. Generally, folk culture is passed on from generation to generation through socialization and by direct experience in a specific cultural setting.

degree because they are not just any story but are foundational stories that provide support and glimmers of understanding for the basic institutions of society; at the same time myths by weaving in observable features in the landscape (a tree here, a rock there) strengthens a people's base to place..." Cf. Tuan, 1991, 686, in Heur, p15.

The ethnographic examples from Salale show that kinship systems, ritual practices, ancestral worship, dispute settlements, tree coronation, spirit mediumship, deities and deity worship, festivals and ceremonies are symbolic performances against the dominant Christian culture. Place names or eponymies, personal names, names of deities and ancestors serve to position *space* (territoriality) within the public memory in the Salale cultural setting and to exercise spatial analysis as one possible method for studying Salale ethnohistory and folkloristics. Next, in an effort to offer a historical and contemporary context to understand well the Salale cultural remaking, I first present a brief account of the ritual site, *Dhiiga Boolla*, a covenant site, and other related facts.

Dhiiga Boollaa (Holy Spring)

Dhiiga Boolla, also called *bakka waadaaa*, i.e. *covenant site*, is located at Saldhe. It is a ritual site of *guma* (*blood-feud*) and *waadaaa* (*covenant*) performance to settle disputes about homicide in Salale. *Saldhe* is an old rugged town in the district of Salale before Fiche was established in the early 1840s⁸¹ There are three important ritual sites near Saldhe. First, near the debris of the military base of Ras Gobana's military base, Menilek's warlord from the same district, at *Ejersa Bokkuu* sacred groves are located in the northeast, on the outskirts. Second, *Dhiiga Boolla* is about a mile east on the gateway to the small town, *Saldhe Aroge*, on the highway to the capital, Finfinne. Third, a mountain, another ritual site, found about two miles to the southwest, opposite the Kidane Meheret church.

⁸¹ Bairu Tafla, "The Historical Notes of "Liqä-Ṭäbbäbt" Abbäbä Yeräfu," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 50, No. 2 (1987b). Bairu Tafla argues, "as early as 1848 Sayfu had used [Fiche] as his center during a campaign against the Oromo of Salale," p288.

Dhiiga Boolla is a place where disputed issues involving blood price (*guma*) are settled and contesting parties are pacified and swear not to contemplate revenge and to forgive for the sake of *Waaqa* (*God*) and *Lafa* (*ancestral land*). The place is unique as a meeting point of four lands/directions (therefore, four winds): *Saldhe Aroge* on the north, *Ejeru* on the northwest, *Machalla Harkiso* on the south and *Machalla Andode* on the east. My informant, Haile Bulcha of Ejeru, said that in Salale tradition there was *Tullu Guma* (*Mount Guma*), a historical ritual site far to the east on the way to Gaba Robi (Insaro) where the sacred tree is *Ejersa Tajjab*. My other informant (Gurmu B.) also confirmed that near St Gabriel church there was also an *eela* (*hot spring*) called *Eela Kuyyu*, after a traditional chief (Abba Malkaa) called Kuyyu Dullume, Gurmu's maternal kin, and the place was used as another ritual site of *gumaa* and *waadaaa*⁸²

Before leaving this topic, I should add that the Salale associate ritually their territoriality with place names (*toponyms*) and lineage/clan names (*eponyms*) which they call in an orderly fashion from elder to junior in ancestral worship at ritual sites or earth altars. Tradition also maintains that remembrance practices in every ritual involve cosmological forces summoned to intervene and appease conflicts and remedy human weaknesses.⁸³ Almost all remembrance practices and types of worship relate to human and physical beings and to cosmological forces at a specific cultural setting (*e.g. deity worship*), or social context (*guma, blood-feud*).

⁸² Those ritual sites also indicate spatial imagination of the people's collective identity as Salale. See Assefa Dibaba, "'God speak to us': performing power and authority in Salale, Ethiopia" *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 26/3, 2014, p8.

⁸³ Informant, Haile Bulcha, Salale, 2010.

Gurura, Warra-Afuuraa Mediumship

Set in Gurara southeast of Shararo town, the *warra afuura* spirit medium presented in this section is a local village temple which people in Salale visit every Friday. The *warra afuura* spirit mediums are “ritual leaders” and therefore believed to impartially serve their subjects, patronize the tradition and administer the temple. In each locale at least one spirit medium temple is located and supported by the resident community with the warra Cabsa divinity set at the center. That is, there are about 7 to 10 locally resident spirit mediums in the vicinity surrounding the Cabsa divinity, the most powerful institution in the area like Debra Libanos monastery located a few miles north of Shararo. In Salale a woman is designated a priestess and she presides over the spirit mediumship. There are a group of men who are entrusted with the responsibility of being intermediaries. Spirit medium is a very strong tradition in the region and the ritual communication involves spells, incantations, curses removals (revocations) and consecrations.



Figure 1.11: Sun set over Gurura, the *Warra Afuuraa* ritual site, near Cabsa, Xummaano.

The data show that the taxonomy of Salale spirit mediumship fall into three interconnected categories: *tuftoo* or *aagii* (curse removal spells or revocation), *afuura* (mediumship), and *Waaqa dubbisa/baarbaada* (seeking guidance for premonition or consecration). The *warra-afuura* mediumship practice represents the uncharted intersecting trajectories between the two cultures, namely, the indigenous belief system and Christianity, by exemplifying the ritual language which also refers to Orthodox Christian rituals and processions. The images and phrases of Salale symbolic performances of death rituals performed at the specific cultural setting constitute an important dimension for the people who live under the shadow of hegemonic religious institution and present an opportunity to maintain their own tradition and reconstruct identity byway of “strategic primitivism.”

The mediumship practice at Gurura is also part of the mythopoetic representation of cosmology (moon and earth) wrought during the thanksgiving renewal of harvest season known as *daddarba*, the Ateete ritual of fecundity. The practices are regarded negatively by Abyssinian monks and priests as primitive accumulation and heathenish practices but served the Oromo as a potential resistance and rearticulated ethnic identity as part of the dynamic process of “history from below.” By staging such a ritual struggle for life and death on several other cultural settings, the Salale provide a way to rearticulate the violent ruptures of cultural domination and political suppression within the much broader historical frame and, in so doing, through a “strategic traditionalism,” the nostalgic motto “return to the source” is called for and promised. The prescriptive ritual is spoken by the middleman in such a high pitch of traditional authority and the carefully selected words of sacred and profane nature— bless, curse, abundance, fertility, wholeness, spells, pain, infertility, impotence and emptiness—demonstrate a mediated relationship between the living and the dead, a tale and circumstances of its telling at the *warra afuura*.



Figure 1.12 Jama escarpment, where the monastery is located



Figure 1.13: Dabra Libanos Monastery in Salale, founded in the 13th century in Jama basin.

Dabra Libanos Monastery

To establish a foundation on which other Salale studies are laid, it is important to understand the Salale setting as a seedbed for planting colonies in Oromo land during the era of the historic imperial Ethiopia. Dabra Libanos monastery is one such key center of “Geez civilization,” monasticism, and Christianity established in the thirteenth century.⁸⁴

“Dabra Libanos” is a district in Salale Zone where several centers of indigenous belief-systems are located; it served as the foundation on which Christianity was forged.⁸⁵ These indigenous ritual sites include ancestral graves (*Ujuba*), sacred groves (*Ejersa Bokku*), mediumship shrines (*Warra Afiura*), earth altars or covenant sites (*Dhiiga Boolla*), and deities and their shrines (*Warra Cabsaa*). After the monastery was destroyed by Ahmed Gragn’s troops in 1531, it was abandoned for 160 years, the time when “the [Oromo] settled in it, dominating from the *qolla* to the *daga* and `inheriting [the area]”, which became, by all accounts, today’s Salale settlement.⁸⁶ Denis Nosnitsin maintains that the monastery “was encircled by the Oromo population” who were practicing their indigenous belief system. As Kofi Darkwah puts it, they “did not care a straw for either the church or the monarchy, institutions which were the embodiment of Amhara civilization.”⁸⁷

The monastery was founded on a terrace between a cliff and the gorge of Jama, one of the tributaries of the Nile River, to reverse Muslim conversions in the region and deter the influence

⁸⁴ See Teshale Tebebu, 1995, pp3, 175-76.

⁸⁵ Ernestine Jenkins argues that Christianity in Shawa was laid over a "pagan" foundation which can be seen in the ways Shawans practice Christianity to this day, interlinking it with deities such as *Qallu Cabsa* near Dabra Libanos monastery. See Ernestine Lovelle Jenkins, “A Kingly Craft: Manuscripts, Ideology, and Society in 18th and 19th Century Ethiopia ” (Michigan State University, Dept. of History, 1997), 207-8. Asafa Jalata also shares this view that both Islam and Christianity “have been gradually grafted on Oromo religion in many Oromo regions,” p39.

⁸⁶ Denis Nosnitsin, 2006, p40, n7; p41; *qolla* to the *daga* in Svein Ege, 1996, p35.

⁸⁷ Kofi Darkhwa, “Some Developments in Ethiopia During the Period of the Mesafent,” p3.

of indigenous belief-systems in Salale.⁸⁸ Before the influence of Christianity was strong in the area Shawa practiced indigenous religion. The Muslim state was founded in 896 at Walala and later absorbed into the Sulatanate of Ifat in 1285, until Christianity and the Shawa dynasty were restored. In the ethnohistorical description of the Salale, there are Islamic toponyms in the area, such as *Idirisii*, *Usmanii*, *Qaasimii*, *Abdalla*, *Tamam*, as there are Muslim eponyms in Salale's genealogies.

The themes of displacement, tenancy, conversion, banditry, war, famine, and resistance are central to Salale ethnohistory. On the macro-level, the "hybrid" and "syncretic" aspects of Salale Oromo ethnohistory can be considered the effect of what Ali Mazuri, in his analysis of Africa's personality, describes Ethiopia as having its own "triple heritage: Indigenous, Semitic, and Greco-Roman."⁸⁹ The history of Salale Oromo in relation to Christians and Muslims in and around Salale requires a detailed examination, which is beyond the scope of the present study.

Poetics of Conversion

The main focus here is folkloric and ethnographic examination of Salale *cultural resistance* against the Abyssinian ethnic and cultural hegemony. Suffice it to say that historically when the shift of power favored Christians, the Oromo adopted Islam, as a strategic means of resistance or "as a protective weapon against Christian Ethiopia."⁹⁰ Following conquest, conversion to Christianity was inevitable. During the reign of Menilek II (1889-1913), the Shawan dynasty

⁸⁸ Asafa Jalata clearly states that a few Oromo groups accepted Islam mainly for political reasons, i.e. against the incorporation into Ethiopia, in addition to armed resistance, whereas, other Oromo groups continued practicing Oromo religion while others accepted, under threat of force, Orthodox Christianity. See Jalata, "Conversion to Other Religions," pp38-39. Jalata argues that Christianity was one of the colonial institutions, a "systematic and organized destruction and repression of Oromo culture for more than a century," p27.

⁸⁹ Ali Mazuri, 1984 cited in Teshale Tibebu 1995: xv.

⁹⁰ Darkwah, p3, citing Antonio Cecchi, 1886, vol. ii, pp55-60; see also Asafa Jalata, 39.

could foster the Amhara culture in two ways: one way was by conversion of the indigenous people practicing traditional belief systems to Christianity, and the second way was by founding garrison towns of Amhara colonies among the Oromo (e.g. Fiche in Salale).⁹¹

The first campaign was carried out intensively through founding churches in the conquered lands, since the church was the repository of Amhara culture, and then involuntary conversion. The George Orwellian comment that “every joke is a tiny revolution” is nowhere more practical than in Salale—some infused with factual experience and some creative—to redress personal and communal grievances. There are two episodes around the new *conversion* in Salale: one is *plotting funeral*, and another, *violating fasting rule*.⁹² During Ras Darge’s period in Salale (1870-1900), more than eighty-five churches were built in the area. However, traditionally, the Oromo bury their dead in ancestral graveyards called *kaabbaa* also called *ujuba* in Salale. Funerals are followed by successive rituals at *ujuba* since the spirit of the deceased is believed to be a guardian, caretaker, for the living. Contrary to Oromo tradition, those who were forcibly converted were told that burials should be held only in church cemeteries.

Narrative 1. Plotting Funeral

My informant, Gurmu, said that when Kenne Badhaasa, a chieftain in Salale, died customarily it was compulsory to bury him at *ujuba*, to gather him to his forebears. But Ras Darge was a godfather for the deceased chief so that the ordinary public would accept Christianity. When Darge ordered the funeral to be held at the church, elders plotted to bury the deceased at *ujuba* in darkness. After they did that, they put wood and soil in the coffin to bury at church the next day. The funeral was held for the deceased chief at the church as planned. Mourners, including Ras Darge the godfather, not knowing what had happened the night before, attended the funeral and consoled the bereaved family.

⁹¹ Informant, Magarsaa R., Wucaale, interview on *religion, gadaa, and institutions*. Date, 02/12/2010.

⁹² Informant, Gurmu B., Sharo, interview on personal life experience, songs, rituals, bandit and banditry, local history, religion and rituals. Date, 01/03/2010 to 05/11/2010

As this narrative goes, for Salale elders and ritual leaders it was not only a question of abiding by their tradition and waiting to see what would happen or submitting to the new rule of the cultural hegemony, but rather it was a wake-up call to stand united and to resist. *Ujuba*, the burial graveyard, is a symbolic representation of an unbreakable connection between the living and the dead in Salale. The spatial reference is credible information and connects temporal evidences to Salale presence in the Christian domain. The evidences for this can be linked to some other sources or traditions and to the traditional chronology of the Salale ethnohistory.

Narrative2. Violating Fasting Rule

This Salale new convert had a few head of cattle. He had a lactating cow for milk and oxen for plowing. Upon his baptism he was told to abstain from eating beef and dairy products on Wednesday and Friday. But he couldn't avoid milk and beef, the two favorite foods of the Oromo. Contrary to church teachings and forewarnings, when the priest visited his home without notice one Wednesday morning, this new convert was drinking milk. The priest was annoyed and condemned him for breaking the fasting rule. To the priest's surprise, the man briskly requested the priest to baptize his cow so that, now she is christened, he can drink milk on Wednesday and Friday.

It is to be remembered that 94% of the Salale population profess Christianity. Hence, it is customary that they abstain from meat and dairy products during fast days, generally on Wednesday and Friday and for a few months on a regular basis. Out of the 365 days of the year, the Coptic Orthodox church observes over 210 fasting periods, which is exceeded by no other Christian community except by the Ethiopian Orthodox church. Hence, the poetics of Salale conversion shows, adhering to the new conversion rules was not an easy practice to assimilate for Salale. The main point here is that, conversion, fasting, and other observances were used to reenforce Christianity as an evolving institution to placate resistance by using religion instead of using force alone.



Figure 1.14: Ujuba, ancestral graveyard, Gumbichu.

Sacred Groves, Local Gods, Remains

Focusing on issues of conservation and sacred sites in Africa, the collection of essays in *African Sacred Groves* provide first-hand information on the significance and current trend of sacred groves in the African continent. By definition, sacred groves range from “vast forests with limited human impact, to a grove where resource harvest follows community established rules, to a single “palaver tree.”⁹³ They represent the pre-colonial primeval forest and are considered by the local communities as their cultural “relic.” Thus, in spite of the ever increasing shortage of land and the growing pressure of globalization, sacred groves serve in Africa as symbols of power, means of communal control over local resources, and also as a source of healing and

⁹³ Jan Bender Shetler, “*African Sacred Groves*, Book Review,” in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2009), pp. 288-290, see p289.

maintaining social cohesion. The impact of social change and shortage of land influences the people, particularly, the guardians of the sacred sites, to be more flexible to meet the ever-increasing demand for land and land resources. The guardians also often change the rules of access, in some cases, to clear part of the groves for agriculture and cut trees for firewood and building.

It seems that, as a result of the influences from inside and outside, the increasing demand for land and influences of globalization, the power and authority of local community over sacred groves is deteriorating. Eventually, as sacred groves and trees are cut down for timber, firewood, building, and for agriculture, only sacred sites remain for ritual purposes. The notion of African “relic theory” of sacred groves is not free from challenges of current social and ecological dynamics. That is, as sacred groves are “increasingly open to exploitation by the powerful and those who act as their guardians have always been open to compromise,” which urges the need for a “hybrid science” and “hybrid policy-making both to “conserve biodiversity and allow cultural self-determination.”⁹⁴

In discussing the state of African groves, Michael Sheridan adopts Anthony Giddens’ “structuration,” the “dynamics through which social actors shape, and are shaped by, social institutions,” to describe that African “sacred groves usually correspond with particular forms of social organization ...and [are] misfit with the secular and religious institutions of the nation-state.”⁹⁵ That is, owing to the rapid social change, the ecological dynamics of African sacred

⁹⁴ Michael J. Sheridan and Celia Nyamweru, eds. *African Sacred Groves: Ecological Dynamics & Social Change*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), p7. See also Jan Bender Shetler, “Review,” p289.

⁹⁵ “The Dynamics of African Sacred Groves,” in *African Sacred Groves: Ecological Dynamics and Social Change*. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), p19.

groves is shaped by the ongoing dynamic structuration in the social organization of societies in the continent.

As an example of the socio-politics of sacred groves and social dynamics in Ethiopia, Tsehai Berhane-Selassie maintains that “In much of the sub-Saharan Africa a critical relationship is the power differential between autochthonous ‘firstcomers’ in a particular landscape and subsequent settlers.”⁹⁶ Tsehai rightly claims that the “Autochthones may ritually legitimize their claims to the landscape features ...yet ‘latecomers’ often dominate the local political economy,” the argument which suits to the Salale socio-political dynamics and the endangered sacred groves under the historically dominant Orthodox Christian culture.

By the same token, sacred groves among the Salale Oromo are not free from the ongoing ecological dynamism and rapid social change. The “strategic traditionalism” practices against the neo-Abyssinian cultural hegemony is the practice of “sacred ecology,” an eco-poetic act discussed in Chapter 1, and the concept that can be a companion to the process of positive social transformation. In Salale small forests are set aside for earth and ancestral worship, and for deity’s exclusive use; however, the people’s fear is increasing as the shortage of land is growing.

⁹⁶ Tsehai Berhane-Selassie “The Socio-politics of Sacred Groves,” in *African Sacred Groves*, pp103-116, see p103.



Figure 1.15: Egersa Bokkuu, Sacred groves, Saldhee.

The community has sacred tree coronation ceremonies by their respective lineage. *Egersa* (juniper tree) is the major tree species that stands out in the sacred groves; and it is given different names among different Salale sub-clans: *egersa kaawoo* in Gerar Jaarso, on the way to Fittaaal, Yaayaa Gullallee, *egersa taajjab*, in Gumbichu, and *egersa bokkuu* near Saldhe Aroge.

The Salale notion of “sacred ecology” can be considered a solution for the failures of massive state-sponsored projects to solve ecological problems. For example, the traditional graveyard called *Ujuba* is an exemplary form of traditional environmental resource management in Salale later replaced by desolate church cemeteries from the second half of the nineteenth century.



Figure 1.16: Ejersa Bokkuu, sacred tree, Saldhee.

The religious taboos surrounding sacred groves and *Ujuba* limit utilizing sacred trees and groves on ritual sites for firewood, housing, farming tools such as plows and yokes except for purposes of rites. This led to the conservation of pockets of flora in areas the people reserved as sacred sites. According to my informant, Gurmu B., to violate the rule of *sacred groves* is to risk a curse and to inflict upon oneself, on one's family and the community, severe consequences.

The issue of sacred ecology or folkloric eco-poetics in Salale is compelling. It is worth examining it closely within religious and social context in which sacred groves take on meaning and exploring reasons for selecting some tree species, juniper in particular, and acacia as sacred trees, and why the Salale chose to preserve some places as ritual sites.⁹⁷ By this account, no doubt,

⁹⁷ Sacred ecology has become the center of interest since the work of Fikret Berke's *Sacred Ecology* about how the indigenous knowledge systems of local peoples and their scientific curiosity are characterized by the knowledge of

Salale “strategic traditionalism” may be considered an environmentally friendly religious practice; the Salale may be seen as advocates for environmental justice.



Figure 1.17: Ejersa Taajjab, Gumbichu, a sacred tree (juniper), adjacent to Orthodox Christian church

The practice can be utilized as an example of using local knowledge to alleviate the deepening global environmental crises by consulting the Salale indigenous ancient ecological tradition. One can see patches of forest protected by religious taboos all over Salale on hilltops, riverbanks, near homesteads and surrounding clusters of houses while the extensive plain is either severely deforested or colonized by the ecologically hazardous eucalyptus trees.

Following the conquest of Salale during the second half of the nineteenth century, the desecration of Oromo ritual sites, sacred mountains, rivers, wells and trees became part of the routine campaigns of hegemonic Abyssinian rule. Among other sacred sites in and around Fiche,

time and space. Berke’s argument of indigenous knowledge is not just knowledge of the “thing known” but “knowledge as a process” throughout the tradition. The Salale knowledge of sacred trees and groves, ritual sites, can be used as effective means of maintaining environmental justice.

the capital of Salale, was the *torban Ashe*, the seven-head wells owned by Ashe Ruufo and his seven sons.⁹⁸ The gnostic origin of the wells relates to a humble prayer recited by Ashe Ruufo as a ritual leader and later chief.⁹⁹ Probably during one long drought, Ashe saw the herds of cattle languishing to death. People and cattle had to travel for weeks to find water. Desperately, Ashe fell to the ground, cried to Waaqa (God) and prayed,

Waaqayyo!	oh, God!
yookaan burqaa naa dhoosi,	you gash out wells for me,
yookaan ana dhoosi.	or you cut me into pieces.

There gushed out seven fountains for the drought-stricken herds. The flocks and horses were able to drink from the rich seven wells and eventually to thrive and breed in abundance. Drinking from the rich wells of Fiche gave life, abundance, and nourishment to the people and the livestock. My informant, Faqaadu, who traced his line of descent to Ashe Ruufo, added that the wells were preserved later as sacred until confiscated by the expansionist Shawa dynasty from Darge to his descendants, whose power was brought to an end in Salale temporarily during the five-year Italian occupation. The question of whether the wells were considered as holy springs in the region and if people visited them for their traditional virtues of healing and divination needs a separate study. To date, the wells are covered by stone edifices, and the majority are in ruins, overgrown, and no longer visited. Some would say that today the *torban Ashe* wells are sources of the Fiche town water supply.

In 1848, when Sayfu Sahle Selassie fought the Salale to expand the Shawa state territory, he made his center at Fiche and, by that time, “the rule of the [Oromo] *balabbatoch* was ended” in

⁹⁸ Informants, Taadasa Galate and Faqaadu Tammana, on Salale local history, genealogy, landholdings, and local chiefs. Fekadu traces his genealogy back to Ashe Ruufo, the local chief who lived toward the second half of the 19th century in Girar. Thus he traced his Fekadu genealogy: Tammana-Jiilchaa-Heelluu-Ashe-Ruufo-Saboo-Doloolloo-Ajuree-Dukam-Nya’a-Hamattoo-Waarrii). Date, 05/11/2010

⁹⁹ Informant, Fiqaadu T., 2010, Salale.

Salale.¹⁰⁰ However, Sayfu was killed in June 1860 during the unyielding Salale resistance. Probably it was during this Salale resistance led by Ashe Ruufo and his companions that the Gennat Giyorgis church was burnt in Fiche. The church was reconstructed between 1887 and 1888, during *ras* Darge's rule.¹⁰¹

Local Gods

There are three religious practices among the Oromo: Christianity, Islam and traditional belief systems. It is difficult to draw a vivid line between traditional religious beliefs and the two world religions, namely, Christianity and Islam. Some Oromo believers of the two mega-religions also privately observe *qaalluu* or deities in their homes or at *qaalluu* shrines with other believers. This religious border-crossing blurs the line between modern/traditional, central/peripheral, and official/private in the realm of religion in Ethiopia. Thus, it is inappropriate to consider Ethiopia as a "Christian Island" surrounded by "barbarian pagans," a claim which denies the existence of non-Christian believers in the country, or leaves Muslims and traditional believers unrepresented in religious domains.

The *qaalluu* shaman or *warra ayaana* practice among the Oromo is known as *zar* among the Amhara.¹⁰² The Oromo *qaalluu* today involves spirit possession. The traditional *qaalluu* priest is traditionally venerated as Abbaa Muudaa (a high priest) by multitudes (*jila*) of Oromo clans gathered from distant areas once a year at Madda Walaabuu.¹⁰³ In Salale where the Dabra

¹⁰⁰ See Bairu Tafla 1987:288

¹⁰¹ Bairu Tafla, 1987b, p289; informant, Haila Maram Moroda of *Warra Heeban* in Fiche, 2010. This informant traced his descent to *Warra Heeban*, traditionally settled in Fiche 04 Kebele, *warra Ganda Goobee*. The genealogys as follows: Haila Maram Moroda-Ayane-Gebru-Goobee-Gochee-Obori-Laaftoo-Abbay-Kuraa-Heeban.

¹⁰² Wolf Leslau, "Zar: an Ethiopian Argot of People Possessed by a Spirit," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Jul., 1949), pp.204-212.

¹⁰³ See Asafa Jalata, "The Qallu," 2005, pp34-35; Enrico Knuttson, *Authority and Change*, 1965;

Libanos monastery has been observed since the mediaeval period, there are also deities of different names, males and females. The most influential deity is the Cabsa *qaalluu*.¹⁰⁴



Figure 1.18: A quiet blue sky over Xummaano, the *Warra Cabsa Deity*

Cabsa is a male deity but the chief priest of the deity worship is a female. This and other *qaalluu* institutions in Salale survived pressures from the monolithic Christian religion in the area through strategic traditionalism, i.e. resistance and negotiation, and by adapting themselves to the new developments. To show the influence of Christianity on Oromo traditional belief systems, it may suffice to mention *Ateetee*, the goddess of fecundity, among the Oromo. Traditionally the *Ateetee* cult has several specific rituals. My informant, Haile Tuufoo, is a *wadaajaa* ritual leader. He classifies the ritual as follows: *Ateetee duulaa* (for victory in war), *Ateetee biqilaa* (for harvest, thanksgiving), *Ateetee dhalaa* (for child bearing and rearing). *Ateetee Guyye* is an

¹⁰⁴ Informants, Gurmu B., 2010; Serawit Bekele, *Hybridized Religious Practice*. (Verlag, Germany: VDM Publishing, 2010). The author is from Salale and currently a PhD student in Germany. In this volume, her MA research in cultural studies published into a book, she analyses the dynamics of religion in practice among the Salale. She illustrates how the adherents produce meaning from their double allegiance to two religions, i.e., Orthodox Christianity and Qallu religious practice. Serawit makes the case for the *Qallu Cabsa* institution, a very influential deity in Salale near Shararo, her hometown, and a few miles from Dabra Libanos monastery, which is seen as the second Jerusalem.

Oromo gate keeper/guardian deity, the Roman Janus-like.¹⁰⁵ In Salale cultural history there have been contacts between Christianity and traditional belief systems leading to the cultural mix and dynamism. However, in this cross-culturalism and interactivity, the claims that equate the Oromo “Maaram” with Virgin Mary and “Sambata” with Sabbath of the Orthodox Christianity, among others, should be taken with a bit of caution.

The *Cabsa* shrine is a sacred place on the western outskirts of Shararo town in Salale. It is dedicated to the deity, *Cabsa*, a figure of awe and respect among the Salale and, therefore, highly venerated and worshiped by Christians and non-Christians alike. It is located on the hilltop only a few yards from an Orthodox Christian church. People gather from all over Salale at this shrine to make votive offerings on its altar. There is no image worship in Oromo *qaalluu institution* and *deity worship* except few gifts pledged by the believer.

One possible reason for the cultural interactivity, after the long-time cultural contacts, is *intermarriage*.¹⁰⁶ However, in the 19th century, after the egalitarian *gada* system was weakened,

¹⁰⁵ Informant, Haile Tuufoo, Wucaale. Interview on *Wadaaja* and *Ateetee* institutions. *Ateetee* is the goddess of fecundity and *Wadaaja* is the observance. The rituals are different according to the purpose of the believer. Date, February 7, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Tsega Etefa succinctly comments on the issue of “political marriage used “to annex a territory” in the traditional Shawan domain. If the king’s marriage proposal is rejected, “the king could send an expedition to occupy the land.” The Queen Mother (Gifty) of Muloo Faallee, Camme, rejected Sahla Selassie’s proposal to her daughter saying that if he would spread the entire road from Angolala with rich carpets, she might perhaps listen to the proposal, but no on other conditions”. (Angolala is about 150 miles far from Amuuma.) Upon her refusal, the Shawa king invaded and annexed the territory west of the Mogor River. See Tsega Etefa, *Integration and Peace in East Africa: a History of the Oromo Nation*. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p173. Contrary to Tsega Etefa’s claim, Svein Ege maintains that this practice of alliance by marriage between the Shawan king and Gifty Camme was certain. Ege writes that as the king married her daughter, her son Jaarra, “was probably elected chief with Shawan support.” See Ege, p90ff, citing travel narratives and missionary sources. I haven’t ruled out the possibility of marriage alliance in Salale and also of the refusal, but this particular case needs thorough investigation. In Salale it is clear that the characterization of Ethiopia (Shawa) as a “Christian Island” surrounded by “pagans” is challenged by the notion of hybridity/heterogeneity of cultures and other resultant multiple identities. For example, one such cultural *mélange* in Salale is through *intermarriage*, which is at a minimal level, if any, among the ordinary public. Intermarriage between the non-Christian Oromo chief and the Christian Amhara royal family was a strategic means of political maneuvering on both sides. Today, the descendants are identified in Salale as *Oromo-gabar*. Like the *mestizo* of

clan chiefs held supreme power and marriage alliances became a practical means of keeping the balance of power between the chiefs and the Shawan polygamous king, Sahla Selassie.¹⁰⁷ For example, Abba Moalle of Saggo, Gerar, became the king’s ally about 1837 and chief of Salale, east of the Mogor River when Sahla Selassie became his godfather and also married his sister. By another example, Mattako, chief of the northeastern Oromo plain and a leading Shawan army commander, was refused to let his son marry the princess. The proposal was seen by the king as “a serious breach of etiquette” and Mattako was put in prison at Goncho.¹⁰⁸ Several examples of such political marriage alliances can be presented, but it seems that the erosion of history has mostly wiped it out of the social memory over time.¹⁰⁹

Genealogy

The local history of Salale resistance culture shows that resistance in Salale is the outcome of protest against the loss of ancestral land; this provides clear information about the general theme of Salale ethnohistory. The aim of conversion and negotiation, genealogy, and intermarriage, as I

whites and indigenous peoples of Amerindian ancestry, in most cases the *Oromo-gabar* change their social and cultural perceptions to Amhara and often do not identify themselves as Oromo. Intermarriage was ceremonially cursed by *waaadaa* (*covenant*) at some point in history and the Salale were against intermarriage with Amhara to resist domination. They swore:

kan an facaafadhe naaf hin margin	may my seed perish
kan an dhalfadhe naaf hin guddatin	may my offspring retard
ilmoon koo saree gurraattii ha taatu!	I swear, I swear by the black dog!

Informants Gurmu B.; Magarsa D. Salale, 2010.

Like Plato’s oath in the *Apology*, “I swear, Athenians, I swear by the dog!” Salale’s oath by the “black dog” is not clear. But the most pressing issue here is the *waaadaa* (*covenant*) against intermarriage with Amhara. *Waaadaa* or *Kakuu* (*Irbuu*) is an irrevocable oath by Oromo tradition. Here it is used to maintain ethnic harmony and internal cohesion against intermarriage which the Amhara used, according to the informants, to feminize the subordinates—metaphorically speaking.

¹⁰⁷ Svein Ege 1996

¹⁰⁸ Svein Ege, 1996:199

¹⁰⁹ See Darkwah’s *The Era of Princes*, (No citation information is accessible, year or source). See Donald Crumme, (Book Review,), Kofi Darkwah’s *Shawa, Menilek and the Ethiopian Empire* in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1976), pp. 292-295.

discovered during my field research, relates to the issue of land and land resources.¹¹⁰ Land insecurity, poverty, and unequal power relations are the three underlying causes of Salale resistance and the central theme of Salale resistance songs and narratives. Thus, land and ethnic identity are closely interrelated with kinship and reveal the place of each lineage in the immediate milieu and in the socioeconomic and cultural matrix of the Oromo in general. My informant in Dagam, Maabre Goofe of Anno Qarree, is well versed and has immense and consistent knowledge about Salale oral history and genealogy. He chronicles the oral history of the settlement of the *Saglan Iggu* (the “Nine Iggu”), in Dagam: *Illaaammu, Dhanqaa, Aannoo, Bonayaa, Saggi, Raaso, Iyataa, Annaa-Jirruu, Dooroo*. Mabre has the view that after Gagn’s war (1527-1543) the area in Dagam was uninhabited for about 44 years. Igguu Aabbuu came and settled on this land with his nine sons and ritually occupied the land, i.e. *meendhicha itti hidhate*.



Figure 1.19: Salale elder with a grand child

¹¹⁰ Informant, Sime A., Suquu, near Saldhe Arooge, 2010; Abbaba M., Muloo Faallee, Hojja-Duree, 2009.

In Dagam, like the seven other districts where I collected my data, the people identify themselves with their respective pedigree preceded by *warra/mana* (*home*) and then the sub-clan or lineage chief: *Warra Gumbichu Shaashii* (*Illaammu*), *Warra Gammadaa Abbaa Jinii* (*Dhanqa*), *Warra Araddoo Roobaa* (*Bonayya*), *Warra Araddoo Waaqee* (*Aanno*), *Warra Badhaasaa Guddaa* (*Saggu*), *Warra Roobaa Mikoo* (*Raaso*), *Warra Abdii Biiree Kashii* (*Iyyata*), *Warra Cabsii Araddoo* (*Annaa-Jirru*), and *Warra Nagawoo Boruu* (*Dooroo*).¹¹¹

After conquest and forced conversion, the people's identity became double: religious and natal. In the above examples I interpreted a few examples of ethnonyms and their toponimic equivalence. Everything on and in the land, the Salale believe, belongs to their ancestors, the most heroic gift they are blessed to inherit.¹¹² The ethnonyms have genealogical representations to the land, which is traced to the first half of the 16th century.¹¹³ As indigenous to the land, the people commemorate their ethnic heroes, almost in every genre of their performances, for defending their ancestral land.

Set in the cultural and socioeconomic setting of the Salale, it is often the case that individuals or groups narrate quite a different scenario about themselves and about other groups within the larger collective whole. The narrative setting has been created and recreated over time through elaboration, exchange of reflexive agents and tradition bearers.

¹¹¹ Informant, Mabre G. has a detailed knowledge of Salale history, settlement pattern, and genealogy.

¹¹² Informant, Ijaaraa T., interview on institutions, Salale history, 2010. Ijaara is 95 but his memory of the pressures in the past, displacement, and local land grab the people suffered and his knowledge of culture is immense.

¹¹³ See Nosntsin, 2006:41ff "A History that Was Found: a recent chapter in the historiography of Dabra Libanos," *African Bulletin*, (2006), 41ff.

To sum up: In this chapter, I made an attempt to outline the Salale setting and maintained a dual proposition: one is, I argued for the spatial role of folklore as *resistance poetics* in modern culture, and the other is, I theorized that unbreakable bond to nature is evident in folklore and, therefore, we need discipline (folkloristics) to pay special attention to configuring a folkloric *ecopoetics* project. Throughout the three sections of this chapter, I tried to explain these two values as deeply interdependent while the dialogue about the nature/culture dichotomy is still an issue.¹¹⁴ The common cause for bloody wars between nations and resource-based conflicts between ethnic groups is scarce land and land resources. Thus, the major goal of *ecopoetics* has been to examine the human-nonhuman relationships in Salale folklore and tradition to lay ground for *resistance poetics* which will emphasize exploring the historically unequal human relationships using the specific case example. For now, to develop a folkloric *ecopoetics* as part of the *resistance poetics* project in this study, it requires close investigation into the native hermeneutics and vernacular methods using the ethnographic examples, which will be the work of the remaining chapters.

¹¹⁴ The indispensable relationship between the two (human/nonhuman) is manifested in the human daily life experience and through different types of interpersonal relations: exchange, taking, giving, predation, production, protection, sharing, and transmission. See Philippe Descola. *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Trans. by Marshall Sahlins. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

**SALALE OROMO:
AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY**

*At home;
We are not at home.*

_____ Salale elder.¹

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores a Salale perspective on “local” history as developed in the expressive culture I collected in Salale in 2009 and 2010 for this project, which seems similar to but has several basic differences from a description of the wider Oromo population. Drawing on literature from folkloristics, critical ethnography, and ethnohistory, I use interdisciplinary methods of micro-history, folksongs and narratives to question certain assumptions regarding alternative history, based on data obtained through interviews and group discussions in Salale. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to develop a narrative frame in which to analyze an alternative history of Salale Oromo, and an unorthodox, contrary account of the people’s aspirations of themselves. The intention is to juxtapose Salale ethnohistory with that of Abyssinian chroniclers’ biases and with most European ethnologists’ and philologists’ scriptocentric views of Africans’ “history” and “civilization.” Strategic primitivism/traditionalism among the Salale, I argue, is a subversive means of confronting the Abyssinian cultural hegemony not by conserving itself as a static entity but by tapping the two-way border-crossings between the indigenous religious practices and Christianity, ethnicity, and group identity. A narrative account of the people’s origin story of themselves and historical events is both thematic and theoretical, whereas the study of the oral data and available written documents is analytic and descriptive in its close

¹ “Mana hin jirru; ala hin jirru,” Informant Gurmu Badhaadha, *Field Journal*, Shararo, 2010.

investigation of the socioeconomic, political, cultural, and ideological nuances, facts and their interpretations.

Hence, a consideration of an alternative history of Salale Oromo evokes the following crucial questions of folkloric, historical, and ethnographic nature:

a) -why we need Salale *alternative history*? how does it relate to Salale *resistance poetics*?

-under what methods and theoretical perspectives do we construct Salale alternative history (ethnohistory)?

b) what are the patterns of resistance and co-existence between the contesting forces in Salale?

c) what are the means (strategies) and themes of articulation of differences and concerns in Salale Oromo history?

-what competing forces and contesting narratives are at work in Salale?

-how do those meanings, themes and patterns of the Salale alternative history relate to the general Oromo historiography in Ethiopian context, past and present?

To explore these inquiries and establish an alternative Salale ethnohistory, in this chapter I employ historical and ethnographic data as a foundation. The task of constructing an alternative history using a micro-historical approach goes beyond using documents such as travelogues, manuscripts, and modern history sources in print. In this ethnohistory of the Salale, the usefulness of such source materials as oral history, folk traditions, names (*toponyms, eponyms, ethnonyms*), and genealogies maintained in the people's narrative tradition is paramount. An ethnohistoric approach is favored here since it claims to achieve more in-depth analysis of the culture according to the cultural codes and facts and meanings from *emic* perspective than the

macro-historical methods. The purpose here is to enable the diachronic description of historical social transformations the Salale recorded over time in their folksongs and narrative traditions.

Toward this goal, the present chapter progresses through the following three stages:

1) an overview of the sources, methods, and perspectives

2) -a rationale for an alternative history (and ethno-history) of Salale Oromo

-an ethnohistoric description of the Salale and their contemporary life set in their immediate milieu.

3) an interpretation of the major “local” (“regional”) historical themes around competing forces, past and present, and their critique based primarily on the recorded folkloric data and other sources.

In what follows, first, I present in the *overview of sources, methods, and perspectives* the methodological shortcomings of available written sources (travelogues, royal chronicles) and highlight what we know of earlier documents.² Second, I survey at length *why we need an alternative Salale history* and illustrate how it relates to *Salale resistance poetics*. The need to reconfigure Ethiopian history has become crucial because “Ethiopian history should be studied afresh.”³ Drawing on Jan Vansina’s view of “oral tradition as history” and the data obtained

² Here examples of travel narratives, Western scholars’ Eurocentric views and Abyssinian stereotypical writings about the Oromo culture and history will be discussed. My view is that court historians and royal chroniclers of Geez civilization and Christianity in Ethiopia, like European travelers, wrote without any empathy for the non-Christians and non-literate cultures. They wrote unethically in favor of the Christian Abyssinians and against the non-Christian “others.” Most of the writings had no any theoretical or methodological orientation but were pragmatically positioned to favor one culture and to undermine another.

³ Teshale Tebebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974*. (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press INC, 1995), xxiv. To “undust” the alternative history of the people it requires knowledge of tradition and its rules and roles in orienting indigenous practices. Tradition is used not just as the dynamics of subversive forces against external cultural domination but also used as the powerhouse of cultural interactivity. As Donald Crummey reminds us, “recent improvements in our knowledge of Ethiopian *society* should lead to reinterpretation of Ethiopian history.” See Donald Crummey, “Society and Ethnicity in the Politics of Christian Ethiopia during the *Zemena Masafent*,” *IJAHS*, 1975, pp266-67, cited in Ege 1996:2.

from Salale, here I will address why alternative Salale history is compelling at present.⁴ Finally, I will explore the surviving fragmentary evidence of folklore tradition retrieved from social memory and address the most basic questions one can ask: what *competing forces* dominate the themes of Salale folksongs and narratives? What means are at stake as *subversive strategies (strategic traditionalism)* in Salale social memory? In this section to develop concepts that can shed light adequately on the ethnohistory from Salale perspective, I will explore in the verbal art the relative sociopolitical and cultural differentiations in Salale social world and illustrate the people's lived experience. Before I pursue this three-part argument about history from a Salale perspective, it is imperative to understand the sources and methods leading us toward Salale *alternative history* and *resistance poetics*.

SOURCES, METHODS, AND PERSPECTIVES: Overview

To fill the methodological lacuna in Salale Oromo social history, I combine an ethnographic and micro-historical approach with ethno-historical method to integrate different theoretical perspectives into a single whole, i.e. *ethnography of resistance poetics*, to offer new interpretive insights into Salale alternative (critical) history. Using folkloric and oral history data with available written sources, the purpose of integrating different approaches here is to gain insights (evidences) into Salale cultural history and to pinpoint alternative ways of studying more aggregate social issues represented by means of folk traditions. An ethnographic analysis is used to improve our understanding of the most pressing social problems at micro-level by combining multiple methods and balancing the particular with the general facts and meanings. That is, the unique features of Salale micro- and ethno-historical landscape are examined carefully vis-à-vis the macro-historical background of the Oromo nation. Given the complexity of the social world,

⁴ Jan Vancina, *Oral Tradition as History*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 48-54, 124-36

interdisciplinary method is a panacea to deal with the dilemma the researcher encounters about the plurality of meanings and their competing interpretations, and multiplicity of voices “in an arena defined by power relationships.”⁵

Sources

Drawing on folkloristic, ethnographic and historical methods this chapter evolves out of the following sources of information: first, the ethnographic and folkloric primary data I collected in Salale, my field-notes and the transcriptions of interview recordings; second, available written sources, i.e., three categories of literature: travel narratives, historical documents and royal chronicles, and folkloric and ethnographic written sources. These and other oral and written sources are deemed pertinent to uncover Salale Oromo ethnohistory.

Travel Narratives

A sociocultural and historical explanation of religious and ethnic identification and unequal power relationships between the Amhara and the Oromo peoples in the area are not well known and need further study. For example, the great survey by Martial de Salviac among the Oromo, particularly the Tulama branch to which the Salale belong, illustrates that the brutality of “Abyssinian armies’ invading land is simply barbaric...At daybreak, the fire begins; surprised men in the huts or in the fields are three quarters massacred and horribly mutilated; the women and the children and the men are reduced to captivity.”⁶ When the Oromo were short of milk and the cattle did not have enough grass or water, the shepherds criticized the *Ras* in this song:

⁵ István Szijártó’s “Four Arguments for Microhistory,” in *African Identities*, (2002), pp209-215.

⁶ Martial de Salviac, Ayalew Kanno, *The Oromo: Great African Nation*. (East Lansing, MI: Self-published, 2005/1900), p349.

after Wasan Saggad reigned
the sheep said, “what shall I lick?”
after Wasan Saggad trod the land
the sheep said, “what shall I graze?”⁷

The long narrative history of the region described in travel narratives by European missionaries (Krapf and Issenberg) and travelers in the 19th century (1836-1843) continue to be a topic of much investigation in Salale Oromo studies. Studies into travel narratives as a genre have not been given critical attention so far; however, they are significant sources, I believe, for the emergent Oromo Studies. Some of the travel writings serve as an eyewitness account of the past events (conquests, plunders, and massacres) against the Oromo carried out by successive Abyssinian regimes.

For example, Manoel de Almeida, the Portuguese Jesuit who was in Ethiopia in the seventeenth century, considered the Oromo as “a crueller scourge” sent to punish Christian Ethiopia for its refusal to convert to Roman Catholic faith and to “ruin that contumacious empire.”⁸ The Scottish traveler, James Bruce, for example, described the Oromo as “the most treacherous and villainous wretches upon the earth ...and no confidence is to be had in the people.”⁹ In spite of great civility and kindness, travelers often misrepresent one culture in favor of another. Samuel Gobat, in his three-year residence in Shawa, writes that the entrance to Abyssinia was closed for Europeans because of the “ruthless inroads made into the district by the fierce predatory bands of

⁷ See Bairu Tafla, *Asma Giorgis and His Work: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Shawa*. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1987a), p529. See also Mohammed Hassen's *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History, 1570-1860* (1994).

⁸ Bahrey, Almeida, Huntingford & Beckingham. *History of the [Oromo] of Ethiopia, With Ethnology and History of Southwest Ethiopia*. (Oakland, CA: African Sun Publishing, 1993), p58

⁹ James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, Vol. 1, (London: J. Ruthven, for G.G. J and J. Robinson, 1790), p225. See also his *Travels in Abyssinia and Nubia, 1768-1773 (Condensed from Original Work by J. Morison Clingan)*, 2nd ed., Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1873).

the Gallas [Oromo] ...the rude barbarians.”¹⁰ He adds that they (the Oromo) made their “first incursion into the lower province of Abyssinia in 1537,” and some assumed Christian names, some preserved Islam and “most of them plunged in the deepest night of paganism...barbarian hordes who brought darkness and ignorance in their train.”¹¹ Place names, rivers, mountains, valleys and caves in Salale, though unsystematically sketched in the travel narratives, have historical and ecopoetic significance in constructing Salale ethnohistory. In his geographical memoir, for example, Charles Beke describes Jama River as the longest tributary of the Nile that receives water from all of Shawa, northeast of Salale.¹² The names of the two rivers, Mogor and Jama, recur in Salale folksongs and narratives as home to Salale ethnic heroes, simply called bandits.

The eyewitness accounts of the Reverends Johann Krapf and Isenberg about the predicaments of the Oromo under Sahle Selassie of Shawa contextualize the travel narratives from 1839 onwards and bring greater depth and diversity to those often biased and one-sided narratives. In their observation about soliciting in Abyssinia, for example, the missionaries write, “Begging is not so frequent in Shawa as it is in Tigre.”¹³ Begging, however, has more religious implications than ethnic inferences in Christian Ethiopia. The missionaries also critically assess Sahle Selassie’s pressure levied on the Oromo by attacking them, taking their property, and selling the captives as slaves, and the social evil continued late into Haile Selassie’s regime. Edward Ullendorff

¹⁰ Samuel Gobat, *Journal of Three Years’ Residence in Abyssinia*, (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1850), pp51, 52, 53; Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, (1894); Edward Ullendorff, p76.

¹¹ W.C. Harris, *The Highlands of Ethiopia*. In Three Volumes. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman (1844).

¹² Charles Beke, “On the Nile and its Tributaries,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 17 (1847), pp15, 16. See also Rachel Moffat’s Dissertation titled “Perspectives on Africa in Travel Writing: Representations of Ethiopia, Kenya, Republic of Congo and South Africa, 1930–2000,” PhD thesis. (University of Glasgow, 2010), in which she epitomizes travel narrative as a genre, a means of representing and understanding the “Other”.

¹³ C.W. Isenberg, and J. L. Krapf, *The Journal of Reverend Messrs. Isenberg and Krapf, Detailing their Proceedings in the Kingdom of Shawa and Journeys in Other Parts of Abyssinia*. (London, 1843), pp61ff, 65; cf. Tibebe, p99ff.

claimed that the Oromo have “nothing to contribute to the civilization of Ethiopia.”¹⁴ Thus, the motive behind all those biases and fears vivid in the Christian scholars’ toward the Oromo were part ethnic and part religious.

Enrico Cerulli: Oromo Folk Literature (1922)

A significant source of information for critical Oromo studies into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’ Oromo folklore, history and culture is Enrico Cerulli’s Oromo folklore collections in Naples, Italy. Enrico Cerulli acknowledges four major sources of his data: *Lij* (Haile Mariam) Gugsa Darge (born in Salale, the son of the Abyssinian duke of Salale), Aga Mohammed Seid of Limmu (Macca), Loransiyos Wolde Iyasus, and the collections in *Oromo Spelling Book*, which include love songs, war songs, and songs of religious ceremonies (*Wadaaja, Atete*), which, Cerulli believes “have been written to discredit the Swedish Mission.”¹⁵ Contrary to Cerulli’s view, the authors (Onesimos Nassib and Aster Gannon Salban) claim that they collected the texts “to show the natives of the Oromo countries the way to God.” Cerulli recorded most of his Oromo texts through interviews, primarily with Loransiyos, a war veteran of Abbichu in Salale. Of the three informants, Loransiyos was the most resourceful and significant one, not only by providing the researcher with substantial data from memory but also by his knowledge of the Oromo language during the translation and interpretation of the texts in Latin script.

¹⁴ See Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p76.

¹⁵ See Enrico Cerulli’s *Folk Literature of the [Oromo] of Southern Abyssinia*, (Cambridge: MA., Harvard African Studies, III, Peabody Museum of Harvard University, 1922). See also Onesimos Nasib and Aster Ganno Salban’s *Oromo Spelling Book*, (Mankullo, Eritrea, 1894), in Cerulli, pp14-15.

The most relevant and recent written historical source is Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa's MA thesis research, which contains accounts of Salale history from an insider's perspective.¹⁶ He analyzes the Salale social history from the time of its incorporation into the Shawan dynasty (1840) to the temporal termination of the empire during the five-year Italian occupation (1936-1941). Another very large document is that of Asme Giyorges titled *History of the [Oromo] and the Kingdom of Shawa* translated and interpreted by Bairu Tafla in which the ethnonym Salale is presented twenty times throughout the voluminous book of 1053 pages.¹⁷ The work contains many valuable themes of Oromo history in relation to the Shawa dynasty, though the author "favors an outside origin for the Oromo just as many foreign contemporaries had done."¹⁸ A phenomenal work of Oromo history is that of Mohammed Hassen, an Oromo historian, titled *The Oromo of Ethiopia (1570-1860)*. Hassen rejects the tradition of the Ethiopian and Ethiopianist scholars' historical essentialism, annuls the "outside origin" theory of the Oromo and, instead, establishes that the Oromo reoccupied in the 16th century the present day territories which they previously lost to Abyssinians.¹⁹ He argues that the Oromo are indigenous peoples in the region with rich history, culture and religion and the *gada* political institution of their own.

Another more pertinent and excellent source of information is Svein Ege's (1996) *Class, State, and Power in Africa: a case study of the Kingdom of Shawa (Ethiopia) about 1840*. This work is an analysis of the socio-political structure of a pre-colonial African state, namely, that of the Shawan Amhara and their unequal power relationship with the Oromo about 1840. Svein Ege

¹⁶ Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa's "The Oromo of Salale: a History," is a serious work of a young historian, Salale himself, who did ethnography on oral history and oral tradition in Salale. (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 2003).

¹⁷ Bairu Tafla, *Asama Giyorgis and*, 1987a.

¹⁸ See Bairu Tafla, p51.

¹⁹ Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia, 1570-1860: a History* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1994).

draws on travel writings and other primary sources by missionaries.²⁰ Though Ege's work can be hailed to be of high significance to historians and anthropologists, the gap left unfulfilled on the side of oral history for the period (1840s), in this book, is a major handicap. The people's perspective of their own past vis-à-vis their current situation—an *emic* approach—is disregarded. To fill that gap is the purpose of the present chapter. Drawing on folkloric data and other sources, I take off from where Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa stopped. Unlike Svein Ege, Tsegaye did ethnographic search in Salale, historically the branch of Ege's Shawa dynasty. The two works of Donald Crummey on *land and society* and *banditry* are other good examples of an outsider's viewpoint in writing modern Ethiopian history and the people's role in that history.



Figure 2.1: Ijaara Ras Goobana, Ras Gobana's headquarter, 1880s, Saldhe. Stone wall.

²⁰ Svein Ege depends exclusively on written accounts for his book titled *Class, State, and Power in Africa: a Case Study of the Kingdom of Shawa (Ethiopia) about 1840*, (Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden, 1996); See Donald Crummey's *Banditry, Rebellion, and Social Protest in Africa*. (Suffolk: James Currey, 1996); Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: From the 13th to the 20th Century*. (Suffolk: James Currey, 2000).

Despite this, the general themes of Enrico Cerulli's collection and interpretation of Oromo folk literature were four major historical events prevalent among the Oromo toward the second half of the 19th century: Menilek's *war of conquest* led by Ras Gobana Daaci of Salale (Abbichu), the externally induced and also internally motivated *conflicts* among the religiously and socially diversified Oromo states, *indigenous Oromo religion*, and *nostalgia and homesickness* in the collections of narratives by the ex-slave young Oromo evangelists based in Monkullo, Eritrea. Thus, Enrico Cerulli's collection can be viewed as an attempt by the narrators to reconstruct the first half of the 20th century. The collector's intention can be polemic, but the collection lays a foundation for Oromo folklore scholarship as an ethnographic attempt in its methodological orientation, but detached from the social context. The study marks the beginning of ethnographic history of Oromo folklore study though it lacks theoretical underpinnings. Its significance for



Figure 2.2: Remains of stonewall, similar to traditional rounded Oromo houses, near Ejersa Bokku sacred groves

Salale history is crucial, since two of his four sources are from Salale, with particular reference to Loransioys, his primary informant from Abbichu.

Those different perspectives in travel narratives give us a diachronic account of some basic themes in Oromo social history in the region, specifically that of Salale and its environs. While Cerulli remains well acknowledged for his contribution to Oromo folklore study, Bahru Zewde is right to describe him as an “Ethiopicist of considerable repute, and the perfect example of scholarship being put at the service of colonial administration.”²¹ After more than a decade of collecting Oromo folklore, Enrico Cerulli was made governor of Shawa and deputy of the last viceroy, Amadeo Umberto d’Aosta, during the Italian occupation in Ethiopia.²²

Salale Folksongs and Narratives as Oral History

The Salale share a common dialect, cultural interactivity between Christianity and traditional belief system, and a common ethnohistory of resistance and negotiation under Amhara ethnic hegemony. Internal migration and social banditry are among other common elements of Salale resistance culture epitomized in their folksongs and narrative episodes. The songs and narratives are important because, on the one hand, they are representatives of Oromo folklore tradition in general, and, on the other hand, they form the historical basis of Salale resistance against

²¹ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1991*. (London: James Currey Ltd., 2001), p162.

²² African folklore research (collection, documentation and brief interpretations) started, presumably, with the coming of European travelers, missionaries, philologists and ethnologists (anthropologists) to Northeast Africa in the middle of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The aim of the collectors was not primarily folkloristic scholarship, however. The aim was to understand Africans’ psychosocial temperaments and cultures in the area, i.e., to peep into the cave of their mind, to advance evangelism and colonial goals and enhance the comparative study of languages and cultures. Through their experience under external pressure and internal colonialism, the Northeast Africans used their expressive culture and symbolic performances (rituals, festivals, and songs) for emancipatory resistance and creative co-existence. None of the travelers in the 19th century or before seems to have shown interest in collecting and interpreting Salae Oromo folklore in Ethiopia despite the massive travel narratives. Peek and Yankah are right in commenting that in African folklore study even folklorists (let alone travelers) cannot apply the narrow European setting to an African setting without clarification and contextualization. See Philip M. Peek and Kwesi Yankah, *African Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, (New York, NY: Rutledge, 2004), p11.

hegemony. They have descriptive character as they chronicle the movement of the people. The themes in the songs, episodes, and personal experience narratives of survivors of displacement, bandits, and ritual leaders should be considered in the ethnohistory of the people. These songs of defiance and episodes about grievances and painful experience will be discussed later in more detail in other chapters. The cultural and social roles of the verbal art in Salale vary based on religious contexts and secular ceremonies. Incantations, for example, are used to prevent bad fortunes, famine, war, epidemics, and include prayers for health and rain, accompanied by ritual songs used for good fortune and harvest. Curses are used to invoke harm to the enemy.²³

Salale folksongs add a public dimension to studying Salale Oromo history. The songs and narratives are creative expressions of social issues and injustices suffered during a particular time in history. The Salale sing various songs and tell stories of historical importance pertaining to local and national experiences, specific individuals, ethnic heroes, and places and times of some significance in the people's history. In this song, in Cerulli's collection, the singer recounts the disconnection between Shawa and the western Oromo confederates following *Ras Gobana's* death in 1889:

<p>Yaa okkotee danfii goommanaa wajjinii karaan Gibee hafee, Goobana wajjinii</p>	<p>Oh, pot you boil boil with cabbages no more crossings to Gibe, border crossing remained with Goobana²⁴</p>
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The allusion made here is to rebuke *Ras Gobana's* son, *dajjach* Wadajo, who was not heroic like his father. In this song, Wadajo is compared to a stew pot which is set on fire to boil and, without any other choice, was left alone to boil in anger, helpless under the despotic control. Wadajo had an extensive fertile land in Salale, named *Dirre Wadajo*, meaning, *Wadajo's Ranch*, in Yaaya

²³ Informant, Tolasaa W., Muloo Faallee, Tiiroo. Interview on *curses, deities, and rituals*. Date, 12/12/2009.

²⁴ See Cerulli, p88 (text 51).

Gullalle, with thousands of households living on it.²⁵ He was also governor of the Gurage but “fell out of royal favor” and died in confinement around 1890 for “refusing to recognize Wassan Saggad, the first child of Shawa Ragga, as his son.”²⁶



Figure 2.3: A pool in Dirre Wadajo Gobana, Yaaya Gullalle.

Folksongs also provide an emic perspective of historical events in Salale. The following song recorded in Cerulli’s collection gives insight into Salale experience from outside as sung by Arsi Oromo. The folklorist or social historian can infer a great deal from this song in which the Arsi singer reprimands the Salale who unwillingly joined Ras Darge’s army to end the five year Arsi resistance (1881-86):

Arsiin du’a hin sodaatu
 maaf of balleesita ilmoo ko
 hin bahin ya ilma Salale!
 hin ceetuu Macca gamatti

The Arsi do not fear death
 why you ruin yourself, o my son?
 do not fight your people, son of Salale
 go to the border beyond

²⁵ Informant, Tolaa Q. in *Dirre Wadajo*, interview on landholding and history of Dirree Wadajo. Wadajo Gobana, Ras Gobana’s son, had land and a stronghold in Dirree. Date, 12/20/09. See also Bairu Tafla, 1987a, p980.

²⁶ Bairu Tafla, *ibid.*

kan Abbaa Jifaar Guddaa too
hin galtuu Jimma gamatti?

to the land of Abba Jifar The Great!
flee to Jimma on the other bank.²⁷

This song is a call for pan-Oromo solidarity made for Salale soldiers to desert Darge's army which they joined, compelled by Menilek's divide-and-rule policy. Menilek used one defeated Oromo clan against the other, which the Arsi understood well as divisive.²⁸

As a strategic means of passive resistance, internal migration or social banditry was seen as Salale resistance culture. To evade tribute paying, the people deserted their home and crossed to other regions or join rebel forces in Jama or Mogor. For the Shawan army, "deserted hamlets implied refusal to pay tribute, and they were set on fire together with the surrounding fields."²⁹

When *Ras* Gobana conquered Salale, Jabaa Nabse, the chief of Saggi, recited:

Yaa tamboo qoricha foomanaa
naa goote yaa Goobanaa
qorichi koo kanaa

Oh, tobacco you are medicinal.
Gobana, you did it to me
alas! you broke me! ah, me!³⁰

Salale historical songs are interspersed with other narratives of defiance and banditry and provide a background setting for the historical events. It is to be remembered that the Salale resistance was subdued after repeated expeditions of the united forces led by *Ras* Gobana and *Ras* Darge³¹

Ethnographic data derived from oral traditions carried in folksongs, stories, ritual incantations, festivals, and personal experience narratives can lay the ground for an alternative Salale history.

²⁷ Cerulli, p89 (text 53)

²⁸ Abbas Haji, "Arsi Oromo Political and Military Resistance against the Shawan Colonial Conquest, (1881-6)". *Journal of Oromo Studies*. Volume II Number 1&2 (Winter 1995, Summer 1995).

²⁹ See Ege, p217.

³⁰ Informant, Taadasa G., *Daalattii*, on *Salale local history, genealogy, sub-clan chiefs*. Interview Date, 03, 20, 2010.

³¹ Cerulli writes, citing his source, Loransiyos, Ras Darge's next mission was the march against Arsi Oromo after he accomplished the conquest of Salale with the aid of Ras Gobana (cf. text 39). Darge, "who ruthlessly suppressed the fierce resistance of the Salale became the butcher" of Arsi Oromo. Before this expedition, Darge was appointed governor of Salale with two residences at Fiche and Salale. See Cerulli, p88 (text 52); Haji, p3.

However, the time factor is a serious limitation if one is depending upon oral tradition without crosschecking with available written sources and careful observations to establish Salale Oromo as a full-fledged historical phenomenon. The time-depth of oral tradition, as Bairu Tafla claims, “does not at any rate exceed the documented period.”³² Those two sets of evidence, that is, the written source and the oral and primary sources of data have indispensable contents as old as the land the people have lived on since time immemorial. In Salale folklore tradition the narrator/performer interprets facts and their meanings by situating them in spatial images and particular “regions” of the events and social interactions among the Salale themselves and between the Salale and the Amharas in the relative time frame of resistance or peaceful co-existence. Thus the time factor is an important element in organizing social memory but not in a linear fashion. People tend to identify more toward their local community, ethnic group or descent group than with a region. This is evident in Salale toponyms, eponyms, and ethnonyms, and genealogical memories they recount in their folklore tradition. As I discussed in Chapter 2, in the local history there are places that retained important spatial images in public memory spotted as “dominant places.” Those places vary from sacred sites, i.e. groves, trees, rivers (e.g. Malka Ateete in Ilu, Holqa Haroo in Jama, Ejersa Bokkuu near Saldhe, Odaa Jilaa in Mogor) to centers of deity worship (*Warra Cabsa*) and spirit mediumship sites (*Warra Afuura*) side by side with churches and monasteries. In Salale folk narratives and songs there are grand local and

³² Social memory is not organized in a linear fashion, distinguishing between the historical epoch under one regime and then another. Oral tradition, amazingly, presents those facts, meanings and their representations in a legitimate local historical reasoning from “below,” i.e., from peasants’ perspective. It is true that time-factor is one limitation to rely fully on oral history. But, Jan Vansina’s notion of “historical causality” presents time as a complex link between events, social phenomena overtime, in which earlier phenomena cause later events. Those complex links of social phenomena exist in public memory “fully fledged as they are in the present.” See Vansina, 1985:130ff.

national historic episodes that relate the people and their land to different events, calamities (e.g. famine), local chiefs and despots.³³

Methods and Perspectives

To understand the Oromo as a nation in Northeast Africa it is vital to understand their cultural, geographical, religious, and historical features transmitted through oral history. The social history of the Oromo and Oromia has been understudied and their historiography has been fragmented. To unsettle the hegemonic discourse that Ethiopia is a Christian island surrounded by barbaric pagans Oromo folklore tradition and oral history is a wellspring to establish the ethnohistory and folkloristics of the people to begin with from an Oromo perspective. Available written accounts show that history started around 1522 and was halted by the Jihadist war (1527-1543) which destroyed the Christian rule in Abyssinia; the Oromo were “actively recapturing their territories and rolling back the Christian and Muslim empires” since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³⁴

Since the macro-historical approach tends to make generalizations on the bases of vast amounts of data, some verified and some estimated, it can lose sight of local and individual nuances.

³³ In Salale history the following personalities and events are important. These include the royal families, *Ras Darge* and *Ras Kassa's* families' who ruled and the Salale partitioned it east and west, *Ij Iyasu's* imprisonment, the massacre of *Ras Kass's* sons and patriots during the Italian occupation, Haile Selassie's flight and homecoming through Salale in 1941. Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa cites Salale oral history about other major actors in Salale history of the late 19th century. Abba Maalle of Saggu, Nagawo Gammada of Kuyyu, Gochu Gisilla of Darro, Doolu Jilo of Warra Jaarso whose names are the subject of Salale folksongs. Later, Salale oral history was characterized by periodic resistance and social banditry, executions of bandits such as the 3 Tullu brothers, Hagari Tullu, Jima Tullu, and Hirko Tullu in Dagam. Other rebels were Mulu Asanu, and his followers from Darro, and Baqqala Gurre of Kuyyu, General Tadasa Birru Kenne from Hidhabu, Badhaadha Dilgaasa from Qarre Tokke, Yayya Gullale, among others. These are among those leading figures in Salale local history and verbal narratives.

³⁴ Asafa Jalata invalidates the tactical estrangement of the Oromo in Abyssinian “official” history citing Virginia Luling, who argues that the Oromo were dominant on their own territories during the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries and no external cultures were imposed on them. Asafa Jalata, *Oromo and Ethiopia*, (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2005), p18; See Virginia Luling, “Government and Social Control among some Peoples of the Horn of Africa,” (M.A. Thesis, University of London, 1965).

Using narratives and anecdotes to better describe the Salale, in this section, I apply both *ethno-* and *micro-historical* methods to bring to life the place of the Salale in Oromo history with contemporaneous and historical descriptions of the setting. Here I problematize *scope* on two methodological bases: first, the *geographical scope* is limited to Salale historically set within the Shawa Kingdom as a center of the *concentric circle* of Abyssinian expansion, and currently, one of the zones in Oromia Regional State. The *concentric circle* metaphor goes beyond the spatial centrality and represents the most affected locality because of its relative proximity to the Abyssinian ethnic hegemony. Second, the *temporal scope* resonates back and forth between past and present, following the diachronic and synchronic scale, not in a linear fashion but by pertaining to some social spaces, meanings, themes and patterns, and individuals current in public memory. Over the time, some cultural and ethnic heroes rose above all others and remained whole in the living narratives, folksongs, and rituals as the memories of some ancestors faded ultimately and their detailed identities are carried only in genealogies in the social memory of the young generation.

In describing the Salale using *ethno-* and *micro-historical* approaches, the *micro-historical* method makes individuals and their lived experience narratives distinct by giving prominence to the person or phenomena that took residence in the public memory and positioned in the collective vision of the society. I present the diachronic developments of phenomena over time and examine the synchronic sociopolitical and cultural transformations at a given time in history to shed light on facts and their interpretations about the legacy of Abyssinian domination. The ignorance of ethnohistorical method generally handicaps the folklorist's endeavor to study the learned behavior of the people in focus, past and present, through examining their narratives,

folksongs, rituals and other folk traditions. Ethnohistory uses historical method with diachronic emphasis for the study of culture and history, or to reconstruct the past lifeways in anthropological insight.³⁵

To supplement the historical perspective of the present folkloric study, careful investigation into travel logs and records of missionaries and chronicles are pertinent for two reasons. First, to reevaluate the unjust historical relationships of the Oromo with the Shewan Amhara rulers based on oral tradition alone is unreliable because the living accounts of oral tradition cannot fully grasp those historical dynamics one or two centuries back. Second, to investigate the causal connections between the social injustices (e.g., economic exploitation, political domination, war of conquest, displacement and the demographic change that took place thereof) and the birth of Salale Oromo resistance culture, past and present, travel narratives and modern literature are indispensable sources with the oral tradition.

In sum, the basic assumption here is that collective memory recapped through verbal narratives, songs and rituals can become the repository of an alternative historical account. The question is not just “what is in the story?” but more, as Michael Jackson asks, citing Hannah Arendt, “What it is in people [in ordinary people] that makes them want a story?” Jackson shares Arendt’s concern that “storytelling is part of the conceptual and physical activities through which people produce and reproduce themselves in the world.”³⁶ People tell stories of their lived experience as true and recount their lives intersected with historical events (war, famine, social movement,

³⁵ W. Raymond Wood, “Ethnohistory and Historical Method,” *Archaeological Method and Theory*, Vol. 2 (1990), pp. 81-109. For it is another feature of the nature of causation as seen in oral societies that individuals are responsible for change they create.

³⁶ Michael Jackson, “Histories,” in *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Intersubjectivity*, (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002), pp251-252

epidemics), which serve as evidence of their ethno-history instead of the story that shadows them.³⁷ Next, I turn to describing the Salale cultural and socioeconomic setting of the people's alternative history.

WHY “ALTERNATIVE SALALE HISTORY”?

In this alternative Salale history, which is part of the ongoing Salale study, it is imperative to examine closely the ways in which the people represent their experiences textually and interpret meanings in context. The meanings constitute their social history at the micro-level, or what Eric Hobsbawm calls “history from below.”³⁸ An alternative history is needed because the present has grown out of the past. It is necessary to understand the past or present from the perspective of the people we study. The lack of understanding of current affairs, I believe, is the result of the lack of historical knowledge about social transformations the people experience in their daily lives. The Salale elders' narrative experience is near enough to the 1930s and early '40s period of the Italo-Ethiopian war (1935/36-41) and after. It was the time when the Italian force invaded the Ethiopian empire and the emperor fled the country. In Salale public memory, the problems then seem as complex as those facing the world today. The young generation sing entertainingly to this day of the royal family's flight, the appeal before the League of Nations, the relative freedom the Salale cherished under the Italian occupation of the empire and the agony of torture, displacement, and abject poverty they suffered after the emperor was restored to power in 1941.³⁹

³⁷ Indira Chowdhury, “Speaking of the Past: Perspectives on Oral History” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. xlix, no.30, 2014, pp30-40.

³⁸ See Frederick Krantz, (ed.), *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology in Honor of George Rude*. (Montreal: Concordia University), 1985.

³⁹ Informant, Gurmu B., 2010; Tolasa W., 2009

In the song,

Haa haddaatuu, shaashiin gaabii wayya White but warmer is toga than shawl
haa hammaatuu, Xaayilaanii wayya plight but sounder is the Italian rule,⁴⁰

Though no real comparison between the past and present is possible without some fault lines and discontinuities, it is evident that the problems in the past shaped the Salale present as they are influencing their future. During the five-year Italian occupation of Ethiopian empire, it seems, the Oromo attained a relative degree of social and economic freedom.⁴¹ Bahru Zewde notes that there was a fierce resistance from the Oromo against pushing out the Italian force "...leading the march [to the capital] into a tragic odyssey."⁴² The names of ethnic heroes who took refuge in the Mogor and Jama river valleys and challenged the neo-Abyssinian oppressive states are subjects of Salale commemorative songs and narratives to this day and the eco-poetic representation in Salale is real.

The need for an alternative Salale history, therefore, is part of the pressing need for an organized and comprehensive Salale study which seeks to analyze Salale folklore tradition, sociopolitical structure, and the history of the people in their entire immediate milieu in Oromia, central Ethiopia. This is justifiable for at least four basic reasons: 1) the disregard for Salale Oromo experience in the hegemonic Ethiopian Studies in favor of the Shewan ruling class, 2) the biases

⁴⁰ Informant, Gurmu B., 2010.

⁴¹ The impact of the five-year Italian occupation of Ethiopia was huge. It reversed the Amhara cultural and political superiority in the country. It favored to flourish the culture of the previously oppressed peoples. Professor Mekuria Bulcha writes, "prior to their invasion, Italians apparently had studied well the conditions of the subject peoples in Ethiopia. Through the works of Italian scholars such as Cerulli, Moreno..., they seem to have been also informed about the language situation in the empire. Immediately after conquest, the Italians divided Ethiopia into regions using language and ethnicity as criteria. ...the employment of Amharas in government offices and using Amharic language in non-Amhara territories was prohibited. *Afaan Oromo*, Kaficho, the Somali and Adare languages were used as the media of instruction in government schools in the south. In Addis Ababa, in schools, *Afaan Oromoo* and Amharic were used. Whatever the motives behind it might have been, the Italian policy favored expansion of literacy in *Afaan Oromoo*." See Mekuria Bulcha, "The Language Policies of Ethiopian Regimes and the History of Written Afaan Oromo: 1844-1994," in *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol 1 No. 2, 1994, pp91-115, see p98.

⁴² Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1991*. (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), p168.

and political motives of the Abyssinian chroniclers and European travelers, and their lack of objectivity, which have been presented in part one of this chapter, 3) the time-gap as another major factor to establish Oromo historiography based on oral heritage, 4) the place of Salale folklore traditions as social critique, as a source of critical history and commemorative pulses have been understudied. Next, I explain these four key propositions.

First, studies of Oromo culture, history, folklore, and tradition in general, have been appended to the mainstream Ethiopian Studies until 1992 when a holistic Oromo Studies emerged in North America. Alternative Oromo studies became compulsory to meet the substantial demand for scholarly research on the Oromo and to supply fresh perspectives in the people's continuing quest for self-determination, human rights and democracy in Northeast Africa. In this alternative Salale history, which is part of the ongoing alternative Salale study, it is imperative to theorize from the people's perspective the ways in which experiences were textually represented. To examine the meanings people make out of songs, rituals, incantations, and narratives about structures of power and structures of meaning depends on the knowledge of the broader cultural base constituting the alternative history, or "history from below."

Second, the royal chronicles, travelogues and ethnological works undertaken by foreigners and compatriots since the sixteenth centuries and mainly, as Steve Ege claims, in the 19th century (1836-1843), had methodological problems.⁴³ Some of the problems include loose generalizations about and biased descriptions of the people and their culture based on scanty information, the lack of interest in the life of the people, misconceptions about the Oromo social structure, and the lack of contact with ordinary Shawan Oromo, including the Salale. Those

⁴³ Steve Ege 1996, p11.

methodological shortcomings were the result of the lack of good rapport with the people to found a firm base for the documentations since the Europeans “could not move without the king’s permission.”⁴⁴This methodological problems were discussed in part one of this chapter. Third, added to the lack of systematic compilation and interpretation of the oral tradition collected, time-gap/-depth was another major factor in an attempt to establish Oromo historiography based on oral heritage.⁴⁵

Fourth, the multiple roles of Salale Oromo songs and narratives as a social critique, as a source of critical history and commemorative functions, have been undermined. In Salale folk traditions the names and heroic deeds of Salale Oromo ethnic heroes, i.e. social bandits and war generals who spearheaded fierce resistances against foreign aggression and internal domination are alive in the collective memory of Salale singers, storytellers, and ritual leaders. Individual flaws and characters of past Abyssinian chiefs in Salale are criticized. Among other warlords and kings whom the Salale present disgracefully in songs and narratives are Ras Gobana Daaci, an Abbichu Oromo, who brought his people under Menilek’s conquest and Haile Selassie, who fled the country during the Italian occupation in 1936.

To mention but a few examples, Salale historical songs are part of the social memory. The two folklore texts below recap a single historical episode, namely, Haile Selassie’s escape before the Italian occupation in 1936. The emperor is a subject of mockery and allusive songs of aberration

⁴⁴ The Europeans entered the region generally called Shawa, and the Salale district, through the regal door of Shawan Kingdom for different purposes, but generally they had a very superficial understanding of the people and their culture. The missionaries (Krapf and Isenberg) were committed to an evangelization project with the Church Missionary Society (CMS) as they also attempted to attract the interest of the British government. The philologist, Dr. Beke (1843), wrote little on Shawa, and Captain Harris, the British government agent, “chose style over facts” and “is certainly much based on assumptions.” Thus, one can conclude, the influence of backgrounds, perspectives, different missions and political motives held by Europeans and Abyssinian chroniclers shaded the objectivity of the facts and their interpretations in ways that tended to subdue the voice of the people. See Ege, p11.

⁴⁵ Bahru Zawde, 2001, p162.

about the anomalous character of Abyssinian chiefs who ruled over Salale. When Benito Mussolini invaded Ethiopia to add to the Italian Somaliland as an economic colony with a hope to resettle 10 million Italians in a reunified Northeast Africa, the emperor escaped with his royal family. Thus the Salale sing to this day about that historical episode and with contempt for the emperor:

<p>Salales miti Darrayis miti, Darroo jala dabarree, odoo ashkarri loluu— Nugusa, duubaa dheechuu agarree!</p>	<p>Not Salale not Darra, passing through Darro, we fought fiercely— when the fight escalated, we panicked seeing the king fleeing!⁴⁶</p>
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Tafari, later Haile Selassie, when he was only fourteen in 1906, was made a titular governor of Salale, the district considered as “a realm of marginal importance” but the second seat of the Shawan dynasty. The theme of a few other Salale narratives and songs harshly criticize the emperor’s fleeing the country before the invader’s force. My informant, Gurmu recites:

⁴⁶ Informant, Gurmu B. 2010. The Salale sang this song sarcastically to critique the royal family’s flight abroad, including Ras Kassa, Abera’s father, who escorted the emperor, reportedly to appeal to the League of Nations:

Hin teenyu maalumatti teenya
alam-mangistaata bira deemna
wantuma jarri jedhu dhageenya

No rest, no time to waste
to the League of Nations we plea
to hear what they say, we flee...

What the Salale ridiculed bluntly but mockingly in this song, one of the popularized songs among the Salale to this day, was once a theme of international concern. Marcus Garvey (1937), in his editorial of the *Black Man* wrote furiously and attacked the flight as treacherous:

.... when it is considered that the freedom of twelve million people is taken away by the negligence of the governing authority [in Abyssinia], no sensible person can exclude such authority from blame if they really think that the Abyssinians should be free and independent like anyone else ... Abyssinia is a Negro country, even though the Emperor did not think so (in *BM* 2 no. 5, January 1937:1-2.).

Pan-African nationalists like Garvey, hoped that Ethiopia, if not Abyssinia, would be a symbol of African political freedom, a model of Black triumph over White invaders. However, the truth is that, Ethiopia was “the only Black African power that effectively participated in the European Scramble for Africa,...the only Black African colonial country” (Teshale Tibebe 1995:xv). The country ranks second in the world in the percentage of the population below the poverty line today, just ahead of Niger,—another country, ironically, with abundant resources but even slower economic growth.

Dur loleet' nama ganaa
maali jabanni goftaan nama ganuu?
eega gooftaan nu ganee,
beenu in ceenaa, Gondor biyya Walee!

In the past, it was servant that defects
today it is master?
since our master turned traitor
let's cross to Wale's country, to Gondar!⁴⁷

This song is not about migrating northward to Gondar, Ras Wale Betul's dominion; it is simply about abhorring treachery and abandoning one's country. Most of the war generals who fought fiercely against the Italian invading force during the five-year occupation were also from Salale, but there were also Salale rebels who joined the Italian force. Ras Abbaba Aragay Bachere of Abbichu was the most loyal leader of the emperor and fought during the five-year resistance. Those events and important names of people and places are carefully recorded in Salale folksongs and narratives.

In the hegemonic Ethiopian Studies, the Oromo were seen as “the destroyers of Christianity and civilization...as the killers of the Amhara,”⁴⁸ which necessitates a counter discourse (counter text) in order for the Oromo to regain their appropriate place in history. The competing forces and their modes of thought, the creative expressions or narrative contentions used by the subordinate to contra-pose the influence of the “official” culture and its discourse will be discussed next.

⁴⁷ Gondar was made the capital of the Ethiopian Empire around 1635. Ras Wale of Yajju (also “Eggu,” in Bairu Tafla, 1987a, p990, which could be “Iggu,” like the sub-clan in Salale) was governing in Gondar. Most Salale chiefs and ordinary people fought in the first Ethio-Italian war in the north in 1895 and '96. For example, my informant, Gurmu B. said, General Tadasa's father, Birru Kenne died in the war in Gondar.

⁴⁸ Teshale Tibebu, 1995:16.

COMPETING FORCES, CONTESTING NARRATIVES

The historically rather rough and marginal coexistence of societies in Northeast Africa, for example, the unequal relations between the Habasha and the Oromo and other ethnic intolerances (e.g. Somalia, Southern Sudan), can foster large scale dissension and conflicts in the region.⁴⁹

The various forms of social injustice prevalent in Ethiopia constitute grievances and violent resistance on one scale as there is desistance, creative coexistence and negotiation on the other. These disenchantments have been present in public memory.⁵⁰ Amidst those differentiations and nuances within and outside groups are shifting identities, contesting narratives, aspirations, and beliefs interwoven into contradictions and shared elements within the larger collective whole. In this section I trace the trail of culture that those competing forces came across and I attempt to answer the following questions: What competing forces and contesting narratives are at work in Salale? What are the means (strategies) and themes of articulation of differences and concerns in Salale ethnohistory? and How do those meanings, themes and patterns of Salale alternative history relate to the general Oromo historiography in Ethiopian context, past and present?

The polarization between Christian/pagan, modern/traditional, and literal/oral is the manifestation of three competing forces and their contesting narratives in the locality. First and foremost, there are traces of the traditional conflicts between the *autochthonous, egalitarian life style* and *the Christian, literal, and hegemonic scheme* carried in oral tradition in the present.⁵¹ Second, there emerged over time out of peasant rebellion *the radical political and cultural nationalism* in response to the *inherited imperial building project* of Abyssinian origin and

⁴⁹ See Dereje Feyisa and Markus Virgil Hoehne, *Borders and Borderlands as Resources in the Horn of Africa*, (Suffolk: James Currey. Northeast Africa Series, 2010), pp1-22.

⁵⁰ *Evil Days: 30 Years of Evil Days of War and Famine in Ethiopia. An African Watch Report*, (London. 1991).

⁵¹ Asafa Jalata, "The Negus System," 2005, p49.

cultural hegemony. Third, there are *multiple voices and divergent trends* within and outside groups, and between elites who are descendants of the people subjugated and excluded from power.⁵² In what follows I explore these uncharted terrains of the competing forces by focusing on their impacts on Salale and examine the people's perspectives, assumptions, and creative responses to counter-pose the coercive discourses of the dominant forces.

Tracing the Past in the Present

Ethnographic examples from Salale show that images and phrases of Salale autochthonous way of life, rituals and festivals reframe an important dimension for the people who live under the shadow of hegemonic religious institution and present an opportunity to maintain their own tradition and reconstruct their identity byway of "strategic traditionalism." That is, in the "traditional" context, through symbolic performances of the cultural practices, the Salale narrate and relocate the "past" in the "present" and epitomize continuity of the invariable and foundational stances of the cultural system symbolizing the "living" tradition.⁵³ Among the Salale, for example, funeral songs, ancestor worship, and mediumship rituals, generally considered as death-lore, is a fundamental human element capable of constituting a universal folkloric theme among the Oromo beyond the specific spatial and dialectal border but different from the Christians next door. Those folk traditions and songs commemorating folk heroes, no

⁵²John Markakis. *Ethiopia, the Last Two Frontiers* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2011). According to John Markakis, historically, in Ethiopia, the highland Christians monopolized power and subjugated a number of ethnations and nationalities in the highland periphery and in the surrounding lowlands. As a result, there has been an ongoing resistance and bitter wars of liberation between the center and the periphery, which is a momentous issue for the country. The last three regimes, particularly the present, resorted to military power and violence in an attempt to control the territory and extract resources by force. In so doing, they led not only the country but also the region into chaos and ever escalating conflict. It is quite important to add that Markakis does not seem to depict clearly the present regime represents narrow ethnic interests, primarily that of Tigrayans, and represents the traditional central power by overthrowing the Mengestu regime in 1991. For the wretched life situation of the people before 1991, see *Evil Days: 30 Years of Evil Days of War and Famine in Ethiopia. An African Watch Report*, (London. 1991).

⁵³ Trevor J. Blank & Robert Glenn Howard (eds). *Tradition in the 21st Century: Locating the Role of the Past in the Present*. (Logan, Utah: Utah University Press, 2013).

doubt, represent a contentious breeding ground of counter-discursive concepts of deities and ideas against the neo-Abyssinian hegemony while the *waadaa* (*covenant*) institution restores peace and social cohesion as a binding force.

In Salale folklore study, understanding the relevance of folksongs and narratives to the ethnohistory of the people confines itself to understanding the folkloristic elements of oral tradition. The nexus of social processes, networks, dialogue, and negotiation result in many shared storylines and themes as there are social differentiations and nuances. The oral tradition serves as the magnum of elements of narrative consensus and dissensus in resistance culture and as the source of social origin and circulation of the songs and the narratives.⁵⁴

To follow the major routes of contesting forces in the repertoire of Salale resistance culture, one way is, I believe, through exploring historical narratives which can take various expressive forms. Thus, what bind the community together are the shared memories that are channeled through historical narratives. For example, one of my prolific Salale informants, Gurmu B. of Shararo, told me that the Salale always occupied the present plains and valleys since time immemorial or, as he said, as long as *Tulluu Salale* (Salale Mountain) has been there.⁵⁵ However, I was told by Mabre Gofe of Anno Qarree, my other very articulate and equally knowledgeable informant in Dagam, that when Salale occupied the present area in the 16th century, the land had been uninhabited for about 44 years following Gragn Ahmed's Islamic war (1527-1543) against the Christians.⁵⁶ The narrative recorded in the Debra Libanos monastic vita is not different from the two ethnographic examples above. Denis Nossitsin reminds us that after

⁵⁴ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition in Africa*, 1985.

⁵⁵ Informant, Gurmu B., 2010, Salale

⁵⁶ Informant, Gebru Gobe, 2010, Salale.

Gragh Ahmed's army destroyed the monastery in 1531, it was abandoned for 160 years. That is, in 1690 when the four Oromo brothers (Caffe, Liqe, Daniya, and Gadde) came from the north to rebuild the monastery, they found "the Oromo settled in it dominating from *qolla* to *daga* and inheriting the area."⁵⁷

My two informants sustained the shared memories, although limited by time-depth to be as specific as the recorded narrative. The toponymic references are used as empirical evidence to justify the lack of a concrete time frame to claim the ethnohistory of the people as old as the Dagam and Salale mountains or Mogor and Jama river gorges. To locate the strategies of convergent trends and traversing lines and to closely examine the trajectories of coexistence and resistance through exchanges, negotiations and dialogue, folkloric, historical and ethnographic interdisciplinary research is crucial in this region.

The nature of the government established in the area was determined by the "means of control for the Shawans and means of resistance for the Oromo."⁵⁸ The means include assimilation to conquer and cultural resistance to subvert the conquerors' power. The assimilative power of the church as part of the state machinery was immense. Amharic language as a court language and Christianity as a state religion were the tools used to weaken the ethnic identity of the subject people. The Salale were reduced to tenants, tributary farmers on their own ancestral land and forced to work for Amhara landholders, a new "social class in Salale of Ras Darge," which, Donald Crummey rightly states, "foreshadowed crucial features of social class in twentieth century Ethiopia."⁵⁹ In his study of "land and society" in the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia,

⁵⁷ Denis Nosnitsin, p41.

⁵⁸ Ege, p191.

⁵⁹ Crummey, 2000, pp9 and 221.

Donald Crummey shows us how social and political powers are related in historic Ethiopia. He claims that material relationships such as land determine “how people in a particular culture understand power” and react to it. Those relationships are ways of meeting material needs (food and other resources) for the Abyssinian ruling class to remain in power and pass on their holdings to their heirs. However, the sociocultural relationship is equally important, I believe; the social and cultural context is broader and lives long in the public memory. At the macro-level, based on available sources, Oromo historiography can be examined vis-à-vis two major rival forces in the Ethiopia’s context, starting in the 16th century when major historical events escalated in the region.⁶⁰

The first is Islam, which was introduced peacefully to Ethiopia in 615 AD by Prophet Mohammed and his wife when they sought refuge in Axum. It became a major contending force later when strong Islamic states emerged in the region. The Muslim-Christian war (1527-1543) led by Ahmed Gragn in 1527 was a Jihad against the central and northern highland Christian kingdoms from the eastern escarpments and threatened the complete destruction of Ethiopian Christendom by burning many churches and occupying the area. During the war, needless to say, the non-Christian and non-Muslim populations, including the Oromo, were markedly affected. There are Islamic place names in and around Salale to date; as an example, Qaasimii, Abdalla, Idrisii, Usmaanii, Tamam, Ali Dooro, and Ali Dheeraa Mountain in Mogor gorges, where 94% of the Salale population observes Orthodox Christianity and Islam is almost non-existent in the locale (5.34%). The genealogical investigation of some of my informants’ line of descent also shows Islamic ethnonyms. *What is in a name?* Whether the names can be traced to the influences

⁶⁰ G.W.B. Huntingford, *The historical geography of Ethiopia from the first century AD to 1704*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 76; Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia: the Era of the Princes* (London: Longmans, 1968), pp. 144ff. Asafa Jalata also clearly assesses the effects of Christianity and Islam which “mainly undermined the political and military roles of the gada system.” See Asafa Jalata, p26ff.

of those earlier contacts with the Muslim states in the east or rooted in the 16th century Jihad war needs a closer study, which is not the purpose of the present study.

The second consideration is the two wars: between the Christian highlands and the central Shawan kingdom, on the one hand, and between the central Shawan kingdom and the Oromo, on the other hand. The latter war was a protracted struggle between “two forces with different political, religious, and social organizations,” i.e. between Christian Shawan Amhara rulers and non-Christians.⁶¹ Historically, the two wars of belligerent religious rivalry between Abyssinian Christians and Muslims in the east and the war of conquest by Abyssinians against the Oromo encouraged the ever escalating *resistance culture* in the region.

The influence of Abyssinian cultural hegemony placed huge pressure on the Tulama Oromo, particularly on the Salale clan put under Ras Darge rule (1870-90), which suffered three major negative social changes including, as Svein Ege maintains, a *permanent chief that evolved out of traditional war leader* and “coexisting with gada rituals;” *disintegration of the Tulama branch* (moiety) into hostile clans and sub-clans, and, *evolution of a clan-chief into chief of the larger population* (e.g., Abba Maalle, east of Mogor; Gifti Chamme, west of Mogor).⁶²

One of the ways in which the Oromo expressed their cultural resistance in an effort to subvert external pressure was the strategic religious conversion to Islam or protestant Christianity mostly

⁶¹ Bairu Tafla 1987a, p47

⁶² Svein Ege, p90. Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, “The Emergence of Local Chiefs In Salale” in “The Oromo of Salale: a History,” 2003, p23ff. Of Abba Malle, Tsegaye reminds us the Salale sang,

gaangolii golatti sooranii
eega Maallee du’a hin oolanii

mules are fed in pens
death is irresistible, for strong or weak, even Maallee.

following the conquest by Abyssinia while they were also practicing their indigenous religion.⁶³ In spite of some cultural changes as a result of Islamization, evangelization processes and cultural contacts, the Oromo shared a common history, common language, and common ancestry in which Oromo nationalism became deep-rooted. One approach to understanding ideological positions within Salale cultural resistance, better exemplified by the notions of “*strategic primitivism*”/“*traditionalism*,” *social banditry*, and *waadaa (covenant)*, is through examining its representations in the cultural expressions set in the context of peasant rebellion counter to state discourses in Ethiopia.⁶⁴

Social Banditry as Resistance Culture

The Salale resistance culture is influenced by the tradition of *shifta*— often translated as guerilla (warfare) or bandit—these men are often referred to as “bad men of the borders.”⁶⁵ To equate the Salale ethnic heroes’ undertakings of political emancipation and economic liberation to “banditry,” i.e. the Ethiopian *shifanet* or an “outlaw” (brigandage), sounds like treason, at least to the Salale. Asafa Jalata is right in commenting that “In Ethiopian history, Gobana Daaci and his Oromo followers were considered heroes, but heroic Oromo leaders, such as Tufa Muna, Sheik Tola, Waacoo Dabalo, Seera, were considered bandits.”⁶⁶ Thus, in Salale folksongs and narratives, the name of Hagari Tullu is very common almost in every genre, like the mythic Robin Hood, the Anglophone prototype, who stole from the rich to give to the poor. Bandits rise

⁶³ The Abyssinian cultural hegemony not only destroyed Oromo culture but it also deprived them a free cultural space in which they could develop “self-respect, assertive group identity, public skills, value of cooperation and civic virtue.” For more details see Asafa Jalata, p27.

⁶⁴ Using ethnographic examples from Gojjam, western Amhara Region, Getiye Gelaye analyses peasants voice their grievances, impressions, protests or support to the state’s land and/or agricultural policies. See Getiye Gelaye, “Peasant Poetics and State Discourse in Ethiopia...,” (2000), p2.

⁶⁵ Richard Caulk, “Bad Men of the Borders: Shum and Shefta in Northern Ethiopia in the 19th Century,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1984), pp. 201-227

⁶⁶ Asafa Jalata, 2005, p86ff.

from the level of criminality to act on behalf of the rural poor and become social bandits, the vital articulator of the cause of the rural poor. As the predatory government becomes dysfunctional and immensely oppressive, bandits become folk heroes as they attempt to relieve the pain of the ordinary members of the society.⁶⁷

At the turn of the 20th century in Salale, the loss of ancestral land following the armed aggression and conquest became tied to settler colonialism and subsequent resistances. The sporadic rebellion and cultural resistance gradually led to the radical political and cultural nationalism in response to the inherited imperial building project of Abyssinian origin and cultural hegemony. During the Italian occupation (1936-1941) the majority of Salale supported the occupying force and bandits led by *fitawrari* Alamu Ejersa, while only a few joined the patriotic front led by Ras Ababa Aragay Bachere of Abbichu.⁶⁸ Both are from Salale. As is evident from this next song, the Salale are more victims of the government's violence than the bandits' malevolence, as it were. It is out of fear of bandits and the Italian forces on one hand and the patriots on the other that the Salale deified *fitawrari* Mulu Asanu of Darro in this song:

biyya kee Darro roobe yaa Muluu	it rained in Darro, your home, oh, Mulu
adaraa sitti himadhe, yaa gooftaa ko,	not to fear for my life in the night,
akkuman nagaan rafee buluu	I entrusted myself to you, oh my hero! ⁶⁹

Mulu Asanu, together with his brother, Balacho Asanu,⁷⁰ organized Salale youth under a guerrilla force called *Mata-gurraa* (Youth Squad) when the guerilla warfare against Italians

⁶⁷ Donald Crummey, "African Banditry Revisited," a paper he originally read at the Annual Meeting of the Social Science History Association in Fort Worth, Texas, November 1999, as part of a panel entitled "Eric Hobsbawm's Bandits: A Thirty Year Retrospective." See also his *Banditry, Rebellion, and Social Protest in Africa*. (N.H.: Heinemann Educational Books, 1986). Beyond its analytical significance, Crummey argues that *social banditry* is a significant social phenomena in Africa, which Eric Hobsbawm unjustly overlooked, p11.

⁶⁸ Informant, Gurmu B., 2010

⁶⁹ Informant, Worqu D., 2010.

spread throughout the country like wildfire. Following Liberation (1941) when Italian forces were defeated with the help of the British army, the causal connection between Salale resistance and Abyssinian economic exploitation and political domination in Oromia became deep-rooted.

Historically, as a result of military aggression, religious conversion, and divide-and-rule policy, it is true, many of the local chiefs chose negotiation explicitly but resistance continued subtly.⁷¹

Perhaps Teshale Tebabu is right in categorizing banditry in the Ethiopian context into three types: *one who flees from injustice*; *rebellion against a ruler* about power sharing or an imperial title; and *outlawry* as a means of livelihood.⁷² In Salale ethnohistory, social banditry is organized guerrilla warfare enshrined by the *waadaa* (*covenant*) principle not to betray the cause nor one's comrade. It is led by an ethnic hero for a major cause of rebellion against the central government for political and economic emancipation. The subjugation of the Salale and the shifting of their right to land-holding to the Abyssinian ruling class "introduced ethnicity as an important factor in the social relations" hitherto not considered.⁷³ Although local chiefs were co-opted into the local colonial system and became collaborators for economic and political advantage, the ordinary people developed local military strategies to deal with the complex contradictions. Following the end of the Italian occupation, there were outbreaks of peasant rebellions.

⁷⁰ Oral tradition has it that among the Salale heroes who fiercely resisted Ras Darge and the Shewan rule was Goshu Gissilla Geto of Darro, the paternal grandfather of Mulu Asanu, a rebel himself whom the Derg military regime executed in 1977 near his homestead. Informant, Kabbe, 2010, Kuyyu. See also Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, p57-8.

⁷¹ Informant, Gebru Gobe 2010

⁷² Teshale Tebabu, 1995:36ff

⁷³ See Crummey, 2000, p221. The Abyssinian ethnic hegemony led to violent peasant rebellions. For example, the Raya and Asabo Oromo fierce resistance in the north before and after the Italian invasion (1935/36) and the Bale Oromo rebellion (1963-1970) caused by unbearable economic exploitation and political domination, land being the major issue. The Salale resistance was based on social banditry led by ethnic heroes and continuous guerilla warfare based in the Mogor and Jama gorges. For more details see Asafa Jalata's "Struggle and Resistance:1860s-1960s," pp175-78; Bahru Zawde, 2001: pp215-216.



Figure 2.4: Enda-lebbu (Addunna Hirphaa) with his wife. Ex-bandit during the 17-year Darg rule.

Now, the question is, where can we locate Salale resistance on the historical map of modern Ethiopia? To make a case for Salale ethnohistory pertaining to peasant rebellions following the end of the Italian occupation in 1941, and under the Derg, the question is crucial. The control over ancestral land is the concern that defines the Salale concept of *dhiirummaa*, “manhood,” the tradition that a man should be strong, courageous, and rebellious; these attributes characterize their ethnic identity as Salale. Perhaps it is important to add that under every successive regime to this day, land right remains a recurring theme of Salale verbal art. To complicate the problem, as population increases, the household land decreases and competition over land and land resources increases, not to mention the materialistic corporate interests and hostile government land policies in Oromia. That is the time when the Salale recited in praise of General Tadasa Berru as the warrior hero, a border raider fighting and fleeing:

Aboote hin gologgolu
coqorsa Birraa gollala malee
garaan roorroo dhadhabnaan
Taadasa Berruu alatti gale

Aboote, do not hoe
only in autumn they tidy the grass
Taadasa Berruu couldn't bear up oppression
and chose the deep jungle to his home.⁷⁴

The singer's insistence follows that Taddasa is one of many other Oromo rebels who chose living in the deep jungle as folk heroes. By the time when Oromo rebellion spread, Hagari Tullu was captured in Naqamte, Wallaga, without a fight and hanged with his two brothers, Jima and Hirko, in Hambiso, Dagam town, in 1970. Thus, this romantic variant of Taddasa's responsibility for leadership:

Walaabu kan Waaqooti
Mulu Asanu leenca Mogori
Hagariin yoo dhadhabee
tokkicha Berru fuuldura gori

Walaabu is Waaqoo's den
Mulu Asanu is the lion roaring in Mogor
and may Hagari rest in peace
you take the lead, Tadasa, oh, Berru's son.⁷⁵

In the song above, one can see that the theme of Oromo national liberation at macro-level is woven into local movements based on the people's resistance culture. The Oromo resistance is gathering momentum recently after a two-decade period of total collapse prompted by the lack of obeying democratic principles to accommodate divergent views within the Oromo and with other ethnations. This political handicap consequently led to an unbearable crisis and disintegration in the Oromo national struggle as it also brewed suspicion in other ethnic groups if the Oromo elites truly value solidarity with other oppressed groups.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Informant, Shaaroo Lammii, 2010.

⁷⁵ Informant, Magarsa D, 2009; *Police enna Ermejaw, (Police Actions)*, 1970.

⁷⁶ Bahru Zawde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1991.*, 2001:216. The Bale Oromo struggle following the Christian Amhara encroachment among the Oromo Muslims, increased tax, new land measurement, and settler arrogance and endangered religious antagonism; Asafa Jalata, 2005, p207. The monastery's chief abbot, the Ichege, was the second most powerful official in the Ethiopian Church hierarchy after the Abuna (Patriarch) based in the capital city Finfinne (Addis Ababa).

Divergent Forces, Multiple Voices

The third competing force is divergent trends among the Oromo about the same national problem which has causal connections rooted in the colonial system. In this section I make an attempt to discuss the multiplicity of voices in the sources and readings of Ethiopian history; these obscure the construction of an alternative Salale Oromo narrative used as critical history. It has been a common mode of academic misrepresentation to forge a representative “history” for Salale Oromo as an extraneous entity in the dominant Ethiopian discourse. However, the polemic against the historicity of Salale Oromo resistance culture is simply to deny the Oromo unjustly the influence of their counter-texts and the strategic traditionalism the Salale practice throughout successive Abyssinian regimes.

There are multiple voices that counter the ruling party’s discourse and its allies. The Oromo Democratic Organization (OPDO) is part of the alliance with other PDOs (people’s democratic organizations) from Amhara, Somali, the southern region, and many other ethnic-based surrogate parties joined with the government. Following the fall of the military rule in Ethiopia in 1991, the Tigre-led government came to power “attempting to save the Ethiopian colonialism.”⁷⁷ The representatives of national liberation fronts, political organizations, and ethnic minorities who endorsed the Transitional Government Charter were intimidated and pushed out. Back in 1991 there were five Oromo political units including the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO), allied with the ruling party.⁷⁸ Today after twenty years, there are more than five factions of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF); the crisis has negatively impacted the national interest of the Oromo, namely freedom to legitimize the right to self-determination.

⁷⁷ Asafa Jalata, p206

⁷⁸ Asafa Jalata, p207

Regarding one of the most striking things about the betrayal of the Habasha, historically it was foretold in Salale folklore that Abyssinians would bring the Oromo elites to power only nominally and would subdue the Oromo protest systematically and not allow for fair representation. It may suffice to mention a few examples: When *lej* Iyasu (r.1913-1916), the grandson and designated heir to Menilek II, was deposed and put in jail in Salale the Salale recited the following poem, which implies a critique of his liberal and inclusive policy:

Gaara magra talbaani	On hilltop grows the flax
yaa Iyasu	oh, Iyasu, on hilltop it grows
gaara magra talbaani	you befriended the Afaars
situ Afaarin michoome	and to <i>ras</i> Tafari
kan Tafariiti algaani!	the throne belongs! ⁷⁹

Lej Iyasu was a fairly intelligent young man from Wallo Oromo, full of life; he had no patience with imperial rituals and was never close to his grandfather, emperor Menilek.⁸⁰ He was much happier in the role of a provincial noble as a hereditary ruler of Wallo than as a prince-regent surrounded by the old suspicious friends of his grandfather. Iyasu's modern policy was inclusive to minorities and attempted to accommodate ethnic and religious differences in the country. Thus, Iyasu travelled frequently to the eastern part of the country, particularly to the Afar Muslim community, one of the marginalized ethnic groups on the periphery. The British East Africa Company needed a responsible authority in Addis Ababa who was sympathetic to their

⁷⁹ Informant, Magarsa D. 2009. For Salale performer, there was no more infuriating situation than this historical event to creatively but critically react. Bairu Tafla notes that in May 1931, "lej Iyyasu escaped from the town of Feche [Salale] and went to Gendabarat. The whole of Shawa went in search, and he was arrested in Gojjam on Saturday, 30 June 1931. On Sunday, a great deal of rejoicing took place. On account of having lej Iyyasu escape, ras Haylu forfeited all his wealth and was imprisoned. Many people who participated in the plan and realization of this matter were financially penalized. Many people perished as the result of flogging, incarceration and hanging. See Bairu Tafla, "The Historical Notes of "Liqa-Täbbäbt" Abbäbä Yeräfu," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 50, No. 2 (1987), pp. 267-300. See page 298.

⁸⁰ Andrew Stephen Caplan, "British Policy towards Ethiopia, 1909-1919." Thesis Submitted to the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of London, 1971, pp2, 95ff). Caplan argues, although Britain hoped Lji Iyasu would take power in 1913 and give Ethiopia a "stable administration, he was opposed by the Shawan hierarchy," pp2, 95ff. See also Aramis Houmed Soulé's "Lij Iyassu and the Afars" (Part II), who is a Fellow Researcher at French Center for Ethiopian Studies.

cause in the region and to Christianity, and that was Tafari Makonen, later Haile Selassie and once a titular governor of Salale in 1906. When the British knew that *lej* Iyasu was not ready to take up his rightful and long-overdue burden, they ousted him and Tafari came to power after the bloody war concluded at Sagale in 1916.

By the same token, during the Derg military rule (1974-1991), Mangestu Haile Mariyam overcame his major hurdle, the Eritrean general, Aman Mikael Andom, who served as the Darg Chairman, in November 1974. After Aman was killed, the Tulama Oromo general, Tafari Banti, came to power as chief of state (1974-1977) but “not allowed the same margin of independence as his predecessor, the Eritrean general Aman.”⁸¹ The Salale predicted that Tafari Banti would not escape the coming major risk, as they compared him to a lamb ready for slaughter, but that he should remain vigilant until his day comes:

Hoolaa dhaltii	Oh, sheep, oh, sheep,
yaa hoolaa dhaltii,	alas! Tafari Banti
of eeggadhu yaa Tafarii Bantii	be vigilant,
Amaarri si gantii!	the Amhara will readily betray you soon! ⁸²

“Betrayal” is a motif that recurs in the general Salale verbal traditions, and life under suppression taught the people a great deal to be careful of Amharas’ intent.

Today the Salale discourage the OPDO cadres who work and live in servitude under the Tigre-led hegemonic power relation in Ethiopia as this system negatively affected their life in every aspect. In this song the “beast of burden” is used to represent metaphorically the disgraced status the OPDO cadres assume in the unequal representation, the political power vacuum in Oromia,

⁸¹ Bairu Zawde, pp250-53

⁸² Informant, Magarsa D, 2009

the unknown fate of the OPDO, and the continued divide-and-rule policy in the neo-colonial empire:

Qubni quba yoo nyaate
akkam jetta yaa garaa
jarat' kana nu godhee
harree daalacha kana
fe'isi harree daalattii
hanguma yoomiitittii

If one finger consumes its own kind
alas! what is left oh, my heart,
they made us wretched
reduced us to ashy beast of burden
for how long should we carry,
but this unbearable burden?⁸³

As Oromia occupies three-fourths of the Ethiopian empire, the Tigrayan ruling party has the fear of disintegration of the empire. Thus, faking the Oromo representation in parliament is a symbolic means of placating the Oromo protest, of which the Salale are well aware. The local peasants have creative means of expressing their feelings of bitter sorrow against local officials whose poor administration led to divisions between the local communities.

Local Officials

The new Ethiopian Constitution⁸⁴ assigns supposedly extensive powers to regional states divided sub-regionally into zones, districts (woredas), and kebeles up to units of households sub-grouped as *garee* and *gooxii* for controlling and mobilizing the people. Kebeles or, literally villages, are products of the previous Derg regime overthrown in 1991. In many ways kebeles are considered as the fundamental unit and the smallest recognized division of local government having parallel administrative and judicial structures with districts. In practice, kebele administration serves as the primary level of institutions with three local officials: *kaadire* (*cadre*), the political group who organizes and leads the people; *taxaqi* (*armed officials*) who maintain local security and control bandits, protests, and thefts, and *kaabine* (*cabinets*) or core-members who administer the

⁸³ Informant, Tadasa Galate, 2010

⁸⁴ See Constitution of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Addis Ababa, 1995) for the rights and roles of the Federal and Regional States.

local people and communicate state orders. Against these pressures are the autochthonous systems competing with the cultural hegemony. The traditional social organization of the community is based on settlement patterns, pedigree and affiliation to *bultoo* or deity in their respective *qeye*, home and neighborhood. To disrupt the autochthonous system, the government uses land grab to remove the people from their home. Historically, land has been the bone of contention between the local people and the Abyssinian ethnic hegemon. Local officials are set up by the *Woyane* junta and take directions from the ruling party. Those local officials who take a stand and protest against interfering in the people's daily life receive threats.



Figure 2.5: Salale youth with their *shimala* (stick), shield, and horse.

The following song is a typical example of such a social critique about interventions by local officials in the daily lives of the people:

Daanyaa har'a dabballeen kudhanii, Local officials, cadres are multiple today,
maaltu hammaannaan shimala keenya gubanii? they burn our sticks to limit our foray?

I observed a group of young Salale Oromo who performed the folksong above and many more at Kurfa, near Shararo (Debra-Tsigie), in 2010. During the religious observance celebrating Saint Mary, boys and girls joined and performed songs of defiance when the police and local officials collected sticks from the angry Salale boys and burnt them. Local officials, also known as *Kebele councils*, form the primary unit of administration.⁸⁵ They are a crucial mechanism for control over the rural communities that constitute 85 percent of Ethiopia's population. They determine eligibility for food assistance, recommend referrals to health care and schools, and provide access to state-distributed resources like seeds, fertilizers, and other essential agricultural inputs based on loyalty to government. They also run the community social courts, which deal with minor claims and disputes at the kebele level, local prisons, and local-level militia.⁸⁶

The "alternative history" approach here is not just a description of the way things *are* but also a critical ethnographic method adapted as an analytic tool of the narratives representing the life experiences of the Salale, past and present. In (re)constructing Salale Oromo ethnohistory, the "alternative approach" is "ethnographic" and "critical" to relocate culture as a site of contention (hence, "contentious folklore") and negotiation, where competing interpretations of the meaning of reported facts are made. The folk tradition can subvert and, also, reproduce hegemony. In this history of Salale resistance poetics, folklore plays a major role in providing a critique of the

⁸⁵ See *Human Rights Watch Report*, "One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure: Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia, (2010)" .

⁸⁶ Getiye Gelaye, sub-topic "Local Officials," p9.

tension imposed by the neo-Abyssinian ethnic hegemony on the people and on their culture. Thus, Salale history is a history of tension the people make and unmake under the broader Christian and Amharic culture. It is also a history of resistance through banditry and “strategic primitivism” wrought to subvert the hegemony by making informed but sometimes unpopular choices based on factors related to class, ethnic identity, religion, and social status.⁸⁷

To sum up, in this chapter, my aim has been to constitute a Salale alternative history, a micro-level project based on folkloric and ethnohistorical data. An attempt has been made to accommodate nuances, multiple voices, and competing scholarly interpretations defined by power relationships. The questions I posed in this chapter have been theoretical and thematic. On the theoretical level, I made an attempt to address the question as to whether or not the concept of *resistance poetics* is relevant to Salale experience. The thematic inquiries dealt with meanings, themes, significances, and the historical and folkloric interpretations of Salale folksongs and narratives. In this search for an alternative Salale history, the end goal has been to constitute a critical history of Salale Oromo *resistance poetics*. In the cultural and socioeconomic scene, I made an attempt to trace Salale history down their cultural trail and to identify folkloric creative spaces, past and present. Equally important, seeking a theoretical construct, namely, “*ethnography of resistance poetics*,” is at a forefront during the course of this project to spell out clearly the folkloric themes and patterns of Salale narratives built around the contesting forces in the area.

⁸⁷ Luigi Lombardi-Satriani, “Folklore as Culture of Contestation,” *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, Vol. 11, No. 1/2, Special Issue: *Folklore Studies in Italy* (Jun. - Aug., 1974), pp. 99-121

I should add that at the time of globalism and transnational commercialism, at the time of heightened influx of immigration to the West to escape induced “folkloric” poverty and suppression in the “rest,” and at the time of terrorism, east and west, introducing *ethnography of resistance poetics* to folklore study and *alternative history* as a serious academic undertaking at a PhD level, and continuing to focus critical energy on *regional criticism*, i.e. on issues of apparently local interest, may seem trivial or irrelevant. However, since globalism is rooted in place, the relationships between place and culture, region and folklore tradition, and people’s knowledge system of their immediate environment (e.g. sacred ecology) constitute their ethnic identity and their concept of “home” or “*warra*.” Using the ethnographic examples presented in this chapter, I argued that this collective argument for “regional criticism” and “strategic traditionalism” makes the primacy of “local” history more pertinent in examining closely the top-down imposition of the “global’ dominant culture.

Following the distribution pattern of folk phenomena from the center to the periphery, Salale was an alternative center of gravity in the historic Shawa. Drawing on a *concentric circle* as a tentative model, I sketched a *history of Salale resistance poetics* and tried to chart the Amhara cultural and political hegemony imposed from the center over the entire Oromo and the subjugated peoples. The micro-level history shows us that, in modern Ethiopian history, the attempt to integrate the multicultural empire into a democratic nation-state has been abandoned indefinitely until the center-periphery power balance is on a par. Based on John Markakis’s argument, this constraint can be identified on two levels: first, that the hegemonic rule at the center is maintaining power that was inherited from the empire builders by excluding from power descendants of the subjugated peoples. Second, those peoples on the borders, lowland

areas, who were excluded from power and kept at bay, have ultimately joined in an ever-escalating violent resistance, hoping for self-rule. Thus, at the center there is an ever increasing political instability and growing resistance. On the periphery, there is border insecurity and ongoing guerrilla warfare and cultural dissidence, both at the center and periphery.⁸⁸

This history of *Salale resistance poetics* shows that the Salale are poets at work set in the rugged landscape of conflict and pain. Today the people are struggling to emerge out of the omnipresent past situated in the heart of troubled old empire, Ethiopia, confounded by “folkloric” poverty.”

⁸⁸ John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (Eastern African Studies), (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 2011).

SALALE VERBAL ART

Elder 1: Should a child resemble the period or the parents?

Elder 2: What do the parents resemble?

____*Salale Dialogic*¹

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2 I presented the folkloric, cultural, and historical data to describe the local politics in a place and time in Salale where politics and history were not recognized to exist. The attempt at constructing Salale ethno-history based on the people's verbal art and oral traditions was to challenge the exclusion of local politics and history from "below" in the mainstream discourse. The texts showed that Salale history includes suppression, economic exploitation, displacement and executions, and social banditry and continuous resistance to subvert the Amara rulers' domination. This chapter explores the major expressive forms of Salale verbal art to exemplify how local interpretive frameworks are used to define ethnic genres and augment the struggle for power. I argue that the relative defeat of the Salale in the hands of the Abyssinian rulers and the subsequent struggle resulted in two interconnected stances for Salale resistance poetics: the consolidation of Salale ethnic identity and perseverance in spite of domination, and the formation of strategic traditionalism in the contesting religious domain. Here I make an attempt at identifying some common genres, controversial terms, cross-cutting themes and concurrent ideas (old and new, past and present), and discuss critically the methodological and theoretical problems of genre categories that arise in the changing voices and their interpretations in the

¹ Informant, Waaqjira, *Field Journal*, Warra-Ee, Kuyyu, 2010. *Oromo version*, "Ilmoon kan warra fakkaattu, moo kan bara fakkaattu wayya? jennaan, Warri maal fakkaatuu? jedhe." Waaqjira and Mul'ata were engaged in this dialogue about *bara* (time, period), rapid social change, and, the growing lack of trust among people.

same culture. The narratives, rituals, and folksongs presented in this chapter will be interpreted from a Salale local perspective, using folkloric and interdisciplinary methods to answer questions of local genre concepts, classifications, and relationships of the expressive forms to ideas and institutions in the society, to the struggle for power and the notion of emancipatory resistance.

That folkloristic discourse and folklore scholarship tend to reflect the society and traditions in which they arise and operate seems commonplace. What is not commonplace is *how* these operate. That is, the folkloristic discourse and its scholarly activity reflect the lived experience of the people expressed through verbal art, rituals and situated performances, which are culture-specific. These culture-specific learned behaviors have been little studied among the Oromo.² As an example of a strong link between the folkloristic discourse and society and its tradition, the classic work of Ruth Finnegan demonstrates how African verbal art transform and are transformed by politics and policies, ethno-history and national history in African traditions.³ Finnegan's study of African narratives, the topical and political songs of the Kenyan Mau Mau movement, the Guinea R.D.A. songs and the Northern Rhodesian party songs allows for a comparative folkloristics of resistance poetics between the past and the present on the continent. The study marked a particular methodological/ethnographic turn in the history of African folkloristics. It influenced African contemporary folklore scholarship with the ethnographic undertaking, in spite of its evasion of the existence of African epic tradition, which is admittedly

² In the history of Oromo folklore study Enrico Cerulli was the Italian scholar who made a large Oromo folklore collection in two parts (Poetry and Prose) and provided their classifications and text-based literary interpretations mainly from historical and the informants' perspective. See Enrico Cerulli, *Folk-literature of the [Oromo] of Southern Abyssinia*, *Harvard Afr. Studies* 3, 1922. Cf. also his 'Poesie di Guerra e di amore dei Galla,' *Arch. antrop. e etnol.* 5, 1942; Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp 453-54.

³ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature*...., pp.265.

a major shortcoming, to be corrected later.⁴ Finnegan's folkloric and anthropological practices were different from previous archival folklore collections and classifications and opened a venue for the later new perspective in folkloristics, namely, the interdisciplinary study of context-based performance in folklore scholarship.⁵ The challenging task of how to approach the indispensable relationship between the folkloric discourse, society, and its tradition on the one side and scholarly activity on the other is an ongoing dialogue in the humanities and the social sciences.

This chapter has two parts. The first part briefly considers the hypothesis of my theoretical locus, namely: *the "indigenous system" or "local knowledge" serves as a repertoire of emic approach to the critical ethnography of Salale resistance poetics.*⁶ Consequently, the second part is an attempt at showing how this argument can be made and providing an outline of Salale verbal art based on the data that has been gathered. Here I argue, from a Salale ethnic genre perspective, an oral performance is considered a genre, a communicative class of events, when it meets a specific purpose of communication. Ethnographic examples from Salale show that the genre functions overlap and blur genre boundaries. Here *resistance poetics* is grounded in the complex local politics often camouflaged in verbal art and shadowed by other institutions and rituals in assertions of indigenous practices and revivalism. As they express the local politics that grants,

⁴ See Finnegan's "A Note on Epic" in which she bluntly declares that Epic "does not seem to be borne out by the African evidence. Ibid, p108. Cf. John William Johnson's "Yes, Virginia, There Is an Epic in Africa," in *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 11, no. 3, ... *Genre and Classification in African Folklore*, (1980), pp. 308-326.

⁵ Ruth Finnegan, "Continuing methodological tensions" and "Current trends" in *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts*, (London, New York: Rutledge, 1992), pp23, 46.

⁶ "*Poetic*" and "*Poetics*:" To define the two terms here I draw on Daniel Mario Abondolo notion of "-ics," referring to an academic domain as in "folkloristics," "hermeneutics" to indicate the methods of study. That is, Abondolo stresses, "As with any academic domain, there are both objects to be investigated and methods of undertaking such investigation." In this study, for the investigation of "objects" by *poetics*, here, "I take no one method to be of higher intrinsic merit, on either practical or theoretical grounds," as Abondolo would have it. I use *poetics* in this study to refer to a *creative process*, "not one which makes things poetic but which makes poetic things, hence, 'poiesis.'" See Daniel Abondolo, *A Poetics Handbook: Verbal Art in the European Tradition*, (Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 2001), p3.

sometimes by design, the strategic traditionalism an overwhelming impact on the dominant culture, verbal art are sources for the ethnographer, inductively, to create rather than discover theory. In this section, I describe features that cover a wide array of the common forms of Salale verbal art and acts, including their recurrent themes and social functions, i.e., the general communicative purposes.

These are some of the inquiries this chapter deals with: How are the ethnographic accounts of Oromo verbal art framed: a) using the indigenous model (emic), b) using the broad analytical (universal) tripartite model (etic), i.e. *poetry*, *prose*, and *drama*, as Enrico Cerulli did,⁷ c) or by combining both (a) and (b) into an eclectic emic-etic approach? Must ethnography be content with presenting local descriptions of folkloric practices without offering universal resources to understand the themes and patterns of resistance poetics? That is, is it possible to theorize power relations based on the ethnographic sources alone? Whose accounts are presented in the narratives that emerge out of the ethnographic search? What is the relationship between the findings from Salale and established folklore scholarship (theories and practices)? What are the major genres of Salale verbal art and related local concepts? Answers to those thematic and analytical questions are predisposed to competing ideologies, contesting narratives, local views, and unequal power relations in the locality. In this study I examine three major categories: *personal experience narratives*, *historical traditions*, and *anecdotal references*; and, in addition, *rituals associated with prayers, spells and incantations*, and *folksongs*.

⁷ See Enrico Cerulli, *Folk-literature*...., 1922. He categorized his general Oromo collections into *Poetry* and *Prose*.

“CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE” AND OROMO FOLKLORE GENRES

Compared to the institutionalized knowledge framework that systematically operates on epistemological grounds, “local knowledge” is an alternative way of thinking, systematizing, and expressing “folk ideas” that takes “cultural expressions” such as *verbal art* and *acts* as its empirical objects for local generic categories. It is unrealistic to establish a comprehensive and definitive list of genres for a given culture for the following reasons: they can be further subdivided into an unfathomable depth; thus, the list of “ethnic genres” of a culture is endless; new genres are born and old ones cease to exist by historical transformation. Hence, it is problematic to limit generic taxonomy to those genres alive at one particular time and to analyze them using a synchronic perspective.

Early Practices, Current Trends

The study of Oromo folklore genres is a long and slow historical process. Ethnologists, philologists, and missionaries began the collection and documentation of Oromo folklore genres in Europe and in Ethiopia toward the middle of the 19th century.⁸ The large collection and documentation of Oromo folklore in Enrico Cerulli’s work marks the beginning of careful classification into Poetry and Prose and interpretation based on the informants’ knowledge of the respective *ethnic genres*.⁹ In Cerulli’s collections, we do not have *names* in the Oromo version of original texts for each genre; however, a concrete cultural meaning is expressed in his brief literary interpretations of the generic forms of the narratives and folksongs.

⁸ Richard Pankhurst 1976; 1979 Some examples of folksongs generally called *weedduu* and a few prayers were collected by Karl Tutschek from the ex-slave young Oromo girl called Birille.

⁹ Enrico Cerulli’s 1922. Banti 2010:1; Karl Tutschek, 1844. There are a few examples of songs and narratives (and prayers) found in Karl Tutschek’s philological works.

Though attempts were made to collect and document Oromo oral literature, starting in the 19th century in Europe and Northeast Africa, theoretically and methodologically oriented study of Oromo folklore genres is only a very recent development. Those early collections and documentations that began in the 19th century could not continue to flourish in Ethiopia since “unfortunately [the] government policy hostile to the use of written Oromo made this impossible.”¹⁰ Phillip Paulitschke’s collection, for example, in the *Ethnography of Northeast Africa* encompasses an Oromo genre of war ritual, a taboo accompanied by song and dance as a treatment of the slain enemy’s spirit among the Oromo.¹¹ The ritual involves *appeasement* (of the spirit), *restriction* (on the slayer) until *expiation or purification* and other ceremonial observances, accompanied by songs and ritual dances, occur before the victors reenter their own houses. This folklore practice among the Oromo in the 19th century is quoted by James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (and Sigmund Freud also cites it in his *Totem and Taboo*¹²) fits into an example of *ethnic genre* that cuts through the universal “analytical” principle of *belief system and narratives*. One can refer back to those small collections of Oromo songs and narratives in Europe and Northeast Africa from 1885-1898, led by Onesimus Nessib and Aster Ganno Salban, as the beginning of Oromo folklore genre study. According to Andrzejewski, the evangelical team’s folklore documentations were exercises primarily used in their bible translation project.¹³

¹⁰ Andrzejewski 1985:410; Bulcha 1995

¹¹ Phillip Paulitschke, *Ethnography of Northeast Africa*, 1893.

¹² Philipp Paulitschke, *Ethnography of Northeastern Africa*, 2 vols., Berlin (1893-96); See the text of (post-)war ritual below in Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1950), pp43-44. The ceremony of appeasing the spirit of the war victim includes dance accompanied by song:

“Be not angry”, they say, “because your head is here with us; had we been less lucky, our heads might now have been exposed in your village. We have offered the sacrifice to appease you. Your spirit may now rest and leave us in peace. Why were you our enemy? Would it not have been better that we should remain friends? Then your blood would not have been spilt and your head would not have been cut off.”

The same is true of the people of Paloo, in Celebes. So, too, ‘the [Oromo] [of East Africa] returning from war sacrifice to the jinn or guardian spirits of their slain foe before they will re-enter their own houses’. Freud cites James Frazer quoting Paulitschke (1893–6 [2, 50, 136]). See Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 1950, p43-44.

¹³B. W. Andrzejewski, (ed.). *Literatures in African Languages: Theoretical Issues and Sample Surveys*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985/2010). p422.

Enrico Cerulli: A Pioneer of Oromo Folklore Study (1922)

The intellectual history of Oromo folklore study begins with the early collections by missionaries, ethnologists, and philologists during the 1840s. In 1922, about the same time when Franz Boas organized the collection of ethnographic materials among American Indians,¹⁴ Enrico Cerulli, the Italian scholar, published his massive collection of Oromo folklore as Poetry and Prose with text-based interpretations.¹⁵ Enrico Cerulli ventured into a huge collection and classification of Oromo folklore based on the “folk knowledge” of Oromo exiles. The classification of his *Folk Literature of [the Oromo] of Southern Abyssinia* (FLO) follows a thematic delivery of the texts by his three informants including data from the *Oromo Spelling Book*, collected and classified by the young Oromo evangelists. The basis for Cerulli’s generic classification is, thus, content of the folk materials, which was also the case for other collections using informants’ knowledge of *ethnic genres*. Of the four sources of the texts Cerulli collected (folksongs/poetry and narratives/prose), the two informants, i.e. Loransioys and Lij Haile Mariam Gugsu Dargie, were from Salale.¹⁶ Thus, Cerulli’s typology is an example of the typology of Oromo folklore genres, particularly that of the Salale. Cerulli praises Loransioys, his primary informant from Salale (Abbichu), as “an old man, a reliable, valuable, and perhaps unique source of information” from whom he collected “nearly all texts” in the volume of “Poetry” and “Prose.”¹⁷ Hence, Cerulli’s collection and classification of the historical songs, love songs, nuptial songs, religious songs, and caravan songs are based on the informants’ knowledge of the *ethnic genres*, particularly Loransioys’ profound experience of both *narratives*

¹⁴ Franz Boas’s view was that the first-hand narrative texts “contain all that is interesting to the narrators and [...] in this way picture their way of thinking and feeling [...] their ideas as free as possible from the bias of an European observer.” This grasp of the “native’s point of view” through their own texts, recorded and published (more than 4,000 pages) as they were, was a major part of American anthropology under Boas. See Frantz Boas, “Kwakiutl Culture as Reflected in Mythology,” in *Memoire of the American Folklore Society*, 28. New York, (1935), p. v.

¹⁵ Enrico Cerulli, *Folk-literature of the [Oromo] of Southern Abyssinia*, Harvard African. Studies 3, 1922.

¹⁶ Enrico Cerulli, *Ibid.* 1922:13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p14.

(historical tales, tales of magic, humorous tales which Cerulli calls *haasaa*, proverbs, and riddles) and *songs*. They were translated and annotated with Loransioys' aid.¹⁸ Loransioys provided Cerulli not only "with a large number of poetic texts but also was able to help him to translate and annotate poems obtained from other sources" with extensive commentary from insider's viewpoint.¹⁹

The historical significance of Oromo folklore genres has its root in the inception of its collections. One of the three sources of Enrico Cerulli's collection in his *Folk Literature of the Oromo* is the *Oromo Spelling Book* which comprises war/historical songs, love songs, religious songs of Mother Goddess (Ateetee), hunting songs, nuptial songs, cradle songs, pastoral songs, and caravan songs, which are all common expressive forms in the different Oromo dialects.²⁰ Though it was "without any explanation of customs, beliefs, and local historical events," the book was highly significant in helping Cerulli to determine Oromo folklore genres.²¹ Cerulli's ethnographic method was a breakthrough for the period; at that time there was no adequate folkloric or ethnographic theoretical and methodological orientation. As a precursor of the "natives' view approach" in Oromo folklore study, Cerulli translated the texts literally with the help of his informant(s), and provided notes. The notes, he states, he "collected from the natives on the subject of the song, ...The history of the independent [Oromo] states, so vague and lacking in documents till now, is the subject of the first group of songs" in the collections.²²

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p13.

²⁰ Enrico Cerulli, 1922, pp15-16.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Enrico Cerulli, p16.

In Cerulli's collections, most of the historical songs were those performed describing the 19th century war events. After the conversion of the Oromo in the Gibe region to Islam in 1855-70, there were two major war events going on in Oromoland: One was between the Oromo Mohammedans and the Oromo traditional believers across the Gibe River. The other was a war of conquest by the Shawan ruler, Menilek, led by Ras Gobana an Oromo warrior from Salale area, "who was to later conquer and govern Oromo areas throughout Menilek's domain."²³ Those war events precipitated Oromo historical narratives and songs which Cerulli's informant recounted from memory. When the past is falsely represented, the faulty representation of facts affects the present and blurs the future. Oral tradition and verbal art of the people must give direction to strayed human condition and help society change. The early attempts at the collection of Oromo folklore in the 19th century by philologists in Europe and missionaries in Northeast Africa mark the beginning of Oromo folklore documentation by genre using the *ethnic genre* knowledge of a few émigrés.²⁴

Current Trends: Common Genres and Themes

To study Oromo folklore from anthropological and historical perspectives, one may consider the following questions: What and how can we learn about Oromo culture from studying its folklore? What are texts to the people who create them, perform them, and attend them at a given time in a given social context? The answer to those part-methodological and part-theoretical inquiries lies in the folklore and historical traditions; the folklorist, the anthropologist, and the oral historian must pay attention to and analyze human actions, expressions, and their meanings.

²³Brian Yates, "Christian Patriot or Oromo Traitor? The Ethiopian State in the Memories of *Ras Gobäna Dače*," in *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, (2013), pp25–52, see p27.

²⁴ As an example, Karl Tutschek, 1844; Johann Krapf 1839-42; the ex-slave young Oromo evangelists, 1885-98.

Traditionally, the folklorist/literary scholar used a literary approach to collect and study “verbal texts,” while the anthropologist emphasized the “folk” to study the cultural significance of their traditional lore. Today both disciplines have opened venues for the new perspectives of folklore study by merging literary and anthropological methods as folkloristics develops more into an eclectic and interdisciplinary science concerned with “text” and “performance” in “social context.”



Figure 3.1: Salale elder, 93, Dirree Baantuu, Hidhabu/Aboote.

“Heuristic Approach:” Emic Perspective

In addition to his “thick description,” the theory of interpretation of cultures, Clifford Geertz, in his *Local Knowledge*, deepens our understanding of human societies through the intimacy of their indigenous knowledge. It is problematic for the ethnographer to work on competitive meanings, particularly when people from the group choose to tell two versions of the same

narrative to different audiences. To alleviate those problems, we should listen to the natives' view. That is, our critique of genre categories should be grounded on the emic perspective, i.e. to the "close experience" of the people. Although we accept the view that the verbal art of a culture should be studied on its own terms, the folklorist's analytical categories clearly cut across emic categories and insider knowledge structures.

Cultural knowledge serves the people by categorizing information about the social environment. It is also a power house of theoretical options, allowing the ethnographer to frame the findings and to analyze them.²⁵ Cultural categorization is also a differentiation of the social world according to family, social class, age, gender, and status so as to organize experience and actions in meaningful patterns and not in arbitrary attributes. In what follows I examine the images of "sacred" against the backdrop of the "folk ideas." Keen observers can see how the notion of the "sacred" and the "profane" analogously works out in real lives in the Salale social world.

Conceptualizing "Local Knowledge"

As the ethnographic example presented below shows, although folklore and anthropology have their unique methodological stances, the two disciplines share common ground. I will try to expound on this proposition, as the present study evolves, based on the data I collected about the diverse folkloric events in Salale. These events include rituals (religious and non-religious), funerals, mediumships, weddings, and traditional conflict resolutions or *guma* and official court cases where traditional belief systems and the dominant religion traverse to attest "trustworthiness" under oath. The people I interviewed were generally non-literate but very

²⁵ Eija Stark, "The Peasant Poor and Images of Poverty: Finnish Proverbs as Discursive Representations of Cultural Knowledge," in *Finnish Proverbs as Discursive Representations of Cultural Knowledge*, <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol53/stark.pdf>. Retrieved on December 6, 2014.

articulate. Some of them were diviners, ritual specialists, seers, and tradition bearers. Those individuals are important in the production, preservation, and transmission of oral tradition and folklore; they are respected in the society as politico-religious leaders. In the following case example I present my observations from a court case where witnesses testified untruthfully against the plaintiff, for his loyalty to the ruling party:

Scene I.

On December 11, 2009, I was at Faalle, Hojja-Duree, a small town about 45 miles northwest of Finfinne, the capital. I started collecting data on Salale folklore and resistance culture in this district, today, Friday. Upon invitation by the judge to observe the court, I attended the case, which lasted about 90 minutes. Tape-recording was not allowed, so I took field notes. It was a “small-claim” case brought by the father against his son about an unpaid debt. It was conceded during the proceedings that the son killed the father’s bull since it was broken fighting for dominance with another bull. The son shared it with villagers on credit and the father complained it was overdue. At the court hearing witnesses were asked by the judge to testify, according to court procedure, and to give their oaths by their bultoo, i.e., by the deity they adhere to, or by any religion they observe. Some witnesses chose to swear by their bultoo, deity, and told the truth, and some swore by the Holy Grail to testify falsely against the litigant, whose loyalty to the state agents they detested.²⁶

According to the judge, almost all the villagers deified the deities more than the Holy Grails such as St. Michael, Madanalem or Holy Savior—one that Faalle was named after—and which the people adhere to. Although officially 95% of Salale Oromo are said to be Orthodox Christian devotees, empirical realities such as in this case suggest a different picture. Common deities in Faalle district are Oofa, Abba Muxxa, Haadha Haroo, Haadha Abbayi, and Garbel. The Salale social world is governed by deities and spirits as extension of the divine power of Waaqa (God).²⁷ Based on my observation and discussion with the judge later, after the case was

²⁶Observation, Mulo Faalle. Fieldnote #1, pp,2-7, December 2009.

²⁷As one Salale young man told me, when they are at peace, the Salale trust in divine order, not in feud and war; if he could not defend his home, literally, his homeland, he would lose his manhood, he swore by the ancestors’ bones! This is *didhaa*, swear, he said, that to betray one’s home is to step on one’s ancestors’ bones. The Salale stories and songs are thus about heroes and heretics, of bandits and pundits; they also sing of humanity, nature, God, love and peace.

suspended for further investigation, I concluded that, in Salale, the state court was often not recognized as a place to testify truthfully but by the *waadaa* principle according to the tradition. For the Salale court attendees, there is a ritual site to testify under a solemn oath, to the deity they are devoted to, but they do not regard the state court in the same way.²⁸



Figure 3.2: Community elders are deliberating over conflicts and public concerns. The perpetrator, standing with his head low, arms folded, submitted to *seera*, law, before the authorities.

Individuals in a society that is studied may tell different versions of one story, for a variety of reasons. As Michael Jackson maintains, the subjective and social viability of storytelling may depend on its counter-factual powers. To Jackson, a distinction may be drawn between types of narrative: one is narratives whose “truth effects” serve and conserve the social order, the status quo; the other is narratives whose “truth effects are more blatantly tied to the struggles and

²⁸ The interaction between the notion of “god” and “politics,” i.e. the idea of theopolitics, implies the traditional Abyssinian common belief that “politics” is determined by the supposed will of God and that rulers are selected by God, which is different from the egalitarian Oromo view of *gada* and *waaqeffanna* religion.

tension of personal existence.”²⁹ In any social differentiation, there are contesting narratives. As an example of competing meanings and multiple voices embedded in narratives, the following two-sided story of land reform policy told by peasants in Ethiopia is illustrative. I heard this story in Salale in a casual conversation with my previous student of folklore, Seyoum A, who was my research assistant in Yaaya Gullalle, where he was working.

Scene II.

When the researcher lived with the peasants and gathered data for over a year about landholding and land use policy, the peasants showed a strong disapproval for government control over land and rebuked interference of government officials regarding local affairs about land. They told the researcher that they inherited the land from their ancestors, a symbol of their identity, the land on which they had paid tribute for years and on which their life existence was based. Thus, they claimed complete rights to their land to conserve it and to pass it on to future generations. In response to the researcher’s questions, the majority of the peasants showed their support for land ownership since they value land, wife, oxen, firearms, and country as “symbols of identity, manhood, and heroism.”³⁰ Contrary to this resistance anecdotal reference, they told the researcher, in a different context, that when state agents and local officials came to implement the land reform policy whether the peasants liked it or not, the peasants showed support for the rural land redistribution, now switching the story and using it as a survival strategy.³¹

By the same token, Getiye Gelaye reminds us that for the Gojjam peasant losing one’s ancestor’s land is essentially associated with a death of a person.³² In Ethiopia land policy is used “as a political project of establishing a class basis for the current regime” by favoring a particular social class (e.g. youth, women, widow and single, and the poor).³³ In this example of peasant poetics one may hastily conclude that peasants have no definite cause to stand for but only have a situated survival strategy in everyday life under a disempowering context. However, through telling different versions of one story about land ownership and reform policy to different

²⁹ Ibid. p26.

³⁰ Gitye Gelaye, 1999, “Peasant Poetics and State Discourse in Ethiopia: Amharic Oral Poetry as a Response to the 1996-97 Land Redistribution Policy Author(s): *Northeast African Studies, New Series*, Vol. 6, No. 1/2 (1999), pp. 171-206, see p22.

³¹ Seyoum A. *Field Journal*, Yaayya Gullalle, Fittaaal 2010.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. p11, 14.

audiences in different social contexts the peasants showed association with and dissociation from resistance. That is, peasants openly support state policies in a social space dominated by state-agents but cautiously sabotage it later in their own social spaces (funerals, social gatherings, feasts). This is an example of peasant poetics as a counter-factual account of storytelling to the state discourse to protest the state-agents' domineering top-down policy which Edward Chamberlin recounts in his book titled *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?*³⁴ Using those case examples of narrative strategies where the narrator chooses to tell two contestable versions of a narrative to different (sometimes opposing) audiences, the persistent fragility of the narrative violates "discourse ethics." By this local discourse ethics theory, where ethical truth is unattainable in discourse, a convenient discourse ethics³⁵ is set in accordance with the overbearing state discourse. The truth value of the discourses (storytelling, folksong) is negotiable. In the above narrative example, the peasants' aim in telling conflicting versions of the same story is to downplay the government's land misappropriation through strategic acquiescence.³⁶ The various versions of a single story require evidence for each version to claim truth to different audiences in different contexts. In Mikhail Bakhtin's "dialogism," truth value is negotiable; whereas, in the top-down monologic act where there is no equal power relation, the

³⁴ When the Indian community in Northwest British Columbia was told by government officials to leave their ancestral land for a "common good," the natives' elder told stories about their historical connection to the ancestral land in Gitksan/Tsimshian language and asked the officials, "*If this is your land, where are your stories?*" which came to be the title of Chamberlin's book. See Edward Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* (Toronto: Alfred Knopf Canada, 2003), p1.

³⁵ In this example, discourse ethics is an attempt to find ethical truths through discussions and to set the ethics of discourse, based on mutual trust, responsibility and care to tell the truth. It aims at constructing intersubjectivity. As fundamental principles of "discourse ethics," sincerity, openness, respect and fair self-examination aim at telling ethical truth constructed through dialogue and strategic discourse on unequal power relations. For example, not to give all or adequate information is not lying but can serve as a survival strategy in a disempowering situation where prejudices, alienation, inhibition, control, and ambivalence rule the dialogic relationship.

³⁶ The anthropological postulate that "ethnographic knowledge is to be positioned and to be based on 'partial truth' is legitimate because "ethnographic representation of information is differently valued in each culture and society." See Mustafa Kemal Mirzeler, *Remembering Nayeche*, 2014, p25.

dominant party claims an ultimate truth, and consensus in discourse is unattainable.³⁷ It is to this hegemonic schema that the peasants react subtly through resistance poetics.

Another case example is *guma*, a blood feud performance, presented next to conceptualize the Salale “local knowledge” from the people’s perspective. The *guma* event actually occurred during my ethnographic fieldwork in Salale.³⁸ In the Salale worldview, the centerpiece of the *guma* (blood feud) is the unbreakable *waadaa* (covenant) principle without which no *araara* (conciliation, reunion) possible. To ensure an unconditional *nagaa* (peace), *waadaa* is a solemn oath pledged at the sacred site before the living and the spirits of the dead not to violate or attempt to retaliate. The ritual site is acclaimed with a unique mythscape, i.e. a mythical history of the sacred landscape.

Salale Mythscape: Guma Ritual

Here I present the Salale local knowledge of the *guma* (blood feud) ritual set in Salale mythscape, that is, the mythical history of the sacred landscape. The notion of mythscape refers to the temporally and spatially extended discursive realm, “the past tense and space of archaic origin based on oral tradition” by which we convince ourselves of the existence of a world which we have never been able to experience first-hand.”³⁹ In Salale mythscape the landscape, i.e., the Salale, is explained in terms of myth. The mythical history is forged, negotiated, and transmitted,

³⁷See Shanti Elliot, “Carnival and Dialogue in Bakhtin’s Poetics of Folklore,” *Folklore Form* 30: 112 (1999). Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of language, i.e. *dialogism*, shows “how dialogic language disrupts uniformity of thought,” like in carnival. In Salale narratives, songs, and ritual traditions, language indeterminacy or “ambivalence creates a flexible realm of meaning that holds socially transformative potential,” *ibid.* p129. In the *Goobee* and *Shoboxa* songs both the official language and the authority are challenged, as it will be explained subsequently in this chapter.

³⁸ Informant (and observation), Magarsa Robi, Fieldnote #1, p80-95. An eight-year-old girl was run over by a minibus coincidentally at the sacred site called *bakka waadaa* or *dhiiga boollaa* where the *guma* ritual is performed.

³⁹ Seppo Knuuttila, “Mythscape,” in Lotte Tarkka, ed. *Dynamics of Tradition: Perspectives on Oral Poetry and Folk Beliefs*, Studia Fennica, Folkloristica 13 (Tampere: Tammer-Paino Oy, 2003), pp151-161, see p152.

and the identity of the ethnic group is constructed constantly in the landscape. Here I relate the collective social memory of place and the notion of mythical history in a theoretically profitable way to explain *Salale resistance poetics*.

In Salale mythscape or mythical history, the past is told as it *is* and myth both enhances and changes the meaning of the “past” under the influence of the people’s present-day lived experience and tradition which structure their perceptions. Thus, the concept of Salale mythscape is relevant to the interpretation of their resistance poetics. For example, by the whole process of totemic classification the Salale relate each lineage, i.e. *clan (gosa)*, *lineage (warra)*, *family (balbala)* to one sacred grove under an emblematic *ejersa (juniper) tree* and define themselves in their mutual relationships as close kin. This form of dialogical process roots the Salale notion of history on mythscape, i.e. studying the people’s history reflexively through a critical hermeneutic approach and using their mythic heritage and the historical traditions that are in place. This ecopoetic notion of Salale mythical history relates to the interpretation of their verbal art and acts set in sacred sites. For example, the *waadaa* (covenant) principle involves *araara* (peacemaking) and settling *guma* (a blood feud) to sustain *nagaa* (peace) at the sacred site called Bakka Waadaa also called Dhiiga Boolla.⁴⁰ In Yaaya Gullale, under the foot of mount Fittaaal, my informants took me to Araddaa Nagaa (*Altar of Peace*), where I saw standing a limestone altar in the sacred site of libations and sacrifices. At Bakka Waadaa, elders and ritual leaders

⁴⁰ Informant, Magarsa Roobi, Wucaale, Interview & Observation, Fieldnote, #1, pp. 80-95, 2010. In Salale Oromo Spirituality, generally called *Waaqeffanna* (worshiping God); there is also a belief in spirits and ancestor worship, often practiced at a ritual site. It is a psychic unity among the Oromo who claim to share mythic history or shared common cognitive ethos to develop a framework of *nagaa* (peace) and harmony both with humankind and nature; hence the *waadaa* principle of mythic unity among the Salale.

meticulously engage both parties (offender and victim's family) in the process at the ritual site, the mythical *Covenant Site*, and lead them through *guma* rituals and deliberations for months.⁴¹

Scene III.

On March 3, 2010 at about 10 a.m. I came to Dhiiga Boolla, to observe a traditional court performance of *guma* (blood feud) ritual. The case was a tragic death of an eight-year-old girl who was tending cattle near the highway when she was accidentally run over by a privately owned minibus. The site of the accident was coincidentally at the same site also called Bakka Waadaa (Covenant Site). Both the owner of the minibus and the victim were Salale, who lived not far from the ritual site. The community elders and traditional legal actors who led the proceedings and performed the *guma* ritual were Magarsa Roobi and Araddo Tullu of Goraa Kataba, Obori, and Sime Addunya of Suqu, near Saldhe. The major part of the narrative is a continuation of persuasive speech by the traditional judge toward peace and conciliation. The other two heads of homestead (Abbaa Qeyee), Sime Addunya and Araddo Tullu, repeat after the traditional judge in line with the proceedings to further consolidate what the tradition ruled and to bring the dispute to a conclusion through sound judgments.⁴²

Eventually, the ritual leader summoned ancestral spirits to bond the *waadaa* (covenant) solemnly not only between the two parties but also between lineages, and thus the Salale in general:⁴³

...in fudhattan 'gaa (eew, edha)
...so you concede to reunite, to reconcile (say, yes)

- Waadaaa 'gaa
-to the Covenant of the Land:

- Waadaaa Jahan Galaan
-to the Covenant of the six ancestors of Galaan

- Waadaaa Shanan Jiddaati
-to the Covenant of the five ancestors of Jidda

- Waadaaa Afran Abbichuuti
-to the Covenant of the four ancestors of Abbichu

⁴¹*Dhiiga Boolla* (Holy Spring) is also called *bakka waadaa*, at Saldhe. It is a ritual site of *guma* and *waadaaa* performance. There are three important sites near Saldhe. First, the debris of Ras Gobena's military base, Menelik's 19th century warlord from the same district, is located in the northeast on the outskirts. Second, *Dhiiga Boolla* is about a mile east on the gateway to the small town, *Saldhe Aroge*, on the highway to the capital. The third is a mountain, another ritual site, found about two miles to the southwest, opposite the Kidane Meheret church. See Bairu Tafra, 1987: 271.

⁴²The mythical history of this place is crucial.

⁴³Informant, Magarsa Roobi, ritual leader, field-note, 2010. All the ancestral names represent the ethnonyms of some of the Salale lineages and the toponyms of their respective places of settlement alike: the 6 *Galan* lineages, the 5 *Jidda* lineages, the four *Abbichu* lineages, and the 3 *Obori* lineages, all the 18 lineages with different ethnonyms.

- Waadaaa Sadeen Oboriiti
-to the Covenant of the three ancestors of Obori

- Waadaaa Goraa Kataabaati
-to the Covenant of Gora Kataba

-Waadaaa dha egaa...
-it is the Covenant of the Land...

... Waadaaa Odaa Nabeeti....
..the covenant of Oda Nabe

...ishii, Waadaaan haa raga'u
*...may Justice prevail, the Law of the land overrule,
...may the Covenant remain intact, forever.*⁴⁴

The metaphoric quality of the Salale *waadaa* (covenant) represents interpretive choices that draw on other actual events which can be found in other text sources such as curse, spell, swear, incantations, and prayer crisscrossing with the dominant culture, i.e. Orthodox Christianity. Through *waadaa* performance, and other rituals not accessible to an outsider, the Salale bind ties of a common past against dominant culture to coalesce and stand united. They express their lived experience in the contemporary situations as they capture their intense emotion or events through verbal art. Mythscape is a collective remembrance set in space to challenge the governing myth of the dominant discourse.⁴⁵ In the narratives of *guma*, prayers, incantations, curse, and spells,

⁴⁴ Informant, Magarsa Roobi, Filednote #1, pp80-95, see p90. Saldhe, 2010. Cf. my "God Speak to Us: Performing Power and Authority in Salale, Ethiopia" *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2014.

⁴⁵ In Abyssinian/Ethiopian dominant discourse the Oromo have been constructed "as the nation's 'Other'" and one can observe counter-discursive strategies employed at the top by Oromo nationalist elites and from "below" counter-hegemonic texts in the casual communicative modes, i.e. performances, by ordinary Oromo people. No doubt, the Western scholars' view of "nations" as "imagined communities" and "tradition" as "invented" has led to new investigations into the social construction of identities. Oromo nationalism is a political project coterminous with the modern state and it is a continuous process of construction of particular historical narratives embodied in the existing tradition. Such claims for allegiance of Oromo nationalism result from their rootedness in the myths and memories of the actually existing ethnic communities. See John Sorenson, "Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse," in Asafa Jalata, *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse*, (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1998), pp222, 237.

emphasis is not just on the “art” but also on the “act” of the verbal utterance and performances in sacred places.

In this “local knowledge” about the *waadaa* non-violent principle, the pressing question is why topographically exceptional places on crossroads, hilltops, riverbanks, trees and groves are chosen as “sacred” and endowed with a sense of social agency and power.⁴⁶ I did some ritual research in Salale but not into the details of the cognitive origins of thinking and behavior about some ontological categories as “sacred” in the people’s “folk ideas.” Finding answer to this fundamental question of *why those ontological categorizations?* is not only a concern of folklorists but also of anthropologists, ethnographers, and scholars of human cognition.

What Alan Dundes called “folk ideas,” and Clifford Geertz called “local knowledge,” is a “folk knowledge” or “indigenous system” which is generally conceptualized as a shared understanding of the social world among a given cultural group who share the same socio-economic status. For Alan Dundes, “folk idea” is a fundamental unit of analysis to study “worldview” in folkloric terms.⁴⁷ In this view “folk idea” is “the traditional notion that people in common culture have about the nature of man, of the world, and man’s life in the world.”⁴⁸ For instance, the following anecdotal reference which Gurmu B. told me in Salale, is his own humorous experience about *ayyaana* (divine worship) when he was young and working as a laborer in the local road authority clearing the highway sides with other men near Dubar village.

⁴⁶ For example, the place *Bakka Waadaa (Covenant Site)*, the Salale ritual site of *guma (blood feud)* is unique as a meeting point of four lands/crossroads (and therefore four winds): *Saldhe Aroge* on the north, *Ejeru* on the northwest, *Machalla Harkiso* on the south and *Machalla Andode* on the east. Metaphorically, people from all walks of life who seek justice present their case to this common ground and elders resolve differences on this confluence.

⁴⁷ Simon Bronner, *Essays of Alan Dundes*, (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2007), pp179-192, see p179.

⁴⁸ Alan Dundes, “Folk Ideas as Units of Worldview,” in Américo Paredes and Richard Bauman, *Toward New Perspective in Folklore*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), pp93-103, see p95. Cf. Simon Bronner, *Essays of Alan Dundes*, p179.

Scene IV.

We had nothing to eat. It was noon. The work was rough. We were all weary, and hungry. Mooru Maakoo, one of the workers, smart as he was, said, “I pretend I am attacked by a sudden arrival of spirit. He added, women in this village will offer the spirit coffee and food.” And he acted it successfully. We all knew that deity worship is a serious matter in Salale. By Mooru’s plan, the spirit swore to kill him unless some coffee ceremony, food and drink were offered. There were women drying cow-dung for fuel outside the kraals. When the women heard Mooru Maakoo was under the influence of ayyaana and saw him yawning, shaking, laughing, yelling, and swearing to kill Mooru, now a medium, they all joined to appease the spirit. Mooru sang in the words and fads of the “spirit:”

Karaan Hora buusa
kottuu Maaram Burruusaa.
Yaa ol kukkuttuu
yaa gad kukkuttuu,
Maaram Burruusaa,
Horeen si yaamtii kottuu...

All roads lead to the Hot Spring
oh, come, descend Maaram Burruusaa.
You who cut it up
you who cut it down,
oh, come, Maaram Burruusaa
we call upon you, we, your devotees...

The women fell on their knees and prayed, oofuu! oofuu!, meaning, Oh, Mercy! Oh, Mercy! They pledged coffee, food, and drink and offered the spirit some. We ate food, drank coffee and farso, a locally brewed beer, to our fill. Now the raging spirit was calm. In the evening, we came home full, laughing, chatting, and teasing Mooru.⁴⁹

By this local “relief theory” of humor, the men took advantage of the existing tradition and tricked the women in order to release the tension and the accumulated energy of weariness, thirst, and hunger; by manipulating the tradition they also resolved their absurd situation and cultural inhibition to solicit food and drink. Their laughter was an escape valve of their guilty feelings, perhaps, for deceiving the women and fabricating the spirit (no spirit in Salale by that name, Gurmu said) or fear of real spirit attack; laughter served them as an escape of the compressed energy.

In Salale, people turn to tradition, particularly to deity worship, for several reasons. Among others, from their “lived-experience” one can observe that intense and painful psychological experience of multiple deprivation impacts on the spiritual make-up of the individual.

⁴⁹ Gurmu B. *Field Journal*. 2010. Shararo.

Discussions and a close examination of the contents of the people's "lived-experience" show the following: inadequate livelihoods and assets; troubled and unequal power relations; risky, isolated and stigmatized poor life situations; exhausted, hungry, and sick physical conditions; a lack of security and protection; isolating and discriminating social conditions; disempowering and excluding institutions; inadequate skills and lack of education and information.⁵⁰ These and other interlocking dimensions of powerlessness and a lack of well-being emerge from the people's "lived-experience," often symbolically represented in rituals, verbal art and acts. As can be seen from the above examples, poor "lived-experience" is more than just material poverty; it also means a disempowering situation and creative resistance to subvert it. The moments of collective "lived experience" and everyday life are interrupted by famine, war, displacement, drought and ecological traditions, and the tragic executions of Salale heroes by the central government. The Salale "local knowledge" about their life journey is refined by the sociopolitical and cultural ideologies channeled through expressive impulses of the people, i.e. their resistance poetics.

"Local knowledge" is unique, culture-bound systematic information about the social world that identifies the society in it. As a heuristic starting point Geertz warns against generalization and "any sentence that begins '...all societies have' is either baseless or banal."⁵¹ It is essential to add that for Geertz, "local" in "Local Knowledge" is unlike "generalities," i.e. unlike "universal"; in some society status differentiation is much more important, whereas in another

⁵⁰ Haile Tufo, Interview on "Wadaaja rites and Ateetee goddess of fecundity." Shararo; Observations or "Eyewitness engagement" at Warra Cabsa Deity Shrine, Xummaanoo. Fieldnotes. February, 2010, Salale.

⁵¹ Clifford Geertz, "'Local Knowledge' and its Limits," in *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 5, no. 2, (1992), 129-135, see p131.

society gender contrast is more important.⁵² In response to the critical claim of “universality and authority,” Geertz implies that ‘local knowledge’ emerges from “historical points in time...or geographical point(s) in space, ... but like all ‘local knowledge’ it is substantive, somebody’s.”⁵³ Geertz here differentiates between “local” and “general” knowledge; he insists that the contrast is not



⁵² Clifford Geertz, *Ibid.*

⁵³ Geertz, p135.

Figure 3.3: A community elder, Germa, smoking *gaaya*, hookah. Gidaaboo Joorgis. Hidhabu/Aboote.



Figure 3.4: A Salale woman, Germa's wife (Figure 3.3), is making coffee out in the homestead. Gidaabo Joorgis.

between “local” knowledge and “universal” knowledge but between one sort of “local knowledge” and another.⁵⁴ It is to serve this “local knowledge” view that native anthropologists emerged in the post-colonial world to consider it as an area of concern to empower natives as “dialogic partners,” as “active agents,” “co-authors,” not as “objects of representation” in ethnographic undertakings; it is also to negate Western academic hegemony and to nullify Eurocentrism and stereotypical images of natives.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p129.

⁵⁵ Takami Kuwayama, “‘Natives’ as Dialogic Partners: Some Thoughts on Native Anthropology,” in *Anthropology Today*, vol. 19, no. 1, (2003), pp8-13, see p8. Cf. Américo Paredes, “On Ethnographic Work among Minority Groups: A Folklorist’s Perspective,” *New Scholar* (1977), 6:1–32.

Américo Paredes, as a native folklorist, challenged the notion of “objectivity” in ethnography and demonstrated that “the ethnographer and the subjects of study operate within circumscribed and often multilayered power.”⁵⁶ Thus, Paredes showed us in his politically engaged folklore scholarship that research is a situated cultural practice and serves as “an important site for political intervention and activism.”⁵⁷ For native anthropologists to access “local knowledge” from the natives’ perspective it is relevant once again to revisit here the notion of what Clifford Geertz calls “experience-near” and “experience-distant” in his “From the Native’s Point of View.”⁵⁸ “Experience-near” is what an informant “might naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly understood by others.” Conversely, “experience-distant” is “one that specialists of one sort or another—an analyst, an ethnographer—employ to forward their scientific or practical aims.”⁵⁹ Geertz doesn’t recommend one over the other: “confinement to experience-near concepts leaves an ethnographer imprisoned within his/her mental horizons,” awash in immediacies, as well as entangled in vernacular;” equally important, confinement to “experience-distant” leaves the ethnographer “stranded in abstractions and smothered in jargon.”⁶⁰ The change in the relationship between the “describer” and the “described” and the spread of literacy (technology) coupled with the view of indigenous people’s rights have contributed to doing ethnography by native intellectuals who write about their own people from their (people’s and the native ethnographer’s) viewpoints.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Olga Nájera-Ramírez, “Encaminándonos: Américo Paredes as a Guiding Force in Transcending Borders,” in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 125, No. 495 (Winter 2012), pp. 69-90, see p71, see Richard Bauman, ed. *Folklore and Culture on Texas-Mexican Border, Américo Paredes*, (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1993), p73.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Clifford Geertz, *ibid*, p56.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p58.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Takami Kuwayama, *Ibid*. p8.

This folkloristic attention to the poetics of political engagement in everyday life is an attempt to analyze how texts use genre and form to respond to multiple political and historical questions. The people engage texts with the political world in a variety of ways. They use specific genres and forms in a way that can alter or develop our understanding of the particular contexts and situations they grapple with. In describing the poetics and politics of everyday life of east African communities, Mustafa Kemal Mirzeler maintains,

historical tradition is expressed in certain forms and conventional structures, and stylized genres....Particular oral traditions are associated with universally occurring social conflicts and ecological and political crisis of everyday lives...such as hunger, famine, and conflict over water or cattle all of which have caused the dispersals of people....⁶²

To achieve a critical understanding of the transformatory power of resistance poetics, the exploration of certain expressive forms sheds new light on the ways in which texts generate specific modes of thought.

In sum, in this chapter I present the “indigenous system” not just as data but also as theory. John McCall’s “Heuristic Ethnography” is relevant here to study a culture and its historical development on the basis of native cultural theories which change as culture changes, and the history of the people we study.⁶³ I make an attempt to emphasize the expression of the people’s own assumptions by creating a polyphony of voices, and by inviting a polyphony of authority—that of the ethnographer and that of the natives. Thus, heuristic ethnography is selective and the data is intentionally selected and connected to the research agenda and the theory of culture. This internal culture view is what McCall calls “heuristic anthropology” or “native anthropology.”⁶⁴ Through reflexivity the ethnographer engages in both the ethnographic fieldwork and the

⁶² Mustafa Kemal Mirzeler. *Remembering Nayeche*, p169.

⁶³ John McCall, *Dancing Histories: Heuristic Ethnography with the Ohafia Igbo*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

analysis of how the identity of the people shapes the process of their knowledge construction.⁶⁵

Using this internal culture view, i.e. a reflexive approach, here I seek to bring some fresh insights to folklore ethnography by examining Salale verbal art.⁶⁶

SALALE VERBAL ART

In this study, in order to examine the social functions of Salale verbal art and to constitute ethnography of resistance poetics, I focus primarily on the major genres of Salale folksongs: *faarsa* (commemorative/historical songs), *geerarsa* (protest songs), *boochisa* (funeral songs), *sirba daboo* (work songs), and *foollee*, *weedduu*, *shoboxa*, “*bar-kume*” (romantic songs). These also include a few personal narratives, rituals and incantations, legends and myth. The rationale for selecting and focusing on those genres (and sub-genres) is two-fold. First is the communicative purpose assigned to those genres. A concrete cultural meaning is conveyed through a particular genre or multiple genres placed in a social context. The analysis of a folklore text requires identifying to which genre the text belongs, a task which folklorists grapple with. Genres have histories; their historical poetics shows the Salale genres convey resistance against domination and economic exploitation; likewise, the poetics of their history shows a critique of unequal power relationships and injustices the people have suffered.

The second focus is the unique features of the genres. There are pre-existing genres and texts that are radical in their contents and to avoid a threat they are performed through every genre (e.g. *faarsa*, commemorative/resistance songs). There are also genres that are newly created and are marginal; marginal because their contents are subversive, subversive because their

⁶⁵ G. Marcus and M. Fisher, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁶⁶ Cf. John McCall, *ibid*, *Dancing Histories*, ...2000.

composers/performers are marginal in the patriarchal society and under the oppressive state, as the texts/informants tell. The *bar-kumee songs* are typical examples; they are composed and performed by Salale women about their inattentive lovers/husbands and the state-structured violence during the historic New Millennium.⁶⁷

Scholars have collected and studied a corpus of Oromo folklore genres but have worked without clear methodological and theoretical orientations to resolve challenges of genre overlap and opacity. Most of the collections and interpretations were also not performance-based nor set within social contexts to determine their unique features. Generally, the Salale folklore and resistance culture have been overlooked. There is a growing body of literature on Oromo folklore research, undergraduate and graduate theses and PhD dissertations; however, there is a lack of detailed empirical research rooted within the respective culture. Most studies in the past were dependent mainly on literary analysis of textual sources. Enrico Cerulli's collection of Oromo folklore is a typical example of texts studied outside of their context.⁶⁸ Based on the available data and existing studies, contemporary Oromo folklore is undergoing historical transformations, i.e., marked differences in *content* (theme and setting) and *form* (structure and style) compared to

⁶⁷ Assefa Tefera Dibaba, "Salale Oromo Women's Songs of Resistance," *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies*, Volume 7, Issue 3, pp.47-66. Abstract available on: <http://ijicst.cgpublisher.com/>

⁶⁸ Enrico Cerulli, *Folk Literature of the Oromo...*, 1922. Desalegn Seyum's MA thesis entitled "E. Cerulli's Folk Literature of the [Oromo] of Southern Ethiopia: a Critical Evaluation" (1985), is an attempt "to show how Cerulli's collection can reflect Oromo culture" (p26). The aim of the study is, among others, "to critically analyze Cerulli's Folk Literature... and examine" the cultural and historical significance of the collections. Desalegn's study is innovative in many ways, and one is linguistic. First, the Oromo vowel length had hitherto been denied to have phonetic value, which is an assumption strongly opposed by Desalegn. Desalegn argues that doubling the vowel represents vowel length in Oromo. Second, Desalegn also declares that the pejorative word "galla" does not represent "Oromo," both the people and the language. (cf. T. Zitelmann's "Re-Examining the Galla/Oromo Relationship" in Baxter 1996:103 passim). The corpus of oral texts in Cerulli's Folk Literature were those composed in the nineteenth and towards the beginning of the twentieth century (cf. the historical songs) which represent the Oromo socio-political and cultural context of the time before the collection, i.e. 1922.

the past.⁶⁹ These and other factors impact the African folklore genre in general and Oromo folklore in particular to pose *ethnic genre* system as an alternative to the universal “analytical” system. The naming and identification of genre types is a historical process and the application of genre names is often unstable. The Salale verbal art are no exception.

Historical Transformation of Genres

Among the Oromo folk narratives and songs are performed and repeated by storytellers, singers, and performers for generations and continue to be reproduced and transmitted based on how they satisfy the sociopolitical and cultural needs of the society. In spite of the influences of the existing tradition, which is also dynamic, the Oromo folklore genres undergo a historical transformation on the basis of the existing tradition and social order. Ruth Finnegan asserts that “the old assumptions are still tenacious and time after time dictate the selection and presentation of African oral literature with all the bias toward the traditional.”⁷⁰ Thus, the historical transformation of genre is covert; however, both the performer and the audience perceive that they have a common past and a certain type of adaptation to their human situation and their environment. The Oromo *geerarsa* genre, for example, and its sub-genres, which used to be hunting and boasting songs, became transformed into resistance (protest) songs over the last few decades.⁷¹ The lengthy recitation of the Borana Oromo *geerarsa* sub-genre called *dhaaduu* is a

⁶⁹Addisu Tolesa, “Oromo Literature, Geerarsa, and the Liberation Struggle,” in *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1994), pp59-65, see p59; B. W. Andrzejewski, (ed.). *Literatures in African Languages: Theoretical Issues and Sample Surveys*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985/2010). p422; Claude Sumner, *Oromo Folksongs*, 1996 ; Enrico Cerulli, *Folk Literature of the Oromo....* 1922.

⁷⁰ Finnegan, Ruth, *Oral Literature in Africa*. (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1970), p49.

⁷¹ Addisu Tolesa. (2005). *Geerarsa Folksong as the Oromo National Literature: A Study of Ethnography, Folklore and Folklife in the Context of the Ethiopian Colonization of Oromia*. Studies in African Literature. Edwin Mellen Press. See also Ruth Finnegan, 1970.

typical example of an Oromo boasting song which has been transformed into a political song.⁷² Abdulahi Shongolo expresses the transformed *geerarsa* genre as poems that “expressed feelings of rage against the political and economic oppression under both Haile Selassie and Mengistu [Derg], and against the harassment by the present Tigre-dominated government.”⁷³ The historical transformation is “an imaginative and creative development of a traditional genre of boasting songs, *geerarsa*, in which men give poetic accounts of their heroic deeds, and sometimes... of their problems and grievances in life” and attempt to counter any threat by “war of words” unlike the past “war with arms.”⁷⁴

By the same token, in Salale verbal art, since *geerarsa* is a grand genre that requires a solemn occasion for performance, to date *quuqqaa* or “problem and grievance in life” is conveyed through every genre. According to my informants, social banditry has become less favored as an option of conveying resistance culture in Salale.⁷⁵ This is due to various sociopolitical factors including massive state control, i.e. structured state violence in the area which is feared for its rugged border landscape and the rebel tendency. The historical transition from the “war of arms” to the “war of words” has significantly affected the generic historical transformation of Salale verbal art. The transformation is mainly in the content (themes and setting) than in the form (style and structure); i.e. new messages are conveyed by the existing genre.

⁷² G. Schlee and Abdulahi A. Shongolo, “Oromo Nationalist Poetry: Jarso Waaqo Qooto’s Tape Recording about Political Events in Southern Oromia, 1991,” Bielefeld: Sociology of Development Research Center, Working Paper, No. 174. See also Abdulahi Shongolo, “The Poetics of Nationalism,” in P.T.W. Baxter et al. eds. *Being and Becoming Oromo*, (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1996,) pp265-290. In his “poetics of nationalism,” Abdulahi notes that “They were, however, not a radically new genre of heroic political poetry of the kind that developed in, for example, the Gikuyu or Somali resistance struggle,” in Baxter, 1996, p269, footnote no. 8.

⁷³ P.T.W. Baxter et al. eds. *Being and Becoming Oromo*, p265.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p269.

⁷⁵ Enda-Lebbu, Addunna Barroshe, Kuyyu, 2010.

Generic transformation can be a social act. A field report by Amatzia Bar-Yosef shows the changing singing style of the Palestinian folk-poet singers known as *hadday*, a change to the social life of folksong, folksinger, and the culture that gave birth to it, following a new pattern of social transformation causing a historical generic transformation.⁷⁶ Innovation in the music system can also change the genre. That is, the introduction of commercialized music modeled on the vernacular and the emergence of popular culture transcending the local culture are also other possible factors. Norman Cohen, in his *All this for a Song*, explains two distinct pathways in which folksongs can change: one is, “small gradual alterations, additions, or deletions that may be either deliberate or accidental;” the other is characterized by wholesale re-composition, “invariably deliberate.”⁷⁷ The Palestinian *hadday* style change could be an example of the first path, I presume, since gradual alterations may affect singing style. As one can see from the examples presented in this chapter, even though genre is a slippery concept, it has served a dual purpose in the discipline: it provides a system of classification, and also a conceptual framework for articulating characteristics of the individual component within the classification. Thus, historical transformation may distress or change genres and disrupt the classification and characterization of the component of each generic category as a starting point in any serious folklore scholarship. Together with the sociopolitical change, the emergence of popular and literate culture has introduced the commercialization of folksongs and caused the fragmentation of context, text, and their symbolic meaning, resulting in the notion of “distressed genres.”⁷⁸

Oromo Genres in African Context

⁷⁶ Amatzia Bar-Yosef. “Traditional Rural Style under a Process of Change: The Singing Style of the ‘Ḥaddāy,’ Palestinian Folk Poet-Singers,” in *Asian Music*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Spring - Summer, 1998), pp. 57-82, see p58.

⁷⁷ Norm Cohen, *All This for a Song*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009), p85.

⁷⁸ Susan Stewart, “Notes on Distressed Genres,” *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 104, no.411, (1991), pp5-31.

The treatment of Oromo narratives set in an African context enables us to have deep insight into the pivotal functions and significant aspects of the structural organizations. In Alice Werner's collection of East African folklore, she discusses the Oromo trickster, *Hillu* (Hare), in the animal stories of the Oromo of Equatorial area (in Kenya) and other superstitions related to the animal. She writes, "I found that the Oromo consider the hare [rabbit] very unlucky (this idea is also current in Abyssinia⁷⁹), will not eat it, and believe that no hunter will meet with success if one crosses his path."⁸⁰ A genre is a culture-bound concept characterized by stylistic features on which a category of artistic performance act is based. A folklore genre generates social meanings open to interpretation and involves diachronic and synchronic dimensions, thematic variations and aesthetic qualities subject to change in context. In the analysis of form (style and structure) and content (theme and setting) of folklore genre it is important to identify to which genre the message of a folkloric form belongs.⁸¹ In a given performative context a concrete cultural meaning is expressed through a particular generic mode of communication such as folksong, folktale, anecdote, proverb, or myth.

Major folk narrative genres in African oral traditions fall into historical (prose) narratives, tales (animal tales, stories, legends, and myths), proverbs, and riddles.⁸² Folk narrative genres vary from one culture to another. The major Oromo narratives are grouped into several sub-genres such as animal tales, tales of magic, religious tales, parables, and, jokes. Oromo *legends* can be

⁷⁹ Abyssinia/Ethiopia: Until 1974, the Emperors claimed to rule by virtue of royal descent in the line of Solomon, and by being anointed by the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Until the mid-twentieth century, this state was known as "Abyssinia," and in the historical context, the northern region or the empire was called Abyssinia in order to distinguish it from the larger area of modern-day Ethiopia. In the region, highland Amhara and Tigray are commonly called "Habasha," a word with the same derivation with Abyssinia.

⁸⁰ Alice Werner, "Some Notes on East African Folklore," in *Folklore*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Mar. 31, 1915), pp. 60-78, pp69, 70.

⁸¹ Daniel Chandler, "An Introduction to Genre Theory," (1997). http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/intgenre/chandler_genre_theory.pdf. Retrieved on December 9, 2014.

⁸² (Finnegan 1970)

classified into origin legends (etiological legends), belief legends, and historical or local legends. Other spoken narratives of realistic nature may fall under the category of folk stories and memoirs which constitute a sub-genre of anecdotes, which are short humorous accounts with an unexpected and effective ending.⁸³

The context or environment in which tales are recorded and collected is as important as the tale itself. The context includes the audience, the time of the day and the season as an integral part of folklore performance which affects the mood of the performer, the participation of the audience, and the occasion. In terms of its dramatic quality, storytelling generally takes place at night out in the kraal during leisure time.⁸⁴ The Salale Oromo reside, perhaps like other African societies, in scattered homesteads of patrilineal nuclear family (*warra/mana/qeyee*) units that swell into *fira* (close kin), *qomoo* (lineage), *ganda* (community), and *gosa* (clan). Genealogy is one way of tracing a common line of descent. Traditionally it is expected that members of those units cooperate and share common interests, core values and concepts of *safuu* (divine moral and social order), *ayaana* (divination), and Waaqa (God). In spite of the social differentiations and the divide and rule policy of the state, the people cooperate to protect their collective interests and take action against external forces that threaten their peace and social cohesion.

An attempt to discover those *culturally defined rules* of folklore communication, as part of the search for meanings and social actions, is bounded by the scholarly distinctions between genres that cut across *emic* categories and insider knowledge structures. This is a signal that we, as folklorists, should pay attention to the natives' view, beyond the disciplinary horizons, to

⁸³ (Sumner 1995)

⁸⁴ Cf. Mustafa Kamala Mirzeler, *Remembering Nayeche*, 2014; Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Story-telling*.

understand the nature of the limitations that encounter our scholarly distinctions and demarcate clearly the generic forms.

Oromo folklore genres, like in any African culture, are historical categories. To use the *theoretical* conception of genre is to attempt to find a logical basis for the *empirical* taxonomies and locate historically-attested genres on the basis of fundamental features of language which draws on historically existing genres. At some point in history some genres or subgenres emerge as hitherto nonexistent forms (e.g. political songs).⁸⁵ Historically existent genres are also changed into new ones to meet the new social order while their form remains intact, like the Oromo *geerarsa*.⁸⁶ The genre of work songs changes into political songs or songs of “displacement,” “banditry,” “protest,” or “nationalism.” The texts in one genre can belong to different genres and serve different purposes at some point in time to critique, recognize, respond to, and act meaningfully within recurrent situations. Thus, genres are not simply text types and artificial systems of classification, nor are they mere *labels* (names) or containers of meaning but, in culturally defined ways, genres reflect what they represent and have a role in meaning-making in historical processes. History of the genre (its historical transformation) is an equally important determining factor in locating generic categories using *ethnic genre* knowledge.

African oral tradition and folklore performance encompasses a variety of court singers/narrators (*griots*), traveling performers (*asmaarii* or bards) performing heroic tales, singing praise songs, or lyric songs of entertainment, and songs of social critique. The ability to speak with wisdom, confidence, and conviction is especially valued, as Kwesi Yankah maintains, by the Akan

⁸⁵ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, (Oxford University Press, 1970), p265; Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁸⁶ Abdullahi Shongolo, “The Poetics of Nationalism,” in P.T.W. Baxter, *Being and Becoming Oromo*, (1996), p265.

peoples. Like Kwesi Yankah's *okyeame* (pronounced "o-cham-ee") of Akan in Ghana, oral performers have some social status that exhibits ethnic genres according to their talent and cultural reception/recognition in the society. Yankah describes the role of the *okyeame* "not just as a speech intermediary" but also as an "envoy, counselor, consultant, protocol officer, ritual officiant responsible for libation prayers" and as "the most reliable among the chief's counselor of elders."⁸⁷ In Akan tradition, royal speech is not articulated with a single voice but as a composite of the chief's voice and of the royal orator, the *okyeame*, whose narrative constitutes a set of cultural practices. Yankah's "*speaking for the chief*" is a genre of speaking, a set of cultural practice or performance of power and authority in a sociocultural domain.

Like the *okyeame* of Akan in Ghana⁸⁸ each Oromo performer has some social status and a repertoire of songs or stories out of the *ethnic genres* according to his/her natural talent and cultural reception/recognition. Among the Salale Oromo, *spirit mediumship* is a ritual public realm where the priestess's voice is channeled to the public/clients by the *warra-afuura* spokesman on the occasion of performing ancestor worship (*afuura*), curse revocations (*tuftoo*), and/or prayers (*Waaqa dubbisa*). The role of the *warra afuuraa* in Salale is not just to channel religious messages from the priestess to the devotees but also to supply memory and cultural direction to all people involved in the ritual performance in a spiritual domain.

In this study I focus on the major genres of Salale folksongs, personal experience narratives and anecdotes, and rituals accompanied by incantations (prayers, spells, chants), including myths and legends. There are no folktales, but a few proverbs have been included. Among other crops,

⁸⁷ Kwesi Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief: Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory* (African Systems of Thought). (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p30.

⁸⁸ Kwesi Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief*, 1995, Ibid.

wheat and teff are exclusively grown by men. As they are labor intensive, among the Salale the two crops are a symbol of masculinity, wealth and the ability to feed one's family. The size of the man's farm field represents his work ethic. *Social function*, Dan Ben-Amos comments, is one of the three features of local genre knowledge, including *expressive* and *cognitive features*, used to determine a category of an African genre system based on *ethnic genres*.⁸⁹ During my fieldwork in Salale, on multiple occasions, my informants performed or recited songs, told personal life stories or stories of ethnic heroes. As "fire" is a symbol of boundless potency, life and masculinity among other African societies (e.g. the traditional Igbo people in Nigeria),⁹⁰ in Salale verbal art, folksongs in particular, "rain" is a common motif symbolizing an unflinching force of nature. This is not to undermine the Oromo saying, "*Abiddi daaraa dhala*," meaning, "*Fire begets ash*," to symbolize "ash" as impotent, cold and lifeless and comment generational incongruity—representing the old generation by "fire."

Salale Folklore Genres

Narratives are verbal art that tells stories. Since people do not often categorize into genres in what they do, genres are arbitrary social constructs and they are set up by ethnographers to understand the people through their expressive acts across time and space. Through studying folksong or folk narrative, a comparative analysis of similarities and differences in genre can be made so as to understand better the modes of transmission and connections. Oromo folk

⁸⁹ Dan Ben-Amos "Folklore in African Society" in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1975), pp. 165-198; Dan Ben-Amos, *Folklore Genres*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos. Austin: University of Texas Press, (1976), pp. 215-42. Using "social functions" as one criterion, William Bascom identifies four major functions of folklore narratives: first, enabling human beings "to escape in fantasy from repressions imposed upon them by society"; second, validating culture, "justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them," e.g. myth expresses, enhances, and codifies beliefs," third, "importance of many forms of folklore (fables, folktales, fairytales, riddles) as pedagogic devices" "to sharpen the wits of younger children," and fourth, the "often overlooked function of folklore to maintain conformity to the accepted pattern of behavior."

⁹⁰ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, (Anchor, 1994).

narratives are enacted in a form of storytelling as a special kind of folk creativity. From a universal analytic principle, genre can be defined based on form, mood, or content. By its form a folklore genre can be categorized as poetry, proverb, or drama, by its content as personal story, ritual song, or autobiography, or by its mood as humor, or lament as in funerals, or in defeat, and cuts across generic boundaries. Narratives have communicative value in folklore as performance acts. Performance involves the narrator and audience in a social context and they are required to show reasonable competence, both in a knowledge of their culture and skill in the language. Without a shared socio-cultural knowledge it is difficult for participants to decode the message in narrative accounts.⁹¹ This new perspective in folkloristics marked a turn of attention from a study of “formal patterning and symbolic contents of texts” toward poetics and the emergence of verbal art as a process in the social interaction between the performer(s) and the audience.⁹²

In this section I present Salale folklore genre as a multidimensional phenomenon which takes into account both the aspects of the people’s struggle to survive oppression and to endure hard times and also the role of folklore in focusing and directing their human endeavors. Thus, I discuss some considerations in developing a faceted classification of Salale verbal art to address the problems of presenting genre as a watertight compartment. This is part of a modest attempt at constructing the *resistance poetics* of Salale Oromo by drawing on the indigenous cultural knowledge model for two reasons. First, in order to understand Salale folklore and resistance culture and approach it as a critical and emancipatory hermeneutics, it is imperative to locate it within the perspective of its established and systematic ways of knowing, i.e. the “local knowledge.” Second, in order to see the culture from the “inside out,” I emphasize studying the

⁹¹ Austin Bukenya 1994:66ff

⁹² Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, “Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 19 (1990), pp. 59-88, see p59.

“folk” and their “lore” to see Salale folklore adequately as a tradition-oriented phenomenon, not just “verbal.” In this section a brief sketch of major Salale Oromo folklore genres is presented.

Using the *ethnic genres* model, I make an attempt to assess the intersection of the Oromo genre categories compared with a few significant alternative systems of genres in Africa.

Salale Oromo folk narratives and folksongs are significant aspects of the people’s sociocultural life. Based on my informants’ *ethnic genres* knowledge and the data I obtained through interviews and discussions, Salale verbal art are generally categorized as follows:

A. Prose (Haasaa)

Sheekkoo/mammaaksa	=	folktales
Durdurii	=	fables / myths
Mammaaksa	=	proverbs
Baacoo	=	humor
Hibboo	=	riddles

Historical Genres (Gooroo Seenaa)

Waayoo	=	legend
Mudata/seenaa ofii	=	personal experience narratives
Seenaa	=	oral histories
Arga-dhageettii (in Boorana)	=	oral traditions

* * *

B. Folksongs / Poetry (Weedduu/Sirba/Wallee)

Faarsa: commemorative songs

Bar-kumee: political song, commonly sung by women and children

Geerarsa: praise or historical song, protest song mainly sung by men.

Asmaarii: historical songs (minstrels/bard).

Shoboxe/Ragada: Boys and girls line up facing each other and perform, i.e. sing and dance love songs and songs of social critique and resistance.

Dhiichisa/Ragada: Men hold sticks and sing songs of various contents and genres and dance in circle. In this genre the contents of the songs include heroic and commemorative, historical, and love songs, which have no exclusive genres and specific context. In any non-religious context, where dhiichisa is (or is not) performed, those songs are sung.

Gurroole: wedding songs sung by best-men returning home with the bride and the groom.

Shinoote: nuptial song sung only by young women.

Sherere: songs sung at night by neighbors gather to hearten someone engaged in a serious family business (wedding, building a house, etc.).

Foollee: Only young men perform this genre. The content may be heroic and historical songs.

Urursa (Ushururu): cradle song or lullaby. Its content can vary from purely praising the child, the mother or siblings or close kin to political, grievance and other topical issues.

Jeekkara/Dalaga: religious songs performed only by men and guided by a man, Abbaa Galmaa on Wadaaja or at deity worship shrine.

Naanee: pastoral song.

Sirba daboo: Work Songs. This genre is broad and gender-based like the gender-based division of labor in the society.

Boochisa: funeral song. In Salale, this genre is performed by men 'professional' lamenters.

Weedduu (-jaalalaa): love songs

Danfa: declamatory songs

Sirba adamoo (ajjeessaa): hunting songs

Faaruu Hoodaa: gnostic songs

Goobee: Salale Carnivalsque

Jeekkara/dalaga: religious songs

Faaruu Uumaa: worshiping God (songs of Waaqa, God), ritual songs (on river banks, e.g. Irreecha; hilltops, tree coronations)

Faaruu Dachee: worshiping Earth as a green-handed deity

Faaruu warra Afuuraa: mediumships, ancestor worships

The *sirba daboo* (work songs), *durdurii* (fables), *faaruu/jeekkara* (religious songs), and *sheekkoo* (folktales) performed in the form of entertainment may also refer to some social, political, and historical events, commemorate an ethnic hero, or draw attention of the public to injustices imposed by the status quo. Not to turn “away from the generalized assumptions of earlier theoretical and romanticized speculators of past (or even present) public opinion,”⁹³ the performer has responsibility for giving a solid foundation for cultural influences that might have otherwise passed by without notice. To study those narratives serves to know better the society they belong to and to understand the sociocultural and political ideas in which the narratives are rooted.

Folkdance: a revivalist approach

⁹³ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, (Nairobi, Kenya: 1970), p49

Another intriguing aspect of folksong function, meaning, and definition (and verbal art in general) is the issue of *revivalism*, which is about socially constructing national identity through upholding one's culture under identifiable political and historical circumstances. If revivals are "considered to be outside the mainstream of tradition" and less authentic, as "consisting of survivals" and "somehow spurious"⁹⁴ it is hard to take for granted definition and classification simply based on features. The revival can be reformist in its means but not necessarily in its end. What is clear about the ideology of revival is, I believe, that in a world where humanity is besieged by hunger, want, disease, and absolute misery, in a world driven by exploitation, in a world of uneven development, no expressive culture can be of purely aesthetic value and no ethnography can "present folklore merely as heritage of the past and class inflicted."⁹⁵

Revival is a product of a set of factors and ideology but not necessarily just "grassroots preservationism."⁹⁶ Thus, revivalist theory and its ideological assumptions, may have a direct impact on the collection, documentation, classification and definition of the verbal art, an impact which is not intrinsic to the folklore material. In studying Salale folklore and resistance culture the relationship between context, genre, and folkdance is complicated in various respects and it is difficult to determine all the factors that are part of the relationship. However, genres function at different local levels to suppress or reproduce social attitudes, interests and assumptions. Salale folkdance is performed during holidays and ceremonies. The major traditional Salale dances, sacred or secular, and the time of their performances, vary according to their purposes. These include, *dalaga* also called *jeekkara* (religious dance on *wadaaja*), *ragada*, *dhiichisa*, *shinoote* (romantic dance), generally called *sirba*. Romantic folkdances are performed mostly during

⁹⁴ Guigne Anna Kearney Guigne, *Folksongs and Folk Revival* (St. John's, NL: ISER Press, 2008), p23

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p29.

weddings in moonlight and sometimes in daylight during some Orthodox Christian observances. Romantic folkdances are performed by unmarried young men and women though married men participate in *dhiichisa*; this can vary from place to place. During a *dhiichisa* performance, young men dance in a circle and play-act with their *shimala*, or sticks, feigning a strike or a sudden blow in the head.



Figure 3.5: Salale youth performing *dhiichisa folkdance* and singing *follee* with their *shimala*, stick.

Thus, play-acting stick-fights are an informal ritual of initiation for young men in the presence of young women, as a symbol of manhood, courage and strength for the winner and to attract women's attention.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Informants, Gurmu B.; Magarsa D., Gammachu D., 2010.

It is worth noting here that various genres and sub-genres of folksongs are performed during all those folkdances, sacred or secular. That is, based on context, every dance is accompanied by a folksong of some genre or sub-genre, but not all folksongs are attended with a folkdance. For example, work songs⁹⁸ are performed to stimulate the work, i.e., harvesting, threshing, plowing, or digging deep water wells, grinding, pounding, or weaving and are devoid of any folkdance at the work place. Hence, from my observation, “sirbi hojii miti, dabalata hojii ti,” that is, “A work song is not work itself; it is a stimulant of work.” After work, men gather at the respected person’s *qeyee* (home) to sing and dance all night, eating lamb and drinking *farsoo*. *Jeekkara* is a religious folkdance at the *wadaaja/Ateetee* ritual ceremony of the goddess of fertility or at deity worship with a grand high-spirited mood followed by religious folksongs at *galma*, shrine or at the individual woman’s place where the fertility rite, *wadaaja* is performed.

Salale Narratives

Thus, it is difficult to categorize Salale narratives precisely because they fit into many categories. However, structural forms of narratives, styles, functions, or themes of folk narratives and folksongs in a specific context can serve as the basis for generic categories using *ethnic genres*. Using my local knowledge of form, content, and social function as a reference point, and working from the data I obtained through interviews and discussions in Salale and other available sources, next I present Oromo narratives (*haasaa*) generally categorized as follows:⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Ted Gioia, *Work Songs*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁹⁹ In Oromo tradition, *haasaa* (*dialogic communicative mode*) is an engaging transaction which requires attention.

Folktale (Sheekkoo): like the Western folktale narrative or that of other African societies, it has a cultural identity that marks its distinct qualities to be investigated in detail.¹⁰⁰ That is, the human or animal characters and content take on traits and values of the culture in which they are rooted. The *form* (style and stylistic structure) of Oromo folktales shows the general common pattern of event timeline (beginning, body and climax, and resolution), and like the folktales of other cultures (Western and African) Oromo folktales involve *villainy, struggle-victory, and reward*.¹⁰¹

Myth (Mammaaksa): explains a natural phenomenon, origin, or occurrence. To explain the creation of the world, the Oromo say, “*Uume Walaabuu baate,*” meaning, “*Creation began at Walaabu.*” Walaabu is the mythical homeland of the Oromo located in the eastern part of Oromia, in Bale. In Oromo myth, *Walaabu* is also referred to as a universal setting for the origin of the world as Christianity refers to Eden in *Genesis*. Like the Western myths, the Oromo myth explains historical events and religious practices, and documents the common fears and hopes of humankind. However, the naming of some Oromo genres has limitations awaiting a detailed study. Thus, the genre of myth gives a religious explanation for something, like how the world or a particular custom began. Unlike folktales, myths do not stick to a chronological sequence related to the present day. That is, myths have internal chronology and coherence but not a temporal series of events, giving the story a timeless quality and making it symbolic rather than just the way it happened. When there is no opinion about the truth value of an event, a story categorized as a myth is believed, as for the people who tell it, it constitutes an ideology of an ethnic group or a nation. The mythic origin of the Salale is presented in Ch. 2.

¹⁰⁰Dorson, Richard. (1972). *Folklore and Folklife*. University of Chicago Press; Finnegan, Ruth. (1970). *Oral Literature in Africa*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers.

¹⁰¹ Vladimir Propp, in his *Morphology of the Folktales*, the influential theory of the structure of folktale plots, identifies 31 plot pieces or *functions*, 7 characters or *dramatic persona*, and rules of combinations he calls *morphology*, which serve as an instance of “analytical category” to study folktales.

Legend (Waayoo): is a story from the past about people, places, or events. Oromo legends include a character that is a saint, king, queen, hero or heroine, or a famous person connected with a particular time and place. The legend of *Hawecha* in Borana is a story about an Oromo woman who is said to have lived among the Oromo in Kenya two hundred years ago.¹⁰² Akkoo Manooyyee is another Oromo legend about the queen who is said to have ruled the Oromo badly under the matriarchal social structure in the remote past—the story that helped to legitimize male chauvinism and domination.

In this study I relate some historical or local legends that relate to actual events and ethnic heroes as part of Salale ethno-history. Unlike myths, legends are situated in a known place and time about an event that happened in the recent past.¹⁰³ These legends are regarded as non-fiction by both the narrator and the audience. A legend is a story told as if it were a historical event rather than a symbolic narrative told as an explanation of how something began. The stories of Robin Hood, for example, as a classic narrative of social banditry, are part of a legend set in a definite period (during the reign of Richard I of England, 1189-99). The narratives of Salale ancestral/ethnic heroes include the stories of Mulu Asanu, Hagari Tullu, and most recently, Badhaadha Dilgaasa, which will be presented in Chapter 6.

Fable (Durdurii): is a folktale that teaches a moral using personified animal characters. The story involves trickster animals such as the Oromo Hillu (Rabbit) like the West African Anansi the Spider; the story is about how the weak animal defeats the strong rival through deception.

¹⁰² Rhodia Mann, *Hawecha: A Woman for All Time*. (Nairobi: Longhorn Publishers, 2008).

¹⁰³ Richard Dorson's essay "Legends and Tall Tales" (in *Our Living Traditions*, edited by Tristram P. Coffin, (1968), pp154-69); Linda Dégh, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

Proverbs (Mammaaksa): Proverbs are wise sayings. Their form and style vary between pithy short sentences and two- to four-line verses full of wisdom. In Oromo tradition children do not say proverbs without apologetic formulas in the presence of elders.

Humor (Baacoo): Humor is used to provoke laughter while the focus can be on a serious matter. Humor is verbal among the Oromo, unlike the Western humor tradition that includes visual elements. To Enrico Cerulli humor is “a distinct literary form of great interest to students of folklore,” there arising among the Oromo by the art of professional jesters in courts.¹⁰⁴

Riddles (Hibboo) are children’s games used to teach numeration, mystical beliefs and taboos about numbers and other cognitive systems.¹⁰⁵ Tongue-twisters and other games played by the fireside are believed to sharpen children’s wits.

To sum up, in this part I have identified the major Salale verbal art (folksongs and narratives) using an eclectic approach. That is, I chose to balance between “ethnic genres,” which draws on categories in native culture and “analytical categories” made up by specialists for classification and description. The reason for choosing an eclectic approach is to avoid the risk of falling prey to untested hermeneutics about genre theory or to a crude application of the Western tripartite literary concepts to native cultures. The use of cross-culturally applicable analytical concepts can

¹⁰⁴ Enrico Cerulli states that while he was working on the Oromo Narrative (*Part 2. Prose*), his “assistant,” Loransiyos Walda Yasus, was ordered by the Italian military authorities to leave Italy and return to Keren, Eritrea, where he was a resident and that left Cerulli’s data on narrative incomplete. Based on the information he had, he classified the narratives as follows: *Texts on Historical Subjects; Texts on Ethnological Subjects; Texts of Magic and Prophetic Literatures; Humor (haasaa); Proverbs*, and *Riddles*. There are a few sub-genres that Cerulli included under the first two narrative categories. See Enrico Cerulli, pp148, 190. Finnegan categorizes African “Prose Narratives” into sub-genres as “animal stories, stories about people, historical narratives, proverbs, and riddles” (p327), which overlaps with Cerulli’s classification. Cf. Ruth Finnegan, 1970, p327.

¹⁰⁵ Tadesse Berisso, “The Riddles of Number Nine in Guji-Oromo Culture,” in *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (December 2000), pp. 49-66.

be profitable to bridge the gap between culture-specific genre forms and universal categories. It has become clear from the examples that in Salale verbal art the seeds of social justice, agency, and self-empowerment are sown through every genre deemed favorable to describe harsh human conditions, as this communicative purpose cuts across every genre. The aim has been to identify the expressive forms that serve as agents of social transformation and cultural transmission from “below.” Thus, this chapter is not a catalogue of a poetic practice of a particular time. Rather, using a synchronic and diachronic approach, it is an exploration of many of the types of Salale texts:¹⁰⁶ *literary* (folksongs, myths), *historical* (legends, oral traditions and oral histories, anecdotes, humors), and *gnostic* (incantations, spells, curses, prayers).

¹⁰⁶ In discussing the Somali’s concept of “text” Martin Orwin characterizes it as “individuated product,” and based on the extra- and intra-textual qualitative criteria, Orwin writes, intertextually, the “metaphor of *text* [is] ‘that which has been woven ... in texts a relatively high degree of internal interconnectedness via multiple non-random links.’” The extra-textual issues are composition, performance, and memorization processes. the quality of coherence or connectivity that characterizes text See Martin Orwin, “On the Concept of ‘Definitive Text’ in Somali Poetry,” *Oral Tradition*, Volume 20, Number 2, October 2005, pp. 278-299, see pp279-279.

SALALE FOLKSONGS

Across the Salale prairie, let's ride,
as the rain storms in Kuyyu, heavy tide!
Oh, Mind, my company at birth,
rule Body to cut girth, to leave hearth.¹

_____ *Salale Song*

INTRODUCTION

Folksongs are a key part of Salale resistance culture and they are woven into the people's lived experience with folkdance and banditry to make a unique Salale cultural pattern. The Salale perform folksongs and dances during festivals, celebrations, ceremonies, and regular chores as media of communication and not just as modes of entertainment. The religious, social, commemorative and political functions of Salale folksongs embody their resistance poetics. To understand the genres, songs and their meanings, roles, and social spaces of performance, involvement with the people is imperative. In spite of their artistic beauty, the deep philosophical thoughts they invoke, and the intricate cultural values they convey, Salale verbal art, folksongs in particular, have not been studied professionally and from the people's perspective. In the first part of this section, I theorize the eco-poetic origin of Salale folksongs from a Salale perspective. In the second part I identify major Salale folk genres and discuss the historical, sociocultural, and political forces at work in the creation, performance, and reception of the folk genres and songs. In the third part of this chapter I pinpoint the recurrent themes that run through the songs as critical expressive acts, and attempt to analyze their functions vis-à-vis the dominant social order

¹ Salale irra naan darbii,
hurufa Kuyyuu roobi yaa cabbii.
Sit' na wajjin dhalatee,
me Garaa narraa dhowwi yaa Qalbii.

Across the Salale prairie, let's ride,
as the rain storms in Kuyyu, heavy tide!
Oh, Mind, my company at birth,
rule Body to cut girth, to leave hearth.

Fieldnote #7, p23, at Ejersa Kaawo, April 22, 2010, Thursday. Two boys performed this love song in a call-and-response. The sub-genre is called *shoboxa*, a satire used as social critique.

and discourse. Next, I discuss briefly the local eco-poetic theory about the mythic origin of Salale poetics, particularly folksongs, and describe the indispensable connection between folklore and environment, and the human and nonhuman connectedness.

Eco-poetic Origin of Salale Folksongs

A folkloric eco-poetic instance of composition of a folksong close to nature is Jan Vansina's fieldwork experience about a Rwandese performer. In his own words, Vansina writes: "I have seen a poet on a hill in Rwanda mulling over his composition for hours, presumably day after day, until he felt it was perfect. Vansina's example of the Rwandese oral poet (folksinger) makes a case for a complete "deliberate composition" of a song rehearsed for performance until the performer felt it "perfect."² By the same token, in 2010 when I asked my Salale informants where folksongs come from, their answer was, from Odaa Jilaa or Haroo Calanqoo.³ According to this view, before the new harvest season, the Salale folksong composer/performer seeks refuge to nature in Mogor River or Jama valley to muse until he is ready to come out into the light with "new" songs. To hide in Mogor or Jama for a week covered in leaves, ferns, and branches on the sacred tree is a virtuoso practice expected from any adept Salale performer, sacred or secular, bound by nature (thick vegetation, meandering perennial rivers, edible wild fruits, humming animals and cooing birds). Thus, in Salale folklore tradition, ritual hiding is not to be underestimated. My informant Haile Tufo confirmed to me that separation and confinement,

² Jan Vansina, 1985, *Ibid.*, p12.

³ "Odaa Jilaa," Informants, Gurmu B., Shararo; Taddasa Galate, Magarsa D., Yaayya Gullalle. Fieldnote #3, 2010. "Holqa Haroo," Informants, Gameessaa Gojee (age, 90), Haroo; Gammadaa Tolaa (age, 92), Gixoo, Hidhabu Abote, Fieldnote #3, p96-104. See Dereje Hinew, "Historical Significances of Odaa with Special Reference to Walaabuu," *Star Journal*, (2012), pp81-90. Available on: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.303.992&rep=rep1&type=pdf>; I. Gemechu, "Odaa Nabee in Oromo Oral Tradition," *Oromo Commentary*, vol. 2, no. (1997), pp14-15. Available on: <https://oromocommentary.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/odaa-nabee-in-oromo-oral-tradition.pdf>



Figure.4.1: Odaa sacred tree, a sacred site also used for secular purposes of assembly



Figure 4.2: Haroo Calanqoo in Jama River gorge, where, Salale elders and folk artists (*shaayi*) believe, artists sojourn for composition, artistic meditation and performance. View from Gidabo Jorgis.

eschatological myth in Oromo tradition.⁴ This Salale local knowledge reminds us of the Durkheimian thesis that “ritual provides an early step in the progress of reflective thought.”⁵ Metaphorically speaking, *ulmaa* represents a meditative sojourn with lots of taboos.⁶

According to my informants, after the ritual hiding, the folk poet re-emerges with the final faithful promise of a proper future to emerge with the new harvest season and of immeasurable abundance. He sings about a *granary* full to the brim, uncovered for days and left for birds until they eat their fill. Thus, after such a creative act of revitalization, self-empowerment, and new insight into creative spirit unhindered by outside interference and control, the folk poet reunites with his people with a repertoire of folksongs. He sings about a proper human future symbolically represented by songs of new harvest, of hope and fear, war and peace, abundance and famine, life and death.⁷ Other Salale folksingers rehearse and repeat the songs in different contexts.

From these African examples of eco-poetic origin of folksongs and comparative folklore, it is safe to argue that people everywhere have similar customs and superstitions, not just about

⁴ Informant, Haile Tufo, a *Wadaaja* ritual leader, Fieldnote #3, pp21-23, Shararo, 2010.

⁵ M. F. C. Bourdillon, “Knowing the World or Hiding It: A Response to Maurice Bloch,” *Man, New Series*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Dec., 1978), pp. 591-599, p591.

⁶ Gemechu Megersa, “The Oromo World View,” in *Journal of Oromo Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, (2005), pp68-79; Lambert Bartels, *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia, an attempt to understand* (Collectanea Instituti Anthropos, D. Reimer, 1983); Karl Eric Knutsson, *Authority and Change: A Study of the Kallu Institution among the Macha Oromo of Ethiopia*. (Ethnologiska Studier, No. 29.), (Gothenburg, Sweden: Etnografiska Museet, 1967). In *Ulmaa*, taboos are observed, and songs are performed. It is the time of blessings, forgiveness, prayers, libations, offerings, and meditation in silence to re-emerge (reborn) clean and peaceful out of confinement with renewed hopes and dreams on the third, fifth, seventh, or ninth day. Cf. Lambert Bartels, *Ibid*.

⁷ Informants, Taddasa Galate, Maabre Goofe, Filednote #7, pp72-75. According to Taddasa Galate of Sule, Daalatti in Yaayya, traditionally songs are composed under Tulluu Qaawa where a spirit of an old lady is heard singing songs nonstop at night at the New Year. She is called *Jaartii Qaawa* or *Jaartii Xoomi*. And people offer sacrifices to learn new songs. Maabre Goofe and Gurmu B. share the view that Odaa Jilaa in Mogor and Holqa/Haroo Calanqoo in Jama are other sites for composing Salale folksongs. At Holqa Calanqo, in Hidhabu Aboote, the deity called Abbaa Toochii is believed to guide the folksinger as a tutor and caretaker, and anyone who seeks the deity’s refuge. Cf. Informants, Gameessa Gojee (age, 90), Gammada Tola (age, 92), Fieldnote #4, p96, Hidhabu Aboote, 2010.

themselves but also about space. Unless we move from the extreme of expecting too much to the extreme of expecting nothing, the non-literate performer is not as ignorant of space as one might imagine. Among the Salale it is a common idea that mountains are looked at with some sense of reverence and awe. In their songs lovers always felt the power of the mountain:

Darroo buuti dhugumaa, ijatu Mulu hin agarree malee Si yaaduunis dhugumaa iyyatu tulluu hin dabarre malee	It's true I went down to Darro, to greet Mulu with my eyes but in vain. It's true I missed you; I called you but my voice was jammed by the mountain. ⁸
--	---

A glance at this love song shows us that, in the first two lines, the singer commemorates Mulu Asanu, the Salale ethnic hero from Darro Daannisa, who fought the Derg (in the 1970s). The next two lines bring to mind the ecopoetic effect of “tulluu,” “mountain,” as the dutiful lover admits on humble remonstrance to his beloved that no spatial distance can bar him from thinking of her as he thinks of his ethnic hero. By the bravery of love at meeting, a light mood prevails despite the interference of the mountain with his communication.

It is worth noting here that the Salale mythic origin is closely connected to the Salale Mountain.⁹ In the Salale social world it is common knowledge that on every hilltop the Salale preserved a ritual site which, following the conquest by Shawa rulers, came to be replaced by Orthodox Christian churches surrounded by cemeteries instead of *Ujuba* (Oromo graveyards) where on each tomb trees are planted symbolically to represent the unbreakable connection between the

⁸ Informant, Gurmu B. Shararo, Fieldnote #2, p91, 2010.

⁹ Gurmu B. told me a story about Salale Mountain that, according to the local history, the area was settled by *waara* Kennee Badhaasa and the hill is referred to as “Salale Nagawo,” Kennee’s descendant, while Saldhe was Bultum Boonaa’s, Gurmu’s ancestor.

living and the dead. One can understand the environmental implication of *Ujuba*, a traditional Oromo graveyard.¹⁰

In Salale folksongs there is a frequent recurrence of phrases such as “yaa karaa Mogorii,” meaning, “oh, the way to Mogor...” which celebrates the profound beauty of the Mogor valley and its deep gorges, which hosted the Salale ethnic heroes during rebellion, and helped the community to endure hard times through reciting songs of rebellion. The poetic spatial analysis of their daily life experience is evidence of Salale’s connection to environment. In this *dhiichisa* sub-genre, a dialogic mode is conveyed by discursive reference to *ulee* (stick) vs. *biirii* (pen):

Kubatiin ya aaree	Cow dung smokes and smokes,
fabrikaa Mokodaa,	the factory smokes in Mogor.
gisee ammaa	These days, (oh, Salale youth)
biirii malee	pick up pen (and pencil),
ulee lafa godhaa!	and carry a fighting-stick no more! ¹¹

In the first two poetic lines of Salale folksongs, one or more references to nature are made to achieve more than mere artistic effect through sound parallelism. The ecopoetic effect of this folksong is two-fold: first, the allusion to “cow dung” and “factory in Mogor;” second, the “stick.” Traditionally, cow dung has been used as a fertilizer, though today it is dried and used as a source of green energy and sold as a means of income generating. In Mogor valley, there are two cement factories, one, government-owned and the other a private property in Darba, and the Salale are aware of the overwhelming environmental impact of the factories. Second, the Salale

¹⁰ Workneh Kalbessa argues that environment has always been the fundamental concern of the rural people. The Oromo attitudes towards the environment and their positive impact on rural development show that they possess accumulated practical knowledge of their environment through experience and productive activity. See Workneh Kalbessa, “Traditional Oromo Attitudes towards the Environment: An Argument for Environmentally Sound Development,” on <http://www.africaportal.org/dspace/articles/traditional-oromo-attitudes-towards-environment-argument-environmentally-sound>. Africa Portal, Retrieved on December 21, 2014.

¹¹ Informant, Caalaa Lataa, Mulo Faallee, Fieldnote #1, p40, song 25. 2010.

young men carry a stick around and praise the stick as their gun, singing “ya shimala too!” meaning, “oh, my stick!”¹²

Similarly, in this *jeekkara* song of the *wadaaja* feast, by force of association of the supernatural with the natural, i.e., a deity with a mountain, the observation about the mountain being shaken



Figure 4.3: Salale horseman with his *shimala*, stick. Dirree Baantuu, Hidhabu/Aboote.

at its seat as the deity descends is clear:

¹² A Salale youth, one who has been imprisoned for charges related to striking someone with a *ulee*, a stick, on the head, resulting in death, or one who heard such tragic news, warns others:

yaa ulee burkutuu	Oh, stick, go decay
an mataa hin rukutuu	I never strike on the head
waan karchalleen	life in prison is harsh
dhiira gootuu,	who has ever seen how austere
hin agarree?	life in prison can be?

Observation, Fieldnote #3, p36, Shararo, 2010; Informant, Tufa Mokonnnon, Fieldnote #1, p60, Mulo, 2009.

Alla Damboo,
yaa guumgumaa koo!
dhufaa jedhee
tulluu warraaqsee.

Alla Damboo,
oh, my god of storm and lighting!
as he descends to redeem us and meet,
giant mountain shakes at its seat.¹³

This genre is *jeekkara/dalaga*,¹⁴ a religious song of a devotee at the *wadaaja* feast. Alla Damboo is the chief deity of the *wadaaja* rites of fertility.¹⁵ As one can see in these eco-poetic examples, in the songs, customs, and traditions, the veil of nature is left hidden in the opacity of the folksongs to be revealed through performance as the human and nonhuman realms intersect each other. As several other examples show, Salale folksongs are not pure love songs, nor pure political songs. They are not mere descriptions of scenery either, or descriptions of the landscape. The singer laments that the mountain wall is a barrier that separated him from his beloved. Thus, not only romance but also eco-poetic adaptation of nature for political significance persists as this *work song* shows:

Qotiyyoo warra qotuu,
ya abaayyee tiyyaa,
gatiittiin dhubbaa qabdii.
Harree warra nagaduu,
ya koorsoo tiyaa
duddi urataa qabdii.
Qotiisa qotti malee.
Qotiyyoon farsoo hin dhunnee
gabaa nagaddi malee
harreen kaakii hin uffannee...

Of those adept farmers,
oh, my dear one,
oxen have marks on their shoulder.
Of those diligent merchants,
oh, my dear,
donkeys have deep back injuries to suffer.
Oxen pulled the plough,
they never shared the millet beer.
Donkeys carried the burden up and down
they never wore khaki either ...¹⁶

This is an example of a work song, a threshing song. Threshing in Salale is a traditional practice of separating grain from the straw by walking pairs of oxen or horses on a flat floor out in the open so that the wind would assist in the process of removing kernels of grain from their stalks. Here the farmer is praising the oxen while walking them on the grain on a threshing floor. The

¹³ Informant, Haile Tuufo, Shararo, Fieldnote #3, p36, 2010.

¹⁴ Enrico Cerulli, Folk Literature of the Oromo...pp136-139.

¹⁵ Informant, Haile Tuufo, Fieldnote #3, p34, Shararo, 2010. The informant is a *Wadaajaa* performer in Salale.

¹⁶ Informant, Tufaa Makonnin, Mulo Faallee, Fieldnote #1, p54, 2009.

song expresses empathy for the animals, both oxen and pack animals, which are used to accomplish the toughest work but alienated from the fruit of their labor, in spite of the injuries inflicted by heavy burdens. My informant, Tufaa, indicated to me that the song is more than a work song. The lines “they never shared the millet beer”/“they never wore khaki either” are indirect references to the fate of local officials who, against the will of their people, worked with the dictatorial regime and were suddenly removed from power without any warning. They were falsely accused, imprisoned and estranged, no longer able to live and work at peace with their people.¹⁷

In sum, in the above ecopoetic examples I have tried to show that there is a close relationship between beliefs about the ‘mythic’ origin of Salale folksongs and the landscape. After the reflective ritual in solitude, back in space, the performance context enables the performer and the audience members to reconstruct the meaning of past events in the present. In Salale tradition tree totems, mountains, rivers, animals and supernatural forces such as deities, gods and ancestral spirits who inhabit the Salale social world influence the worldview as they characterize the resistance poetics. The reproduction of cultural themes through various ecopoetic representations influences the Salale genres and subgenres to intersect and also link the multilayered meanings of the songs to the dialogically constituted resistance poetics within diverse contexts.

¹⁷ My informant, Abbaba Hulluuqaa, also added a song of historical tradition about power inequality and social injustice during Menelik’s conquest of the Oromo by Ras Gobana, a war leader of the Shawan King:

Wareen Ras Goobana,
Kan lolu wattaaddara.

Gobana is praised as the conquer,
but soldiers fight and conquer.



Figure 4.4: Holqa Bole, Bole cave, Wucale, where Salale bandits took refuge, Wucale. Gumbichu seen to the northwest from Holqa Bole.

Major Salale Folksong Genres

In this chapter genre is used as an umbrella concept used to better understand other concepts of Salale Oromo expressive forms and examine folklore and resistance culture in view of the ethnic genre categories. The aim is to determine the functions of folklore materials used beyond the immediate context (of natural or impromptu performance) to address human conditions in the Salale social world. Next, I will identify the Salale indigenous genres and examine their sociocultural values in the context of the contemporary mode of their folkloric (literary) and historical production.¹⁸

¹⁸According to my Salale informants, Gammachu D. and Magarsa D. the Salale major folksong genres are gender-bound. That is, there are songs that are religious or non-religious by their *content, context, and performer* specialty, exclusively sung by women, men or both. The topic of *quuqqaa* or grievance can be addressed in any one of the genres and songs.

Ethnic Genres: Contexts and Themes

Genres, for Salale, are specific functions of a text performed in a particular context that have social value in the culture.¹⁹ Unless one knows the context, it is difficult to delineate Salale folk genres by their form or theme alone. A choral romantic song can convey a serious political message when sung by *dabo*, cooperative work singers, while harvesting. One genre may have implications for other components of meaning. That is, there are often associations between a particular genre and a particular song based on the context or gender of the performer. For example, there is a contrast between the genres of *shinoote*, nuptial songs performed exclusively by girls, and *shobote*, where both boys and girls sing and dance together in the same social context, such as at a wedding, when the mood is romantic. According to my observations and discussions with informants, the Salale create and recreate or renovate the existing genre to convey their feelings, uncertainties, fears and hopes in their social world.

Gender and Genre: “bar-kumee” as female-text

Genre and gender boundaries intersect, and labels for generic categories are often functionally complex. There are genres and songs attributed to women, composed and performed exclusively by Salale women to critique the social injustices they experience under the male-dominated social structure and the oppressive state. In 2007 the New Millennium (*Bar-kumee*, in Oromo language) was celebrated in Ethiopia,²⁰ which was a new phenomenon. And the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, the late Meles Zenawi, declared “A thousand years from now, when Ethiopians gather to welcome the fourth Millennium, they shall say the eve of the third Millennium was the

²⁰ The Ethiopian Orthodox church follows the Coptic calendar and remains seven years and eight months behind the Gregorian calendar. Like the Julian calendar used by the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches which remains 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar used in the West, since the major change in the 6th century, the Ethiopic calendar is quite different, sticking to the old calendar.

beginning of the end of the dark ages in Ethiopia.”²¹ Even though the New Millennium generated huge enthusiasm among some Ethiopians, many still live in abject poverty. As an example, the Salale created ‘new’ songs and renovated the existing genres to represent *Bar-kumee* (the New Millennium). In reaction to the new sociopolitical context and promises made by authorities the Salale women sang:

Yaa Bar-kumee	Oh Bar-kumee
Bar-kumee mataa daaraa,	Bar-kumee with dusty hair,
garaa-duwwaan,	I stroll aimlessly, empty-belly
zangii qabee xaaraa.	with my walking stick, I stagger. ²²

The reality of the life situation represented in the phrases “dusty hair,” “empty belly,” “stagger” can be thus clearly historicized and prompts the researcher to portray the situation as it is. In the song above, the words “dusty hair” / “stroll” / “empty” / represent the wretched life condition of the people and the pessimistic disdain many felt towards the Millennium and the promises of change. In Oromo tradition, scarcity is met with a sad and distressing mood, for those who are poor are considered to be slothful. However, according to the officials, Millennium brought the promise of a period of abundance, joy and hope.

Salale folklore and resistance culture emerges from continuous social and environmental interactions involving interpretation, evaluation, and negotiation through the process of constructing social structures. In the next song, Salale women say that the people used to depend on their livestock for fuel called *koboota*, a dried cow dung, also a source of income. However, the negative social transformation affected the harmonious relationship that existed previously:

²¹ BBC News, Wednesday 12, September 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6990298.stm>. See also my article, “‘Great Man’ or ‘Great Myth’? Meles Zenawi: Historic or Mythic Ideologue?” *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1&2, (July 2013), pp 91-131. Available on: <http://www.oromostudies.org/publications/osa-journal>; <http://www.africabib.org/rec.php?RID=391204998>

²² Informant, Tirashe, Fieldnote #2, p25, Gumbichu, 2010.

Koboonna hin jiruu, <i>qulquwaalii</i> bobeeffannaa! waan Bar-kumeen nu goote masqala baanee himannaa.	[No cow,] no more cow dung, now cactus is our only fuel! what Bar-kumee did to us, we talk after Masqal, and many stories we tell. ²³
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One can observe in the above song that the poverty the people live in and its severe impact not only on the everyday life experience of the people but also on the environment. When there was no food security, they sold their cattle to buy grain for consumption. Since there are no cattle left in the kraal, there is no cow dung, *koboota*, for fuel in the homestead, so they turned to cutting *qulquwal*, cactus tree, a spiky and spiny leafless plant called “*adaamii*” growing in dry regions. The singer chooses to wait until these evil days pass, a passage that is symbolically represented by *birraa*, the Oromo harvest season after Masqala and Irreecha in September.²⁴

In Salale verbal art such as *faarsa* is male-text; “bar-kume” is delineated as female-text. This is counter to the commonly held view that women are not only passive but also inferior to and less capable than men in patriarchal social structure. Thus, “bar-kume” has become a gendered genre as the song is mainly performed by women, constantly reprimanding men for being sluggish and wanton and, metaphorically speaking, critiquing the inactivity of the dominant state, which is, at least in this context, represented by men. The following text is consonant with the view that the Oromo women are not voiceless, despite the fact that we may fail to heed their voices. In the following song,

Yaa Bar-kumee, Bar-kumee mataa kanniisaa! Dhirsi baranaa obboleessaa, cal jedheema na cinaa ciisaa. As galagali jedhan, dhiitichoonuu nama dhiisaa?	Oh Bar-kumee, head veiled by a swarm of bees! Husband has become a brother in vow now, he lies all night frozen; no turn no churn. Who dares to awaken him, if he kicks and kills?
--	---

²³ Informant, Tarashe, Fieldnote #2, p23-26.

²⁴ “Masqal” is the Orthodox Christian festival beginning in the third week of September before “Irreecha;” which is the Oromo thanksgiving festival celebrated on the last Sunday of September as the new harvest season is starting.

jette dubartiin Riqichaa, jedhan. said the women in Riqicha.²⁵

This song is a critique of an indolent husband who passes his days and nights inattentive to his wife (lines 3&4). Struck by hunger and languishing, now men are inactive, docile and impotent and women scornfully comment about weak men who lie all night long with little or no desire for sex. The words “frozen,” “no turn,” “no churn,” “Who dares to awaken him?” (lines 4&5) also indicate that *Bar-kumee*, i.e., New Millennium, is a barren period of time. Despite all the state propaganda which elevated the Millennium as an imagined utopian age of joy, development, peace, and justice, acclaimed generally as the age of “Ethiopian Renaissance,” the expectations were disappointed and demands were unmet. According to my informant, Tarashe, “*bar-kumee*” monologues are satire concocted to be a song of joy for such a time especially created through revolution, revolution for the oppressors not for the oppressed. The monologue is also about troubled love and marriage during such a harsh time. Through the monologue, according to the composer/performer, symbolically, the Oromo women in the locality express their concerns during adverse socioeconomic and political conditions and voice their gloomy outlook on the situation in which they are dominated by the repressive state and patriarchal structures.

Thus, the *end* of one epoch is not signified by its own *closure* so much as it is tragically overshadowed by a ‘new’ *opening* through which alternative paths continue to lead us towards the unpredicted socio-economic and political impasse one can label as the *New Millennium crisis*. Sexuality is another extreme polarization in this gendered genre which goes against the conventional subjective rendering of self to the societal norms while echoing the general harsh reality of the nation. In so doing, the border between the oppressed and the oppressor, male and

²⁵ Informant, Tirashe, Fieldnote #2, p25, Gumbichu, 2010.

female, 'We' and 'Other,' fades and narrows, but only temporarily in the face of great emotional and physiological deprivation. Deviation being a novelty, it is an irresistible rule of the day. I will return to Tarashe and her texts in more detail in Chapter 5.

The Poetics of Geerarsa and Faarsa

The contemporary Salale poetics is the result of what the people have experienced in the process of a struggle for survival. *Geerarsa*, *faarsaa*, *foollee*, and *dhiichisa*, among others, reflect the learned behaviors, aspirations, attitudes, and social injustices; they call upon *qeerroo*, the young generation, to join the unflinching resistance with new insight into national spirit. As Addisu Tolesa asks, "After all, Oromia has been placed on the map and Afaan Oromo, the Oromo language, is allowed to develop,...But are Oromo resources benefiting the natives, or are they being illegally taken away...? Are the Oromo as a nation being singled out, unjustly treated, suppressed, and summarily forced out of their jobs, jailed, or killed because of their different political views from those of the ruling party?"²⁶ The folksongs and narratives I consider for analysis in this study express certain elements of the sociopolitical and cultural life of the people under a disempowering situation. Often the verbal art tell about a world of ancestral heroes and bandits who the people hope will, in some way, come to their aid. Among the major Salale folksong genres in the remaining section I analyze the social and sociopolitical communicative purposes of a few genres as examples of Salale resistance poetics.

²⁶ Addisu stresses the role of culture, citing Allen Buchanan, that "culture provides an appropriate structure for individuals to connect what otherwise would be fragmented in a coherent, mutually supporting way, offering ideals of wholeness and continuity not only across the stages of human life but over generations as well." In the case of the Oromo, Addisu adds, "it has been weakened by the onslaught of Abyssinian occupation." "Oromo Literature: Geerarsa and the Liberation Struggle," *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Volume I, Number 2, Winter (1994), pp59-65, see pp50 and 60. Cf. Allen Buchannan, *Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), p 51.

Based on the social context, as their tacit knowledge of the new genre becomes explicit, it seems that by using the new genre the women become active functioning members of the society, rather than just victims of oppression. Getie Galaye ventured into the folksongs and local history of East Gojjam peasants about land rights. Drawing on Donald Levine who wrote in 1965 during the monarchic rule, “the genius of Ethiopian peasants is visible in the stories, songs, verses, proverbs, etc. that make up their rich oral literature. Within the oral tradition, a good deal of original expression and personalized commentary are found, especially in verse.”²⁷ Getie Galaye analyzes those verses, “differing in subject, occasion, and context,” by focusing on East Gojjam (Ethiopia) peasants’ local ideology about land in his “peasant poetics.”²⁸

Genres express identity based on gender, class, age, status, ethnicity, and religion and they also shape intentions in a social context, and motives, expectations, attention, perception, and affect through time. A particular genre can convey in the local context current ideas, knowledge, institutions, and historical traditions. As contexts are multidimensional, genre functions at various interrelated levels in those local contexts. The local and broader levels of Oromo folk songs can be at odds and cause difficulties when one attempts to identify the types and purposes of the genres. When tradition faces complex pressures, communities do not readily submit but often institute strategic traditionalism to challenge the dominant culture by means of creative resistance as an emancipatory act. According to Salale informants, one such strategy is committing to *social banditry*. My informant Gurm B. pointed out that when the state authority or a state agent abuses the traditional authority, an irresolvable conflict flares and the *faarsa* commemorative songs in memory of ancestral heroes are performed through different genres

²⁷ Getie Galaye, “*Peasant Poetics and State Discourse in Ethiopia*,” in *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1-2 (New Series) 1999, pp.171-206, p171. Cf. Donald Levine, *Wax and Gold*, 1965:269.

²⁸ Getie Galaye, *Ibid*.

including work songs, nuptial songs, pastoral songs, lullabies, funerals, and *geerarsa*. The song below is a typical example of the case represented by *faarsa*:

Muluun Shaggari gala	Mulu is coming home from Shaggar
dirribii kutaa gadi dhiiseetoo,	clad in a cotton shawl,
garaan nan bada jedha	his gut is quivering to run away
shiririi duraa itti dhiiseetoo.	leaving behind the good old day. ²⁹

Mulu Asanu was an MP (Member of Parliament) from Salale until Haile Selassie was removed from power in 1974. Following the end of the monarchic rule, there were rural upheavals led by “local gentry, traditional forces, landlords, middle level officials, judges, local governors or members of parliament,”³⁰ though not always ideologically driven. Similar to the historical tradition in Salale, the people were commemorating the three Tullu brothers executed in 1970 under the monarchic rule when Mulu Asanu from Darro Daannisa set out to symbolize the traditional heroic character. The aim of *faarsa* is to initiate social banditry “which embodies a rather primitive form of organized social protest of peasants against oppression” led by social bandits, whom the state considers as outlaws or criminals but who are seen as heroes by the peasant.³¹ The above *faarsa* chronicles the heroic deeds of the ancestral warriors who operated within the moral bonds of the community.

²⁹ Fieldnote #5, p71

³⁰ Temesgen Gebeyehu, “Rural unrest and resistance in Ethiopia: The experience of Wello and Shewa provinces. A comparative analysis,” in *Global Advanced Research Journal of Social Science* Vol. 1(1) pp. 001-008, June, 2012, p2. Mulu Asanu Goshu’s ancestry (Goshu Gissilla Geto Gicho) is already established for its heroism in Salale ethnohistory (Fieldnote #5, p115):

Darroo Geto Gicho	Darroo of Geto Gicho
Baantu Ture Duume	Baantu of Ture Duume
Hidhabu Jaanka Nagi	Hidhabu of Jaanka Nagi
Awwaare Daadhii Rooba	Awwaare of Daadhii Rooba
Machaaraa Guyyaa Tolaa	Machaaraa of Guyyaa Tolaa
Jaarso Gichu Dafarsha	Jaarso of Gichu Dafarsha
beenaa Darrootti gallaa ...	let’s seek refuge to Darroo...

³¹ Anton Blok, “The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Sep., 1972), pp. 494-503, see p494.

In the context of the everyday life experience of the Salale, each narrative and folksong genre has a practical function. Cooperative works, generally called *dabo*, call for *sirba dabo* or work songs; family welfare or revocation of a curse or ancestral worship require visitation to the *warra affura* mediumship, or deity divination; child bearing entails *hammuu*, a naming ceremony at one's clan deity shrine; weddings involve *eebba* (blessings), *rakoo* (nuptial rite), and *hooda* (taboos); as *du'a* (death) is followed by *awwaala* (funeral) and other death lore and taboos. And, above all, deep-rooted grievances and violence result in an insurmountable resistance and matching expressive cultures. Those events transform everyday spaces into places of high social significance attended by a relatively large number of people.

Culture contributes to the lives of the individual and the community a sense of belonging and offers ideals of “wholeness and continuity not only across the stages of human life but over generations as well,”³² to reinforce the ideals of *nagaa* (peace) as aspirations of self-defense and solidarity within the society and with its neighbors.

The Geerarsa Genre

In Salale folklore, *geerarsa* is an overarching folksong genre which includes historical songs, praise songs, commemorative/heroic songs, hunting songs, and caravan songs, and songs of *quuqqaa*, grievance.³³ It is sung as a solo in a high-pitched stylized manner, interspersed with contributions from a group of cheerleaders, supporters who sing a sub-genre called *cooka* to help the performer to pause and sing once again or to conclude the song with a declamation. Among its traditional functions, *geerarsa* chronicles war events (before, during and after the war).

³² Addisu Tolesa, “Oromo Literature, Geerarsa, and the Liberation Struggle,” in *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1994), pp59-65, see p59.

³³ Informant, Mikaa'elu Waaqjira (male, age, 76), Fieldnote #5, p116. Gidaabo Jama, Hidhabu Aboote, April, 2010.

Traditionally, *geerarsa* was used “to send a message to fight at an appointed place,” “to insult the enemy before the battle,” and to raise “the singer’s morale to face the challenge.”³⁴ In his collection of the *Folk Literature of the Oromo*, Cerulli presents the first three groups of war poetry³⁵ generally considered *historical songs*, and he writes, “Here are a few songs of the kind which the Oromo call *geerarsa*.”³⁶ Examples in the collections show that what Cerulli categorized as “historical songs” are songs about the events of war sung by *asmaarii* (minstrels/bard) recited by Loransiyos and do not really fit into the genre *geerarsa*.³⁷ *Faarsa*, according to Cerulli, applies to “long poems with short verses, in which are celebrated the most famous warriors, particularly by recalling their ancestors.”³⁸ In this study, I use *faarsa* to mean *commemorative songs* performed out of memory to revitalize the tradition of heroism and to celebrate Salale ethnic heroes. Those commemorative songs presented in almost every genre have no single labeling or naming in Salale folk genres; hence I adopt Cerulli’s *faarsa*.

Ruth Finnegan argues that *geerarsa* is a warrior’s boasting poetry “often in the form of a challenge, sometimes hurled between two armies.”³⁹ This “boasting poetry” is referred to as “horfa” in Cerulli’s collections and “danfa” among the Salale.⁴⁰ Other genres and sub-genres can

³⁴ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970), p205.

³⁵ Enrico Cerulli, pp14-14.

³⁶ Enrico Cerulli, p100.

³⁷ Enrico Cerulli, p98.

³⁸ Enrico Cerulli, p58.

³⁹ Citing Chadwicks iii, (1940: 548–49), Finnegan notes that “the use of war poetry in the actual face of the enemy is best documented for certain peoples of North-West Africa,” Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature...*, *ibid*.

⁴⁰ Cerulli, p103. Cerulli calls this “warrior’s boasting poetry” a “war cry” which “usually precedes the boasting songs compared to the Amharic *zarraf*,” i.e., *fukkara*. Cerulli’s example of “horfa” (Salale’s “danfa”) is a typical one:

Saala, butaan dakuutti saala
 cirriinquun dubraa saala
 saala lama baatanii,
 lamma baachifatanii
 dhiirarraa dheessuun saala

The edge of sword on the apron is shameful
 the spit on a girl is shameful
 after bringing two edges (of a spear)
 after ordering two edges (of a spear)
 flight from enemy is shameful.

vary by name, content, and context from place to place; however, traditionally *geerarsa* is performed on a grand occasion among the Oromo to articulate serious subject matter, individual or collective, with the same generic name, *geerarsa*, but with possible variations in rhythm. Addisu Tolesa maintains that “*geerarsa* is the treasury of the national literature of the Oromo people”;⁴¹ it documents the heroic, historical and commemorative events, and narrates their lived experiences. My informant, Mikaa’elu, told me that the singer can create, recreate or renovate



Figure 4.5: The folklorist (ethnographer) with informants, Gidaabo Joorgis, Hidhabu/Aboote. Mikaa’elu is second from the right.

⁴¹ Addisu Tolesa, “Oromo Literature, Geerarsa, and the Liberation Struggle,” in *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1994), pp59-65, see p59; Addisu Tolesa, *Geerarsa Folksong As the Oromo National Literature*, (New York, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

the previously existing songs to express one’s lived experience. Mikaa’elu sang the following *geerarsa* to recount his own *quuqqaa* as part of the collective predicaments suffered from displacement:

Geeraraan daadhii dhugaa	A <i>geerara</i> (singer) drinks mead
sirbaan durba dhungataa	a dancer kisses a virgin
geeraree daadhii hin dhugnee	I never sang <i>geerarsa</i> nor drank mead
sirbee durba hin dhunganee	I never danced folkdance nor kissed a virgin
.....
Tuqanii na kaasanii	Forced, impelled, and pressured
biyya na calaasanii.	I was chased from my home to wander. ⁴²

In the above song, my informant, Mikaa’elu, 76, feels resentful that he was evicted from his land and could not tell joyful stories about his youth, because he lived as a wanderer in the past. The above *geerarsa* is also about a successful “*geerara*,” a singer against whom there was no restriction, or a “folk-dancer” who was privileged to kiss a virgin.

Traditionally, *geerarsa* is performed exclusively by men; in Salale, I was told, successful women perform *geerarsa* on their son’s or daughter’s wedding day. However, I didn’t witness any such event during my fieldwork. Thus, *geerarsa* is almost exclusively a gendered genre.⁴³ The following *geerarsa* sub-genres and songs I collected in Kuyyu at a *mana-lixa* homecoming ritual at the bride’s home, three days after the wedding ceremony. The *geerarsa* was performed by Dirriba and included a *danfa* (declamation). The *geerarsa* genre has three parts: Cheerleader’s song (*cooka*); Performance (*Geerarsa*) with the performer’s overture (*Jalqaba*); sometimes, Cheerleaders (*Cooka*) in-between; and, finally, Declamation (*Danfa*). Through singing the emotional catalyst songs, *cooka*, a group sings and stirs the present audience to perform,

⁴² Informant, Mikaa’elu Waaqjira.

⁴³ Informant, Gurmu B. Fieldnote #2, p46, Shararo, 2010. There is a *geerarsa* song about this restriction:

Dubartiin hin geerartu,	A woman never performs <i>geerarsa</i> ,
reettiin areeda hin baaftu.	a she-goat never grows a beard.

particularly men and youths. Next, “ready-made” texts are used as an emotional catalyst to prompt *geerarsa* songs:

Yaa ijoolleewoo,
daaloon arerra gootaa (2x)
maasiin areera qotaa.
Yaa utubaa mananaa (2x)
majan ya dareeraa,
odoo goonni jiruu,
seesaan maa wareeraa.

Oh, countrymen,
horse is life for a valiant warrior
as farm is for an industrious farmer.
Oh, pillar, the pillar of this house,
alas! why a coward,
with hero present,
why a coward trembles!⁴⁴

According to my informant, Dirriba, a reputable *geerarsa* performer himself, to perform a good *geerarsa* song one needs practice and a good memory of events of the past, success or failure, war or famine, in the individual and collective social memory. It also requires knowledge of the contemporary lived experience, the local history, and not only enjoying singing the song as an art but also performing it as an act. As Dirriba did next, the performer warms up, says a few *cooka* and stirs the audience with some refrains to join in a choral call and response:

Galma fardaa
eegee facaase kaa...

Oh, my horse is unsettled
spreading its tail, uneasy

(Audience repeats in chorus)

Gabba-guddaa
Waaq si dammeesse kaa
Waaq si miyeesse kaa

Oh, Gabba-guddaa
God made you a honeycomb
God made you ever sweet

(Audience repeats in chorus)

Kalee' guyya
Maal maa ala teessan ree?
Yo isaa yo, isaa malee!
Xiixi maa xiixuu didda ree?

Yesterday,
why were you sitting out?
Oh, that, oh, that!
buzz about, dissent, why sit quietly?

(Audience repeat in chorus)

⁴⁴ Dirriba, Kuyyu, 2010.



Figure 4.6: Dirriba, performing *geerarsa* song and *danfa*, Kuyyu.

The Performer comes on board (with Introduction, praising a hero, and rebuking the coward):

Takkan goota faarsa yaa lugnaa sin aarsa	* *	Let me praise the hero let me upset the coward.
Warri loonii kooree, kosii duubaa qotaa kosiin midhaan jigsaa dibadhu yaa gootaa dhadhaan martuu jigsaa... Xiixi maaliif xiixuu diddaa, xiixi maa xixxiixuu didda ree xixixxiixuun kanniisa, damma hin dammeessituu reegaafa akkanaa.		Those who have cattle are proud, they farm the fertile backyard, manure makes grain better like butter makes your tuft hair rich in oil, dreadlocked, healthier. ⁴⁵ Buzz, whine, dissent, Why do you sit quietly? the busy buzzing bee makes honey get up, buzz, dissent, make honey this time. ⁴⁶

In the third stanza the metaphor of “buzzing” goes beyond sound parallelism, and it has a message, “Sting like a bee!” It also goes beyond the need to promote a hardworking behavior but

⁴⁵ Informant, Tufaa Makonnen (age, 78), Fieldnote #1, p50, Mulo Faallee, 2010.

⁴⁶ Observation, Fieldnote #6, p18, Kuyyu, Garba Gurraacha, 2010.

to unite, according to the singer, to “move” like a buzzing “honey bee” to collect nectar and make honey, to “sting,” not to sit aimlessly. Metaphorically speaking, in Salale discourse of contemporary lives, “xixxiixuu,” “buzzing” is one resistance strategy to subvert the dominant state discourse, i.e. the empty propaganda and unfulfilled promises about democracy and development, the crisis which human rights agents’ reports show.⁴⁷ Ironically, the May 22, 2010 Ethiopia’s national parliamentary election was embellished with the industrious bumble bee symbol of the ruling party. In Salale poetics, *geerarsa* is a grand genre in which the motif of land, banditry, displacement, and the moments of tragedy when life is interrupted by famine, state violence, and abject poverty recur.⁴⁸ Next, a peasant performer complains *quuqqaa* about the ever increasing scarcity of land:

Gurraachi qaacaa hin fufu garuu, fuulootu jiraaf malee, laftis tamunii taatee, dubbiinis isa durii miti malee!	The black [horse] won’t stretch its chord, but there it has a blinker, land has become a nickel, scant. Rapid changes; alas! It’s odd. ⁴⁹
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This Salale peasant poetics expresses disenchantment (lines 3&4) with unfair land distribution; the peasants are often inspired by the persistent desire to free themselves from exploitation.

Declamation (Danfa/Horfa)

Danfa derives from “danfuu,” i.e. “boiling,” “overflowing” of emotion. It is a sub-genre of *geerarsa* in which the performer or a participant uses an emotional conclusive remark. It is a recitative high speech, a declamatory discourse articulated loudly, recounting his own and other heroes’ heroic deeds. Shaaroo Lammii’s *danfa* is longer and expressive of his lived experience as

⁴⁷ *Human Rights Watch Report*, “Ethiopia: Development without Freedom: How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia.” (New York, NY, 2010). See, <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/ethiopia1010webwcover.pdf>.

An Africa Watch Report, “Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia,” (New York, NY, 1991).

⁴⁸ Addisu Tolessa, *Geerarsa as a National Literature*,... Ibid. 1995.

⁴⁹ Observation, Fieldnote #6, p7, Kuyyu, Garba Gurraacha, 2010.

a living bandit. Shaaroo fought the Derg regime with Mulu Asanu, who was executed in the late 1970s in Kuyyu. Dirriba concluded his *geerarsa* with the following declamation in which he praises himself as “hard but soft like a rainy season reed”:

Soba-laafaa	Hard but soft,
akka quncee roobaa	like a rainy season reed,
dhaqaa-gala miyaawa	bitter-sweet,
akka diddiga dammaa	like honey, bee-spew, that comes and goes
Dirribaa, bakka-oole-tolchu!	Dirriba, one who betters where he is! ⁵⁰

The contemporary *geerarsa* songs represent the historical transformation from the traditionally boasting or praise song to a resistance song with melancholic tone of dissidence about unequal power relationships and social injustices. These themes are common in almost every other genre.

Salale Religious Songs (Jeekkara/Dalaga)

To determine the characteristic features of religious songs, Ruth Finnegan considers three criteria: “Firstly, the content may be religious, as in verse about mythical actions of gods or direct religious instruction or invocation. Secondly, the poetry may be recited by those who are regarded as religious specialists. Thirdly, it may be performed on occasions which are generally agreed to be religious ones.”⁵¹ According to my Salale informant, Haile Tufo, a Wadaaja⁵² performer himself, the three criteria presented here overlap and characterize the folksongs presented here as religious. However, there are songs with religious content that are exclusively deemed love songs performed in romantic social contexts:

Abbaa Tufaa Bargaayi	Oh, Abbaa Tufaa of Barga
qaallicha daabee margaa,	a deity with dreadlocked hair,
afaan ulaatti as bahi,	come out to the gate [my love],

⁵⁰ Observation, Fieldnote #6, p9, Kuyyu, 2010.

⁵¹ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, *ibid.*, pp165-66.

⁵² Enrico Cerulli collected religious texts, particularly on *Wadaaja* & *Ateetee*, in his profound Oromo folklore collection. *Jeekkara/Dalaga* is a collective name for the genre performed on *Wadaaja*, which Haile Tufo performed for me in 2010 in Salale.

waa sitti dhaameen darbaa. I have quick news for you.⁵³

The subject of this song is “Abbaa Tufaa,” “a deity of Bargaa,” in the first two lines. However, in the second two lines the lover is not calling upon the deity but addressing his beloved to sneak out to the gate for “quick news,” though we are not told the “news.” Such songs are used to exchange secret information for resistance purposes when *mogoro*, a bandit, comes to the village at night. The *wadaaja* feast is performed by women mainly to worship Ateetee, the goddess of fecundity, and other deities and goddesses; the ritual leader is usually a man. In the following song, the subject matter and context are religious. According to tradition, Nabi is the chief god of *wadaaja* who resides at the lofty abode close to the sun:

Warra qaalluu nuun jedha qeesiini,	The clergy call us deity worshipers,
nurraa hidhi teepha keetiini.	tie them tight with that cord of yours.
Yaa Nabi yaa naggasaa	Oh, Nabi, oh chief deity,
biiftuu jala mannisaa	whose abode is under the sun. ⁵⁴

The above song is a typical example of the hostile interaction between the traditional belief system and the Orthodox Christianity where the *wadaaja* performer and the devotees complain (line 1) to Nabi that the clergy call them “deity worshipers,” i.e., “pagans,” and they pray to Nabi to tie up the clergy. The Salale engage in both types of religious practice, i.e., their ancestral traditional belief systems and Orthodox Christianity.⁵⁵ A close analysis of the existing Salale historical tradition shows that there has been mutual enculturation between the two religious practices. However, the competition between the traditional religion and Orthodox Christianity has been tense. According to my Salale informant, Gaddise Baqqala, of Ejeru near Saldhe, after the annual religious procession of the Kidane-Mehret church in Saldhe, in February, there is a traditional ritual ceremony to pray for rain at the sacred site, Abdaarii, west of the church. She

⁵³ Informant, Gurmu B., Fieldnote #2, p86. Shararo, 2010.

⁵⁴ Informant, Haile Tufo, Wadaaja performer, Fieldnote #2, pp44-45, Shararo/Wucaale, 2010.

⁵⁵ Informant, Haile Tufo.

added that women ritual leaders sing the following rain song, “goodaa rooba,” and young men sing *foollee*. According to Gaaddise, after the women ritual leaders performed the following recurrent motif of rain and young men sang and danced to *foollee*, the rain fell the same night:⁵⁶

Ya Kidaana Mehrati
goodaadha irreessi
sitti boo’a hiyyeessi!

Oh, Kidana Mehrati
the *irreessa* rite is ready
your devotees call upon you!

To ignore these conceptual relations and negotiation of religious cohabitation between the competing values is to impoverish the analytical potential of the spatial concept in folkloristics. That is, to understand the dichotomous tension between tradition and modernity, and their coexistence strategies, one must consider the ultimate question of resistance poetics about power, authority, and identity in space. Those examples of genre, songs/texts, and contexts presented in this section are particularly relevant in the analysis of how the state and modernity reshape tradition, societies, and their space in the contemporary era.

Ethnography of Salale Funeral Song (Boochisa)

Death occasions involve various folklore genres and ritual practices; beliefs about death ease relations between the spheres of the living and the dead. In Salale, traditionally, it is a social responsibility and common concern of close kin and the villagers to nurse a hopelessly ill person.⁵⁷ That is, people from near and far come to see and comfort the dying person and to perform rituals and pray for her/him. There is a belief that disregard of the dying person can cause haunting and rough times of fearful dreams caused by *ekeraa*, the spirit of the deceased, terrifying to the living relatives. Hence, tradition requires visiting and feeding the dying person to avoid misery and hunger afflicting the survivors. It is believed that it is in vain to cry for the

⁵⁶ Informant, Gaaddise Baqqala Tola, Fieldnote #2, pp39-45, seep44, Ejeru, 2010.

⁵⁷ Informant (Performer) Giza Lamma Tolcha of Gooro Warxu, Filednote #3, pp107-113, Shararo, 2010.

deceased without nursing the ill person while he/she is alive. If the hopelessly ill person is a member of a close family, visiting the *warra afuuraa*, mediumship, for *tuftoo*, i.e., revocation of curse, if any, is part of the death lore.⁵⁸

These folk beliefs about illness, death, and funeral practices have been restructured beyond recognition under the influence of the dominant culture. Consequently, their function, performance, and meaning have fallen into oblivion and are understudied, even though they affect the behavior of members of the community. The poetics of the Salale death role reveals that in Salale cultural space the funeral genre has been a part of the tradition as a living practice since earlier times in spite of influences by the dominant Orthodox Christian culture.

In discussing the poetics of the funeral genre, the following questions are compelling: Is the function of the funeral ceremony ritual, social, or both? Under what circumstances does the genre of funeral intersect with ritual practice? Is the practice merely to restore and balance harmonious relations between the living and the dead or an expression of personal grief? If it is an expression of personal grief, what is the meaning of a state funeral to distant mourners? Next, I will examine these questions of funeral texts.

The ethnographic data of Salale funeral poetics presented here were obtained from four different sources: first, Giza performed at Saldhe at the funeral of a woman called Assaggadu; second, four different people performed alternately at Tullu-Guddo, Dubar, where the deceased, Nuguse,

⁵⁸ Observation, *Field Journal*, p103, Gurura, 2010. There are three reasons why devotees come to the *warra afuura: tuftoo* (revocation), *afuura* (spirit mediumship, i.e. seeking connection with the spirit of the dead), and *waaqa-dubbisa*, to resolve a magic spell or to seek a solution for challenges in life (health, failing fertility, etc.). Cf. Madis Arukask, "Communicating across the Border: What Burial Laments can Tell Us about Old Beliefs," in *Estonian Journal of Archaeology*, (2011), vol. 15, no. 2, 130-150, p131.

who fell from his mule and died after unsuccessful medical care, was commemorated; third, at Xummano, where an old man, Wadaajo Hurriso, passed away of natural causes, and there was one performer; and finally, data obtained through my research assistant when Meles Zenawi, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, passed away in 2012.⁵⁹ On this last occasion, the Salale local officials and elders were ordered to attend the state funeral, and lamenters performed at the Grand Palace. Emphasis is on death's static and symbolic aspect, as a state funeral, contrary to the other three cases where the commemoration and its meaning is rooted within the cultural habitus, rather than focusing on the person who had died. Each recording of the funeral lasted from thirty minutes to two hours. Traditionally, every single funeral case springs from the established death lore and genre. The lamenting sessions I recorded are good examples to theorize that the lamenter performs from his experience by fitting the existing polyphonic texts to a particular case by combining traditional themes with the history of the deceased, kinsfolk called by name, and concerns of the individual mourners who are present or absent.

⁵⁹ Giza, Filednote #3, pp107-113, Saldhe, 2010;

beenu egaa, yaa Asaggaduu
hazanii bal'oo...

Oh, Assaggaduu
farewell...

Seyum Badhane of Sone, at Xummano, Fieldnote #3, pp114-122, 2010;

Wadaajo ya Abbaa Tashoomaa
Abbaa Mangistuu,
egaa dhakaa boraafate
dur minishirii boraafata ...jedhanii

Oh, Wadaajo, father of Tashoma
father of Mangistuu,
now your pillow is a rock;
a rifle used to be your pillow, ...they say

Nuguse Takle's funeral at Dubar, Fieldnote #4, pp7-41, see p8, 2010.

...mirga moo bitaatti kufte
yaa Nugusee
mootorri kee maal haa taatuu?

...you fell to the right or to the left
oh, dear Nuguse
and what about your grain mills?

Meles Zenawi's funeral, Finfinne, Salale mourner-performer, at Grand Palace, 2012

Mallee abbaa hiyyeechaa
Mallee abbaa misoomaa
Mallee abbaa bicaaqaa...

Oh, Meles, benefactor of the poor
oh, Meles, master of development
oh, Meles, provider in abundance

“Funeral” as Genre and Ritual

As I observed some funeral ceremonies in Salale and interviewed “professional” lamenters (e.g. Giza), I found that, unlike the Amhara mourning culture, in Salale lamenters are men, not women. Hence, *boochisa* is another genre restricted by gender. The widely accepted function of funeral song is its therapeutic effect of consoling the grief-stricken family. In February 2010, I attended a funeral ceremony of a deceased woman in Saldhe where Giza performed on horseback. The text of the funeral song is characterized by a number of repetitions. Usually the first line states the topic –a mission statement—followed by the name of the deceased person the song is about:

Koodee tiyya koodee tiyya dhufne egaa, Si qabnaatii maa nu gatta egaa? * * *	Oh, my dear, oh, my dear, here we come, why did you abandon us too early? ⁶⁰
Yaa Assaggadu! siin xaballi si hin maarre hakiimiin si hin maarre ...jedhani	Oh, Assaggadu! alas! Hot spring couldn't save you, a doctor couldn't save you ...they say. ⁶¹

In the remaining parts, alternately, the lamenter role-plays the deceased calling her other deceased close relatives by name and paying homage to each one of them as she heads to them. Hearing those heartbreaking songs, mourners shed tears passionately by repeating the deceased's name. Women join in circles and mourn while the performer(s) mourn seated on horseback. In Oromo tradition, it is said, *boo'icha isa jiruuf dhaqan*, meaning, “to attend mourning is to attend the living.” That is, mourning for the deceased is believed to be one way of maintaining a strong social cohesion with the living; it also serves to appease the spirit of the deceased.

⁶⁰ Observation, Giza performing, Fieldnote #3, mp83, Saldhe, 2010.

⁶¹ Observation, Giza performing, Fieldnote #3, mp85, Saldhe, 2010.

Among the Salale, all burials are accompanied by funeral songs and deaths are celebrated with memorial ceremonies. Thus, the Salale funeral song is a gendered genre performed by paid “professional” men who are seated on horseback and perform, accompanied by women wailing, sobbing, and weeping. Men lament by recounting memories of the deceased person’s generosity, achievements, industriousness, and role in maintaining unity among the community. Among the Amhara, in Ethiopia, lamenters are women and generally called *musho awraj*, meaning *dirge singers*, i.e. *boochiftuu*, in Oromo. As Finnegan observes, in most African traditions, laments are sung by women “led by one soloist, and often accompanied by dancing or drumming.”⁶²

Sociopolitical Role of Funeral Songs

According to the available data from Ethiopia, my research assistant, who remains anonymous for his safety, confirmed to me that the Salale horsemen went to the Grand Palace on August 31, 2012 all the way from Sululta, 20 miles northwest of the capital, Finfinnee, as ordered by the local officials to mourn for Meles Zenawi, the dictator who ruled the country for 21 years with an iron fist.⁶³ The Salale horsemen decorated themselves and their horses in heroic insignia, and then came to the Grand Palace play-acting with spears and shields, glorifying the deeds and ventures of the deceased. They praised Meles by outlining his activities, traced past events, and mourners joined in singing and mourning to honor the deceased at the state funeral. Although mourning rites and customs vary from culture to culture and religion to religion, the overriding theme is universal, that is, to show honor and respect to the deceased. Among the Salale Oromo, professional lamenters are paid to perform funeral songs to eulogize and commemorate the

See Philipp Paulitschke, *Ethnography of Northeastern Africa*, 2 vols., Berlin (1893-96); See the text of (post-)war ritual below in Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1950), pp43-44.

⁶³ I was one of the prisoners of conscience until I was awarded the IIE/SRF 2009/2010 Scholars Fellowship and relocated to the United States in 2010. See Amnesty International Report, 2009, A Letter of Petition on behalf of the Oromo prisoners in Nov 2009. Available on: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4a1fadedc.html>. Retrieved, May, 2015.

deceased. However, in this particular example, we can see that funeral songs are manipulated for the purpose of political propaganda. According to the available data, the songs epitomize the context and the genre used by authorities for their hidden agenda, namely, for mythmaking purposes out of the state funeral, to establish Meles Zenawi's legacy in Ethiopia and idolize him as a "great man," to ensure unity and stability, and a peaceful political transition.⁶⁴

State Funeral: Grand Palace

On August 31, 2012, the Salale horsemen came to the Grand Palace to mourn the death of Meles Zenawi. Horsemen decorated in heroic traditional costumes, carrying spears and shields, pronounced the heroic deeds and adventures of the deceased, praised him outlining his activities, acclaimed him as a great man before his relatives, who were dressed in black and sat on stage.

Mourner I. A horseman came by and saluted:

-Mallee
leenca Itiiphiyaa dhaa.
Amma eeche dhaqaxa egaa?
Mallee,
abbaa hiyyeessaa
abbaa hirreessaa
gooftaa bara dheeraa

-Malle
Ethiopia's all-time lion.
Where are you heading?
Malle,
our benefactor
our leader,
our everlasting master, great man

-Mallee
abbaa hiyyeessaa

-Malle
our benefactor⁶⁵

For whatever reason, "authentic" or "spurious," the mourner is romanticizing the long-time ruler Meles as a "benefactor," "great man," and "Ethiopia's all-time lion." In so doing, he conjures up a mourning atmosphere. His tone of lament is imperative as death is commanding, inflexible, and irreversible. According to the data obtained at the scene, when the Ethiopian Television reporter

⁶⁴ Assefa Tefera Dibaba, "'Great Man' or 'Great Myth': Meles Zenawi, Historic or Mythic Ideologue"? *Journal of Oromo Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1&2, pp91-131.

⁶⁵ Informant, M. D. (Anonymous), September 2012.

stopped the lamenter, the mourning and lamenting had to be stopped. The lamenter's high tone echoing across the Finfinne Sacred Spring (behind the Grand Palace) was silenced, as it were, and not to reign supreme. Local officials are paid to report any rebellion or such misgivings and they were definitely ordered beyond a shadow of doubt to come to the funeral.

The Ethiopian Television reporter asked the lamenter in Amharic to answer a few questions about the mourning in general and how he felt about Meles in particular. The horseman answered resolutely: *Afaan keenyaan yoo tahe hin wayyuu?* meaning, *Would it not be better if we speak in our language, i.e., the Oromo language?* The horseman's question to the reporter is neither simplistic nor innocent. The Salale Oromo have lived near the Amharas and have faced severe repression under the Habasha rule and the Orthodox Christian influence, all kinds of subjugation, both cultural and political aggression, for over a century and a half. Notwithstanding all these facts, the Salale Oromo around Sululta and to the north managed not only to foster their ethnicity and ethnical affiliation, but also to preserve and articulate their language, Afaan Oromoo, both in everyday and in ritual contexts.

Mourner II. In the following mourning song, the lamenter ruminates over the transitory nature of life and mourns the futility of human existence as he outlines the activities Meles purportedly undertook, such as fixing a power supply, and bringing pure water, roads, and employment. In the recurrent line "abbaa hiyyeessaa," meaning, "benefactor of the poor," every mourner ponders over the deceased, as so dear, as idol, guide and direction which is echoed in the lament next:

-Yaa abbaa hiyyeessaa
hiyyeessi kooruu Jamaree ...hooo
baadiyaatti ibsaa galchitee
baadiyaatti karaa baaftee

-Oh, our benefactor
the poor are now proud....ooo
you gave us light to the village
you opened road to the village

daandii makiinaa nuu tolchitee...hooo	you gave us road to drive car on
-yaa Mallasaa! Boombaa bishaani nuu galchitee bar...hooo	-oh, Meles, how generous you were! you gave us pure water you know...ooo
-yaa ijoolee, hojjedhaa biiroo keecha teechai jedha Mallasaanii,...hooo	-and he said, work hard don't be lazy you said....ooo
-yaa ijoollee, hin dagatinaa an isin gateetan deemaa, jedha Mallasaanii	-and he said, don't be reluctant while I'm gone, he said
-yaa Mallasaa, yaa Mallasaa yaa nama fira baayyee qabuu	-oh Meles, one with ample friends is too quick to depart too often ⁶⁶

The lamenter uses hyperbole in order to show how kindness, wit or power fails to save one in the face of death—an irresistible life force. One who had everything to give is helpless, and the very meaning of existence seems to be pointless since to have friends, to do good and have power, does not save one from death.

“Remembering to Forget”

The metaphor of “remembering to forget” as embroidered in the recurrent motif “hin hafini, hin sobini,” a call upon the deceased, “do not be absent, do not lie,” is a straightforward affirmation of “truth,” a disarticulation of *a priori* “truth-claims” and the undoing of anything that the dictator(-ship) is remembered for and lives memorialized ever. And the mourner and his companions repeat,

Hin hafini, hin sobini yaa Mallasi yaada kee nuu mullisi... garuuyyuu....	Don't be absent, don't lie oh, Meles, or send us your rulings... So long ⁶⁷
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⁶⁶ Informant, M. D. (Anonymous), September 2012.

in a call-and-response tone. In that case a metaphorical operation of “remembering to forget” soon comes to a closure by saluting the aggrieved family and relatives. About his wellbeing and care in the wonderland, the horsemen have this to say:

Si hin xuqinii si hin xuqini	Be well be well
nagaatti, egaa nagaatti	you rest in peace
simbirri wacuu Jamartee	it’s dawning on us
nagaatti kaa nagaatti	now be well you rest in peace. ⁶⁸

The ideology of language, the metaphor of mourning, the disorientation of media eventually attracted by the mesmerizing song: *it’s dawning on us!* upon which the peasant lamenters’ (local) ideology hinges. Using mourning as a metaphor, the mourner subtly exercises agency under such a disempowering situation that, come what may, it is dawning with hope in the future! The mourning songs raise issues about truth rather than falsity, presence rather than absence, parochial provinciality rather than individualist cosmopolitanism and, at the same time, an outright dismissal of the rural/urban, oppressed/oppressor, ruler/subordinate simplistic binaries; now all is temporally equal but ideologically divided in the city conquered by death. Mourning the dictator(-ship) exemplifies the mythologizing of ideology to the extent that the social boundaries become increasingly fuzzy. The relation between mourning and metaphor is obvious on another plane. That is, the horsemen are descendants of the ancestors evicted in the 1870s when Emperor Minilek moved his court from Entoto to the present site in 1878. The Oromo name of the capital, Finfinne, meaning “hot spring” (holy fountain) was a ritual site for the Oromo of Ekka, Galan, and Gullalle, until the three clans were expelled from their home. The horses crashed the metaphoric extravagant inwardness imagined as being a heterotopia, other space. Finfinne represents the notion of a particular place, a mythscape—a mythical history of

⁶⁷ Informant, M. D. (Anonymous), September 2012.

⁶⁸ Informant, M. D. (Anonymous), September 2012.

place—which metaphorically represents a certain property of belongingness, another comeback, and embodying paradox, for metaphor itself is a route of displacement.

By this theory of minimal rites (*haluu*) of separation, transition, and incorporation, here, the deceased person's social position is being transformed from this world and into the realm of the dead and the grieving family's status is also transformed and undergoing significant change through lamenting and grieving, singing and sighing.⁶⁹ Thus, the audience plays a significant role in funeral genre because it has a strong connection not only with the deceased but also with the cultural space in which both the funeral genre and the song texts are reproduced. In the Oromo worldview, death is not the end of existence, since the dead and the living are only in separate transcendent and transient realms. By liminal rites, the deceased is temporarily separated but contacted ritually at the *warra afuura*, through mediumships, and ancestor worship.

Based on the above example we can conclude that the metanarrative themes of Meles Zenawi's legacy are constituted around the notion of a "great man" drawing on the official stories during the state funeral. The aim of ordering Salale local officials to attend the state funeral and lamenters to perform on the event is to orchestrate the idea that the nation is mourning the death of the "great man." By the metaphoric "state funeral" stance the mythic "great man" trope is the main meta-story (metanarrative) which constitutes an overarching national discourse. The Salale funeral songs and other stories are part of that meta-story, i.e. the "great man" narrative.

⁶⁹ Lauri Honko, "Theories concerning the ritual process," in *Science of Religion: Studies in Methodology*. Ed. L. Honko. (The Hague, Paris: Mouton Publishers, 1979), 369-390.

The “Faarsa” Songs: “Social Function” Approach

In this section my analysis of Salale folksongs centers on the subject of *quuqqaa* or disenchantment in Salale resistance poetics, particularly in the *faarsa* commemorative songs. Similar to the *corrido* tradition of Mexico's Costa Chica or the Texan-Mexican border genre,⁷⁰ violence is the underlying theme of Salale *resistance poetics*. *Quuqqaa* is a performance of political strategy or moral response to the problem of unequal power relationships and social inequalities using almost every genre of Salale folksong, particularly, *faarsa*, i.e., commemorative songs of *mogoro*, bandits. In Salale verbal art, *quuqqaa* has a sociopolitical theme about a single incident but it critiques the status quo by retelling a story of some past incident. Though its anecdotal reference is to past events, through historical allusions the focus of *quuqqaa* is on the present. In every context, whether accompanied with folkdance or not, the purpose of Salale folksong genre can be to address *quuqqaa*, a contemporary social problem, and to alert the people about an urgent topical issue.

Among other Salale folksongs, the *faarsa* commemorative songs are the vehicles of social memory, a repertoire of individual and collective lived experience of the resistance poetics. Reflections on the course of the events I observed and the interviews show that the lived experience of the people is parallel with the historical traditions; one can observe the fusion of personal memories, historical narratives, and artistic urges rooted in their resistance poetics. The actions of the heroes in *faarsaa*, the memories of the deceased in *boochisa* funeral songs, and the

⁷⁰ John H. McDowell. *Poetry and Violence: The Ballad Tradition of Mexico's Costa Chica*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958/1970).

desires and challenges in the romantic songs, and the personal narratives and anecdotes have symbolic values evoking historical traditions and personal memories.

For the purpose of this study an extensive sampling of data was obtained through in-depth interview, observations, and direct participations. During my fieldwork in Salale, I recorded folksongs, personal narratives, and oral histories on nearly eighty tapes; I transcribed a few of them in seven notebooks and one field journal for the present project. Most of the *faarsa* commemorative songs in praise of the Salale ethnic heroes, past and present, the *jeekkara* religious songs, and the romantic songs were recitations by my informants, outside natural contexts; whereas the funeral songs, the *geerarsa*, the work songs, and ritual incantations were recorded live in their social contexts. The personal experience narratives are real-life stories based on the historical tradition of the people. For this study I consider those folksongs and narratives I transcribed and analyze how human experiences are analogously worked into resistance poetics through the common genres (and sub-genres) to express certain elements of the life situation of the people.

In the artificial contexts my informants followed a free conversation style to allow a free flow of memories during their recitations. As they sometimes drifted into discussing the broad social world outside the context of the interview, it rendered the methodological concerns became weighty. That is, it was not because my informants did not care about what had happened before or what happened afterwards but because some remote past events have vanished out of individual and collective memories. Thus, it is easy to remember and recite (or perform) some haunting memories of prolonged violence, war, or famine, banditry, displacement, and

executions; setting those events in place and referring to personal and place names as remote past is not specifically possible in Salale resistance poetics.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, which began in Mulo Faalle in 2009, it took me about three months to establish a good rapport. As the national election was planned for May 2010, the local officials were more apprehensive about oppositional parties and suspicious of a stranger. To ease the tension, I started attending events with the people rather than focusing on merely collecting data. Through meeting with people and learning the complexity of their interpersonal relationships, gradually, I both collected the necessary data and built a good relationship with the people; there were still some challenges, however. The issue of *quuqqaa* or grievance was not public, though it was a subject of every genre. For example, in 2010, in Yaayya Gullalle, I requested four young men who were drinking local beer at Bar-kumee Hotel, where I leased a room in Fittaaal town, to sing some folksongs for me to record. I thought they would also provide their own literary critique (comments) about the songs, which are likely to reflect their contemporary lived experience. One young man was furious and prompted, to his companions:

Keessaa dhugii ka'i! Waan quuqqaa waa itti dabaltee, ilaa, lafa kanattin si rirriita, ilma haadha raawu!

*Empty your cup (of local beer) and move! You sing a song of some grievance or resistance, you Motherf***er,⁷¹ I'll walk on you on the floor.⁷²*

⁷¹ “*Jibbitu:*” the Salale Story of “Motherf***er”

Here is the Salale version of Oedipus myth.

My informant, Magarsa D., said that *Jibbitu* is the name of a young Salale woman who fled from her old husband, an armed Amhara settler (*naftanya*) landowner. According to Magarsa the tradition holds that he married by force the daughter of his tenant and she bore him a baby boy despite the mismatch. Hence, *Jibbitu*, an uncommon feminine name, literally means, ‘rebel,’ ‘hater,’ or ‘loather.’

Jibbitu escaped and moved to Ada'a, near Bushoftu, 20 miles east of Finfinne, the capital, and lived for years by herself brewing and selling *farsoo*, i.e., local beer. Historically, when the Salale were displaced by their Shewan Amhara landowners, they (internally) migrated to Bale, Arsi, Jimma, and Hararghe etc. Others worked as daily laborers in the nearby districts while those who remained back home lived as tenants under harsh servitude on their land.

The central theme of the four young Salale men's narrative is not a mere acquiescence to the status quo, since, historically, the Mogor valley is only a stone's throw away and is considered the seedbed of social banditry and bandits. Because of the economic and political uncertainties of living in an unpredictable environment, it is hard to trust people, especially, an outsider; the refusal to succumb to my request was to avoid unnecessary risk. The torturing "dirty word" *ilma haadha raawu*, whether or not its origin story is true, poignantly exemplifies some deep-rooted malevolent social order in Salale world.

Drawing on John McDowell's "social function" of the African-Mexican (Afro-mestizo's) corrido ballad texts, I analyze an in-depth sampling of the functions of Salale folksongs, particularly the *faarsa* heroic songs in the remaining part of this chapter. The Salale *faarsa* composers/performers, male and female, express *quuqqaa*, grievance, about land appropriation by the state, displacement, heavy taxes, forced conscriptions to military, unfulfilled promises by the state, unfair and unfree elections, corruptions, and the abject poverty the people live in.

In this section, to explore the living vernacular tradition of ethnic heroes in Salale, I adopt McDowell's three theses built around the social function of Costa-Chica's corrido, namely, the

During one harvest season, Jibbitu's son, whom she left when he was young years back, fled home to search for his mother but in vain. After years passed he came to Ada'a to work as a laborer and frequented Jibbitu's local brothel every night after the heavy work. Eventually he fell in love with her and married her.

The story of the mother of the Salale 'dirty word,' *Ilma haadha raawu*, as a horrid face of subjugation is historically poignant. It is widely used in Salale during *stick-fighting* or *horserace*. It is also common to hear the same bawdy word among the Macca Oromo and in Hararge or elsewhere among the Oromo (and other tribes?) but the narrative of its origin could still vary.

(See also *The Complete Motherfucker: a History of the Mother of All Dirty Words*, by Jim Dawson (Feral House, 2009) is a history of the word in black culture and in American literature, film, comedy and music.)

⁷² *Field Journal*, p44, Fittaaal, Yaayya Gullalle, 2010.

celebratory, regulatory, and the therapeutic functions.⁷³ Before I further elucidate the Salale commemorative songs, *faarsa*, it is imperative to discuss the three approaches which McDowell introduced in his study of the relationship between “poetry” and “violence.” The first is the notion of *celebratory* function. In this view, corrido celebrates heroes and violence, and in so doing, it has a galvanizing role to draw more male bandits stirred by the stories of heroic mortal encounter. Second, by the *regulatory* function the poetry of violence positions violent behavior within the realm of moral universe and helps the people to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate violence. Third, the *therapeutic* perspective is about the healing power of the songs of violence which helps the people to endure hard times.⁷⁴

To apply those functions to the concept of Salale resistance poetics there is no single ethnic genre to represent the notion of *quuqqa*, grievance. In this study, for the sake of convenience, I adopt the label introduced by Enrico Cerulli, who writes *faarsa* “are the poetical expressions of the bonds which unite the members of the tribe. They are the boasting of the tribe as a whole as opposed to the boasting songs of the single warriors which are called “geerarsa.”⁷⁵ In Salale resistance poetics *faarsa* is composed and performed by *qeerro*, youth, particularly male, and serves those *celebratory, regulatory, and therapeutic* “social functions.” First, based on the ethnographic examples, *faarsa* is an established youth sub-culture used to model one’s heroic activities on *gombisa* (horsemanship), *faccee* (stick-fighting), *wallaansoo* (wrestling), and most of all, *banditry*, following the paths of the tragic hero, commonly known as *mogoro*, in Salale resistance poetics. Second, *faarsa* is not a “poetry of violence;” it is rather a strategic traditionalism used to launch resistance against the ongoing structured state violence orchestrated

⁷³ John H. McDowell. *Poetry and Violence*, Ibid., pp122, 171, 174.

⁷⁴ John McDowell, Ibid.

⁷⁵ Enrico Cerulli, *Folk Literature of the Oromo*, 1922, p58.

by police forces, corrupt local officials, media, and foreign investors who are involved in massive land grabs. According to the *faarsa* texts presented in this section, it is a morally justified obligation and a great expectation of every physically sound member of the community, especially male youth, to heroically subvert domination and economic exploitation. Third, *faarsa* is a resistance poetics that consoles the community by relocating the violent events in the historical tradition. By this therapeutic effect, it embodies the violent experience as a body of knowledge and valuable deeds that justifies the people's sense of collective glory, identity, dignity, social justice, and solidarity. It is a bond that unites members of the community under harsh conditions by historicizing the "tragic mortal encounters" of the ethnic heroes into the historical tradition of the ancestral heroes.

Faarsa, according to my informants, is a counter-hegemonic text against the Abyssinian stereotypical discourse. Like the notion of "African thesis"⁷⁶ which John McDowell critiques as a racist view of linking the afroestizo population with a greater potential for violence and influencing the ballad tradition and its artistic community, the Salale *faarsa* and folksongs have been understated by the dominant culture as a weapon of warlike population ready for violence.⁷⁷ *Faarsa* glorifies the deeds of ancestral heroes and perpetuates the *kaawoo*, the cause they died for. Traditionally, *geerarsa* served as an individualized genre of expressing personal experience of success or failure in life (a successful harvest or hunting); conversely, the theme of contemporary *geerarsa* has become displacement, prison, poverty, and breakdown of family as a general motif of Oromo national narrative.⁷⁸ Next, I present examples of *faarsa* texts to

⁷⁶ John McDowell, *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Informant, Abraam, Fieldnote #7, p121, Giraar-Jaarso, 2010.

⁷⁸ Addisu Tolesa, "Geerarsa as Oromo National Literature," *Journal of Oromo Studies*, (1995).

demonstrate their *celebratory, regulatory, and therapeutic* functions of commemorating Salale ethnic heroes past and present.

Sociopolitical Functions of Faarsa Texts

The Salale *faarsa* adds to the local culture the sense of loyalty, honor and integrity by recounting the heroic deeds of the ethnic hero. The composer/performer achieves this artistic effect through various metacommunicative tools, tropes, and repetitions of violent episodes and refrains in public narratives. The aim of this social function is *leellis*, i.e. to commemorate, which serves, like *corrido*, “to exalt the noble qualities of story of the protagonist” through commemorative means of recalling the heroic deeds, unforgettable ventures and tricks of the hero.⁷⁹ The *faarsa* about Hagari Tullu, who was executed in 1970 with his two brothers, and his ventures and tricks has influenced to a great deal the sociopolitical function of Salale resistance poetics to this day:

Baddaa hin magru liitiinii	In the highland, the liitii plant never sprouts
hurufa baddaa hin magru liitiinii.	nor does it grow in the bush.
qawwee HagariTullu	Hagari Tullu’s wife swears
maree hin gurguru jette niitiinii!	not to sell Hagari’s gun in anguish! ⁸⁰

The first two lines are used for sound parallelism (liitiinii/niitiinii), usual in Oromo folksongs. They also cast an adverse atmosphere as a background to the whole story. That is, the plant refused to sprout in the bush since the hero, who dwelled in it like a beast, had been executed. The artistic function of this *faarsa* song is in the second part of the four lines. In the second two lines, the following three functions are revealing. First, supposedly the story is a report of the hero’s wife’s swears not to sell her husband’s gun, a symbolic gesture to celebrate her husband’s legacy, that is, resistance represented by his gun. The performance is celebratory in function as it

⁷⁹ John McDowell, *ibid.*, p122.

⁸⁰ Informant, Gurmu B. Fieldnote #2, p122,

venerates the ethnic hero who gloriously fought against the landlords who removed his people from their home under Haile Selassie’s rule. Second, the social critique embodied in this *faarsa* text is also compelling as it conveys a moral lesson to the living members of the community to inherit heroism and hand it over to the succeeding generation. Finally, as it is tradition, dirge singers stir mourners and families of the deceased by narrating the heroic deeds of the protagonist, as someone pulls his horse unmounted and his gun carried around during the funeral ceremony. Hence, the therapeutic function of the *faarsa* song above is in the determination of the widow, which the composer/performer crafted carefully to “help people transmute their feelings of sadness and anger.”⁸¹ For example, when the three Tullu brothers were hanged at the same place at the same time in Hambiso, Dagam, in 1970, the Salale composed the following *faarsa* wondering if the mother of the three bandits survived the grief:

Yoo gaara bahani, baala koshommii baala koshommii. Jirti, moo, in duute, ballo! haati Hagari, haati korommii!	Up the hill sprouts thorny leaves thorny leaves. Is she alive? Alas! Hagari’s mother, the mother of unflinching heroes! ⁸²
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There are *faarsa* songs with a focus on a single function such as this text, an example of a “social critique,” performed to memorialize Balacho Asanu, Mulu Asanu’s elder brother, also a rebel:

Balaachon daggala ciisaa simbira seetee hin darbatini halagaan boru si dhiisaa kun fira seetee hin abdatini	Balaachoo lives in the bush, do not think it is birds that rattle. A stranger betrays you soon, do not trust a stranger as close kin. ⁸³
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The central theme is a warning against trusting a stranger. It is a “social critique” to maintain the discipline of social banditry, to avoid unnecessary sacrifice, and also to assume responsibility for the safety of members of the community who collaborate with the resister as well as strategically

⁸¹ Ibid., p174.

⁸² Informant, Magarsa D., Fieldnote #5, p56, Fiche, 2010.

⁸³ Informant, Gurmu B., Fieldnote #2, p93, Shararo, 2010.

ally with the state. The two brothers, Balaahoo and Mulu Asanu belonged to the tradition of ancestral heroes who refused to succumb to the Abyssinian domination in their locality in Darro.

The regulatory function of the *faarsa* songs commemorating Taddasa Birru is “nurturing a hidden mission”; namely, radical change such as “land for tillers,” mass education, and national liberation for the Oromo. However, the following dirge-like *faarsa* probes the notion of generational incongruities between father and son, i.e., between Birru Kenne who died fighting Italian forces in Dabra Tabor, Gonder, to maintain the unity of the Abyssinian Empire in the 1880s and his son, General Taddasa, who challenged the legitimacy of the imperial power and rebelled in the early 1970s, and was arrested and executed in 1975.⁸⁴ The *shaayi* (composer/performer) utilizes the historical tradition about ethnic heroes carefully to depict the brutally humiliating worlds of domination the Salale suffered under the successive Amhara rulers and forced recruitment to the military to conquer other ethnic groups:

Ilma kee giddiit’ godhee,
maaluma taate yaa Birru Kennee?
Silaa warra aagiitii,
daama guddaa meeqa rakkannee!
* * *

Your son [Taddasa] had an obligation,
but what about yours, oh, Birru Kennee?
We are, inherently, peace-loving, law-abiding,
but we suffered endless violence after violence!⁸⁵

As it is evident in this *faarsa*, folk genres, folksongs and contexts are utilized artfully to address the not yet complete economic exploitation, displacement, cultural destruction and annihilation

⁸⁴ “Arrest of [Oromo] Insurgent Forces,” US Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1975 March 14, 12:37 (Friday). Retrieved on January, 09, 2015. https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1975ADDIS03052_b.html. General Taddasa Birru gave military training to Nelson Mandela when he sought refuge in Ethiopia in the 1960s to help reorganize the armed wing of the ANC. See Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, (New York, NY: Back Bay Books, 1994, 1995), pp304-305.

⁸⁵ Informant, Shaaroo Lammii, Fieldnote #5, p79, Kuyyu, 2010.

of Salale identity. The singer recounts the unrecognized martyrdom of General Taddasa Birru's father and contrasts the two events: Taddasa's sacrifice in the 1970s as patriotic to liberate the Oromo and Birru Kenne's heroism as misplaced and pitiful. With the tragic themes of executions



4.7: General Taddasa Birru (L) and Colonel Hailu Raggasa (R), handcuffed, 1975.



4.8: Taddsa Birru and Hailu Raggasa, with other Oromo peasant rebels, waiting prosecution branded as criminals.

of Hagari Tullu and his two brothers, and Mulu Asanu, Taddasa Birru, and most recently, Badhaadha Dilgaasa, *faarsa* dusts off the Salale historical tradition and revives the heroic exploits of the ethnic heroes. Most recently, in the early 1990s, Badhaadha Dilgaasa, a young rebel who set the Salale locality free from heavy taxes and any unjustified influence of the central state was murdered by state security agents in 1994. A *faarsa* composer and performer from Gumbichu, Tarashe, recited the following song:

Harangamaan muka maaliiti	What is a thorn plant good for,
muki daraaru firii hin qbane,	if it flowers but bears no fruit nor shoot?
yaa Badhoo kiyyaa?	Oh, Badhoo, what is it good for anyway?
Giseen ammaa kuni maalinni	What time is such a time,
giseen ajjeesan damii hin qabne?	they kill us, no blood price, no dime? ⁸⁶

In this song, the composer's monologue is about the plant that flowers but without fruit (lines 1&2), and the time, i.e., the status quo, when people are killed and remain without justice (lines 4&5). This *faarsa* song, with its tragic theme, transforms the sentiments of the audience. Tarashe is a visually impaired Salale woman who was in her late forties when I recorded her *faarsa* on the living memories of Badho Dilgaasa, Hagari Tullu, and Mulu Asanu. Also, I obtained a lot of in-depth sampling of *faarsa* songs centering on Badhaadha Dilgaasa from Tarashe.

In sum, in describing the poetics and politics of the everyday life of east African communities, "historical tradition is expressed in certain forms and conventional structures, and stylized genres....Particular oral traditions are associated with universally occurring social conflicts and ecological and political crisis of everyday lives...such as hunger, famine, and conflict over water or cattle all of which have caused the dispersals of people...."⁸⁷ The exploration of Salale expressive forms sheds new light on the ways in which texts generate specific modes of thought

⁸⁶ Informant, Tarashe, Fieldnote, #2, p34, Gumbichu, 2010.

⁸⁷ Mustafa Kemal Mirzeler. *Remembering Nayeche*, p169.

(for example, using tropes). Another sociopolitical function of the Salale folk genre is to reconstitute and ensure a morally upright (non-violent), indestructible, and spatially stable Salale.

On the whole, Salale resistance poetics shows the correlations between social and literary history, the rise and fall of the society in particular historical periods. The ethnographic examples presented in this chapter show that the constant concern in Salale historical poetics is social agency and empowerment in a disempowering situation, a new cultural history on the basis of folkloric production. The historical poetics conveyed through the verbal art is an encounter between the new ethno-history and the old dominant historiography and between the indigenous and alien institutions. It is often manifested in the coexistence of the Orthodox Christianity and the traditional religion, and in confrontations by the public and collaboration by the elite. We have seen that individuals at the lowest levels of the social matrix in Salale social world assert various degrees of agency by finding ways to mediate power, and in so doing, they challenge and subvert abusive authority and its oppressive power structure. This reminds us of Kelly Askew's description of power as a "diffuse resource available to everyone everywhere, albeit to differing degrees, and never the exclusive domain of some over others."⁸⁸ Using the "ethnic" concepts of genre, I have presented the major Salale folksong genres considered the main source of *Salale resistance poetics*. To examine how the Salale resistance poetics is entangled with social banditry and bandits is a topic to be analyzed in more detail in the chapters that follow.

⁸⁸ Kelly Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), p12.

SALALE VERBAL ARTISTS

But to make you understand the Salale,
first I must tell you a story.

_____Gurmu B.

INTRODUCTION

In the last two chapters, it was stated that one of the social functions of Salale poetics is to make it possible to endure life during hard times, as seen in Henry Glassie's *Stars of Ballymenone*, or to celebrate, regulate, and console each other while living with losses and traumas as seen in John McDowell's *Poetry and Violence*.¹ Paradoxically, poetics also inspires violence and offers outlets for grievances as it makes peace.² Following McDowell's account of the Costa Chican living ballad community and his distinction between the "traditional ballad" and "ballad tradition,"³ I attempted to show that the Salale "*faarsa* tradition" represents the "vital component of culture," the intimate everyday life of the people unlike the "traditional *faarsa*" or "traditional *geerarsa*," which are less committed to critiquing contemporary everyday life. The Salale verbal art presented so far clearly depict the resistance potential of Oromo folklore and can be considered as a "Kalevala for Africans,"⁴ that is, peasants' subversive imagination against domination. Thus far, from what has been argued, what Africa in general and the Oromo in particular gravely need today is not a new "folk Reich" or a new empire, but a new Kalevala,⁵ a new national poetics that heralds freedom and peace.

¹ McDowell, J. H, *Poetry and Violence: The Ballad Tradition of Mexico's Costa Chica*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Henry Glassie, *The Stars of Ballymenone*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).

² John McDowell, *Ibid.* p14.

³ Paredes, 1983, *Ibid.* p43.

⁴ See M.M. Mulokozi, "Kalevala and Africa," in *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 1(2), (1992), pp71–80.

⁵M. Mulokozi states four propositions regarding the significance of the Kalevala for Africa: a) political-cultural, (b) literary (c) linguistic, and (d) academic. *Politically* speaking, Africans passed through the experience of alien subjugation and sought national identity and nationhood; the *literary* significance refers to the transition from orality

In this chapter, I explore the life history of three Salale verbal “artists,” generally called *shaayi*. From the available data, it seems that the Salale *shaayi* are dutifully charged with the task of cultural transmission and social transformation from “below” as culture-bearers, and they maintain the arts and acts, rituals, beliefs, and resistance culture of the people. The *shaayi* are thoughtful social critics, community historians, ritual leaders, counselors, and mediators between men and women, men/women and gods, and men/women and nature. They exhibit a complex understanding of time as endless journey, though time is frequently halted by unbearable human conditions such as violence, famine, war, and displacement. This back-and-forth journey in time and place as depicted in the poetics of the people’s everyday life in stories, songs, and rituals is a symbolic representation of social regression, digression, transgression, and progress. To center the ethnography of Salale resistance poetics on the people in place, in this chapter, I present three informants whom I consider to be not only “artists” but also pundits or even heretics, i.e., dissenters against hegemonic discourse. To revere these artists and trace their footprints in the sands of time in Salale historical poetics is not only to honor the *shaayi* but also to take the ethnography of resistance poetics beyond mere literary encounter. I took my cues from those *shaayi* to write about Salale as its inhabitants conceive of it; I make an attempt here to pin down the poetics of Salale folklore and resistance culture. These artists are “folklorists,” I posit, who didn’t go to college but who are heroes and heretics, bandits and pundits, and represent those classic poets on whose shoulders most of us stand and whose longings we pursue. They are rooted in place by ecopoetic creative will, like Hesiod at the foot of Mount Helicon as a lowly

to literarity and from rural subsistence culture to urban commercialized culture in both the Finns’ and Africans’ circumstances. To realize the promotion of national language and culture in the decolonization process, and having rejected the colonial language, the Kalevala is of paramount *linguistic* importance both for the Finns and Africans. In addition, *academically* speaking, the Kalevala, meaning, the *people of Karelia*, inspired the renowned Finnish folklore studies and analytical methodologies for the same discipline. See Mulokozi, *Ibid*, pp71-72.

shepherd tending flocks, or like Jan Vansina's Rwandese oral poet who rose to the hilltop to meditate with African Muses.

Using the available data (interviews, songs, and stories), I focus on analyzing what is considered, as the everyday "lived experience" of the ordinary people operating within the Salale social world. They narrate their eye-witness accounts of the human condition as part of their personal narratives of what they have been cognizant of during their own life span. They also narrate or recite as they heard the piece sung, storied or performed in rituals, festivals and ceremonies as carried through oral histories and historical traditions. Among the questions I attempt to answer in this chapter are: Who are the "artists?" What were the important turning points and challenges in their life? What verbal art form are they known for? How did they learn that particular verbal art? Why does the artist do this particular verbal art?

Outline

This chapter has two parts: first, the ethnography of the "life history" approach, which is well suited for inquiry in folklore research⁶ because the participants are collaborative partners, and they engage in exploration, understanding, and discovery of their life history data as they reconstruct their lives through the telling of their stories. Here I theorize that the life history method facilitates the researcher to obtain lifelong data and allows him to explore a variety of experiences and relationships, in order to examine changes over time. The second part of this chapter examines the poetics of cultural representations of the Salale social world by locating each individual *shaayi* within the wider scope of culture and setting of individual memories in a

⁶Barbara Allen, "Personal Experience Narratives: Use and Meaning in Interaction," in Elliott Oring, ed. *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres*, (Logan, Utah: Utah University Press, 1989), p236-243.

larger context of social memory and historical tradition. The genres of life history are used to locate within the tradition the individual and collective memories recapitulated in stories and songs as an ethnographic exchange.

LIFE HISTORY APPROACH: ethnographic method

Oromo folklore scholarship necessitates an appropriate and intellectually stimulating theoretical analysis and new models based on a variety of methods, not just positivistic explanation of mere facts but rather an intellectual and attitudinal framework to pursue a constructivist stance. To this end, folklore produces a different kind of “imagined community” utilizing elements of shared dialect(s) and the vernacular, instead of the neo-Abyssinian linguistic and cultural domination, to produce an ethno-national sublime poetics. To understand the collective resistance against domination and how the people become conscious of their identity through self-reflexive poetic calls to action, we must bring the poetics of memory, tradition, and society down to the grass-roots level through working with individuals and culture groups based in a particular locality—not as a space detached on its own but as a relational and contextual one. Since the end of military rule in 1991 and the beginning of an intensified aura of identity and nationalism in Ethiopia, the interconnections and dialogue between locality and national and/or global processes have constituted a new phase of memorizing and reinterpreting history both at the micro- and macro-levels.

Toward this goal, I use a constructivist stance that builds on the people’s lived experience by making sense of the world they live in. At an individual level, my informants reclaim the place, as Edward Soja puts it, “the life world of being creatively located not only in the making of

history but also in the construction of human geographies, the social production of space.”⁷ The constructivist stance sees human existence as contextual, relational, and ethical. The “construal” act can only be understood in terms of living in a shared world socially negotiated through shared perspectives with others. From the life histories and performances of the Salale *shaayi* presented in this chapter, one can see that culture plays a major role in monitoring social transformation processes as a wave of dynamics internalized in the consciousness of the people, directing their life activities. The oppressed have ways of enduring difficult situations. One way of coping with oppressive structures and challenging hegemony is through creative resistance used as an emancipatory act. The songs, stories, rituals, and festivals performed under a disempowering situation are not simply resistant to change or counter to positive social transformation. They are the voices of the oppressed, symbolic subversions at work from “below” against dictators who cling to power and local officials who represent proxy political parties.

Interviewing Life History

In life history data collection, the interviews and conversations are like journeying back and forth through time and place. Both the ethnographer and the interviewee reconstruct a specific part of the person’s whole life story at a time. Interviewing life history technique can facilitate investigating specific social, cultural and historical issues through the individual life story, thus reconstructing the link between individual lives and wider public events such as victory, prosperity, and liberation or incidents such as war, defeat, famine and natural catastrophe, and

⁷ Edward Soja, “History: Geography: Modernity,” in Simon During, ed. 2nd edition. *The Cultural Studies; a Reader*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), p114. Soja argues that

displacement.⁸ Through interview techniques and narratives of life history, intergenerational patterns of behavior, opinions and attitudes passed down through families can be reconstructed. As a micro-history, these interviews woven around a single life experience of an “outlier” character considered as a “normal exception,” can be useful for studying a single aspect of a person’s life in the context of a more complicated life story. Life history interviews can take different forms: the naturalistic model assumes the social world is “out there” and the stories are told in a given culture about the social world without shaping by research intervention; from a constructivist stance or ethnomethodological approach, the social world is constructed, or is in the making, through life history narratives.⁹ All forms of life history interviews require both the interviewee and the interviewer to cover a broad variety of topics and to evoke strong emotions such as that of Cuqqaalaa Buttaa about losing one’s home and land to an oppressive regime, and what that really means set in place and time. Edward Soja claims, “To be sure, these ‘life-stories’ have a geography too; they have milieux, immediate locales, provocative emplacements which affect thought and action.”¹⁰

To arrange the narrator’s experiences into a meaningful pattern and to relate it to the present and other current life events, to help reconstruct both his/her lived (and imagined) life experiences, it is useful to divide the interview process into successive segments. The life history of the individual may be put into three categories: the *dimension aspect*, i.e. the main forces that affect the person’s life; the *turning phase*, changes that the person makes and that demarcates periods

⁸ Robert Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview.*, (SAGE Publications, Inc, 1998).

⁹ Jane Elliott agrees that “Both the naturalist approach and the constructivist approach are concerned primarily with individuals’ everyday lives and experiences. However, while the naturalist view is that the social world is in some sense ‘out there,’ an external reality available to be observed and described by the researcher, the constructivist view is that the social world is constantly ‘in the making’ and therefore the emphasis is on understanding the production of that social world. See “Listening to people’s stories: the use of narrative in qualitative interviews,” (Chapter 2) in Jane Elliott, *Using Narrative in Social Research*, (London: SAGE Publishers Ltd., 2005), pp18ff.

¹⁰ Edward Soja, p118.

of life; and, *adaptation*, that is, changes and continuities maintained throughout the person's life.¹¹ Thus the life history as a narrative technique is not just a narration of events but a two-way communicative relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. It is a respondent-led process that facilitates organization, clarification, and justification of the life-experience, including memories about family background, neighborhoods, and community, everyday life events during childhood, youth, and adolescence, and adulthood.

Hence, among other questions that one should focus on in the life history approach are: Whose truth is the collected life story, whose narrative? Does it accurately reflect the facts of the life as lived by this person? Does it emphasize the issues and experiences that the interviewee thinks are important, or the perspective of the interviewer? Answers to these basic questions of life history method constitute not simply the articulation of a politically resistant Salale realm but also a particularly precarious folkloric persona, the persona of the Salale peasant in perpetual embrace of, and conflict with, successive regimes. The persistence, resistance and strategic desistance or acquiescence of the oppressed articulated in their folkloric stance distance them from the realm of subjectivity. This distance finds an outlet through expressive culture, i.e., personal stories, humor, and irony in stories and folksongs. Through re-storying the social world in the making, the individual hikes back and forth between disdain and a concerned bleak vision under an oppressive system.

The personal stories of the three artists presented here and the ethnographic examples of the local symbolic performances are instances of emancipatory resistance acts by ordinary people

¹¹ David G. Mandelbaum, "The Study of Life History: Gandhi" in *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 14, No. 3. (1973), pp177-206.

(peasants, women, artisans) who constituted them both spatially and temporally in their own social reality. Ordinary people are not actually ordinary. They live their lives with hope and determination free from moral disengagement or oblivion and are ready to act and to subvert the cultural and political hegemony. They story, narrate, sing, and dance to what may pass without being appraised and, in so doing, they claim agency. The resistance acts/words eventually become part of the local historical experience and constitute part of a stream of sociocultural knowledge. Thus, when culture is transformed into emancipatory acts, folklore used as creative resistance becomes emancipatory because the reaction is not to a one-time incident or a temporary oppression but resistance grounded in a belief in fundamental human freedom. This hypothesis makes the ethnographic, folkloric, and historical approaches viable methods in studying social transformation and resistance culture from the people's perspective.

Gender, Disability, Folk-art

Two basic questions I attempt to answer in this section are the following: The first is why do blind folks perform well, or in some cases even better, and make a difference in a specific art form, e.g., folk poetry and music? Second, how does identity, being blind and a woman, such as in Tarashe's case in this study, inform cultural production, i.e., folklore performance, and is also informed by cultural production? The two questions are not easy to answer and may require a separate project. However, for the purpose of the present study, I attempt to pose some questions for investigation. First, does creativity correlate with disability, particularly blindness? Some studies, outside folkloristics, claim that "folk traditions have long maintained that blind individuals manage to overcome some of the difficulties associated with their condition by

developing extraordinary sensory and cognitive capacities.”¹² That is, according to this study, blind people possess a “substantial advantage in memory tasks,” [...] and this “improved perception and superior memory task can be fully accounted for,” especially in individuals who became blind early in life.¹³ One may also argue that in folk traditions, the lack of visual sense has long been explained from a religious or mystical viewpoint. Liina Paaes, in her folkloric study of Estonian deaf-lore, states that “The Pagans [...] believed that the disabled were under the protection of gods – or that they were divine;”¹⁴ and the view varies from culture to culture. Citing L. Bragg, Liina adds that, “in southern Europe the idea is personified by the blind wise man or the divinely inspired poet, while the North-European mythology tells us of deaf poets, gods and mythological creatures.”¹⁵

Like Liina’s Estonian deaf-lore, no doubt, there are different myths, stories, proverbs and beliefs (superstitions) about visual impairment among the Salale Oromo. However, I limit my discussion to the life histories of my two blind informants. Second, how the society perceives blindness and also how the visually impaired person perceives blindness are equally pertinent. The cultural politics of gender and disability provides sophisticated theoretical underpinnings of folklore and resistance culture and a methodologically sound research topic. Here I draw on some folklore examples collected from the visually impaired woman folk “artist,” Tarashe, in Salale, to explore not just concerns about her gender and disability but also questions about the local politics. The society’s uneasiness with disability, such as connecting it to bad omen, generally marginalizes

¹²Ariel Rokema & Merav Ahissar, “Interactions of cognitive and auditory abilities in congenitally blind individuals,” *Neuropsychologia*, (2009), pp1-6, see p1. doi:10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2008.12.017. Retrieved on Jan 24, 2015.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp3, 5.

¹⁴ Liina Paaes, “A Hearer’s Insight into Deaf Sign Language Folklore,” *Folklore*, 27 (2004), pp49-84, see p52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the blind person, or any person with physical disability. Consequently, in most cases people with disability are left to solicit as beggars. Only a few disabled persons struggle and succeed to change their fate and become renowned entertainers such as Dajane (in Bokkoolo) and Bokona (in Dagam), the two most well-known blind male minstrels in Salale.¹⁶

SALALE VERBAL ARTISTS

Why focus on individual Salale artists? Methodologically speaking, tradition, it is generally agreed, “is enacted only through an individual’s acts of creative will,” the starting point which “is not merely a methodological necessity...but more significantly, a philosophical conviction.”¹⁷

In what follows, the themes of Salale verbal art are examined in light of the life histories of three Salale “artists” or *shaayi*. In so doing, an attempt will be made to reveal the negative social transformation that markedly threatened the Salale indigeneity, i.e. the identity constituted through shared practices. It also aims to uncover the ongoing land grab policies the Oromo suffer in general and the Tulama in particular.¹⁸ First, Tarashe’s personal experience narratives exemplify the fact that, in spite of long-time exposure to hostile relationship with the Shawa Amhara sociopolitical and cultural influences, the Salale sense of pride and self-conception remained fueled by people’s view of themselves as warriors. Second, looking back at the way in which Salale Oromo suffered land and land-resources dispossession under the Shawa Amhara rulers, Cuqqaalaa Buttaa, 92-year old, recounts his own experience. Based on the Cuqqaalaa life

¹⁶ *Field Journal*, p171. I met Dajane briefly in Bokkoolo, Hidhabu Abote, on April 8, 2010 and recorded some of his songs. We planned to meet the following day at his home to record more songs. As planned, I went to his home on a stormy morning but in vain. Presumably Dajane was cautioned by local officials not to meet with me again. Such challenges and ethical matters are part of the politics and poetics of ethnography.

¹⁷ Ray Cashman, Tom Mould, and Pravina Shukla, eds. *The Individual and Tradition: Folkloristic Perspectives*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), p12.

¹⁸The Tulama Oromo are one of the largest branches of the Oromo ethno-nation inhabiting the heartland of Ethiopia, and of which the Salale are one. Finfinne (Addis Ababa) is the capital city surrounded by the Tulama.

history accounts, following displacement and brutal executions at the hands of Shawa Amhara rulers, the Salale moved and crossed social and spatial boundaries to other far-off parts of Oromoland,, but they did not migrate to other non-Oromo regions which were closer. Third, Gurmu Badhaadha, a 78-year old visually impaired man, narrates his life history set in the historical tradition of the Salale. His life history is a discursive remembering of the historical tradition of the people and provides a significant insight into social memories of executions and displacement under monarchic rule, war and famine under military dictatorship, and social invisibility and abject poverty under a proxy-democratic rule. Gurmu's autobiographical episodes are a critique of antisocial individuals who feel no empathy or guilt and do evil things to others, e.g., Amde Abera, who ruthlessly evicted the Salale from their land. The three *shaayis* interlock their stories with the sociopolitical and cultural milieu, which is a strategic representation of good and bad social actors.

Tarashe of Gumbichu: Ethnography of Women's Life History¹⁹

The life histories of African women obtained from oral and written sources indicate that there are legendary African women in history who were set between two worlds of a wife or a widowed mother who cooks, raises children, and keeps house and one who also assumes male's duty of local and village chieftaincy or duty of a verbal artist.²⁰ Such is the life history of the South African Xhosa storyteller, Mrs. Zenani, told by the linguist and folklorist Harold Scheub.²¹ Mrs.

¹⁹ Informant Tarashe Safara, Fieldnote #6, pp41-44, Gumbichu, 2010.

Name/Genealogy: Tarashe-Safara-Nagii-Gammada-Fidano-Nagawo-Wadaay-Waleesso.

Age: 38 or 39.

Current situation: Visually impaired, single mother; *Place:* Gumbichu; *Education:* No formal education.

²⁰ Patricia W. Romero, ed. *Life Histories of African Women*, (N.J.: The Ashfield Press, 1987), p530. Cf. Judith Olmstead's *Woman Between Two Worlds: Portrait of an Ethiopian Rural Leader*, (Urbana- Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

²¹ Harold Scheub, ed. *The World and the Word*, by Nongenile Masithathu Zenani, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p164.

Zenani was raised by her “traditionalist grandparents” and later she became a successful storyteller and traditional healer.²² As Scheub clearly states, Mrs. Zenani of Transkei of the Xhosa nation was known for her *ntsomi* performance, which depends on core clichés of ancient songs, sayings, chants, and dramatic narratives full of traditional images.²³ Stylistically speaking, Zenani’s productions were shaped by others’ performances she observed, performances presented by her family members, an aunt, a grandmother, an old friend. Zenani “picked up a detail here, a stylistic device there,” to weave into her own an amalgam of all the performers, and utilized a number of traditional images to form into themes of her own: personal sorrow and her profession (as a performer and a diviner).²⁴

According to Scheub Zenani’s story lends itself a sense of immediacy to her story which is an indicative of gender roles in the Xhosa society, Nelson Mandela’s origin. Mrs. Zenani is a renowned traditional Xhosa storyteller known for her stories of strong moral code, commentaries and emphasis on “traditional and ritual in preserving Xhosa identity and ethnicity.”²⁵ For Zenani, storytelling is a ritual and performance undertaking, a cultural expression and representation, more than just a verbal art, and involves elements that dominate the actual performance of storyteller, which is problematic, not to mention the dynamism of oral tradition and possible changes with each telling.²⁶

²² Patricia W. Romero, *Ibid.*, p530.

²³ Harold Scheub, “The Art of Nongenile Mazithathu Zenani: a Gcaleka Ntsomi Performer,” in Richard Dorson, ed. *African Foklore*, by (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp115, 116.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp116, 117.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p165.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Why is women's "life history" so important in constructing the biography of Salale Oromo verbal artists? Historically, Salale women attained political honor, like Camme of Mulo Faalle in the first-half of the 19th century.²⁷ Some ethnographic examples also indicate that Salale women enjoy to this day relative prestige over men as ritual leaders, for example, as mediumship and deity priestesses.²⁸ In Salale mythscape, i.e., the mythical history of the place, the etymology of "Salale" is traced to the young mythic woman who climbed to the hilltop, lit a fire in the middle of the night, used the horn-blower, *dheertuu*, to summon her close kin who answered "Si'laale," meaning, "I can see you," Hence the toponymic reference became the ethnonym "Salale."²⁹ Her kin came back from different directions with their cattle and settled around the mountain now called Salale. This story reminds us of Mustafa Kamal Mirzeler's Nayeche, the ancestral woman who is considered the mythical mother of the two East African Jie/Turkana communities.³⁰ Both communities claim common origin and live in peace; thus, women are often binding forces in a society. In the interpretation of past memory images, in Salale Oromo historical tradition, women, landscape, nature, and fertility are closely interconnected. As an example, Ateetee, the goddess of fertility, is believed to assure the redemptive power of nature.³¹

One of the weaknesses of autobiographical studies (or life histories) is that they center on the individual "with little regard for the individual interacting with the wider scope of culture."³²

²⁷Ege describes Camme as "although a woman, [she] continued to lead her tribe in war successfully," until the "leadership of the tribe soon passed on to her son Jarra." See Svein Ege, *Class, State, and Power in Africa: a Case Study of the Kingdom of Shawa (Ethiopia) about 1840*, (Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden, 1996), p90.

²⁸My observation at Gurura, the *warra afuura* mediumship, and *warra cabsa*, *Field Journal*, pp73, 101, 2010.

²⁹Informants Maabre Goofe, Fieldnote #7, p5-16, Dagam, Annoo Qarree; Haila Maram Moroda, Fiche, Fieldnote, #7, p146, 2010.

³⁰Mustafa Kamal Mirzeler, *Remembering Nayeche and the Gray Bull Engiro*, p105. To reconstruct the biography of this Salale mythical woman, to whom the Salale Oromo make a homonymic reference, requires an ethnographic revisit to Salale.

³¹Tarashe's Maaramii Galaalana of rain ritual in July is the case in point. Fieldnote #6, pp42-44, Gumbichu, 2010.

³²Mustafa Kamal Mirzeler, *Remembering Nayeche...*, p219.

Hence, it is with this setback of the life history approach in mind that I make an attempt to situate the three informants within the culture. The life history method is crucial to invigorate ethnographic research with examples drawn from real lives.



Figure 5.1: Tarashe Safaraa, a *shaayi* (folksinger) from Gumbichu.

Women's life history shows the emotional aspects of their lives and opens the door not only for understanding challenges they face in life but also their economic, social, political, and religious roles, and their significance in their respective communities.³³ The life history approach provides sufficient data about women's fears and hopes as a marginal cultural group in a male-dominated social world. Available ethnographic data on women's life history shows that the life history approach challenges existing negative stereotypes about the traditional role of women in the community, and demonstrates that as a mother and wife she does all the house chores of a

³³Charlotte J. Frisbie, "Traditional Navajo Women: Ethnographic and Life History Portrayals," in *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 1/2, Change and Continuity as Experienced by Navajo Women (Spring - Summer, 1982), pp.11-33, pp11, 12.

woman at the hearth to raise her family and in addition the hard work of a man in the field. My focus here is not to balance the treatment of women as a passive marginal group in ethnography but primarily to examine how women see their own place in a disempowering situation and understand how they react to a two-fold domination under an oppressive state structure and in a male-dominated society. The story may focus on a whole life span, which can be, in most cases, a full-fledged book-length project or it may focus on a particular aspect of lived-experience such as marital difficulties, life status, poverty, disability, childhood experience, lack of marriageability, or death of a close family member and its emotional bearings. With all these personal difficulties, however, many women triumphantly survive or stumble along, facing what life has to offer, like Tarashe of Gumbichu who can represent the life experience of many more Salale women.

According to Lila Abu-Lughod, the Bedouin women of Northwest Egypt communicate directly in very modest and conservative way, which they call *hishna*, i.e., a proper manner fitted to the norm, but implicate their feelings and sentiments about the often unhappy relationship between men and women through little songs.³⁴ By the same token, the Salale women communicate their emotions and veiled sentiments, *quuqqaa*, about men or the oppressive system through *naanaa* love songs or through the *bar-kume* resistance songs.

As I argued in Chapter 5 (under “Gender and Genre”), there are genres and songs attributed to women, composed and performed by women to critique the social injustices they experience under the male-dominated social structure and the oppressive state. Salale women in Gumbichu

³⁴ See Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, (Oakland, CL: University of California Press, 2000).

have serious concerns about what is going on in their everyday lives, mainly the sociopolitical and economic crisis observable in their lived experience. The cultural intersection with those serious issues of economic, social and political matters and the role of women in the society constitute their lived experience which they voice through stories and songs on behalf of a sub-population that remains. Social life is entangled with struggles about ethnicity, gender, class, ideology, representation, and economic rights, among other factors. Added to all those social issues and the anxieties that result from them, to deal with disability and the pressures of everyday life is more demanding than one might assume. Part of it is negotiation with the attitudes and beliefs of the non-disabled, which is hard in almost all cultures since it requires the person to spell out a position to negotiate the attitudes and beliefs, and even superstitions, about a particular disability covertly wrapped up in forms of culture. It seems that living with disability and facing the challenges of everyday life itself requires creativity. The lack of space for negotiation and the need for a route to claim agency inspires creative resistance against what is covertly wrapped up both in the culture and in the status quo, using various forms of the culture itself (stories and songs). Gender is another marginal category which subjects the person to a variety of negative attitudes and stereotypes in a male-dominated social structure. Added to disability and gender is a suppressed life experience under an oppressive state structure, because of one's ethnicity or race, where it applies. Thus life can be miserable for a disabled, single mother, like Tarashe Safara.

Tarashe's life history: Songs of bar-kume

Tarashe is a visually impaired single mother. She said she was 38 or 39 when I met her in 2010 during my fieldwork in Gumbichu, Salale. She was born in Bacho Loode, near Gumbichu, and later had two sons. I met her living with her younger son, Badhaadha, 16 years old, named after

the notorious bandit who was murdered in 1994 in Mogor and celebrated in Tarashe's *faarsa*. I recorded Tarashe's songs of *naanaa* (women's songs of the secret lover), *faarsa* (commemorative songs), *bar-kume* (political songs), *urursaa* (*lullaby*), and *Maaramii Galaanaa* or *Ateetee* ritual (of fertility, rain ritual). I will first present her songs of *bar-kume* in which Tarashe carefully crafted her personal narratives into the folklore-oriented tradition, with emphasis on the present, and constituted a Salale Oromo woman's social critique about the so-called *Bar-kume*, i.e., the Ethiopian Millennium. Throughout the songs and her life history accounts, points of view, ideologies, and perceptions about government policies and false promises are critiqued, and local officials are sarcastically demeaned. The songs reveal the need for social and economic empowerment for women as one determinant factor in development. Tarashe performs songs and tells stories to recount episodes of her life experience to draw connections between historical traditions and personal life history. The three most legendary bandits in Salale history of social banditry and commemorated in Tarashe's *faarsa* are Hagari Tullu, Mulu Asanu, and most recently, Badhaadha, who challenged the current Tigre-led government in the early 1990s. Here I present a few examples of the latter.

Having become visually impaired woman at the age of five, Tarashe said, she almost always stayed around home, doing house chores, composing and singing songs, and raising her son single handedly with very little support from other people.³⁵ In her own words, Tarashe portrayed how difficult life was:

In the old days, life was cheap. We had everything in abundance in Bacho Loode. But it was tough for those on the other side. And we had violent times in those days too, like today. Now, during *bar-kume*, millennium, a *quunna*, i.e., a can, like a bushel, of corn costs 80 Ethn Birr, which was only 1 Birr in the past. Then we sang of corn thus:

³⁵ In our conversation in 2010 in Gumbichu, Tarashe said, "...nama marareetuman bula," which means, "I seek peoples' support; they sympathize; they offer their kind support." It is really heartbreaking to live on meager alms.



Figure 5.2: Tarashe with her youngest son, Badhaadha (Dassu), Gumbichu.

Bacho Loode
 biyya hormaa,
 dhirsiifi niitiin waliin oode.
 Bacho Loode
 boqqollo baachuutti
 gatiittiin adoode
 nyaachuutti
 ilkaan adoode...

Bacho Loode,
 in other neighborhoods,
 Husband and wife are starved, unhappy.
 In Bacho Loode, they're tired
 of corn harvest: shucking or husking,
 piling mounds upon mounds,
 tired of corn feasts
 till their teeth ache.³⁶

It is illuminating to examine closely in the above story and song the way in which Tarashe represents the collective social memory of her people who lived in two different periods. Based on this ethnographic example, one can see how the historical tradition and the individual life history inform each other. Tarashe wove out of her memory the time of relative abundance compared to the new images of famine, desolation, and hopelessness during the millennium. She

³⁶ Informant, Tarashe, Fieldnote #2, p26; see 29-36. Gumbichu, 2010.

molded the themes and patterns of collective lived experience into her life history, and composed and recited or performed the new *bar-kume* songs of millennium and the *faarsa*, commemorative songs.

The following monologue is about a husband and wife who spent “dreary nights” without fun during *bar-kume*’s adverse socioeconomic and political crisis, in spite of the authorities’ propaganda:

Yaa bar-kumee!
Bar-kume mataa sariitii,
dhirsaafi niitiin,
osoo wal hingahin
lafti bariitii.

Oh, bar-kumee!
Bar-kume with cobwebbed hair,
it dawns, the dreary night dawns,
before husband and wife
turn around, to play or to fight.³⁷

Tarashe’s stories and songs combine social history, biography, and the new images of an unbearable human condition. In this song, she comments that during adverse life conditions such as famine and violence no husband or wife can be happy and think of fun, because they are overwhelmed by their wretched life conditions; the night passes as idly as the day, which is normal for her. Dreadfully enough, “bar-kumee with cobwebbed hair,” has come to represent the life situation of the people caught up in a web of insubstantial life, a trap wherein husband and wife are caught up and inactive, without (sexual) intercourse until the day dawns on them idle, unproductive. As in Tarashe’s songs of *bar-kume*, there can be such gender-bound marginal voices in Oromo folklore. However, the characteristics of women’s voices have not been studied in any detail. *Bar-kume* song is a satirical story, a song of disillusionment for such a desolate time of revolution, revolution for the oppressor not for the oppressed. It is a Salale woman’s monologue about troubled love and marriage during a harsh time. According to Tarashe, almost every artistically able Salale woman performs *bar-kume* songs while doing various chores, but

³⁷ Informant, Tarashe, Fieldnote #2, p26.

the aesthetic beauty and philosophical depth of the songs can vary from person to person. It seems that Tarashe was encouraged to incorporate her feelings and perspectives into her songs since she could be disregarded as a threat or pass unnoticed, politically speaking, by security agents as a woman with a disability. Here she performed this song of a woman's sarcasm to critique her indolent husband:

Boqqolloo baranaa, ya daabboo koo! Dhirsa baranaa, ya aabboo koo! Ganda dhaqee, nama hin aarsu, as galagal jedhee, nama hin xaarsu ittuu galagalan, nama hin warraaqsuu!	Oh corn, today, in famine, what a divine daily bread! And, husband, of this day, starving, no fooling around, to burn me in a rage of envy, no want of sex, to wake me at night, he shows effort, but dull, albeit! ³⁸
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Tarashe is supposedly voicing the experience of Oromo women. She purportedly praises an inactive husband who symbolically represents the inactivity of the male-figure, i.e. the dominant culture and the status quo. In this song women are daringly voicing their situation although freedom of expression controlled by the general inhibitions caused by the masculine culture and the oppressive state. To discuss openly the agenda of eroticism and sexuality is to violate *safuu*, the established social and moral code; eroticism and sexuality can be publically discussed only under some apologetic procedures. Hence, according to Tarashe, Salale women sugar-coat their grievances in songs and convey agreeably what is wrapped up in culture. In this view, one can assess in the song above the broad-spectrum of Oromo women's sub-cultures ranging from erotic to political and social themes which are of equally paramount significance in the domain of these women.

In a time of abundance and excess, "corn" (maize) is not accepted as a conventional food among the Oromo of Salale and Jirru; barley, wheat, and *teff* (a grass crop) are the staple foods. The

³⁸ Informant, Tarashe, Fieldnote #2, p29. Gumbichu, 2010.

other cereal crops are considered only secondary. Now that agriculture has failed, a final resort is to turn to formerly despised crops such as “corn” as a survival strategy. When it comes to choosing between crops, the Oromo go for wheat and barley. “Teff” is said to be introduced by the Abyssinian Orthodox Christians—this is not well founded, however.³⁹ According to Tarashe, in those days she used corn like all the other people who had no choice but “corn” which was provided as part of humanitarian aid. It was also purchased in the market and locally called “saxana,” meaning, in Oromo language, “miserable,” “famine food.” Poverty food is often strongly associated with the hardship under which it was eaten, and downplayed socially as a food source in times of relative plenty. In any society, the characterization of a foodstuff as “famine” or “poverty” food is social, and some foods are considered poverty foods in some societies and luxury foods in others. As there are taboo foods and drinks, so there are cereals and foodstuffs detested and used for food for some unjustifiable reasons. From these songs, one can understand that the foregrounding of women’s role in a society casts some light on the collective viewpoint, on the political sentiments of women in a specific historical context, which invites a folkloristic resistance research. Next, I will turn to Tarashe’s self-portrayal through *faarsa* commemorative songs about the present sociopolitical status quo.

Tarashe’s life history: faarsa songs

Tarashe seems fascinated by the collective experience carried in the social memory of the Salale people, and she connects this experience to her own. On March 30, 2010, when I returned to Gumbichu for the fourth time in the same month, Tarashe recited more *faarsa* songs for me, which I recorded. She said that she renamed her youngest son Dassu, who was previously named

³⁹ Christopher Ehret “On the Antiquity of Agriculture in Ethiopia,” in *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1979), pp. 161-177, see pp., 163, 168, 172.

Badhaadha at *hammu*, a naming ceremony at a deity shrine. Badhaadha, which means “prosperity” in the Oromo language, is the name of the celebrated *mogoro*, bandit, in Salale, and it was unsafe for people to name their newborn baby boys as “Badhaadha,” which is understood as a symbolic gesture for identifying with the bandit. At the center of this naming/renaming metaphor is the politics of culture and identity politics, voices of high versus low, and meanings of those social constructions. Tarashe recited,

Yaa Badho kiyyaa	Oh, Badho
kot' yaa Badho	come Badho, you valiant,
caammaan shararaa!	light-footed fearless folk!
Duuti shiftaa duruma jiraa,	A bandit passes away too often,
keetumtti maa nama mararaa?	but why is yours troubling to forget anyway? ⁴⁰

By this memory image of a bandit, Tarashe, no doubt, quickly transforms the event of Badho’s murder so as to evoke historical memories. It is obvious that “a bandit passes away too often,” however, Badho, whom she calls also Midhe, is as unforgettable as his heroic deeds; the knowledge and meaning of the past events are transmitted to the next generation through naming, storytelling, and singing. One can imagine how Tarashe’s *faarsa* songs and stories of bandits and social banditry augment the resistance poetics and inform the youth (like her son, Badhaadha, renamed Dassu) of the social and moral obligations of their people. The death of Badho, “the light-footed hero,” evokes the death of other Salale bandits, that of the three Tullu brothers, Mulu Asanu, and others. Through the following lines, Tarashe gives a summary of the mediatory role of the *shaayi*, to protect the bandit and ease the tension between the people and the government:

Yaa Badho kiyya,	Oh, Badho,
ya Badho goodaa Maaramii	living in the prairie of Maarami,
lakkii gosaanis araarami	better for you to come home, to make peace
lakkii biyyaanis araarami	better for you to join your countrymen
lakkii aabeetis araaramii,	better for you to see your father, to appease

⁴⁰ Informant Tarashe, Fieldnote #2, p34. Gumbichu, 2010.

ya leenca goodaa Maaramii... with him...oh Badho, you lion in the den...⁴¹
This song is illuminating regarding an individual's perspective about the ongoing violence and the desperate call for peace and harmony. The role of genre and gender in the society is revealing here in the recounting of life history conveyed through songs and stories in line with the historical tradition permeated with literary and artistic responsiveness.

As the themes in the songs and stories indicate, Tarashe voices the gloomy situation under domination which is imposed by the repressive state and patriarchal structures. Her songs touch the people's psyche not only by the songs' potential to depict the miserable situation the people face during recurrent famine but also the unpredictable political and environmental circumstances. To reverse this story, perhaps the following song has some therapeutic effect:

Gootaraan torba, yaa Badho kiyya gootaraan torbaa. Biyya hormaatii galuu wayya! kan hore hin jaalatu biyyi hormaa.	Seven granaries are full of <i>teff</i> oh, Badho seven granaries. There is no place like home! "Others" estrange you when you get rich or poor. ⁴²
--	--

This is a concern about emotional experience, identifications, and attachments with home and with one's countrymen, the values that are lacking in a bandit's life. The discussion of the thematic concerns of the song in question establishes the distinct status of songs of banditry, *faarsa*, as a separate genre with complementarities with life history. The history of the evolution of such a subject-specific genre, i.e., a "faarsa tradition," unlike "traditional faarsa," is set in a specific historical context. Analysis of this folkloric genre is included here to spell out characteristic adverse conditions.

⁴¹ Informant Tarashe, Fieldnote #2, p35. Gumbichu, 2010.

⁴² Informant, Tarashe, Fieldnote #2, p32, Gumbichu 2010.

In general, this is a life history in process; the artist, *shaayi*, said little about herself and rather gave more emphasis to the society's collective experience of political, socioeconomic and cultural matters. Thus, "life history and culture are grounded in the lives of specific individuals" and reveal "history and culture as lived."⁴³ "Life story" and "life history" are separate since the former "meant simply the story of someone's life," and, unlike "life history," life story "does not connote that the narration is true, that the events narrated necessarily happened."⁴⁴ From Tarashe's narratives and songs I am convinced that negative states of affairs such as widespread suffering, unhappiness, poverty, recurrent famine and endless rebellion and banditry create fertile ground for resistance and the oppressive state is considered responsible. By revisiting the corpus of *bar-kume* and *faarsa* songs, later to be added at length to *SONGS* in the Appendix, I claim that Tarashe weaves the rubrics of individual and collective memories into her own to compose and perform the social reality, past and present. Thus, we can capture at least four general lyrical themes woven into the new genre, *bar-kume* and the *faarsa* commemorative genre: *socioeconomic crises*; *starvation* (physiological/emotional); *banditry/resistance* and *environment*. The intersection of multiple differentiations and the structure of inequality, e.g., gender, class, and ethnicity, is the major aspect of such nuances in an emergent society contributing to history in the making, and to politics from below, as may also be seen in Cuqqaalaa Buttaa's life history, next.

Cuqqaalaa Buttaa: Songs of Displacement

⁴³ James L. Peacock and Dorothy C. Holland "The Narrated Self: Life Stories in Process" in *Ethos*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Dec., 1993), pp. 367-383, see p367.

⁴⁴Ibid., p368.

In this section, using ethnographic and life history approaches, I examine Cuqqaalaa Buttaa’s biographical anecdotes. Cuqqaalaa Buttaa (92) is a living testimony of displacement and resistance against damage inflicted upon him and upon the Salale by the Shawan Amhara rulers. Thus, as Cuqqaalaa speaks I follow the themes of his storyline which endure in his memory about himself and his society and are rooted in tradition. This life history approach sees folklore used as an emancipatory act against a disempowering situation to subvert the overriding memory of conflict-induced displacement. Toward this end, in addition to the personal narrative accounts, I distinguish between “tradition-oriented folklore” and “folklore-oriented tradition” to construct meaning from the social relationships and the cultural representation of the world past and present. I posit “tradition-oriented folklore” as an imaginative tradition that can serve as a



Figure 5.3: Cuqqaala Buttaa, 92, in homespun garment, holding flywhisk, sat outside his mud-plastered thatched hut. Bookko Shanan.

wellspring of data to recapitulate the past using historical songs, mythscapes (mythical histories), rituals, and legends. “Folklore-oriented tradition,” on the other hand, is an ethnographic

exchange of cultural expressions to better understand the impacts of induced social transformations from the people's current viewpoints and to examine closely the way such transformations affect individuals, communities, and the societies at large. Analysis of the local dimensions of social transformations, I submit, benefits from close investigation of the life experience of the people, their history and politics from "below" vis-à-vis the (trans)national processes. While the significance of the life history approach has been widely acclaimed in folklore and anthropology "for the study of culture and personality," the concern remains as to how to frame the individual life history into the larger oral tradition.⁴⁵ Equally important is, how to compare the collective experience and the larger oral tradition that informs the individual life experience expressed through songs and stories with "the significant details of personal memories and experiences."⁴⁶ As Cuqqaalaa's life history recounts the past events and state of his lived experience, this life history presents the complex relationships of his experience across time compared to the present.

"Life History" Themes (Events)

Cuqqaalaa Buttaa's life history reflects the influence of a series of socio-political transformations and economic, cultural, and historical "events" and "states" external to the individual. The narrative technique in life history is a research method for exploring data on understandings and opinions of what people remember doing, and the attitudes and feelings they have in common. Some qualitative interviews such as the present one are used to gather descriptive data to generate information by probing deeper into the life accounts of the individual. As Cuqqaalaa's

⁴⁵ Mustafa Kamal Mirzeler, *Remembering Nayeche and the Gray Bull Engiro*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014,) p222.

⁴⁶ Mustafa Kamal Mirzeler, p219.

life history recounts past events in his lived experience, it also presents the complex relationships of his experience across time compared to the present.

Peak Life Event

The events or states in life are of a different nature. Some events could be classified as a *peak experience* as in Cuqqaalaa Buttaa's life during his 92 years, having experienced displacement from his original Salale homeland to different places and finally to the present locale in Bookko, near Mojo, East Shawa. The peak experience of life events may be the time when the individual goes out by himself to represent his people, to voice their grievance and to reclaim their land as a marked and legitimate calling in the life of the narrator and his people. To Cuqqaalaa Buttaa, the peak experience of his own life is the present, which is an adaptation to the status quo:

Cuqqaalaa: ...yaa ijoolle 'gaa, guyyaa taaggalaatan oolee...amma egaa dugduu na dhukkubee, ka'eetan rafa, taphadhaa egaa...

Oh, my kin! I have been striving the whole day. Now I am tired ...my back is aching...let me get to bed ...you enjoy yourself...

Interviewer: -Sii hin gamne ganaadha, yoom...kan dhugdu daadhii dha, maal dhadhabdeetoo... Oh, no...you are strong...you drink mead...and...

C: Abeet! Abeet! Abeet! Maali barri alamiin...maali barri alamiin...yee ijoolle...amma kanumti bara kana keecha seennee...maaluma jenna amma duunu illee in gaabbinaa?

Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Oh, my God! What a wonderful world! What a wonderful time! Oh, my countrymen! Should we complain, should we die right now, having survived to see these good days, the present!⁴⁷

This excerpt from the end of his narrative represents a critical event in Cuqqaalaa Buttaa's life history; it stands out as a high peak event. It is important to Cuqqaalaa because, at least to him, it

⁴⁷ Interview Texts #95-96. Bookko, Mojo.

is “*a wonderful world! ...a wonderful time!*” at his present age, 92. Cuqqaalaa chose to conclude his life history with this key statement of the significant event which he survived to witness in his life before he went to bed with his apologetic statement, “*my back is aching, let me get to bed.*” Metaphorically speaking, “striving the whole day” and “going to bed” as the sun was hurrying west-down shows Cuqqaalaa’s whole narrative has come to an end as he is close to death. I chose to open this exploration of Cuqqaalaa Buttaa’s life history with this excerpt of the peak event in his life as it illuminates the relationship between individual memory and the long process of suffering in the collective experience. Hence, what I offer in this chapter is an investigation of the wider historical tradition using individual life histories.

In life history research, interviews are designed in such a way that they elicit key events, specific happenings, critical incidents, significant episodes set in a particular time and place.⁴⁸ Those events are complete with particular characters, actions, thoughts and feelings as peak or nadir (low) life themes, very happy or very sad but important in some way. Those key events say something about whose “life” the story it is or who the subject is/was as a person; it makes the life history project more practical and demanding. In Cuqqaalaa’s narrative, this life history event is the moment that stands out in his memory as a wonderful scene that he describes at length, for this represents his adulthood. Such a high peak event is also where the ethnographer plays a key role to make sure that the subject addresses those salient features in the interview and also to make the conversations clear by focusing on the impact of the experiences. Methodologically speaking, one would ask for extra details, if necessary, after the subject has finished his/her initial description of the event, so as not to interrupt the flow of the conversation.

⁴⁸ Robert Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview.*, (SAGE Publications, Inc, 1998). p6.

In the light of the historical tradition and the existing human condition, Cuqqaalaa's gratefulness to his present life situation, compared to the past is reasonable; however, the general desolate life condition of peoples in Ethiopia can be best exemplified by the findings presented in the Human Rights Watch Report/Ethiopia, October 2010.⁴⁹ Within the context of Cuqqaalaa's life history, there are different levels of text. The *dimension aspect* shows the toughest moment when he was young and he and his people were removed from their land and lived in utter poverty; the *turning point* was the time when positive significant changes occurred after he moved to Bookko Shanan, his current home; and *adaptation*, the last phase, the present, relatively, the happiest time of his life.⁵⁰ In order to focus attention on the present experience, I chose to open the interpretation by the most recent events and states in Cuqqaalaa's life history narrative.

Nadir Life Event

In life history the nadir life event is the lowest point in the life experience, that is, the time when the subject lived in a discouraging, disempowering life situation, which might be the result of economic, social, or political distress. Thinking back over the past, the subject tries to remember a specific experience in which one felt extremely negative emotions (disillusionment, terror, guilt, disconnectedness, dishonor). Such a lived experience is, for instance, in the moments of abject poverty, which Cuqqaalaa recounts toward the end of the interview, describing the time when he carried hides and skins on his head during displacement:

⁴⁹According to one Human Rights Watch report, "Ethiopia is one of the world's largest recipients of foreign development aid. It receives approximately US\$3 billion in funds annually." However, "Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world. Half of Ethiopia's 85 million people live below the poverty line, and 10 to 20 percent rely on food aid every year. A large percentage of the population needs government assistance in the form of food, seeds, fertilizer, and cash support. Ethiopia is also one of the world's largest recipients of foreign development aid. It receives approximately US\$3 billion in funds annually." According to this report, the government used "...donor-supported programs, salaries, and training opportunities as political weapons to control the population, punish dissent, and undermine political opponents." See "Development without Freedom: How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia," (New York, NY, 2010), p4.

⁵⁰ Cf. the sub-topic "Interviewing Life History" in this Chapter.

C: maal ijoolle barri alamiin barri akkanaa...maal utuu kuni jiraatee...maan olii-gadi kaachaa baha..., erbee baadhee mataatti...harree hin qabuu, waa tokko hin qabu, ijoollee,

Oh, boys! "What a wonderful world!" If only this life could have ever happened in my life during those days, then when I carried hides and skins and sweating up and down. I never had a donkey, I had nothing ...oh boys!

*Interviewer. Balaa abbaa lafaati ka gooftaa kiyya...
You suffered oppression imposed by landlords. Yes?*

C: Erbee mataatti baadheetan, daa'ima gatiittii tokkotti baadhee, olii-gadi deemaa ture...
*I carried hides, skins on my head. I carried my kids on my shoulder, and labored down and out!*⁵¹

Such an event in his life is recalled with resentment, humiliation and dismay, with emotions of disenchantment. The events mark a turning point in his life history, that is, as nadir episodes they represent what happened in Cuqqaalaa's life history as a result of displacement. Internal migration, movement from place to place, and desolation are nadir effects, and also passive resistance against injustice and intense moments of eviction from home and alianation both for Cuqqaalaa and the Salale communities.

The experience and attitudes of the individual we analyze in doing life histories could be a rich field of data or elementary facts, but also instances of other general facts or classes of data. In that case, the data can be used for the determination of defining features of other facts and for analyzing detailed life records of the subject and the observation of mass phenomena. However, to cover the totality of the social problem, it is difficult to obtain such concrete data through life history interviews across the enormous scope of the social group based on personal materials necessary to characterize its life history.

⁵¹ Interview texts #98-99, Bookko, Mojo. These texts also include Cuqqaalaa's blessings as the interview session was ending.

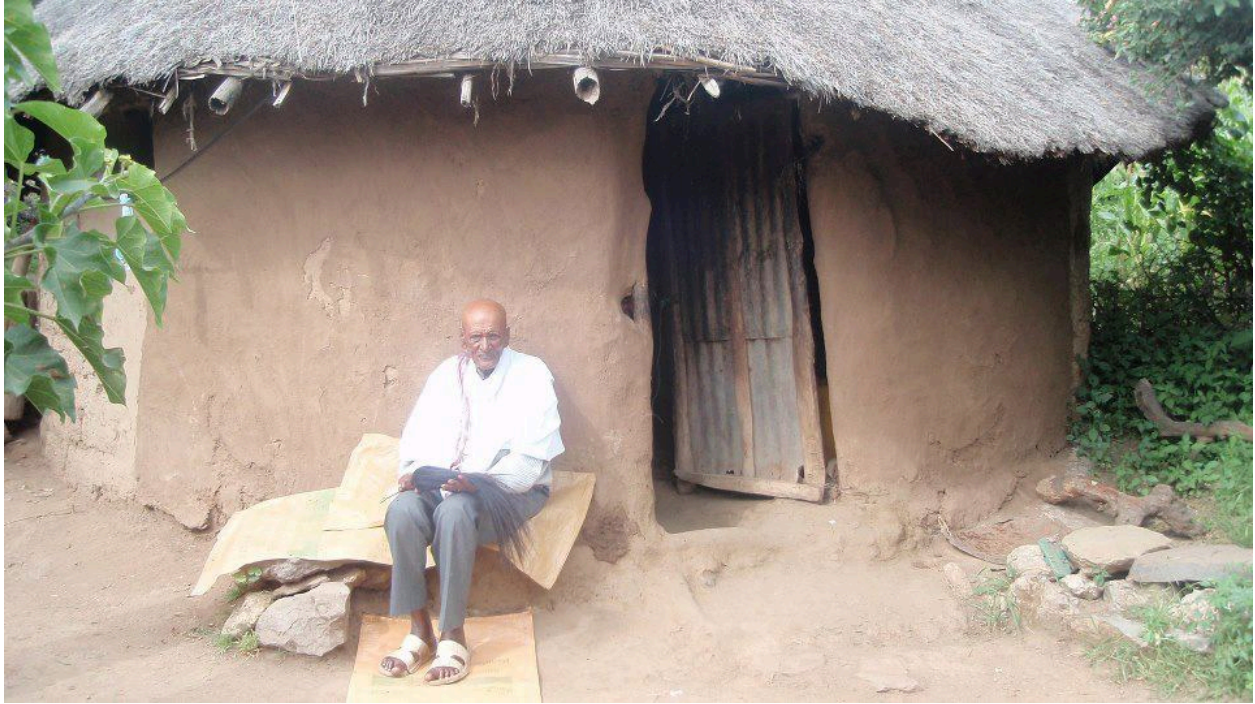


Figure 5.4: Cuqqaala Buttaa, tall, graceful, posing for photo.

From Cuqqaalaa's life history we can see that narrative expression indicates a combination of conscious concern about life events and also about unconscious cultural, societal and individual presuppositions and processes. Hence, life histories support research into the lived experience of the individual and also the collective experience of the community, and facilitate the understanding of both the inner and the outer worlds of historically evolving persons in historically evolving situations.⁵² In so doing, life history as a method gives clues into the interactivity of inner and outer world dynamics; their outcome is determined by the effectiveness of the interview.

⁵²Paul Thmpson and Daniel Bertaux, eds. *Between Generations: Family Models, Myths and Memories*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p198ff.

Displacement, Toponyms, Disenchantment

Because of their geographical proximity to the Shawan Amhara Christians, the Salale lived in an unequal relationship historically and suffered cultural domination and economic exploitation, especially, land appropriation, displacement, and political subjugation since the 19th century.⁵³

In what follows an attempt is made to explore how folksongs of displacement and narratives performed by Cuqqaalaa Buttaa promote issues of social justice, emancipatory resistance, and an understanding of nuances. Whether the songs and narratives of displacement call forth something from our experience or help shed light on an experience that is unfamiliar and remote in time will be closely examined next. Sources indicate that Menilek incorporated the Oromo from the 1880s until 1900, and the Salale Oromo suffered displacement.⁵⁴ The Salale were recruited by force into Menilek's army, the army which conquered the frontier and subdued Oromo resistance while, for the most part, other Salale communities chose internal migration rather than tenancy and forceful military service.⁵⁵ According to Cuqqaalaa, the Salale were evicted from their homeland continuously and dispersed to other parts of Oromoland, rather than to any other region:

Interviewer: Mikinaata maaliin biyyaa bahuu dandeechan?
Why did you leave your home(land)?

C: Egaa warri durii, horii eeguu malee...egaa, ka'aa egaa, jenaan, ka'an
Well, our ancestors were mainly herders...and, when they were evicted, then they left their home.

Interviewer: Gizee sanii...ogga sanii mangistiin keechan kan isin bulchu eenyu?

⁵³Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, "The Oromo of Salale: a History" (1840-1936), History Department, Addis Ababa University, Unpublished MA Thesis, (2003); Svein Ege, *Ibid.*, 1996.

⁵⁴Tsegaye Zeleke, "Salale Oromo: a History (1840-1936),"...*Ibid.*; Svein Ege, 1996, *Ibid.*

⁵⁵Brian Yates, "Christian Patriot or Oromo Traitor? The Ethiopian State in the Memories of *Ras Gobäna Dače*" in *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, (2013), pp.25–52, see p27. Gobana Dace came from Salale to become Menelik's warlord. Yates notes that "Due to the fact that Menilek was simultaneously incorporating frontier areas and subduing new areas, he needed a class of loyal local leaders to maintain his empire, and no one was more powerful or important than *ato* Gobäna Dače, an Oromo warrior who was to later conquer and govern Oromo areas throughout Menilek's domain."

When was it, and who was the ruler at that time?

C: Axee Menilek jedhan

His name was Emperor Menilek.

Interviewer: Achii ariinaan, eecha qubate hundee keechan kunimmoo ammas?

Where did you settle immediately after you left your place of birth, Salale?

*C: Addis' aabaa... naannoo Gullalle... Biyyoo Baala-Woldii... Dhimbiibi... Siibaa...
Addis Ababa... Gullalle... Biyyoo Baala-Woldii... Dhimbiibii... Siibaa...⁵⁶*

After they were forced to leave their homeland, Cuqqaalaa Buttaa's lineage settled among the Gullalle Oromo near Finfinne (later re-named Addis Ababa), then settled at different places at different times: Biyyoo, Dhimbiibi, Siibaa, before they came to the present site, Bookko Shanan. If Cuqqaalaa is accurate about his age (92), he was born around 1921. This was the time when Zewditu, Menilek's daughter, had already been officially announced Queen in 1916, and Teferi Mekonen, later Haile Selassie, was appointed her heir apparent. When Menilek died in 1913, Lij Iyasu, a Wallo Oromo who reigned from 1913-1916, succeeded Menilek, only to be removed from power in 1916 and replaced by Zewditu and Teferi Mekonen, later Haile Selassie.⁵⁷ This is to say Cuqqaalaa's narrative accounts are based on what he heard of the displacement of his people before 1921 and which he experienced under Haile Selassie's long reign. Thus, the Tulama Oromo, the Salale in particular, suffered massive economic exploitation and political deprivation under successive Shawan rulers. This eviction continued under Haile Selassie until the Italian occupation in 1936, when Cuqqaalaa was about 15 years old and shared the unfortunate fate of displacement. It was to this dehumanization and negative transformation which affected him and his people that Cuqqaalaa reacts.

⁵⁶ Interview texts #8-12, Bookko, Mojo.

⁵⁷ Tsegaye Zeleke, "Salale Oromo: a History (1840-1936),"...Ibid.; Svein Ege, 1996, Ibid.

In what follows Cuqqaalaa did not promise to offer much, nor did he feel compelled to provide lots of details in the interview in which the interviewer(s) posed general, direct questions rather than initiating performance in the artificial context and recording songs, which he did later. Cuqqaalaa chose to give a fraction of life events set between states, a sense of the story's outline to be followed by more clarifications and elaborations in the interview session.

Interviewer: ...Hoo Abbaan Lafaa qe'eerraa ka'aa isiniin jedhu sanii...wanni aartanii ykn dhiichissan aartannii wannii dubbatan jiraa...?

When you were forced to leave your home (and your land), what were the songs of resentment you sang as you traveled the long journey with the other people?

C. Sii bahe	I left my home....
yaa abbaa lafaa,	I am forced to leave my home
biyyaa sii bahe	because of you
eega jaldeechi ollaa sii tahee!	oh, landlord!
eega quraan jigii sii bahee	You removed me from my home, from my land
sii bahe	and let monkeys be your neighbors
yaa abbaa lafaa,	and crows be your tenants,
biyyaa sii bahe!	I left my home and my land
because of you, oh landlord!

...jechaa deeman kaa...karaa deeman...horii oofan
...expressing through songs their unfathomable grief, they migrated with their cattle.⁵⁸

Cuqqaalaa's life history indicates that he and his family—and the community in his neighborhood—were absorbed by the ruling group; it was difficult for him to exit and reclaim his identity once again as Salale Oromo, and thereby to return to the basics, i.e., his roots. Here he claimed early on his place of origin:

Interviewer: Dhaloonni keechan biyyami? Zariin keechan biyyamitti dalattaniiti...as gahuu dandeechan?'

Where were you born, and can you tell us how you ended up here?

C: Eгаа warri keenya Mogoritti dhalate.
Our ancestors were born and lived in the Mogor valley.

Interviewer: Salale jechuudha Mogor?

⁵⁸ Interview text #15, Bookko, Mojo.

Does that mean Salale?

C: Salale
Yes, Salale.

By combining several such transient (recurrent) and absorbing (non-recurrent) states, one can closely investigate the details of Cuqqaalaa's narratives and the full sequence of events in his life history. As timing is important in life history studies, Cuqqaalaa Buttaa's narrative is set in the context of Menilek's and Haile Selassie's reigns, nearly 100 years ago, and recounted as a point of departure for the transition from one social order to another. It is also marked by social time and place; that is, it combines aspects of age, duration, and place:

Interviewer: Mee, bakka amma haassoftan sanattan waa isinii deebisaa...amma Salale irraa kaatanii, Finfinee ykn Shagaritti galtan, Shagar irraa immoo kaatani, naannoo Biyyoo tti galtan..Biyyoo irraa kaatan immoo naannoo Booraatitti...

As you said, you were removed from Salale, and settled in Finfinne/Shaggar [now called Addis Ababa, the capital] in a place called Gullalle, then removed from Gullalle and settled as a group at Biyyoo, then at Booraa...

C: Eeyee..
Yes, indeed.

Interviewer: Baruma baraan kaa...bakkee tokkoo bakkee tokkotti dabraa turtan...
Over and over again, you were dislocated and couldn't settle permanently at one place you call your own...

C: Dabraa turre...!
That is right...never!

As he is 92, Cuqqaalaa Buttaa has experienced a number of physical and psychological factors. As a living testimony for the injustices the Salale Oromo suffered for over the last 100 years, he represents the unheard voices of his people who chose (or were forced to choose) internal migration as passive resistance against internal colonialism.⁵⁹ By forced conversion, he told my assistants during the interview, his clan, including himself, became Orthodox Christians and their

⁵⁹ Tsegaye Zeleke, "Salale Oromo: a History (1840-1936),"...Ibid.; Svein Ege, 1996, Ibid.

ancestral belief system became marginal. This pattern of inter-generational crosscurrents and generation gaps follows the historical time line of the official historiography and disrupts the hitherto normal flow of the transition of social roles from father to son (e.g. , as in the *Gada system*) and mother to daughter (as in *Ulfaa* rituals and Ateetee).⁶⁰

Of Power and Powerlessness

The resistive, transcendent, and transformational possibilities through symbolic performance presented below provide evidence for the unequal power relationship of the Salale with the Abyssinian rulers and the social and economic handicaps they suffered. The interviewer posed a question to Cuqqaalaa as to whether the Salale could defend themselves against the “internal colonialism” and aggression:

Interviewer: Sila humna hin qabneefiti?
Because of lack of power, right (that you lost your land)?

C: Humna hin qabnu, maal tu jira...
*What power, no, no power at all.*⁶¹

Even though there was firm social and economic control on their subordinates, in the history of the Abyssinian rulers, internal power struggle, problems of power transfer, and other factors made it difficult for the central government to control tributary local states and enforce laws and tax collection.⁶² When the central state could not enforce law and order, the local tributaries

⁶⁰ See Paul Baxter and Aneesa Kassam, “Introduction: Performing the *Soodduu* Ritual,” *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Volume 12, Numbers 1 & 2, (2005), pp1-15. The authors pose the following questions about Oromo worldview: “Did the Oromo have an Earth Goddess? Is the Atete female “divinity” cult a later transformation linked to agricultural production or did it predate monotheism? What role did sacrifice and hamspication play? What exactly are the sacred stones, or objects, known as *ulfaa*, and what role did they play in the traditional religion? Is Oromo religion a unified set of beliefs?” *Ulfaa* and Ateetee are the two major concepts of fertility and agricultural rites central to Salale Oromo women’s folklore and worldview alongside Orthodox Christianity.

⁶¹ Interview text #55, Bookko, Mojo.

⁶² Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, “The Oromo of Salale...,” 2003, Ibid.

apparently exercised a type of sovereignty and escalated resistance and banditry.⁶³ When power was consolidated at the center, the tributary states were crushed and weakened; both resistance and strategic or actual compliance were inevitable.⁶⁴ In Cuqqaalaa’s songs below, migration was considered a passive means of survival when oppression was intense. Through creating intense emotions, folksongs produce connections and a scene that feels truthful, and, in doing so, songs inspire political or socially conscious action:

C:	Yaa tahuu yaa tahu yaa tahuu an nan deemaa an nan deemaa!	I am evicted from my home I am forced out of my home because of you, oh, landlord May God judge you! ⁶⁵
----	--	---

Thus, as Cuqqaalaa’s life history shows, songs can be judged based on their ability to evoke emotions for distressed people to claim common historical traditions:

Yaa abbaa lafaa siifillee, waan sii hedu Rabbitu beekaa, naafillee! Waan naa hedu Rabbitu beekaa nagaatti yaa biyya too nagaatti ...jechaa deeman.	For what you did to me oh, land owner God will judge you, ah me! God knows my destiny, farewell, my home, farewell. ⁶⁶
--	--

As Cuqqaalaa’s songs indicate, under unequal power relations, laws were imposed only to be violated, orders were announced only to be disrupted, and, consequently, humanity was dislocated and life disintegrated. When the center doesn’t hold, things fall apart! For where there was no justice, no wrong life could be lived rightly! Thus, the Salale were dispersed or forced to migrate from one part of the country to another. Of those who remained in their homeland, some rebelled and some lived as tenants under servitude from the time of Ras Darge to his great-

⁶³ See Svein Ege, *Class, State, and Power in Africa: a Case Study of the Kingdom of Shawa (Ethiopia) about 1840*, (Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden, 1996).

⁶⁴ Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, “The Oromo of Salale...”, Ibid.; Svein Ege, 1996, Ibid.

⁶⁵ Interview text #56, Bookko, Mojo.

⁶⁶ Interview text #56, Bookko, Mojo.

grandchildren, Amdie Aberra and others. During social banditry the heretics' abodes and caves became the heroes' sanctuaries. When the Shawan Amhara rulers appropriated their land, the Salale sang:

Ati yaa Amdee Abarraa	Oh, Amdee Abarra
maaf qotte maasaa lagarraa	why you plowed the farm on the banks
silaa hiyyeessa fixxee lafarraa?	and displaced the poor?
si haa gaafatu ayyaanni warraa!	may their ancestral spirit judge you, punish you ⁶⁷

According to Cuqqaalaa, the Salale Oromo used narratives and folksongs as cultural resistance against domination, and in so doing, they commemorated Salale heroes and constituted their identity and 'history' from "below." I claim that a constructivist strategy must be employed to consider the role of cultural resistance in general and folk songs and narrative accounts in particular to understand Oromo resistance poetics. Internal colonialism, social inequalities, and "uneven development" of regions in Ethiopia, to this day, fanned the flames of nationalism supported by cultural resistance from "below."⁶⁸ The Salale are no exception.

Of the Glorious Past

In those folksongs and narratives there are snapshots of the glorious past, of Oromo heroes and successful farming. The nostalgic ruminations and recollections of the good old days refer to the time when the Oromo were autonomous and life was fulfilling. They had herds of cattle grazing in the open fields, and granaries full of grains out in the yard, and it was a time when everyone could feed his children from harvest to harvest and from the bounty that came from ox-driven ploughs. Cuqqaalaa's work song,

Yaa ijoolleewoo!	Oh, countrymen!
Kun hin taatu haree,	It even becomes more evil,

⁶⁷ Informant Nuguse Lamma Dammu, Fieldnote #7, p47, Giraar Jaarso, 2010.

⁶⁸ See Edmond Keller, "The Ethnogenesis of the Oromo Nation and Its Implications for Politics in Ethiopia," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 33. 4, (1995), pp621-634.

maarashaan lafa reeban malee! unless you dig harder, adept farmer!⁶⁹

assumes the later period as one of interruption and stagnation when the hero and farmer failed the great expectations of the people following rapid social change, namely, defeat, displacement, and poverty. The utterances are of deep-rooted grievances of the narrator and represent the moment of resonance, remembrance, anonymous compulsion, and the transition from heroism, abundance, and autonomy to subjugation and sporadic resistance. The songs voice pure desire, sometimes naïve, and profound individual experience detached in time and space and nostalgic passion of *heimat* (one's homeland) embodied only in collective (sub)consciousness:

C: qotaa qotaan, gootaraa daraaddaree
 gootaraa daraaddaree
 lolaa lolaan, goofaree abaxxaree
 qotimee yaa ijoollishee ...jenna aabboo

(The interviewers take on the call and response and sing the refrain...)

goofaree abaxxaree, goofaree abaxaree...
in lolta moo, in qotta yaa ijoollishee jenna...
Hayyoon guutee, Hayyoon guute guutee

C: Oh, what a diligent farmer, what a diligent farmer
 with mounds of grain, heaps of bundles, and grain banks
 oh, what a hero, what a hero
 flamboyant with superbly combed hair

so, you better the farm or you butter the hair?!
oh, Hayyoo, Hayyoo River is overflowing
and the hero is fierce, he tends to swim upstream⁷⁰

In this song, the line “so, you better the farm or you butter the hair?!” is a social critique directed at those who are reluctant to “better the farm,” i.e., to till the land, to work hard, and, instead they laze about, “butter the hair”; in Oromo tradition, to oil hair with butter is leisure and ritual. At the threshold of the departure of the hero for war, he enunciates rhymes full of emotions,

⁶⁹Interview text #95, Bookko, Mojo.

⁷⁰Interview text #94, Bookko, Mojo.

recounts his own heroic deeds and those of his kin, and then he leaves. Similarly, when evicted from their home, the Salale performed rituals, uttered curses to attack those who drove them away from their land, and blessings and prayers to stay firm in the face of disempowerment, and then took stock of their belongings including farm tools, animals, family, and ritual objects thought to be guardian caretakers wherever they settled, but among their own people, the Oromo. According to Cuqqaalaa, the tools and ritual objects are believed to manifest themselves on their own, and are carried to the new places where the Oromo settled not out of desire but by forced “duty.” The animals also signify the Salale connection to their homeland between the two river basins (Mogor on the west and Jama on the east) and solidarity with other Oromo clans.

I return to these lines:

Hayyoon guutee, Hayyoon guute guutee guute garaan in bibilliqee	oh, Hayyoo, Hayyoo is overflowing and the hero is fierce, he tends to swim upstream. ⁷¹
--	--

This song invokes the erratic travel of an old man bounded by time and space and the depersonalization imposed by displacement as well as by age. The song of displacement closes the life-history with a state of reactive disorientation or adaptation of the performer (*shaayi*) to domination. Compared to the past evil days, the present seems “a wonderful world/time” represented by the overflow of a winding river, “Hayyo guute.”⁷²

To sum up, in this section I have attempted to demonstrate a life history approach through analyzing discursive narratives and songs of displacement which permit detailed accounts of complex relationships of events and experiences across time. In a few examples presented in this

⁷¹ Interview text #94, Bookko, Mojo.

⁷² See “Development without Freedom: How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia,” (New York, NY, 2010), p4.

section, we have seen that life history evolves out of a story which a person chooses to tell about the life experience he/she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible. It depends on the memory of the person and on the will to tell what the person wants others to know. A consistent, reliable, and coherent data through life history is a result of such clear and intricate questions serving to elicit personal narratives. As we have seen in Cuqqaalaa Buttaa's stories, life history serves to bring into accord humankind with oneself, with others, and with the mystery of life. So, stories of lived experience and the episodic discourses reflect timeless themes and motifs of life history events and guide the ethnographer into the deeply stratified human conditions past and present, rooted within the larger tradition.⁷³

Next, from Gurmu Badhaadha's life history accounts we observe that the personal narrative experience of a Salale verbal artist, shaayi, is inseparably connected with the historical tradition of his/her society.

Gurmu Badhaadha's Personal Narratives: Change and Constancy⁷⁴

I arrived in Dabra Libanos, Shararo, on January 20, 2010, after having spent a few months in Mulo Faalle and Yaaya Gullalle. I rented a room in Gurmu's compound through Magarsa D. and Ganamo, who also took me to the district administration office for a research permit. My meeting with Gurmu and renting a room in his compound became very productive. Soon after

⁷³ There is a selection of Cuqqaalaa Buttaa's life history accounts, including the songs he performed at his home in Bookkoo, near Mojo. Out of 101 interview texts and songs only a small portion is selected and included here.

⁷⁴ Informant, Gurmu Badhaadha, Fieldnote #6, pp26-40.

Name/Genealogy (Paternal): Gurmu-Badhaadha-Daadhi-Maallee-Araddo-Nagawo-Mikoo-Kubii-Bultum-Boonaa

(Maternal): Meeto-Odaa-Alla-Kuyyu-Dullumee

Age: 78 (in 2010)

Current situation: Visually impaired, Businessman. No formal education

Place: Shararo/Dabra-Tsige town, Salale.

meeting with him, I realized that I was privileged to study Salale folklore, tradition, and society based in Shararo and as Gurmu's apprentice. Gurmu confirmed me that in spite of the presence of the monastic sanctuary in the district, Dabra Libanos is considered a place of important ritual grounds, tree coronations, and deities side by side with the Orthodox Christian churches, which was the rationale for choosing Salale as my research site.

Gurmu is from Saldhe near Shararo town where he currently lives. In Saldhe the multiple sacred sites include *Ejersa Bokku*,⁷⁵ *Bakka Waadaa*, and *Irreessa Goodaa*, all of which appear in



Figure 5.5: Gurmu with his youngest son, Dawit.

Gurmu's songs, stories, and prayers. His father died when Gurmu was eight, and he grew up among the tenant-farming communities in the share-cropping plains in rural Salale, where the

⁷⁵At Ejersa Bokku, there is a spring called Burqaa Ejersa Bokku, i.e., Ejersa Bokku Spring, near Caffè Saldhe.

influences of the Abyssinian despots, Ras Darge and his grandchildren, were vivid in the everyday life experience of the people.⁷⁶ Gurmu recited the following song to portray the historical tradition about the violence and resistance to subvert it:

Salalee lallabanii,
Shaggar nagumaa
yaa Tufaa Munaa

They wail from Salale,
is Shaggar peaceful,
Oh, Tufa Muna [of Gullalle]?⁷⁷

With Gurmu we usually had conversations about our life experiences. Most often, in our casual/natural conversations Gurmu inclined towards local history, politics, bandits and banditry, folksongs of all genres, sacred or profane, and humorous tales of an obscene⁷⁸ nature, and his life history. Like the new genre of *bar-kume* songs of resistance composed by Salale women during adverse social conditions about men's indolence and the general barrenness and unproductivity of the state, men also tell tales with all kinds of obscenity about women's sexuality. The purpose is, as it seems, to laugh at and ease the tension during adversities and to subvert sarcastically the official discourse about crisis.

When he was young, Gurmu said, he did every kind of work for a living, and to pay the heavy taxes to till his ancestral land near Saldhe.⁷⁹ He worked as an egg-vender and carried tens of

⁷⁶ The Shawan Amhara rulers set out to replicate in Salale the dominant culture, particularly Orthodox Christianity and the Amharic language, and imposed land appropriation and eviction of the people from their homes. The tradition was well-entrenched in Salale and the attempted cultural domination and economic exploitation was met with heavy resistance. Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa writes, "...once the Shawan victory was over and the Oromo in a certain area were considered conquered, previously submerged groups would rise in rebellion again..." Citing Enrico Cerulli, Tsegaye adds that after the conquest of Harar, "Oromo from the center rebelled against Emperor Menelik," p67.

⁷⁷ Informant, Gurmu B. Fieldnote #2, p61, Shararo, 2010.

⁷⁸ "Obscenity" is considered as a minor genre in folklore until it drew folklorists' attention to organize the Symposium on Obscenity in Folklore, AFS, 1962. Though not well established as a genre yet in Oromo folklore study it occurs significantly in the lore. I recoded in Salale some famine stories of an obscene nature and obscene humorous tales of different themes from Gurmu, Maabre Goofe, and Opsan Moroda in a different context. See Herbert Halpert, "Folklore and Obscenity: Definitions and Problems," in *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 75, No. 297, Symposium on Obscenity in Folklore (Jul. - Sep., 1962), pp. 190-194.

⁷⁹ In our conversation Gurmu said that he worked as a sharecropper, loading and unloading quintals of grains on market days, and vending eggs, fuel oil and food oil. In 1957, when he fled to Albaso, Kaakkaa, to live with Mulo

dozens of egg carefully placed among straw as a shock absorber in two baskets, which dangled on a hard stick from a person's right and left shoulder like a yoke. And back home, Gurmu carried heavy gallons of fuel oil for consumption by communities in rural areas. Seasonally when the market was not conducive to incur a good profit, he worked as a daily laborer under the rural road authority, which I discussed in Chapter 4. He walked across the hills and the hollows in Salale to purchase eggs and then carried them all the way from Salale to Finfinne, the capital, a long distance round trip, twice a week. Eventually Gurmu became successful. That was the time when Gurmu heard or composed different kinds of songs when he was travelling throughout Salale. Through self-discipline, perseverance and resistance against oblivion, Gurmu said, he laid a firm foundation for his present skin and hide business. Now in his eighties, Gurmu, like most of my informants in their early eighties or nineties, might be sadly closer to death than I assume myself to be. I wish I could make a research trip to see my Salale elders but, unfortunately, that seems unlikely to occur anytime soon.

Gurmu is not only extremely knowledgeable about the historical traditions of the Salale, but he is also an entertaining *shaayi* and religious pundit. His knowledge of the belief system is immense. I have discussed elsewhere in Chapter 4, under "Conceptualizing Local Knowledge," Gurmu's humor crafted out of the high regard that the people had for deity worship in Salale when he was young. The everyday life experience of the individual is strongly intertwined with the collective experience of the communities, in line with the traditional belief system, particularly deity worship. Next let us hear how Gurmu relates this premise to one event:

and Meettaa Oromo among the Arsi Oromo clan, he was 21. This was the time when he learned Mulo and Meettaa Oromo songs, and composed and performed with Salale songs until he came back home to marry and settle down. Gurmu's father was a bandit who fought the Ethiopian patriots alongside the Italian forces and died in Fiche, Salale.

I sold skins and hides with my assistant, Taddasa, and saved 50000 Ethiopian Birr, which I brought home and locked in a wooden box. And my ex-wife and my son knew about it. I checked the money the other day and lost 1000. Then I asked Taddasa if he kept 1,000 previously only to trick me. Taddasa became very offended and swore both of us should go and see *waa-beeka*, an oracle. We said we would go to Oofa, far away in Gumbichu, to keep the matter secret. Before we left I needed some change for transportation and I asked Hurrisa, the shopkeeper. Hurrisa caught me by surprise saying that my son was changing notes yesterday. We went to Oofa oracle to be told the same.⁸⁰

Added to the domestic religious practices such as *wadaaja* for women, the local or regional cult continues to influence the everyday life of individuals and collectives. Gurmu was talking with me about his understanding of the culture and people's expectations to take appropriate measures when such difficulties as theft, betrayal, and a threat to one's life occur in marriage. Following the above theft incident which was attributed by the oracle to Gurmu's wife and his son, unfortunately Gurmu had to divorce that wife and marry his current wife, with whom he had five children. These and other events in Gurmu's life history, which I recorded, proved productive to me as they show the indispensable connections between individual life history and tradition and how the two mutually influence each other vis-à-vis the dominant Orthodox Christian culture.

"The Impossible Past"

Gurmu remembers some of his past life experiences with remorse. He has the view that people should focus on contemporary issues in terms of ideas and beliefs drawn from the past; when referring to the past is of some practical purpose, they should reformulate those past experiences in the context of the present. And he told me this enigmatic story, "the impossible past":

But to make you understand the Salale, first I must tell you a story. There was this young girl whose father died when she was too young. Her mother too died from drowning in the river close to the village. Distressed by grief, this young girl swore by invoking the name of a deity and refused to drink water fetched from the river. Her brother couldn't persuade her either. Desperately, he consulted a ritual leader who compassionately advised the young girl, "My dear, the river water your mother drowned in lasted only for

⁸⁰ Informant, Gurmu B., *Field Journal*, pp87-88, Shararo, 2010.

the moment. No one can step in the same river twice. We'll revoke the taboo/curse and you drink the water."⁸¹

This tragic story of drowning and swearing is rooted within the beliefs and worldview of the people. In her analysis of Sister Abena's narrative of female self-assertion in Ghana, Beverly Stoeltje states,

A major contributing factor to the vitality of oral traditions is the relationship connecting individuals to institutions, specifically the integration of language and social life with the structure of the family, the traditional courts, and indigenous religion.⁸²

Stoeltje's Sister Abena told the author that her former boyfriend placed a curse on her, which she had to take to the traditional court and pursue ritual processes to revoke. Stoeltje's Sister Abena's narrative reminds us of the close connection between the human and the nonhuman in the processes of revocation, which involves river, plant, places, people, and animals. Gurmu's character evoked the curse on herself or swore by calling a deity, which put her in a conflicting position with herself and with the traditional authority. To ease the tension, like Stoeltje's case but in a different context (self-evoked curse), it is required to revoke the curse and, by so doing, to restore the young girl's self-assertion and agency.

To take Gurmu's story further, there is a double enigma: first, to revoke the oath, to drink the water and survive death, ironically, is to surrender to death; second, to succumb to the oath, to avoid the water is all in vain but is an attempt to resist death—an "impossible past." As the tension between the will to live and the will to die escalates, the eco-poetic reality of the story

⁸¹ Informant, Gurmu B. Fieldnote #3, p135, Shararo, 2010. (*Text, Oromo version*):

Akka ati Salale bartuufan dursee mammaaka sitti hima. Mucayoo abbaan ijoollummaatti irraa du'e, haadhas bishaanni nayaate. Laguma mana goodaa yaa'u, bishaan waraabbiif okkotee fudhattee buutee tu, haati, achumaan hafte. Intalli, gadda haadhaan cabdeetu, bishaan laga san yaa'u waraabdee dhuguu, ayyaana warra iheetiin kakattee, lagatte. Obboleessi fala wallaalee tu jaarsa itti baase. Jaarsi Salale bahee, ayyaantuudha, akkana jedheen: "intala to, bishaanni haadha tee fudhate, achumaan darbe. Bishaanni of duuba hin yaa'uu, hin du'inii, dhugi, haluu baafnaa," jedhee, jedhan.

⁸²Beverly Stoeltje, "Asante Traditions and Female Self-Assertion: Sister Abena's Narrative," in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Spring 2009), pp27-41, see p27.

persists. The eco-poetic reality is, in this brief representation of social fact that the “human condition,”⁸³ above the objectivity of the environment, is not reducible to the subjectivity of the actions of the individual(s). In this case, the actions of the young girl (rebel), her brother (conformist), the deceased mother (heroine/martyr), the *ayyaantu* (ritual leader/mediator), and the gods (divine interveners) are relational and social, and they correspond to the human condition of plurality.

The crux of Gurmu’s story is this: in life or death, resistance is bound to happen! The maxim “No one can step twice in the same water” is not just a Greek (Heraclitus) notion of time but also an element of African and Oromo worldview put in a proverbial metaphor *kan darbe galaana...*, meaning, past is a river’s flow. Who said the root of human knowledge is Greek or Latin, anyway? Gurmu’s narrative has a profound philosophical depth and artistic beauty. It is the notion that “bara” or “time” is in flux; constantly changing and, that change is the fundamental nature of reality.⁸⁴ And revocation is about correcting the past, making peace, appeasing the grudge the past etched on us. That is to say, there are pasts that we should remember because to forget them is to forget the imprints left engraved on the present. Are we not born into the present with the past? There are pasts that we should forget because to remember them is to forget the present and to lack confidence in the future. In Gurmu’s story, the ritual leader’s counsel to mollify the young girl’s self-avowed unflinching resistance to death is not to forget the present, but rather to remember the past, to embrace it, and predict the future.

⁸³ Hannah Arendt claims that “...men, no matter what they do, are always conditioned beings. Whatever enters the human world of its own accord or is drawn into it by human effort becomes part of the human condition. The impact of the world’s reality upon human existence is felt and received as a conditioning force.” See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p9.

⁸⁴For the Oromo temporal units and ritual system, see Aneesa Kassam, “Ritual and Classification: A Study of the Booran Oromo Terminal Sacred Grade Rites of Passage,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (1999), pp. 484-503, esp. see p490.

(Is the present committed to our memory pool already?) Gurmu also knows well from lived experience that life is all memory except for the resistance of the quick present moment which one can hardly catch as it is going by (My parent/family folklore, *Time was; time never is*, is relevant here). Gurmu convinced me that the present is an ever moving shadow: “*Me gaaddidduu keerra utaalii na agarsiisi*,” meaning, “Jump over your own shadow and show me,” he said, at some point, to mean that no one can deter time from passing as one cannot jump over one’s shadow. To Gurmu, the present is a dividing line between yesterday and tomorrow. Therein lies hope in the future. The past is central to resistance because it is the soil that feeds the roots of the present, and our capacity to understand and deal with it. With the socioeconomic and political injustices inflicted in the past we come to the present human condition. The native folklorist, anthropologist, or a social historian should be passionate about and a perceptive observer of what lies below the surface of everyday life of the people: the unspoken assumptions of everyday life: the unspoken assumptions of contemporary life, the symptoms that indicate the (ethno)nation’s ailing socioeconomic human condition, and the day-to-day resistance to death.

When God is silent, it seems human beings take charge of their destiny as collective shared experience. Hannah Arendt clearly describes this notion of “collectiveness,” “plurality,” as saying, “men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.”⁸⁵ In Arendt’s words, “Things and men form the environment for each of men’s activities, which would be pointless without such location.... No human life is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies

⁸⁵ Arendt claims, “While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically *the* condition...of all political life.” Thus, men as political beings, aspire “to live,” meaning, “to be among men,” while “to die” means “to cease to be among men.” Hence, the irresistible absence of her mom haunts the young girl to evoke a curse on herself and to resist death, an inescapable human destiny. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*,....pp7-8.

to the presence of other human beings.”⁸⁶ Thus, as Gurmu’s story indicates, the work of “poetics” is to “make,” to “act” the “poetic,” i.e., to perform the “conditioned human existence,” and to resist or conform to the “conditioner,” in the specific, identifiable, objective world, environment. The rationale for the “poetics,” whether engaged or not, is to ensure that the resistance against or coexistence with the conditioning force is grounded and justified.

Poetic Sub-narratives

In his other poetic anecdotal references, Gurmu recaps certain episodes of poetics of Salale historical tradition. Through his stories and songs he instilled in me the specific aspects of Salale Oromo folklore and resistance culture that express the unbearable “human condition” in that social world. At the age of seventy-eight Gurmu was an excellent storyteller and folksinger though he had been visually impaired for eight years before I met him in 2010. Every morning he walked from his home with his youngest son, Dawit, as his guide to his store, quite close to his home in Shararo. He spent most of his time sitting and talking to his customers and monitoring his family who were involved in a skins and hides business. Gurmu had old friends, new customers, close kin and distant relatives who visited him on the market day, sold hides, chatted and shared stories and songs as well as food and local beers. The Salale were forced out of their home by *naftanyas*, Amhara armed settlers, which Gurmu refers to with remorse saying, *Mana hin jirru; ala hin jirru*,” meaning, *At home; we are not at home*. Gurmu’s song next confirms that the Salale moved, along with their cattle, on the long journey to Baale and Arsi, and to other regions which they thought were safer. The flight was a fight for the Salable, a passive resistance they practiced almost throughout the successive Ethiopian regimes, singing bitter songs of flight:

⁸⁶ Ibid. p9.

Kuulle dhale
iyya-andaaqqoo
iyya-andaaqqoo gara boodaa
siifan dahabe!
Lafa Abbaa koo
Lafa Abbaa koo kan dhalootaa

Kuulle, my cow, bore a calf
she bore a calf at daybreak on the road
toward late in the morning
I missed my Father Land
because of you oh, *naftanya!*
my Fatherland was born to own and to protect.

Such songs of fury, full of resentment and agony caused by forced internal migration and displacement are common today in Salale work songs, religious songs, and other songs implicitly communicating grief, dissatisfaction, and grievance. In the song above, Gurmu said, there were times when expectant women delivered on the journey. And so did cows, goats, sheep and pack animals. The Salale remember their history of defeat, resistance, and internal migration. The oldest members of the communities know most of the history and can recall and narrate the stories verbatim. Young people can also learn the history but only gradually as they mature and progress through life. Albaso was where Gurmu lived in Arsi among other Salale evictees, Muloo and Mettaa. Supposedly, the *naftanya* joked about Albaso where the Salale moved:

Kaatus eechea geechea mitii
Albasuma teechea mitii?
Albaso bishaan deebisaa
rakkattu asuma deebitaa!

Where else you escape to,
isn't it to Albaso?
Albaso, the land by the river. You get poor
and you come back to my tenancy soon!⁸⁷

The above song is not Gurmu's story, but he sympathizes with his people who lost their land and are ridiculed, as in this song. He lived in Arsi among the Salale who lost their homes to *naftanyas*, when he escaped an arranged marriage and poverty at an early age. He came back soon and married a girl of his choice, worked hard to the utmost of his effort, and became successful.

At night, sitting in his chair in the parlor of the tenement, Gurmu would brood over a member of his family who disappointed his customer during the day or who did not obey him. He is very

⁸⁷ Informant Gurmu, Filednote #7, p97, Shararo, 2010.

respected and cared for by his family members and liked by the community as a hard worker when he was able as a benefactor of the poor. Sime Addunya of Suqu, a man Gurmu had known long ago, and who was the head of the lineage living near Saldhe, often came and spent long hours talking with Gurmu about rituals, harvest, business, family, and current local gossip about some social and political crisis but in a subdued voice. As one example, on a market day, when a stranger stopped by and took a chair, Gurmu sugar-coated the message with a song to warn others to be cautious “not to turn the matter inside out,” i.e., to keep it secret:



Figure 5.6: Gurmu Badhaadha (R) with Sime Addunnaa of Suqu, a community elder.

Arbuu garaa hin saaqanii—
 arbuu keessi bookee!
 Nyaatan nyaatanii,
 jibban gatani,
yaa ijoollee!

In nature’s garden, one never opens Arbu
 inside out, but one knows the seed has insects!
 One eats it,
 or one leaves it.
 ...oh, our heroes!⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Informant, Gurmu B., Fieldnote #2, p64, Shararo, 2010.

Arbu is an edible wild plant, in spite of the small insects in it, by which Gurmu metaphorically represents the status quo as unpalatable situation. He suggests not to face risk head-on, but that one should choose either to resist, to join the bandits, or to conform to the system. Such matters as politics and banditry were/are not to be talked about in public spaces without considerable risk. Gurmu is the most well-intentioned, considerate man I have ever known. Be it close kin or a distant relative, whoever came to him, he was said to be the keeper of faith in the community. For example, when the stranger left his store, Gurmu said this proverb, playfully, to bid goodbye to him: *bakka hin oolle, kokkolfaa dhaqan, jedhanii, gali ka*, meaning, *Where one can never be absent, one should go laughing.*⁸⁹ And the stranger laughed, and we all enjoyed Gurmu's sense of humor. Most often Gurmu uttered "Yaa Rabbi nu baasi!" meaning, "Oh, God, set us free!" in moments of high disgust, or invoked the name of a nearby Orthodox church. And now he turned back to the local gossip about the May 2010 coming national election, which was a serious matter and songs of unfree and unfair election were already composed or renovated.

In the stories Gurmu tells and the songs he recites there are strong relationships between the historical traditions and folklore which not only maintain links with the past but also help to reconstruct meanings of past events as they apply to the present. In the early 1970s in Ethiopia, the decrease in democracy, the famine in the Wallo and Tigray regions in 1973, the demand for independence, the cries for land reform by peasants, and the lack of infrastructure led the country into turmoil. On September 12, 1974, after continued unrest and strikes by workers, peasants, students and teachers, Haile Selassie was deposed and the Derg military junta came to power. Gurmu said he was in his late thirties when this happened and it was shocking for him to hear that Haile Selassie, who was the governor of Salale in 1906, and later Emperor, proclaimed

⁸⁹ Ibid.

“elect of God,” Lion of Judah, was now disgracefully thrown into prison. Gurmu recited the following song composed and performed then by a Salale *shaayi* (performer) to express the disorder and confusion about the whereabouts of the monarch:

Finfinnee dhabamanii, Hararitti dawwalii akka Tafariin gale gaafadhuu...	He is removed from Finfinne, call and check in Harar if Tafari came home, give us a hint.
--	---

Hararis hin jiranii, Mangistuu tu, hallayyaa gate jedhanii	He is not in Harar, rumors are, Mangistu threw him into a pit. ⁹⁰
--	--

Gurmu looks back at himself at a young age and recalls the youth sub-culture using folksongs and narrative resources. One can observe from his life history how the themes of oral traditions changed along with the rapid social changes in the present social relations. From Gurmu’s personal experience narratives and the historical traditions, one can infer that recalling past memories and sharing nuances of the present human condition enhances understanding of the historical poetics of the Salale Oromo.

Overall, in this chapter I have demonstrated that Salale “artists” are generally called *shaayi*. They compose and perform songs on occasions and intensify not only the pastness of their collective experience but also uncover and locate it in the present by their consistent memory of events and of names of places and people, through narratives and songs. Both Gurmu and Cuqqaalaa focus attention upon the centrality of ancestral memories handed down as folklore and tradition to recount the deeds of memorable ancestors. Tarashe stands out among the three for the emotive qualities of her words and poetic expressions that traditionalize the current affairs and revitalize the historical poetics.

⁹⁰ Informant, Gurmu B. Fieldnote #2, p50, Shararo.



Figure 5.7: Abandoned home. There were/are several causes for abandoning homes in each system: heavy taxes and tenancy, revillagization, and today land grab, which the Salale sing about and tell stories of bitter remorse.

To recapitulate what I have presented in this chapter, first, Tarashe's distinctive poetic representation of the relatively recent past through the gendered genre, *bar-kumee* songs, and her discursive remembrance of ethnic heroes/bandits, particularly Badho Dilgaasa, through *faarsa* are charged by the emotions knitted into the metaphor of resistance, recurring in the past and present. Tarashe of Gumbichu has also been visually impaired since she was five years old. Second, Cuqqaalaa Buttaa's first-hand accounts and interpretation of the themes of displacement and estrangement which the Salale suffered under Shawan Amhara rulers are compelling. We have seen that Cuqqaalaa Buttaa's lived experience narratives and anecdotal references to historical tradition critique the larger political context and challenge the dominant discourse. Third, Gurmu demonstrated the ability both to handle the stock images of Salale verbal art set within the tradition and to show some level of originality in his stories and songs. He was active as a young boy in the local youth sub-culture of horse-riding games (*gombisa/gugsii*), hunting

(*adamo*), stick-fighting (*faccee*), cooperative works (*daboo*), and travel. He attended ritual events and ceremonies, talked to those people who recur in his recitations and narratives (e.g., the bandits Hagari Tullu and Mulu Asanu), and sang the songs and danced the folkdances. Now at seventy-eight, visually impaired, his ability to create new themes and interpretations is significant.

Generally, in the views of the three *shaayi* presented in this chapter, and other ethnographic examples, the poetics of Salale “culture,” “folklore,” and “tradition” has been interpolated as mutually inclusive. From a Salale perspective, “culture” (*aadaa*) is the whole way of life and includes agriculture, the kinship system, and the complementary relationships between humankind, and between humans and animals. “Tradition” (*duudha*) is a representation of the people’s worldview, history, and artifacts signified by objects, sounds, and ideas or beliefs that are carried in individual and social memories. Folklore (*afoola*) is the lived experiences of a group, past and present, with their change and constancy expressed through oral tradition, belief systems, performances, and interpretations of their meanings to facilitate cultural transmission and social transformation from “below” at the grassroots level.

SALALE BANDITS AND BANDITRY

Oh, Nagawo, you listen,
oh, Nagawoo Gammadaa,
the grief of your people,
whom Layye yoked,
and plowed, like oxen?

—*Salale song*¹

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will examine the relevance of social banditry to the Salale experiences and understandings of social order, heroism and resistance. Toward this end, I analyze the historical meaning of the bandit tradition in Salale by exploring their bandit lore. The data for this chapter was obtained from Salale verbal artists concerning three major Salale bandits who fought and were executed under three different regimes (1966-1994). The pioneer folkloristic study into the narratives of bandit-related songs, *corridos*, led by Américo Paredes on the Texas-Mexican border, has crucial significance both for the people studied and for the discipline.² First, it challenged conventional histories and stereotypes about Mexican-Americans along the Texas-Mexican border. Second, it shaped a positive cultural identity among the Mexican-Americans, who were regarded as uneducated laborers and the victims of migration. Third, the study also

¹ Kana dhageessaa, ya Nagawoo,
yaa Nagawoo Gammadaa,
akka Layyen, hiyyeessa kee
camadee ittiin qotu,
akka sa'aa?

Fieldnote #2, p60. Dajjach Layye was a district governor of Warra Jaaraso during *ras* Kassa's administration in Salale. Tsegaye confirms that until 1920s certain areas in the district, like Mogor river valley and the Abbay gorge, "seem to have been used as a safe haven for those who opposed the system," i.e., bandits. Nagawo Gammada Bonaya was the traditional chief of Kuyyu, Hidhabu, and Warra Jaarso before *ras* Darge, See Tsegaye, 2002, p107.

²José E. Limón, *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp46-79. Richard Bauman, ed. *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

awakened new generations of scholars and opened a venue for critical study of the lived experiences of Mexican-Americans from an interdisciplinary perspective. Similarly, the present study will open a venue for folklorists, social historians, and anthropologists interested in social banditry as an alternative political aspect of the resistance culture in Northeast Africa.

This chapter has three sections. First, I offer some conceptual and definitional outlines to pinpoint the notions of “bandit” and (social) “banditry” by drawing on local historical accounts of power relations using “social banditry” approach. Here, I argue that both the Salale ethno-history and the broader macro-history show that, in Ethiopia, the concepts of *shefta* (bandit) and banditry have a historical root in “resistance” against cultural domination, economic exploitation, and political exclusion.³ I also examine the relevance of social banditry as a Western model of resistance to the Salale experiences. Second, I identify the *faarsa* bandit lore (including the concept of banditry) of three Salale bandits who lived in three different historical epochs. Some of the *faarsa* songs of bandits and banditry analyzed in the third section of this chapter are drawn from the selections of the main texts presented in section two. Finally, using the ethnographic examples presented in section two, I will explore this wide range of social experience laden with historical meanings based on the ethnographic and folkloric examples. I contend that the tradition of “banditry” is a source of Salale resistance poetics through which the people earnestly seek to exercise power and authority.

³ Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia* (1896-1974), (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1995), pp. 36-37; see also Donald Crummey, “Banditry and Resistance: noble and peasant in 19th century Ethiopia,” in Donald Crummey, ed., *Banditry, Rebellion, and Social Protest in Africa*, (London: James Currey, 1986), see p. 133.



Figure 6.1 Holqa Boole, a cave in Wucaale, historically, bandits' sanctuary. Underground, it takes long miles, the folks tell, and has an opening on the other end.

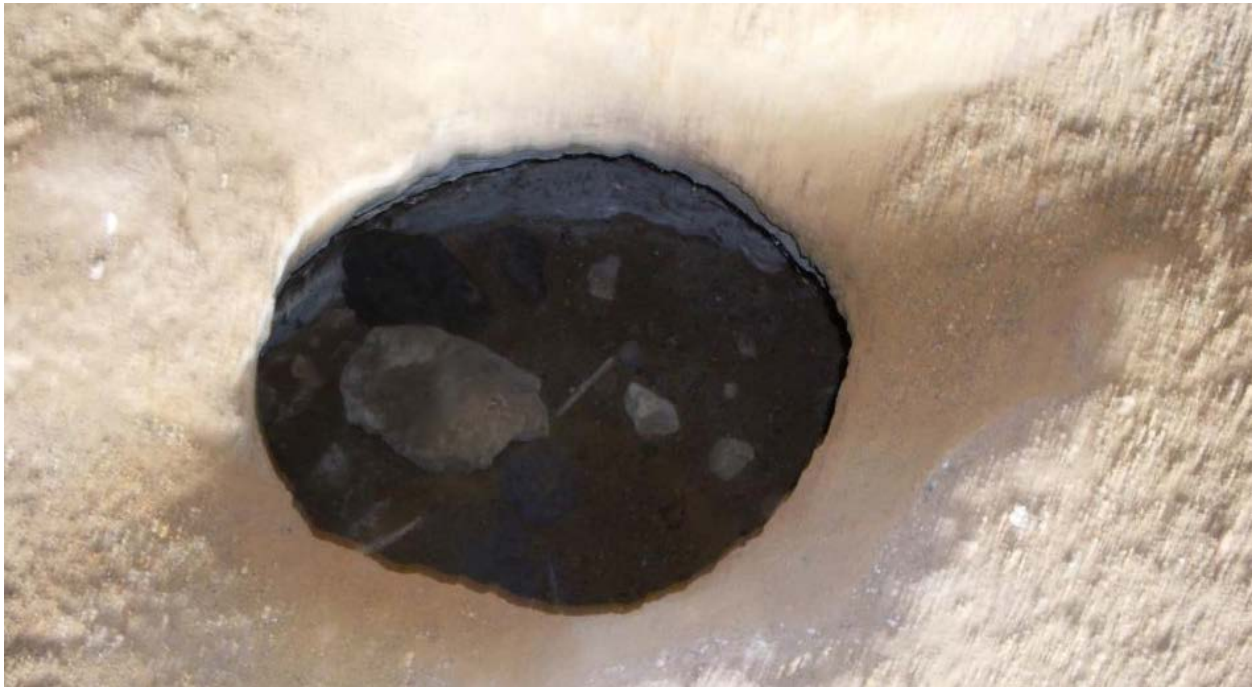


Figure 6.2: Grain bin in the cave floor, Holqa Bole, Wucaale. According to my informants, *fitawrari* Alamu Ejersa fought along the Italian force (1936-1941) from here.

SOME CONCEPTUAL AND DEFINITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

As will be explored further in this chapter, the grassroots history of the Salale shows that “traditional nationalism” took varied forms in resistance culture, i.e., cultural resistance or strategic traditionalism, social banditry, and full-scale battles against the “*predatory, plunderer state* that lived by looting the *gabbars* or tenants.”⁴ By “traditional nationalism,” I refer to the non-state movement, or non-official grassroots ideology, a popular movement expressed along ethnic, civic, cultural, religious or local ideological lines; these lines are not mutually exclusive.⁵ By this account of “traditional nationalism,” the end goal of Salale resistance poetics, I argue, transcends the Abyssinian official ethnocentrism and expansionist nationalism built on a religiocentric or theopolitical ideology. According to this Abyssinian theopolitical ideology, there is one “divine nation,” and it is a Christian Island surrounded by barbarians, heathens, and people without writing, ruled by God’s chosen people, “elects of God.”⁶

⁴Teshale Tibebe, *Ibid.*, p. 32. Svein Ege maintains that “The process of assimilation often provoked Oromo resistance,” p. 195. This resistance, I argue, had two phases: military and cultural. The open military confrontation was unsuccessful because “It might be unfeasible to resort to arms [for the Oromo], due to overwhelming Shawan superiority, but they [the Oromo] nevertheless sought to defend their own culture as long as possible.” And to do so, Ege adds, both parties followed means available to them, “means of control for the Amharas and means of resistance for the Oromo.” See Svein Ege, *Ibid.* p191, 195.

The Salale historical poetics indicates, in synchronic terms, that the cultural resistance took two forms: first, through “strategic traditionalism,” the Salale maintained their traditional belief system, in spite of the forced conversion to the dominant Orthodox Christian religion; second, following the examples of *warra Darro Daannisa*, esp. their chief, later, bandit, Goshu Gissilla Geto Gicho, the Salale fiercely resisted, through social banditry, the Shawa Amhara expansion spearheaded by Darge in 1870-1890. See Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, “The Oromo of Salale: a History, 1840-1936,” MA Thesis, History Department, Addis Ababa University, 2003, pp. 55-58.

⁵ Craig Calhoun argues that nationalism and ethnicity are not “vanishing as part of an obsolete traditional order. Both are part of a modern set of categorical identities” and “shape everyday life, offering both tools for grasping pre-existing homogeneity and difference and for constructing specific versions of such identities. It is impossible to dissociate nationalism entirely from ethnicity.” See Craig Calhoun, “Nationalism and Ethnicity,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 19 (1993), pp. 211-239, p. 211.

⁶By this historical essentialism, “Ethiopian history has been written as the story of dynastic narratives” from the Axumite dynasty to Haile Selassie. As the base of this essentialist paradigm, Teshale satirizes the mythic relationship between King Solomon and the Abyssinian Saba and her “transfer (or stealing)” of the original Ark of the Covenant: “Shouldn’t we call the Axumite paradigm the ‘sex and theft paradigm?’” Teshale, *Ibid.* pp. 12-14.

What initiates banditry or resistance? In their history, Africans resisted injustice, exploitation, and “the rule of others, African or non-African,” a theme which has been the subject of modern African studies since the early 1960s.⁷ Those studies set the stage for close examination of African reactions to external rule; these reactions had two faces: resistance and collaboration.⁸ From a Salale perspective, as data shows, it is unmet expectations that trigger resistance. There is an acute demand for justice and a new social order at all levels of everyday life of the people. This demand requires commitment to action and to the search for reason, to serious scholarship and critical ethnography, to facilitate fundamental social changes at the grassroots level. Unmet realistic expectations, such as justice and a new social order, provoke anger and violent resistance, aiming to change the status quo by whatever means are possible. In Oromo Studies, there has been an academic interest in studying colonial experience, conflicts, violence and resistance, but there is the lack of well-documented information about Salale bandits, banditry, and resistance culture.⁹ In his pioneering study of Salale history, Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa

⁷ Jon Abbink, et al., eds. *Rethinking Resistance*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003). The issue of “resistance” and “collaboration” is controversial. Here in *Rethinking Resistance* scholars distinguish between African reactions to colonialism as “resistance” and “collaboration,” which gradually evolved into early forms of violent resistance (primary resistance) and to modern nationalist battles for independence (secondary resistance). In this view, this progression of conflict set the stage for the concept of “resistance” as a historical dimension of African nationalism, see p2.

⁸The question of “resistance” and “collaboration” during liberation struggle is compelling. In discussing African reaction to colonial conquest and domination, J.F Mbwiliza argues, it was a fatal mistake to link resistance with nationalism and collaboration with treason. Both dynamics depend on the conditions that prevail at a particular time in history. By using a case example of Sancul from northern Mozambique, Mbwiliza argues, “national heroes should be sought not only among the leaders of the resistance but also from among the collaborators as well.” In so doing, history can be reinterpreted. See p. 195, J.F Mbwiliza, “Resistance and collaboration or the struggle and unity of opposites,” in *Utafiti: Journal of the Faculty of Arts and Social Science*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1979), pp195-217. See *Africa Bibliographical.org*: <http://www.africabib.org/rec.php?RID=188616845>. Retrieved on February 7, 2015.

⁹Abbas Gnamo. *Conquest and Resistance in the Ethiopian Empire, 1880 -1974*, (Brill Academic Publishers, 2014). See Mohammed Hassen, “A Short History of Oromo Colonial Experience: 1870's-1935, Part 1” in *Journal of Oromo Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1&2, (1999), pp108-158. Cf. Mohammed Hassen, “A Short History of Oromo Colonial Experience: Colonial Consolidation and Resistance, 1935-2000, Part 2,” in *Journal of Oromo Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1&2, (2000), pp. 109-198.

documented the Salale resistance against the Shawa rulers' conquest and, relying on Salale historical tradition, he laid a firm foundation for the legitimacy of Salale resistance.¹⁰

Using examples of resistance poetics obtained from Salale people as a ritualized remembrance of economic exploitation and domination, I examine internal colonialism in the Ethiopian context through the analysis of *faarsa* heroic songs and narratives. Salale Oromo resistance culture is considered as a galvanizing force of social movement against internal colonialism in Ethiopia, and it is a vehicle for collective mobilization and revitalization of cultural nationalism embedded in the concept of *Oromummaa* (Oromoness).¹¹

Contrary to the Abyssinian nation-building tenet of the late 19th century based on forced territorial integrity (expansionist nationalism), nations are not the mere products of territorial unity but the result of politics, technology, and social transformation, i.e., economic and technological development based on an equal distribution of resources.¹² Thus, “internal colonialism,” which will be further explored in this study—resulting in the social inequalities and “uneven development” of regions in Ethiopia—fanned the flames of traditional nationalism supported by cultural resistance, i.e., strategic (and actual) traditionalism and social banditry from “below.” According to Eric Hobsbawm, nations and nationalisms are constructed essentially from above, which cannot be understood unless analyzed from “below.”¹³ From a Salale Oromo perspective, the *waadaa* principle of *Oromummaa* (Oromoness) has a major effect

¹⁰Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, “Local Resistance against Darge’s Hegemony,” in “The Oromo of Salale....., pp53-69.

¹¹Gemetchu Megeressa, “Oromumma, Tradition, Consciousness, and Identity,” in P.T.W. Baxter et al. *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*, (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press., 1996), pp92-102. See also Asafa Jalata, “Promoting and Developing Oromummaa,” *Sociology Publications and Other Works*, (2012). http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_socopubs/83. Retrieved on Feb 12, 2015.

¹²Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹³Eric Hobsbawm, 1990, p10; Ozkirimli, 2010, p96.

on the way in which people perceive and describe the social world and others who inhabit it. By the *waadaa* principle the human-nonhuman relationship should be always on an ethical base ruled by *safuu* (social/moral order).¹⁴ In what follows, I discuss indigenous practices including the view of bandits and banditry as forms of resistance to subvert internal colonialism and the injustices which fuel resistance poetics.

*The Concept of Internal Colonialism*¹⁵

Internal colonialism theory examines the issue of nationalism and national questions regarding political solutions to economic exploitation and oppression imposed by a dominant power within a country. The theory deals with social inequalities caused by uneven development and economic exploitation and looks at whether the oppressed people have the right to self-determination as a nation and whether they can exist as a cohesive independent state. The internal colonialism theory deals with a notion of structural political and economic inequalities between regions within a nation state. It describes the effects of uneven economic development on a regional basis, also known as uneven development, and identifies the exploitation of minority groups within a wider society. The Salale Oromo have been practicing social banditry as a practical resistance culture to subvert exploitation and domination imposed by internal colonialism.

¹⁴ Informant, Gurmu, Fieldnote #2, p. 68, Shararo, 2010.

¹⁵ Internal colonialism is the economic exploitation and political exclusion of the subordinate group by the ethnically or racially dominant group located in the same domain. In Ethiopia, without the spread of literacy and mass education to maintain a national language, uniting the nation around a common discourse and creating national identification around the official ideology of “official nationalism” has been difficult. Internal colonialism in Ethiopia has been aimed at creating the common-sense notion of “manifest destiny” (the nation-building thesis) and, in so doing, to stabilize “official nationalism” through deepening what Linda Gordon calls “intimate colonial relations” (in Stoler, 2006) by the construction of colonial practices (education, dominant culture, religion) to perpetuate, Ethiopia as a “heimat,” a ‘homeland,’ a Christian island, a melting pot of ethno-nations. See Linda Gordon, “Internal Colonialism and Gender,” in Ann Laura Stoler, ed. *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), pp427-453. Cf. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, “Classes, Colonialism, and Acculturation,” *Studies in Comparative International Relations*, 1:6, (1965), pp53-77.

John Markakis, in his *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, adeptly delineates the border between those two, seemingly separate, social worlds: the dominant core and the oppressed periphery in the neo-empire building process in Ethiopia.¹⁶ Markakis is well aware of the ongoing historical “internal colonialism” in Ethiopia and the entire region to integrate a multicultural empire into a modern nation-state. Thus, if Michel Foucault is right, “modernity” is a colonialist project by which societies are possessed, administered, reformed and reframed, surveyed and regulated as objects through proxy pseudo-democratic authorities.¹⁷ By this theory (of internal colonialism), those frontiers are the “blurred” lines drawn between the geographically close locations of the “dominant core” and the “subject periphery” which are clearly different in terms of culture: language, religion, life style, and types and levels of technology.¹⁸ As an example, from the Ethiopian and Ethiopianists’ scriptocentric view of Geez civilization, the Oromo are depicted as ‘barbarian hordes,’ a view which was “not only a prejudice of Geez civilization but also of very well-known European travelers to Ethiopia and prominent names in Ethiopianist scholarship.”¹⁹ The regions conquered after fierce resistance fell under colonialism, which eventually evolved into the *naftanya* system. Teshale Tibebu notes, “In regions of local military resistance, the *naftanya* system was imposed once the resistance was ‘pacified.’”²⁰

¹⁶ John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers (Eastern Africa Series)*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2011).

¹⁷ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*. (Cambridge: Polity, 1994); Harold Wolpe, “The Theory of Internal Colonialism: The South African Case,” in I. Oxaal et al., *Beyond the Sociology of Development*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

¹⁸ S. Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). pp18, 19.

¹⁹ Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*, ... Ibid., p16.

²⁰ This new system (colonialism) introduced to the Oromo toward the end of the 19th century, eventually evolved into a *naftanya* system, i.e. settler colonialism, where the *naftanya*, i.e., “one with gun,” and the colonized “faced each other without mediation. The language of the gun was the means of communication. So was formed the dual society: conqueror and conquered, victor and vanquished, civilized and barbarian, believer and infidel...” See Teshale Tibebu, Ibid., p. 44; Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest, Peasant Revolts in the 20th Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Internal colonialism derives from “Colonialism” which is “the subjugation by physical and psychological force of one culture by another...through conquest of territory.” See M. McMichael, *Development and Change: A Global Perspective* (5th ed.). (California: Sage Publications, 2012), p. 27.

“Resistance Culture”/“Cultural Resistance”

In this study in the introduction (Cf. “Resistance Culture”) I discussed the idea that “resistance culture” is not necessarily against positive social transformation or positive change. Rather it is a “plurality of resistance” present everywhere in the power network—a situation which, in Michel Foucault’s view, is “a multiplicity of points of resistance.”²¹ To Foucault, power “implies having more than one option open,”²² and in this view, ecological resistance against environmental degradation²³ is not opposing science but is proposing alternative scientific approaches to save humanity and the environment, which is an example of emancipatory resistance.²⁴ “Cultural resistance” is carried out in varied, fragmented, transitory genres, and is a reaction to specific divergent situations through cultural means, whereas “resistance culture” is a solid quality of cultural practices that underlies existing patterns and transmissions of cultural idea, behavior, lifestyle conveyed through rituals, symbols, or other imitable phenomena. In Salale, banditry has been practiced as resistance culture and is considered as a stepping stone toward political activities at the local level. Hence, political activity and resistance culture are interdependent since “the very activity of producing culture has political meaning.”²⁵ Hence, while resistance culture is an overarching subversive means of challenging domination, cultural resistance includes a multiplicity of different means of doing the same.

²¹ José Medina “Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance,” in *Foucault Studies*, No. 12, pp. 9-35, October 2011. Foucault’s notion of *subjugated knowledges* is relevant here to refer to the “forms of experiencing and remembering that are pushed to the margins and rendered unqualified and unworthy of epistemic respect by prevailing and hegemonic discourses.” The “multiplicity of points of resistance,” also reminds us of Foucault’s notion of *guerrilla* pluralism, which “enables us to see how different possibilities of resistance appear for differently constituted and situated subjects as they develop different forms of agency.” Jose Medina, *ibid.* pp11, 31.

²² David Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), p84..

²³ Among possible causes of environmental degradation and social injustice are “overpopulation, pollution, deforestation, global warming, unsustainable agricultural and fishing practices, overconsumption, maldistribution of wealth, the rise of the corporation, the Third World debt crisis, and militarization and wars.” See Martin Donohoe “Causes and health consequences of environmental degradation and social injustice,” in *Social Science & Medicine* 56 (2003) 573–587, see p573.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.* p7.

Bandits and banditry: origin and evolution

To understand the Salale bandit folklore requires revisiting the historical background of the origin and evolution of bandits and banditry as a social phenomenon and the state's coercive measures and bandit suppressions in Ethiopia. There are two general views about the causes of banditry: first, fundamental changes in economy, and, second, social misery.²⁶ In Hobsbawm's view, fundamental changes in the economy caused an increase in banditry by affecting two social realities. One is changes in classic modes of production, i.e. adopting agrarian capitalism and the modern economy; the other is an egalitarian system of communally based society being replaced by a class-based and hierarchical social structure or state,²⁷ which is the case with the Salale in Tulama starting during the first-half of the 19th century. The Tulama historical tradition, to which the Salale belong, indicates that, by *gada* tradition, their government was "based on participation and absence of state machinery or bureaucracy"; and the people "had to be a political community."²⁸ Svein Ege adds that, among the Tulama Oromo, beyond "inequalities within the households in the size of herds, ... there was no unproductive social class extracting a surplus from another class."²⁹ The economic change, the emergence of class, and limited political participation, led to the evolution of new leadership patterns, i.e., "the rise of a chief relying on his following," and allying with Shawan rulers to subdue his Oromo rivals.³⁰

²⁶ Timothy Fernyhough, "Social mobility and dissident elites...", in Doanald Crummey, *Banditry, Rebellion,...*, p151.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Svein Ege, *Class, State, and Power in Africa....*, pp89, 90.

²⁹ Ibid., p89.

³⁰ A corollary of the latter argument is that the allies and "incorporation of a large number of Amharas weakened the unity of the tribe and the influence of the gada government. The Salale tribe is the case in point." See Svein Ege, 1996, p91.

Before I proceed to analyze the *faarsa* bandit lore, I quickly recap the relevance and shortcomings of the Western model of social banditry to the Salale experience. By Eric Hobsbawm's social banditry model,

bandits were typically peasant outlaws ...represented...popular protest that were devoid of any explicit ideology, organization, or program. Bandits' activities were aimed at the landlords and officials of an intrusive capitalist regime and were supported by peasant communities and common people who benefitted materially or psychically from the bandits' operations.³¹

Unlike the classic Robin Hood legend of a social bandit who took wealth from the rich and redistributed it to the poor, the second type of social bandit is “‘the avenger,’ a bandit who was excessively violent and often feared by the poor but gained their popular appeal” as one who expresses the “unarticulated rage of the poor.”³² The third variant of Hobsbawm's social bandit is the *haiduks*, a group of armed men involved in armed struggle for national liberation and operating in frontier zones.³³ In Ethiopia, Timothy Fernyhough rightly observes, “different social and political contexts dictated very different kinds of banditry,”³⁴ and, historically, *shefta* (bandits), “were not only drawn from all social ranks, but they appeared with regional variations, [...] flourished in frontier regions.”³⁵ In the Salale context, which will be presented shortly, banditry was initiated both by economic changes and social misery. Bandits came from both the peasant and elite classes and operated in, but were not limited to, the inaccessible parts of the Mogor and Jama gorges.³⁶ However, whether because of internal conflicts or state suppression,

³¹ Gilbert M. Joseph, “On the Trail of Latin American Bandits: A Reexamination of Peasant Resistance,” in *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1990), pp. 7-53, see p8.

³² Ibid.; Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, Ibid., 1969 (edited version, 1985).

³³ “Haiduks” are bandits “named after robber groups who waged resistance against the Turks in the Balkans.” See Timothy Fernyhough, “Social mobility and dissident elites in northern Ethiopia,” in Doanld Crummey, *Banditry, Rebellion, and Social Protest*, Ibid., pp166.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p153.

³⁶ As in Ethiopia, empirical instances of bandit and banditry from Latin America challenge the universality of Hobsbawm's social bandit thesis. Jilbert Joseph's critique of social bandit theses and his summary of essays in Richard Slatta's *Bandidos* show us that, unlike the Hobsbawm's universal Robin Hood paradigm, the close ties of

historically, banditry in Salale has been short-lived; the banditry rarely went on for more than five years before the bandit was betrayed and finally executed.

Bandit suppression, state coercion, and resistance

Here I argue that there is a lack of academic interest in the study of bandits and banditry as an alternative means of resistance in Ethiopia. Available literature on bandits in Northeast Africa focuses on the traditional feuds among nobilities and brigands in highland Ethiopia.³⁷ According to Nene Mburu, current literature is scanty and “fails to establish a firm anchor of the phenomenon with geopolitical issues that wrap together poverty, political instability and inexorable lawlessness.”³⁸ Beyond Hobsbawm’s social bandit thesis, in the North African context banditry has become a national and transnational threat as it is intensified by socioeconomic and political instabilities within states and by interstate territorial disputes, added to ecological factors. To subdue this “social evil” or “lawlessness,” Nene Mburu sets short-term and long-term goals for the region; this is a reactionary attitude toward emancipatory resistance. It is reactionary because, on a short-term basis, he recommends both the passive approach of offering economic aid to regional governments, which have held power for more than two

class and the comradeship between social bandits and peasants are not practical in the Latin American context. In arriving at this conclusion, Joseph examines the revisionists’ essays in Slatta’s *Bandidos* and summarizes the Latin American social bandit experience as follows: the rural masses’ motive to support banditry is more economic than (pre-)political protest (essays by Vanderwood, Chandler, and Lewin); peasants chose banditry as a last resort (Langer, Perez); banditry occurred on the frontiers where settled peasantry is lacking (Izard and Slatta, Slatta); and, finally, elite-bandit alliances unlike Hobsbawm’s pre-political peasant-bandit solidarity (Vanderwood, Lewin, Chandler, Sanchez and Meertens). Thus, with some exceptions, it is family conflicts, blood feuds, individual vengeance and clan honor, not broad social injustices, that characterizes banditry in the Latin American context, and, thus banditry doesn’t emerge as a distinctive historical experience of resistance culture. See Gilbert M. Joseph, *Ibid.*, 1990, p11. See also Richard Slatta, ed. *Bandidos: The Varieties of Latin American Banditry*. (New York: Greenwood, 1987).

³⁷ See Donald Crummey, *Banditry, Rebellion, and Social Protest in Africa*, *ibid.*, pp133ff; 151ff.

³⁸ Nene Mburu, “Contemporary Banditry in the Horn of Africa: Causes, History and Political Implications,” in *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 8(2): 89-107 (1999), p89.

decades, and a more coercive strategy of recruiting, training, equipping, and deploying of counter-bandit troops for bandit suppression.³⁹ In the long term, as banditry

cannot be eradicated through purely coercive methods,...collective effort must address the national and international social, economic and political factors that are the root causes of banditry.⁴⁰

Hence, where there is injustice, coercion and exploitation, banditry is an alternative means of resistance for the societies in the region and “is the epitome of a wider phenomenon where there is a symmetrical connection between poverty, political instability, and infectious lawlessness.”⁴¹

It is sheer insensitivity to the people’s suffering under coercive government measures, in the name of “bandit suppression,” to undermine the legitimate resistance for freedom, an emancipatory act, simply as “lawlessness,” or conversely to deny the people categorically the right to self-determination by categorizing them as “victims of banditry.”⁴²

Salale Resistance Culture: Banditry and Strategic Traditionalism

Though Salale resistance to domination is often undermined or thought of as nonexistent or simply misconstrued as collaboration, this presumption underestimates the complex and strategic thinking that the people commonly employed to address the challenge of power imbalance with the Abyssinian “predator state,” which was allied with European powers to obtain firearms. This presumption also neglects the power-dynamics of the time, of which the Salale were well aware.

Around 1837, the two major forces, Camme of Mulo Faallee and her son, Jaarra, and Abbaa

³⁹ pp103, 105.

⁴⁰ p104.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Mburu insists that “...victims of banditry feel that the re-institution of pre-colonial mechanisms for controlling social behavior is a possible solution to banditry.” And he adds a rather official discourse that preempts the ordinary people as victims, not victors: “It requires time and patience to inculcate trust among the victims and to convince them of the government’s unconditional commitment to their security and sustainable development.” See Nene Mburu, Ibid. pp102, 104. Data obtained from Salale indicate that the people performed as victims of the central state and local authorities rather than as victims of bandits and banditry, which they commemorate in song.

Maalle of Saggo, who were competing with King Sahla Selassie of Shawa, eventually allied with the latter to claim power over their other Oromo rivals.⁴³ This Abyssinian divide-and-rule policy markedly affected the future Salale reaction (collaboration and resistance) and continued to affect negatively the Salale local politics and means of enduring life under domination. Citing Blackhurst, Tsegaye clearly depicts the Salale situation following conquest:

...the exclusive political authority that was once vested in the *gadaa* system was further dispersed. In addition, all the various positions of the authority within the Oromo society were downgraded, for now final authority lay with the Shawan kingdom...” and “politically speaking, they [the Oromo] were no longer whole societies, but parts of a larger whole.⁴⁴

This bleak situation of the Salale continued into the 20th century under Ras Kassa, Darge’s grandson, a situation which Donald Crummey described as follows:

Darge’s subjugation of Salale introduced ethnicity as an important factor in the social relations surrounding the distributions of land...Their [Amhara landlords’] tributary farmers were all Oromo. Social class in the Salale of Ras Darge foreshadowed crucial features of social class in the 20th century Ethiopia.⁴⁵

Based on available data, it is possible to argue that, to cope with this novel social reality and the harsh living conditions under domination, the Salale turned to their culture as their gun. Their resistance culture had two forms: strategic traditionalism (cultural resistance) and banditry. First, following forced conversion, when the chiefs adopted Orthodox Christianity and built churches, I submit, the general public ostensibly became Orthodox Christian. However, in practice, as if by cultural regression or degeneration, at least in the view of the dominant culture, the Salale recoiled from Christianity and returned to their traditional belief system.⁴⁶ According to Tadesse

⁴³ Svein Ege *Class, State, and Power...* 1996, pp90-95.

⁴⁴ Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, “The Oromo of Salale...,” p70; Hector Blackhurst, “Continuity and Change in Shawa Oromo Gada System,” in P.T.W. Baxter and Uri Aumago, (eds.) *Age, Generation and Time: Some Features of East African Age Organization*, (London: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd., 1978).

⁴⁵ Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: from the 13th to the 20th century*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p221.

⁴⁶ Informant, Raggasa Badhiyee, Field Journal, p. 58ff., Dedde Xiggi, Ilu, 2010.

Tamrat, this resistance through the traditional belief system, i.e., cultural resistance, against Orthodox Christianity was historical. During the medieval period, the “Cushitic religious practices with which the Church had to contend were dominated by the worship of the sky-god [Waaqa] and an indefinite number of spirits inhabiting springs, rivers, lakes, hills, trees, and other objects. Some cult of fire ...and worship of serpent-god is also referred to in some traditions regarding Amhara, Gojjam, Shawa, and Damot.”⁴⁷ Historically, the politico-religious role of traditional (pagan) priests and priestesses was indomitable. Tadesse adds, “the power of the Christian kingdom was still very weak and the few isolated Christian communities in northern Shawa were at the mercy of the local pagan chiefs.”⁴⁸ Conversely, in the 19th century Salale under Darge, and much later under his grandchildren’s harsh rule, Christianity evolved into a more dominant cultural ideology, though strategic traditionalism as a tool of cultural resistance was still present. In 20th century Ethiopia, in reference to one instance of peasants’ cultural resistance to the modern legal system, Teshale Tibebu wrote,

...the peasant always started with the circumstances that led him to the alleged illegal act, rather than with the act itself. The judge was interested in the act; the peasant in the conditions that led to the act...for the judge the facts speak for themselves; for the peasants, facts need circumstantial interpretation. Legal “rationalism” and peasant “traditionalism” were expressed through their respective approach to the relations between the act and the social conditions that led to the act.⁴⁹

This example is one among several other cases that illustrate the disparity between the numerous hurdles of legal processes and the economic resources at the disposal of the peasant which leave the latter either to flee his home to other regions or to join banditry or to sell his labor-power and live in servitude. When options were lessened, to fight or flee was another form of passive resistance.

⁴⁷ Tadesse Tamrat, “A Short Note on the Traditions of Pagan Resistance to the Ethiopian Church (14th and 15th Centuries,” in *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January 1972), pp137-150, see p137.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p139.

⁴⁹ Teshale Tibebu, 1995, pp135-136.

Second, according to the existing data, the end goal of Salale resistance culture is not merely to ensure survival of their traditions and to endure hard times by means of cultural resistance (strategic traditionalism). The resistance culture also directs social banditry to evolve into a more revolutionary and mass-based social movement guided by democratic cultural ideology out of a hitherto reactionary tendency of criminality, vengeance, and robbery. In line with this organizational and ideological limitation of banditry in resistance culture, Timothy Fernyhough maintains, “Lacking political organization and ideology, *shefta* were unlikely to initiate concerted peasant action to change their society.”⁵⁰ Thus the study of social banditry in Salale requires extension of the analytical framework within which to examine rural resistance culture.

Banditry and Resistance in Salale

Donald Crummey offers a definition of “*shefta*,” “bandit,” “one who stirs up trouble, while taking to the forest, or the bush, departing from the king, the government, rule (*gezat*), instituted order (*sereat*), and the law.”⁵¹ Drawing on Eric Hobsbawm’s classic study, Crummey adds that the motive behind banditry in Ethiopia reveals instances of “outlawry, of armed defiance, of lives based on plunder played out within a self-conscious context; it reveals few links of a progressive or socially redeeming nature between the peasants and the institution of banditry.”⁵² Crummey reminds us that in northeast Africa, this concept of resistance, namely, *banditry*, “from Sudan to Kenya, it refers to any armed band at odds with the state.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Timothy Fernyhough, “Social Mobility and Dissident Elites in Northern Ethiopia,” in Donald Crummey, *Banditry, Rebellion, and Social Protest in Africa*, Ibid, p163.

⁵¹ Donald Crummey, p133.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Donald Crummey, p135.

Studies of bandits and banditry in Ethiopia have been confined to the northern regions, mainly Amhara and Tigre.⁵⁴ The outcome of those studies depends on whose history the scholars chose to write, from whose perspective, and when the history began. However, as Donald Crummey notes, “Banditry was widespread in nineteenth and twentieth century Ethiopia....The Ethiopian ruling classes dominated the institution of banditry, and molded it to their own ends...for political competition for office.”⁵⁵ To the contrary, among the Salale, in addition to the cultural domination, it was the economic impact of the internal colonial rule that served as a factor leading to banditry as violent resistance. The *warra Darroo* Oromo were the forerunners in the history of banditry in Salale, led by Goshu Gissillaa, who took refuge in a cave and fought Darge’s encroachment in the second half of the 19th century.⁵⁶

When other Salale chiefs (e.g. Birraatu Waaqee) paid tribute to Darge by allowing him to remain on their land, temporarily, Goshu chose living as a bandit in the bush rather than subjugation.⁵⁷ His two grandsons, Balaacho and Mulu Asanu Goshu, maintained the ancestral folk hero paradigm. Teshale Tibebu distinguishes between three forms of banditry in Ethiopia: “fleeing from injustice and the Robin Hood-type *shefta* (outlaw, bandit); rebellion against a ruler by making a claim to a certain imperial title; and as a mere means of livelihood,” i.e., robbery, plundering and criminality.⁵⁸ While scholars agree with the ambiguity of the term “shefta,”

⁵⁴ Donald Crummey, “Banditry and Resistance: noble and peasant in 19th century Ethiopia,” in Donald Crummey, ed., *Banditry, Rebellion, and Social Protest in Africa*, (London: James Currey, 1986), see p133.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ The following *foollee* is a typical text which commemorates Goshu for his heroic endurance as a bandit:

Goshu Gissillaa	Goshu Gissillaa, the fearless
xabataa qawweedhaa,	who played games with gun,
hin gabbaru jedhee	repelled subjugation,
waashaatti gale,	and took refuge in the cave
dabbaallii jawweedhaa!	to share a room with a python!

⁵⁷ Tsegaye Zeleke, “The Oromo of Salale,....” Ibid, p60.

⁵⁸ Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*, ... Ibid, pp36-37.

bandit” (*shefta* or *mogoro*, in Salale), they also share the view that, in the Ethiopian context, it is used as much “to dismiss such bitter enemies of the current regime,” as it is “used to extol certain historical figures.”⁵⁹ Teshale claims that “the Robin Hood-type *shefta* protected peasants against abuse by notables,” while the “imperial aspirant became *shefta* for he claimed that power belonged to him instead of the one ruling,”⁶⁰ which was the major motive of banditry among the Amhara and Tigre in the north. In the Salale context, in his “Brief survey of the people’s reaction to the socioeconomic changes in the early 20th century,” Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa states that, in Salale, “certain individuals rose up against the system and went as far as killing their overlords. Historically, the Mogor, Abbay, and Jama gorges served as a safe haven for those who opposed the tenancy system.”⁶¹

Thus far, we have seen that in Salale history, there have been various forms of banditry: first, the *resisters*, mainly the clan chiefs in the late 19th century, who initially rebelled against the Shawan encroachment on their land but eventually submitted or fled. Donald Crummey maintains that the “association of banditry, rebellion, and resistance to oppressive rule lasted beyond ousting the Italians in 1941.”⁶² Under Haile Selassie, though while economic reasons were important, bandits evaded not only poverty and harsh living conditions but also “the authority of overlords and the state,” as was the case of Hagari Tullu in Salale.⁶³

⁵⁹ Crummey, p135.

⁶⁰ Teshale Tibebe, *Ibid*, p37.

⁶¹ Tsegaye Zeleke, p106

⁶² During the Italian occupation, the resisters, also designated as “patriots,” and celebrated thus in the official discourse, were bandits, e.g., Ras Abbaba Aragay, from Abbichu, Salale area. See Bahru Zewde, “The Resistance,” in *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), pp162-163; See Donald Crummey, *Ibid*, p135.

⁶³ See Ethiopian News Agency, “Hulat Wanjalagnoch Ka Polis Gar Sittakosu Motu,” (trans. “Two Gunmen Shot Dead in Confrontation with Police,” *Addis Zaman* (Tir 26, 1962 E.C.), p1; *Idem.*, “Agari Tullu Siqlat Täfärädäbät,” (trans. Hagari Tullu Executed,) *Addis Zaman* (Mägabit 29, 1962 E.C.), pp1, 6.

Second, the *collaborators*, also called *banda*, were those who chose to fight alongside the Italian forces rather than to live a miserable life under internal colonialism. There were also Amhara hereditary nobles like Ras Hailu, the ex-governor of Gojjam, who had submitted to the Italians and agreed to rule the country jointly, but failed because of “racism and the Fascist praxis of total power.”⁶⁴ During the five-year war, there were ethnic divides in Salale. Hence, Salale bandits (*banda*, e.g. *fitawrari* Alamu Ejersa Bune) collaborated with the Italians⁶⁵ there were also Salale bandits, led by Mulu and Balacho Asanu from Darro, who took up arms against the Italian force.⁶⁶ During the military rule, the Derg’s failure to demonstrate “Genuine political reform... drove disillusioned radicals to take up arms against it.”⁶⁷ Next, I turn to presenting the bandit lore data.

⁶⁴ Bahru Zewde, “The Resistance,...” p167.

⁶⁵ Bahru Zewde, “The Resistance,...” Ibid., p162.

⁶⁶ Alemseged Dabale notes, “In Kuyyu...many people... became *shiftas* (bandits) and struggled against the Italians... Although many of them were men, there were also women patriots.... Bälachäw Asanu and Mulu Asanu from Darro, Hirphaa Barushe and Waaqtolaa Barushe from Biriti and Badhaadha Jima from Wulinco. In Hidhabu ... Jilo Kenne, Badhaane Kenne and Tadässä Birru were also active bandits/patriots.” See Alemseged Dabale, “History of Kuyyu...,” pp28-29. Alemseged does not provide us with information about collaborators, *banda*, in Salale, however, unlike the historical tradition and folklore data from the area. When they fell under unbearable domination after the emperor was restored to power, the Salale sang:

haa haddaatuu, shaashiin gaabii wayya	white but warmer is toga than shawl
haa hammaatuu, Xaayilaanii wayya!	plight but sounder is the Italian rule!

⁶⁷ John Markakis, “Conflict in Pre-Federal Ethiopia,” *First National Conference on Federalism, Conflict and Peace Building* (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Federal Affairs, 2004), pp. 14, 17. For Baqqala Badhaadha and Mulu Asanu rising against the Därg regime in 1970s, see Ethiopian News Agency, “Adhariw Wänbäde Bä Gäbare Tibäka-Guad Tägädälä,” Addis Zaman (Yakatit 16,1969 E. C.), p. 3; Idem, “Bä Salaalee Kändägna Yä E. D. U. Wäkil Ena Leloch 11 Tsärä-Abiyotägnoch Tädämasäsu,” Addis Zaman (Nahase 29, 1969 E.C.), pp.1,7; For banditry in Kuyyu see also the songs collected by Tesfaye, “Bä Sämen Shäwa ...,” pp. 57-70; Tesfaye Legesse, “Bä Sämen Shäwa (Salale) Zone, Kuyyu Wäradä Akäbabi Läshiftoch Yätäzäfanu Gitmoch Tintane.” (trans. Songs of Bandits and Banditry: North Shawa (Salale) Zone, Kuyyu Area). A B.A. Senior Essay, Yä Etiyopiya Kaunkauwoch Sine-Tsihuf, Addis Ababa University, 1996 E.C.

SALALE BANDIT LORE

In this section, for lack of a better term, I adopt Cerulli's *faarsa* more for its commemorative quality (content), than for its aesthetic form—short verses of long poems. Cerulli characterizes *faarsa* songs generally as “long poems with short verses” used to celebrate most famous ethnic heroes. In addition to their commemorative function as boasting songs of the folk as a whole, “as opposed to the boasting-songs of the single warriors which are called *geerarsa*,” *faarsa* songs are “bonds which unite the members” of the community.⁶⁸

The Salale commemorative songs, unlike Cerulli's *faarsa*, tend to stress familiar forms of short verses with three to six lines which constitute series of long stanzas memorializing the different events and heroic deeds recounted about an individual hero. Thus, thematically, the focus of the Salale *faarsa* is less on the wider community or close kin than on the individual bandit. Stylistically speaking, in Salale *faarsa*, as it is generally the case with Oromo folksongs, “there is a parallelism of sound between two verses. The first verse in this case is “no way connected with the sense of the song,” with some exceptions, “but it is introduced merely to make” sound parallelism between the first two verses and the second.⁶⁹ The Salale bandit lore, *faarsa*, presented here centers on metaphors and symbolic meanings to avoid unnecessary risks inflicted by state agents. The sixty *faarsa* texts (short stanzas) presented in this section in three parts were collected from oral sources (four informants) in Salale mostly in personal conversations and in one-on-one performances in artificial contexts to avoid danger and selected to represent each of the three major bandits widely commemorated in the wider other Salale folksong genres.

⁶⁸ Enerico Cerulli, 1922, p58

⁶⁹ Ibid., p59.

Next, I present Salale bandit lore, *faarsa*, drawing significantly on performances by Tarashe of Gumbichu and Gurmu (cf. Chapter 5), Dajane, a bard, and some other informants. The three bandits presented in this chapter are Badhaadha (Midhe), Mulu Asanu, and Hagari Tullu. The aim of the present folksong data is primarily to substantiate Salale resistance poetics with comparative evidence of social banditry under different regimes and to provide scholars of folklore, anthropology, and social history interested in the area with ethnographic and folkloric examples. The data will also supplement evidence for the perception of “bandit” and “banditry” in Salale, which has been undermined as “outlawry,” not as legitimate resistance against exploitation, and domination, and also for the practice of “bandit suppression” under successive Ethiopian authorities. In an attempt to establish the value of the bandit tradition for the student of Salale Oromo folklore, anthropology, and social history, I hope the next two sections will also identify particular problems in the study of *social banditry* as resistance culture which appear to warrant further future investigation.

Badhaadha Dilgaasa (Midhe)

1

Laaftoon goge
 laaftoo jiidhaan goge.
 hoo yaa Midhe!
 Yaa rafarraftuu Laga Mogee!

The acacia is dry
 oh, the wet acacia is dry,
 oh, Midhe!
 You shooter in Mogor, I cry!⁷⁰

2

Sheeka galee,
 Sheeka nagumaan galee?
 ya Badhaadha Dilgaasa ergi sagalee. Oh, Badho, tell us the news if you have it.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Group performance, *Foollee songs*, Fieldnote #2, p36, Gumbichu, 2010.

⁷¹Both Midhe and Sheeka were bandits from Yaaya Gullalle. Midhe was from Guuyama and Sheeka, from Goto, Yaasa Lami. Both competed for power and territorial control in Salale in the early 1990s. Prior to planned peace-talks mediated by elders, Badhaadha ambushed Sheeka and killed him. Raggaasa Badhiye, *Field Journal*, pp49-52. Dedde Xiggi, 2010. Following is another version of *foollee* about the tragic death of Sheeka and the rivalry with Badho:

3

Fooqii korte
re'een fooqii korte.
Ya Badhaada Dilgaasa
zambaabi, reef sitti toltee!

She mounted the tower
the goat mounted the tower.
Oh, Badhaadha Dilgaasa
may you prosper, now you have power!

*Faarsa Commemorative Songs by Tarashe of Gumbichu*⁷²

4

Yaa Badho kiyya
kot yaa Badho hamma shumburaa!
situ Moge keessa shurshuraa
Soolee Gibee sumatu hunkuraa.
Soolee Gibee maal balleessitee,
Shaahul dhufnaan gadi dheessitee?

Oh, Badho,
come, you little seed like chickpea,
who unsettles river spirits in a rage!
You troubled Soolee Gibee,
what wrong did Soolee Gibee do?
When Shaahul arrived, did you retreat?

5

Yaa Badho kiyya
kot yaa Badho gaafa diggisii
kot yaa Badho yaa likiskisii
maaliif dhaqxe mana diggisii

Oh, Badho
come up, feast with us!
Oh, you little imp,
why did you solicit crumbs like a chimp?

6

Gad ilaalewoo,
Shaalloo mataan gad ilaalewoo!
yaa Badhoo kiyya
barana yoo wajjin baanewoo,
xilaa-warqii sii tasaalewoo.

His head bent,
sorghum's head has bent down!
Oh, Badho,
let's spend these evil days together
I pledge a golden umbrella in your honor.

7

Looniin eeganii
zangii qalloo looniin eeganii.
Yaa Badhoo kiyya
kot shugguxii kee narraa fudhu
yoon du'ellee waan hin beekanii

They tend cattle,
with a thin stick, they tend cattle.
Oh, Badho
come and collect your gun,
should I die, life is uncertain!

Sheeka du'ee
Gullalleen in iyyaa
yaa Badhoo,
ati bulchi biyya.

Sheeka is dead,
Gullalle is grieving,
oh, Badhoo,
you rule the country living.

⁷²Informant, Tarashe of Gumbichu, Fieldnote #2, pp31-35, songs #4-20. Gumbichu, 2010; Cf. Informant, Moroda T. Fieldnote #1, Mulo Faalle, 2009.

8

Gootaraan torba,
yaa Badho kiyya
gootaraan torbaa.
Biyya hormaatii galuu wayya!
kan hore hin jaalatu biyyi hormaa.

Seven granaries are full of *teff*
oh, Badho
seven granaries.
There is no place like home!
“Others” estrange you when you get rich or poor.

9

...yaa Badho kiyya
Badhoonoo gooftaa diinaati,
maaliif xuqxu haadha Badhiyo
haadhi Badhiyoo haadha dhiiraati

Oh, Badho,
Badho is the victor over enemies.
Why do they threaten Badhiyo’s mom,
she is the mother of a valiant one?

10

Gaafa conqollee
hoolaa jorroo gaafa conqollee
Hamma’a kiyya
uggaa Badhoon si biraa kufuu
maa tokkosuu didde tokkollee

A crooked horn,
a sheep with a crooked horn,
oh, Hamma’a,
when Badho was shot and fell,
why you didn’t shoot at all?

11

Daalota gubbaa
yaa Hamma’a, Daalota gubbaa
ya Badho, Daalota gubbaa
lolli hafee, hiiki shurrubbaa

On Daalota,
oh, Hamma’a, on Daalota you walk
oh Badho, on Daalota you walk
the war is over, untie your dreadlock!

12

Yaa Badho kiyyaa
kot’ yaa Badho
caammaan shararaa!
Duuti shiftaa duruma jiraa,
keetumtti maa nama mararaa?

Oh, Badho
come Badho, you valiant one,
light-footed fearless folk!
A bandit passes away too often,
but why is your death hard to forget anyway?

13

Ya Badho kiyya
Kot yaa Badho Qarree Tokkee
Warra Wayyaanee garaat’ shokkee

Oh, Badho
of Qarree Tokkee, come home
the *wayyaane*⁷³ are trembling!

14

Harangamaan muka maaliiti
muki daraaru firii hin qbane,
yaa Badhoo kiyyaa?
Giseen ammaa kuni maalinni
giseen ajjeesan damii hin qabne?

What is a thorn plant good for,
if it flowers but bears no fruit,
oh, Badhoo, what is it good for anyway?
What time is such a time,
they kill us, no blood price, no dime?

⁷³*Wayyaane*: Tigreyans from Tigre, who, after 17 year of guerilla warfare, came to have the lion’s share in the current ruling party in Ethiopia under the leadership of the late Meles Zenawi.

15

Yaa Badho kiyya
maal katamaa maashoon boba'u?
Yaa Badho kiyya!
ajjeeftanii nurra hin deeminaa,
damiin carqii miti hin moofa'uu!

Oh, Badho,
what is up in the town, lamp is lit?
your dream that I knit!
Let them never step over our dead,
not worn out; it clots—our blood that they shed!

16

Yaa Badho kiyya,
ya Badho goodaa Maaramii
lakkii gosaanis araarami
lakkii biyyaanis araarami
lakkii aabeetis araaramii,
ya leenca goodaa Maaramii...

Oh, Badho,
living in the prairie of Maarami,
better for you to come home, to make peace
better for you to join your countrymen
better for you to see your father, to reconcile
with him...oh Badho, you lion in the den....

17

Tullubbee sani
tulluu gamaa tullubbee sanii
ya Badhoo kiyya,
kachamaaliit' fudhatee bade
niitii Badho shurrubbee sanii

Over the hilltop,
beyond that hilltop!
Oh, Badho,
a lorry took her away for life,
gone with the wind, your pretty young wife.

18

Ya hareeratoo
bishaan koddaa hareera sanii!
ya Badhoo kiyya
kachamaaliit' fudhatee sokkee
niitii Badho bareeda sanii

Oh, sweet,
how cold, how pure, water in the jar!
Oh Badho,
a lorry took her away too far,
your pretty young wife is no more!

19

Yaa Badho kiyya,
ya Badho goodaa Maaramii
lakkii gosaanis araarami
lakkii biyyaanis araarami
lakkii aabeetis araaramii,
ya leenca goodaa Maaramii...

Oh, Badho,
living in the prairie of Maarami,
better for you to come home, to make peace
better for you to join your countrymen
better for you to see your father, to reconcile
with him...oh Badho, you lion in the den....

20

Diiddee hin galtuu,
biyyee diiddee hin galtuu?
yaa Badho ko,
akka arrittaa reefuu magartuu !

Why do you not come home,
why not erupt like a quake?
oh, Badho, make the ground tremble,
fall apart, and you rise out of the shake.

Mulu Asanu⁷⁴

1

Muluun Shaggari gala
dirribii kutaa gadi dhiiseetoo,
garaan nan bada jedha
shiririi duraa itti dhiiseetoo.

Mulu is coming home from Shaggar
clad in a cotton shawl,
his gut is quivering to run away,
leaving behind the good old days.⁷⁵

2

Gaara magraaree,
boqqolloon gaara magraaree?
niitii Balaachoo ya Geexee,
kophummaa koo arganiiti,
koodee barbaachi argaaree?

Does it grow on the hilltop,
does corn grow on the hilltop?
Oh, Balaacho's wife, oh, heroine,
lonely as I am,
can one find a brother gone?

3

Ya barbarree ya binnaanyii
qe'een kan Getoo Gichooti
adbaarii keenya hin gadhiifnu,
jedhe Mulu Abba Giraanyi.

It is dust, a pepper flour dust,
should we abandon Geto Gicho's home,
should we leave our *adbaarii*, sacred site,
Mulu said, we are lost, to dust.

4

Ya Alamaayitee
ya Alamaayyoo Komaando,
Darroo Goshu nama hin baasu
quba shaniin hari faandoo

Oh, Alamaayo
Alamaayyoo of Komaando,
Darro will put you to bang
and make you clear cow dung

5

Alamaayyo,
dhgumaan ya Alamaayitee
bar-dheengaddaa barri kooti
barana ya Alamaayyoo
daboo wajjin natti duultee

Alamaayyo,
truly I call upon you,
it was my season, yesteryear, to flourish
today it is yours,
with collaborators to punish.

⁷⁴ Fieldnote #4, pp63-87, 2010, songs 1-11. The *shaayi* (*afoolee*) who performed in praise of Mulu Asanu was Dajane, a visually impaired minstrel in Dirre Baantu, Hidhabu Abote. Dajane said he lost his sight when he was only two. He has been a minstrel for over twenty-five years, and minstrelsy is a means of livelihood for Dajane, who has six children. He was born in Sire Morose. *Genealogy*: Dajane-Daadhi-Badhiye-Saambe-Abbooyye-Sire-Heexo-Humbi.

Mulu Asanu ancestry (*Goshu Gissilla Geto Gicho*) is established in Salale historical tradition (*Fieldnote* #5, p115):

Darroo Geto Gicho
Baantu Ture Duume
Hidhabu Jaankaa Nagii
Awwaare Daadhii Rooba
Machaaraa Guyyaa Tolaa
Jaarso Gichu Dafarsha
beenaa Darrootti gallaa ...

Darroo of Geto Gicho
Baantu of Ture Duume
Hidhabu of Jaankaa Nagii
Awwaare of Daadhii Rooba
Machaaraa of Guyyaa Tolaa
Jaarso of Gichu Dafarsha
let's seek refuge to Darroo...

⁷⁵ Fieldnote #5, p71

6

Jajjabaadhuu,
ya Shamabaallii ya Burruusee
jedhe Mulu Abbaa Giraanyi.
Ani kan koo of argeera
harki mirgaa dhahameera
bitaan silaa mirga hin taatuu.
Na gane ka Mariideeni,
ilmi intalaa ilma hin taatuu?

Be brave, courageous ,
oh, Burruusee
reassured, Mulu Abbaa Giraanyi.
Evil days! I am ruined, no more astute,
alas, my right hand is shot,
and left hand is no substitute.
Oh, Mariide, you let me down,
a grandson is nothing like a son?

7

Yaa makoodii baroodi
kan an Jamare hin dhiisu
ya miqqanyaa gadoodii!

Keep on cooing, my dove,
I never stop, I keep on doing,
though they envy, what's right, what I believe!

8

Nananana-nanaa...
baqaqsaan tarsaate
Giraanyi yaa Mulu
Giddi yaa Balaacho
tiifuu keessa dhufa
Mulu onneen shaare
Bakakkaa fakkaate!

Nananana-nanaa...
the darkness is torn asunder
oh, Mulu, don't surrender
and, Balaacho,
Mulu comes in mild rain
unseen, unheard, sudden,
like thunder!

9

Uddeellaa sibiilaa
Fitiraarii Mulu
ya biiftuu Oromoo
ya urjii Salale
Giddi ya Balaacho
ya birbirsaa Geto
qe'ee Goosee Gijo
baqaqsaa tarsaasee
tiifuu keessa ajjeese
Fitiraarii Mulu
bakakkaa fakkaatee!

Bundle of steel
was *fitiraarii* Mulu,
our rising sun
our shining star
oh, Balaacho
Geto's sacred tree afar
in Gissillaa Gicho's abode
darkness is torn asunder
in mild rain, he fell, he killed,
Mulu, unseen, unheard, and sudden
like thunder!

10

Uddeellaa sibiilaa
Fitiraari Mulu,
sodaachisaa dhiiraa!

Loads of steel
oh, Mulu,
a terror to his foe!

11

Falaxaan boba'ee,
dhumaa fiixee ga'ee!

A piece of chopped wood is burning,
a cinder remaining!

Gisee Xaayilaanii
Faashiftoonni dhufnaan
egaan akka gootuu
fuuldura dhaabbattee
kooltii Darro Goshu!

During occupation,
under Fascist rule,
you fought boldly
defied the enemy
like your ancestors, the Darro.

12

Dheeffanni gaarree mitii!
Ha gubattu goojjoooni
teephaan ijaarre mitii!

Coward is of no use!
it is burnt down, our house
made of reeds. We built it not of leather.⁷⁶

13

Kutaan dhumte yaa Mulu
daggala Mogee keessa lowuutti.
Si hin dhiisuu na hin dhiisini
hamma miqqanyaana dhiiga boowutti

Oh, Mulu, your shawl is worn out,
living in Mogor, in the rough bush.
I will never abandon you, my love
let them burn in envy, in malice chafe.

14

Balaachoon qawwee tumaa
Mulun xiyyitii tumaa
kot' si fudheetan badaa
warra hafeetu baasaa gumaa

Balaacho makes gun
Mulu does ammunition,
let us flee, my love,
others will pay the price.

15

Qawwee hin baatan yaa Mulu
ashkarii qawwee baachisan malee.
Xalaataan hin oodani,
kokkolfaa biyyee nyaachisan malee!

Do not carry that heavy gun
oh, Mulu, let the servant do it.
Do not belittle your enemy,
treat playfully and hit!

16

Ya mishingaa gammoojjii
maali midhaanni hin biille
warri Mulu Asanu
Jamaran waan isaanii
maali zariin hin jiillee

Oh, lowland sorghum,
what a grain that never buds!
Mulu Asanu's folks,
they began once again (banditry)
what a folk that never pauses!

17

Balaachon daggala ciisaa
simbira seetee hin darbatini
halagaan boru si dhiisaa
kun fira seetee hin abdatini

Balaachoo lives in the bush,
do not think it is birds that rattle there.
A stranger betrays you soon,
do not trust a stranger as close kin.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Informant Gurmu B. Fieldnote #2, pp91-94, songs 12-18, celebrating the two Asanu Brothers, Mulu and Balaacho Asanu Goshu, Shararo, 2010.

⁷⁷ Informant, Gurmu B., Fieldnote #2, p93, Shararo, 2010.

18

Mana ijaarre qorqorroo.
Balaachoon biraa hafnaanii
Mulu, lafa ilaale mataanii
akka asheeta boqqolloo

We built a house with iron roof.
Now Balaachoo is gone,
Mulu is bowed down with troubles
like ripe desolate corn, ravaged, left alone.

19

Kabbabush ma
intalli too Kabbabush ma!
intalli gooba kormaa murtu
intalli waashaa jawwee bultu
intalli too Kabbabush ma!

Kabbabush,
she is my daughter, the fearless!
She cuts bulls' hump,
living in a cave with a python,
My daughter! She calms life's qualm!⁷⁸

20

-Mogeen dhowwaa dha
rigaallee hin muratanii.
Harkaa cabde,
moo, ulee dhabde,
kan shaggee kee fudhatanii?
-Harkaas hin cabnee
ulees hin dhabnee
siraata sidaafani...

It is forbidden to hike in Mogor,
or to cut a toothbrush as usual.
Your hand is broken, lame,
or you dropped your stick? How come
they took your beloved, your fame?
Not broken my hand, left or right,
nor dropped my stick,
for the legal system, I fear to fight!

Hagari Tullu

1

Yo mataa-mataan caccabe malee
kusaayeen hin caccabu.
(Yo mataa-mataan dhadhabe malee)
Hagariin hin dhadhabu
Wallagga bu'ee qabame malee
Hagariin hin qabamu.

Unless its top is wrecked,
the kusaayee plant never vanishes.
Unless he was exhausted,
Hagari is never banished.
What a mistake to seek refuge in town,
thinking he could evade capture!⁷⁹

2

Fuuldurri warqii
duubni guduruu,
qawwee Hagari Tullu—

Its front is golden
and its back is embroidered,
Hagari Tullu's gun—

⁷⁸ Informant, Hailu Tola, Fieldnote #4, pp70-71, Foollee songs 19 and 20, Ejere, Hidhabu Aboote, 2010.

⁷⁹ Informant, Dajane, a minstrel, Faarsa songs 1-3, Fieldnote #4, pp80-81. Dirre Baantu, Hidhabu Aboote, 2010.

Gurmu Badhaadha claims that he met with Hagari personally on different occasions. One time was at Tafarra's home, in Ali Dooro, at a feast. Gurmu also told me that he heard about Hagari's parachute training and his landing at Arbu Gaale, on the way to Mogor (need to verify this from reliable sources). Hagari was a palace guard under the monarchic rule before he came back home to Salale and became a bandit in 1960s. Gurmu has information about Salale bandits who were executed during Haile Selassie's reign and Derg: Tullu Urge, Badhaadha Jamama, Mangasha Jabal, Addunna Bokona, Dabale Birru, Taddasa Birru, who fought the Italian force at a young age, to mention but a few. Informant, Gurmu, Fieldnote, #2, p62.

ya haadha shaggee dhaltee,
duddattan si baadha ushururu...
haati daalachoo dhaltee
hallayyaan si buusa, kumbululu!

3

Kan Ganda Shano sani boollooni
doolooloon asiin bahee,
kan Jimaaf' Hirkoo sani roorrooni
Hagari gifiit' gahee!

oh, the mother who bore pretty
I'd rather give you a piggyback,
oh, the mother who bore ugly,
I'd rather throw you down the cliff.

The well is Ganda Shano's,
Its mud came to our homestead.
Hirko and Jima were unjustly hanged,
Hagari knows what he did!

4

Geeshoo soruu
Hirkoon beekke hin loluu
Hagari koo,
yaa ilma bitaa-mirga loluu...
(...jette haati isaanii, jedhan.)

Oh, Geeshoo
Hirko knows not to fight,
oh, Hagari,
you who disperse enemies left and right...
(...cried, their mom, it is said.)

5

Irranaa gad dhufaa
Waabee marfata karaanii,
Yo abbaan du'ellee
ilma jabaa jiru hin badu maqaani

The road descends,
and goes round Wabe River,
When the father passes away
a strong breed maintains the name forever.

6

Burre yaa gaaddidduu
booso maa si elmatti
dhiittee hin didduu?

Oh, Burre, a lactating cow,
how come a stranger milks you,
Why don't you kick now?

7

Baddaa hin magru liitiinii
hurufa baddaa hin magru liitiinii.
qawwee Hagari Tullu
maree hin gurguru jette niitiinii!

In the highland, the liitii plant never sprouts
nor does it grow in the bush.
Hagari Tullu's wife swears
not to sell Hagari's gun in anguish!⁸⁰

8

Addeessi halkan baha
kan gara barii bahuu bakkalcha
oduman biyyee tahee
morma Hagari hin nyaadhu nan galcha!

The moon rises at night
the north star at daybreak.
If I were the grave,
I would revive Hagari to life and save.

9

Shamaamee qorri dhaye

Selected wheat,

⁸⁰*Shoboxa* songs 7 and 8 above were performed by two young boys in Ejersa Kaawao, Fieldnote #7, pp24-25, Girar Jaarso, 2010. *Shoboxa* songs are performed at weddings, as work songs, and at different romantic ceremonies and festivals.

qamadii shamaamee qorri dhaye
goofaree kee ya Hagarii
Dagamitti awwaarri waliin dhaye

Shamaamee is frosted.
Your Afro hairdo,
oh, Hagari, which they put in the dust!⁸¹

10

Kaloo dheede nan hima
hoolotat' kaloo dheede nan hima.
Qawwee hidhatte malee
hamma Hagari hin lolle yaa Jima

She grazed the pasture,
I will tell how the flock grazed the pasture.
You were armed, oh, Jima,
you fought but not valiantly like Hagari.

11

Cabbii roobi yaa Rabbii
hurufa Kuyyuu roobi yaa cabbie,
Hagari fannisanii
Me ati harkaa baasi yaa Rabbi!

Hail, oh, heavy rain, hail
storm in Kuyyu, heavy rain
they hanged Hagari,
free him, oh God, from strain!

12

Garbuu mooyyeetti naqxee
misira dogoogootti naa gattee.
In tolchite yaa Hagari
du'a hin oolani baga dhalatte

You added barley into mortar,
and lentils into the granary.
Of a strong breed, Hagari, your birth,
You lived like a hero,
so you died, inescapable death!

13

Baar-zaafii Salaal jalaa,
in koran malee bu'a hin oolanii,
In tolchite yaa Hagari,
in turan malee du'a hin oolanii

Eucalyptus trees in Salale,
one climbs, one comes down.
You might as well, oh, Hagari,
death is an inescapable crown!

14

Wallaggaa dur in galtaa,
amma maa galuu didde yaa Hagari?
garaa koo dur in raftaa
amma maa rafuu didde halkani

You used to come home, from Wallagga,
oh, Hagari, why not now, to see my plight?
You used to sleep at peace,
oh, my gut, why not tonight?

15

Hagari Tullu malee
maaltu gomboree jala kaachisa?
Yo qalbii ofii malee,
maaltu xiyyitii nama nyaachisa?

It is only Hagari,
who else can chase like him?
It is one's big heart alone,
what can place one before gun?

16

Hoolaa gugurraa sani
hoolota Amde gugurraa sani
shibo irra marani

Those black sheep,
like those Amde's black sheep,
they tied Hagari and took his pride,

⁸¹ Songs 9-19 were performed by Abraam, Fieldnote #7, pp119-124, Ejersa Kaawo, Girar Jaarso, 2010.

morma Hagari mushurraa sani

17

Ya addeessa waaqarraa
ya addeessa baariitti boo'uu
Hagari Tullu dhufee
leenci barahaa keessa bobba'uu

and hanged that neck elegant like a bride.

Oh, distant moon, creeping across the sky
you are apt to watch me sad and cry
Hagari Tullu has come, has risen
the lion who bounces out of his den.

Hagari yaa Agarii,
yaa tokkicha qixxee nama sagalii.

oh Hagari what a wondrous hero you are,
Hagari, not one, you are equal to nine.⁸²

18

Salale calleessanii
qamadii salale calleessanii
kan anaaf' Hirko tolee
koodee koo Jimaan maal balleessani
(...jedhe Hagariin yo fannisani.)

They harvested wheat
threshed and winnowed Salale wheat.
They might as well hang Hirko and me
but what wrong did Jima do?
(...Hagari said.)

19

Yaa burqaa Salaal jalaa
ya Burqaa Goraa sitti gorani,
budaatu si nyaate moo
Hagari Tullu sitti moorani?

Oh, springs in Salale
Burqaa Spring, where people rest
oh, Hagari, any eye is an evil eye
that bewitches a hero out of his nest.

20

Ittan yaabbadha jennaan
kooraatu didee naan garagalee
Hagariin in shaffatee
Jimaatiif' Hirkooutu na mararee!

I aimed to mount on top,
but the saddle turned me down.
Hagari took to the forest as a bandit
but Jima and Hirko, it is a pity.

Baala koshommii baala koshommii
jirti moo duute, ballo!
haati Hagari, haati korommii?!

Thorny leaf, oh thorny leaf
alas, did she die or alive
Hagari's mom, whose sons thrive?⁸³

⁸²Cf. Informant, Gurmu, Fieldnote #2, pp47, and songs 5 and 6, p124, Shararo, 2010.

⁸³ Informant Gumru B., Fieldnote #2, p119, Shararo, 2010.

SALALE BANDIT LORE IN CONTEXT

In the bandit lore presented above, the Salale carefully knitted into their narratives of resistance and banditry the disturbing experiences of wars of conquest, land appropriation, displacement, and its aftermath, past and present. They recount the bitter and outrageous experience of displacement, evictions and executions under Haile Selassie's overlords and later under the 17 years of brutal Derg rule, followed by the present Tigre-led authoritarian regime. As will be discussed shortly, those tales of resistance culture address the economic exploitation, cultural domination, political exclusion, and competition between the traditional egalitarian system and the hierarchical and stratified Abyssinian rule. Here I will also suggest that focusing too narrowly on Eric Hobsbawm's model of "social banditry" and "bandits" in discussing Salale resistance poetics undermines nuances of the social reality, past and present, and overlooks other alternative means of resistance when both elite politics and armed warfare have failed to change the arrested development and lack of democracy in Ethiopia. I will also examine the ruthless "bandit suppressions" and executions carried out by the successive Ethiopian regimes to subdue Salale resistance.

Badhaadha Dilgaasa (Midhe)

In this section, the bandit lore of Badhaadha Dilgaasa, also called Midhe, is presented. Badhaadha, hereafter Midhe, was born in Guuyamaa, Yaaya Gullalle, during the late 1960s and lived many lives—herd-boy, farmer, hunter, soldier, bandit, and ethnic hero of the poor and the



Figure 6.3: Badhaadha Dilgaasa. Photo by research assistant.

marginalized. He grew up partaking actively in the youth subculture of horse-riding, stick-fighting, wrestling, hunting, singing songs of war and peace, and dancing to them. As he grew up observing the poor and intolerable living conditions around him in a rural village, and singing songs of the bandits who lived before him, especially Hagari Tullu and Mulu Asanu, Midhe understood that he needed some military training to become a bandit. At his young age, Midhe joined the Derg military force and got the training he needed for his future career as a bandit.⁸⁴ Next, the Salale bandit lore recounts Midhe's heroic life, conflict, and death, and, thus myth-making about the contemporary banditry in Salale was revived.

Bandit Lore

Throughout history societies have constructed cultural heroes and well-known figures such as the mythical Sherwood Forest figure, Robin Hood, or Gregorio Cortez, or Billy the Kid or Nat Turner. Legend and facts are deeply intertwined by storytellers and folksingers, writers and

⁸⁴ In the 1970s and early '80s the Derg military regime was caught in serious internal confrontations with liberation fronts and also external invasion from Somalia, the situation which put the Derg in acute need of a force numbering 500, 000. See *Africa Watch Report*, "Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia," (New York, NY, 1991), p51. See p350 for pressures from the "Oromo Fronts in Ethiopia."

historians, around those historical figures in both literate and non-literate cultures. Close examination of those songs, stories and historical narratives constructed over time by different societies across cultures or the same society through different times, reveals traits common to all social bandits. First, one such common feature is the role of secret societies and solemn oaths, *waadaa* (covenants) to keep secret. In order for a social institution to sustain itself, it is necessary that all members of the society and beneficiaries of the institution are cognizant of its rules and expected behaviors in order to execute certain acceptable roles. Second, equally important, members of the community and supporters of the institution are cognizant that, in spite of its shortcomings, ultimately, the institution is just and separate from what officials consider as criminality. The bandit activities are perceived to be legitimate because there are social grievances about land appropriation, displacement, heavy taxes and injustices which social banditry can redress as an alternative political agency. Third, in spite of the secret societies and supporters to protect him and sustain the institution, but of his invisible nature, supra-moral temperament, the bandit must die by treason, treachery. Kent Steckmesser rightly argues that examples from the Western bandit tradition shows the common theme of betrayal: Robin Hood died betrayed by his trusted cousin, Jesse James was betrayed by Robert Ford, Billy the Kid was betrayed and killed by a one-time friend, Pat Garret,⁸⁵ and Gregorio Cortez made it all the way to the Mexican border where he was betrayed by a Mexican to the Anglos. Steckmesser adds that, “If a betrayer did not exist, folklore would invent...For the outlaw hero to die by any means other than treachery is unimaginable.”⁸⁶ The motive of the betrayer may vary but, based on the data, I posit, the common ones may include intra- and inter-band rivalry, economic benefit, and jealousy.

⁸⁵ Kent Steckmesser, “Robin Hood and the American Outlaw,” in *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 79, (1966), 348-355, see p. 353.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

In Salale Oromo bandit lore banditry is understood as an alternative type of political agency. Banditry is a violent practice, which not only transgresses conventional symbolic norms and official discourse; it also reconfigures the people’s understandings of the social phenomenon, namely, social banditry, as legitimate political behavior. Following the tragic death of Midhe, Tarashe, the folk artist, challenges the status quo:

Yaa Badho kiyya maal Katamaa maashoon boba’u? Yaa Badho kiyya, ajjeftanii nurra hin deeminaa, damiin carqii miti hin moofa’uu!	Oh, Badho, what is up in the town, lamp is lit? Your dream that I knit: Let them step never over our dead, it is not worn out; it clots—our blood that they shed! ⁸⁷
--	--

In this song, the individual bandit is understood not as an “outlaw,” “criminal,” or “brigand,” which has a negative connotation of lawlessness and anarchy, but as a freedom fighter who represents political resistance. Historically, the contemporary widespread Oromo liberation movement evolved out of the various forms of resistance culture including banditry, rebellion, social protest, and full-scale armed struggle, which eventually transformed into the cultural and political ideology of seeking the right to self-determination led by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) since 1974.

Although the bandit is glorified and his courage is taken for granted in the present, the underlying principle in banditry and warrior-like sentiment is handed down from generations and traced to the exploits of other ethnic heroes in the past. Bandits are subjects of folksongs, which constitute the bandit-hero phenomena. Through *faarsa* the Salale present the bandit as a folk hero, glorified and romanticized as an astounding figure:

Yaa Badho kiyya kot yaa Badho hamma shumburaa!	Oh, Badho, come, you little seed like chickpea,
---	--

⁸⁷ Midhe, *faarsa* #15.

situ Moge keessa shurshuraa you unsettle river spirits in defiance!⁸⁸

The singer (Tarashe) perpetuates such heroic songs and mythical stories about the bandit, praises him, and relates him to the people's struggle for self-empowerment. Thus, Badhaadha or Midhe is the most current social bandit, a Robin Hood-type folk hero in Salale, belonging to the contemporary bandit narrative distinct from the official history. Tarashe Safara's songs of Midhe presented here have an appeal wider than their native environments of Gumbichu, and have the power to move the Salale youth:

Gad ilaalewoo, shaaloo mataan gad ilaalewoo! yaa Badhoo kiyya barana yoo wajjin baanewoo, xilaa-warqii sii tasaalewoo.	His head bent, sorghum bent its head down! Oh, Badho, let's spend these evil days together I pledge a golden umbrella in your honor. ⁸⁹
--	--

The *shaayi* establishes the political significance of social banditry by referring to Midhe's influential presence in Salale. In this song, a young woman, attracted to him by his reputation, seeks Midhe's attention to "spend these evil days together," and she "pledges a golden umbrella," as tradition holds it, to a deity to draw Midhe to her. However, in spite of the people's genuine support, rivalry and skirmishes continued between the two bandits, Midhe and Sheeka.

Intra-band rivalry

As an example of contemporary bandit behavior racked by rivalry, vulnerable to internal conflicts, infiltration from security agents, and treachery, the competition between Midhe and Sheeka claimed the two bandits' lives and ultimately destabilized social banditry not only as

⁸⁸ Midhe, *faarsa* #4.

⁸⁹ Midhe, *faarsa* #6.

resistance culture but also as an alternative political agency in Salale.⁹⁰ Both bandits were soldiers in the previous Derg military. When the news came that Midhe had ambushed Sheeka and killed him on the day arranged for reconciliation of the two, the *shaayi* composed and performed the following rather sympathetic lyric:

Sheeka galee,	Has Sheeka come home,
Sheeka nagumaan galee?	has Sheeka come home safe?
Ya Badhaadha Dilgaasa ergi sagalee. Oh, Badho, tell us the news if you have it. ⁹¹	

The same mood is reflected in another version of bandit lore welcoming Midhe to power, now that he was the sole bandit representing the Salale:

Fooqii korte	She mounted the tower
re'een fooqii korte.	the goat mounted the tower.
Ya Badhaada Dilgaasa	Oh, Badhaadha Dilgaasa
zambaabi, reef sitti toltee!	may you prosper, now you have power! ⁹²

Local politics is also not free from competition, much like the central elite politics. The politics from “below,” barred from the realm of formal competition, is characterized by radical opposition which transgresses the traditional norm.⁹³ The song above emerged during the time of economic dislocation and political instability in the country, when Midhe and Sheeka, the two rival bandits, came to the forefront, not only to challenge the legitimacy of the central government in Salale but also to compete with each other for power.

⁹⁰ Informant, Raggaasa Badhiye, *Field Journal*, pp50-51, Yaaya Gullalle, 2010. Raggaasa was one of the community elders from Ilu, who took part, traditionally, in solving the raging conflict between the two bandits, but in vain.

⁹¹ Midhe, *faarsa*, #2. Following a version of *foollee* about the tragic death of Sheeka and the rivalry with Badho:

Sheeka du'ee	Sheeka is dead,
Gullalleen in iyyaa	Gullalle is grieving,
yaa Badhoo,	oh, Badho,
ati bulchi biyya.	you rule the country living.

⁹² Midhe, *faarsa* #3.

⁹³ This kind of inter-organizational violence tainted the foundation of Oromo liberation movements spearheaded by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the IFLO, followed by the tragic death of the well-reputed Baro Tumsa, representing the OLF.

Midhe's tragic death

Reconfiguring the resistance culture of the Salale requires understanding the recurrent interruptions of social banditry, which does not exceed three years, and halted by the tragic death of the folk hero, usually by treachery. Theorizing the linkage between the divide-and-rule policy of the central government and, historically, the “incorporation of a large Amhara population, which weakened the unity” of the Salale is perhaps another logical proposition about internal divisions.⁹⁴ However, the social inequality and public sympathy for bandits inspire resistance poetics in spite of the division. Next, the singer identifies a clear social division between the politically corrupt class and the marginalized, whose interest the folk hero represents:

Harangamaan muka maaliiti	What is a thorn plant good for,
muki daraaru firii hin qbane,	if it flowers but bears no fruit or shoot,
yaa Badhoo kiyyaa?	Oh, Badhoo, what is it good for anyway?
Giseen ammaa kuni maalinni	What time is such a time,
giseen ajjeesan damii hin qabne?	they kill us, no blood price, no dime? ⁹⁵

In this song, the singer brings us closer to the political situation in Ethiopia, to the uneven distribution of power: the worst time when people are violently killed and do not receive justice. The narrative positions one class as monopolizing power, exploiting the less advantaged, and violating human rights. Thus, social inequality in Ethiopia is not an accident but the result of a specific political arrangement that favors one class/ethnic group and facilitates exploitation—a time when a plant “flowers but bears no fruit...what is it good for anyway?”

⁹⁴ Svein Ege, *Class, State, and Power in Africa*, Ibid., p91. This social crisis has historical roots. Hobsbawm’s view is that nations do not make states and then nationalism, but the other way round. That is, nationalism emerges at the intersection of politics, technologies and social transformation and not just by herding people forcefully into a territorial *mélange*, but through technological and economic development. See also Eric Hobsbawm, 1990.

⁹⁵ Badhaadha/Midhe, *faarsa* #14.

One common problem in the history of banditry is betrayal. When the most feared rebel leader Midhe (Badhadha Dilgassa) of Guyyama was invited to a feast in a village near Mogor in 1994, his tragic death became real and the Salale sang thus with resentment:

Yaa Badho kiyya	Oh, Badho
kot yaa Badho gaafa diggisii	come up, feast with us!
kot yaa Badho yaa likiskisii	Oh, you little imp,
maaliif dhaqxe mana diggisii	why did you solicit crumbs like a chimp? ⁹⁶

Whether the motives of the bandit are associated with social or economic issues, the moral demands that the society places on the individual hero are determined by his self-discipline and heroic imagination rooted in the historical tradition to carry on the fight to end and avenge the predicaments of the people that gave birth to him. In the song above, the artist critiques Midhe for going to feast to “solicit crumbs.”⁹⁷

Following Midhe’s death, in the Mogor rough terrain and Gumbichu canyon, the popular imagination of Salale bandits and banditry ran wild. The *shaayi* composed and performed new *faarsa* songs. Storytellers told multiple stories of real and mythical bandits’ inevitable tragic death. Villagers in Qarre Tokke and Goto in Yaaya, in Bacho Loode, around Mogor, who once gave him shelter, fed him, and showed him direction, refused to believe that their hero would die so naively; this played into the hands of security agents, and unfaithful friends and supporters. They remember and commemorate him with grief:

Yaa Badho kiyyaa	Oh, Badho
kot’ yaa Badho	come Badho, you valiant,
caammaan shararaa!	light-footed fearless soul!
Duuti shiftaa duruma jiraa,	A bandit passes away too often,
keetumtti maa nama mararaa?	but why is your death hard to forget anyway? ⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Midhe, *faarsa* #5.

⁹⁷ The same disastrous incident befell the OLF in 2010 when their most valiant energetic fighter, Naggasa Wagi, fell sick and was struck in the head in his sleep by the peasant who, purportedly, gave him shelter and cared for him.

⁹⁸ Midhe, *faarsa* #12.

It seems that Midhe built a temple in the social memory of the people, who, in fact, assumed there would be no more valiant bandits after Hagari and himself. Hence, to study banditry we need to look at both the heroes of the myths and the mythmakers, the heroes of the folksongs and the performers, who, to varying degrees, have created these heroes. The song below is an instance of the public support for Midhe as a folk hero and shows that he was seen by the people as a beacon of popular resistance:

Laaftoon goge	The acacia tree is dry
laaftoo jiidhaan goge.	oh, the wet acacia is dry.
Hoo yaa Midhe!	Oh, Midhe, you are gone!
Yaa rafarraftuu Laga Mogee!	You shooter in Mogor, I cry! ⁹⁹

Ironically, in many such instances the Salale Oromo historical bandits were actually in league with the forces of reaction and yet they are portrayed as defenders of the oppressed. Metaphorically, *odaa* (sycamore), acacia, and *ejersa* (juniper/wild olive) are sacred trees in Oromo tradition and represent strength, endurance, longevity, and sublimity. In light of the foregoing discussions pertaining to ecopoetics, it is not just bandits' heroic deeds that leave traces on the sands of time but also the terrain— caves, gorges, trees and rivers— that they used as their hideouts. Like the legendary Major Oak, about 800 to 1,000 years old, within the heart of Sherwood Forest, which was the famous hideout for Robin Hood, the *Odaa Jilaa*, the old sacred tree in Mogor valley, Salale, was where Salale bandits, took refuge throughout history.

To sum up, based on the *faarsa* songs, the bandit folklore composed and performed in praise of Midhe is crucial as an alternative site of contemporary political resistance in Salale for two reasons. First, it highlights the class resentment and disenchantment about the prevailing injustices, and, second, it is an alternative means of political agency for the marginalized class

⁹⁹ Midhe, *faarsa*, #1.

and an emancipatory act of self-empowerment through creative resistance. The Salale commemorate Midhe not just for his heroic exploits of four years (1991-1994) of bitter struggle with the current Tigre-led authoritarian regime but also they remember with remorse the intra-band rivalry with Sheeka and critique Midhe's self-inflicted betrayal that led to his tragic death.

Mulu Asanu

In Salale, from the time of their first encounter with the Shawan rulers up to the 1930s (during the reign of Haile Selassie), the *warra Darro Oromo*, to which *fitawrari* Mulu Asanu belonged, represented a strong culture of social banditry.¹⁰⁰ During the resistance against Italian invasion (1936-1941), Alemseged Dabale maintains, Mulu Asanu “organized under his leadership



Figure 6.4: Mulu Asanu, bandit during the five-year Italian war, governor of Kuyu and Member of Parliament (MP) during the monarchical rule, and again bandit during the Darg military junta, fought for three years (1974-1977).

¹⁰⁰The Darro Oromo, particularly, Mulu and Bälachäw Asanu, represented the ancestral heroism beginning with their grandfather, Goshu Gisilla, who was famous in Salale during the rule of *Ras* Darge in the second half of the 19th century. Mulu and Bälachäw sustained banditry as a resistance culture during the Italian Occupation and Mulu continued into the Darge regime in the 1970s. Informant, Warqu Dabale, Kuyyu, 2010.

hundreds of Salale youth [under a warrior name] *Mata Gurraa*, meaning, *Youth* (Qeerroo), and killed many Italians in Darro cave, where the enemy had fortifications.”¹⁰¹ When the Italian Occupation ended and the emperor was restored to power in 1941, both Mulu and Balaacho, his elder brother, were given titles as patriots, and later Mulu was elected as an MP until 1974.



Figure 6.5: Mulu Asanu’s homestead. Informants told me that he was shot here.

During the emperor’s long and harsh reign, the Salale suffered land expropriation, alienation, and internal conflicts because of the disempowering divide-and-rule policy. Salale folklore examples presented here show that peasants who experienced confiscation of their land, tenancy, and heavy taxes, became bandits or migrated to another part of the country, where farming land was available, during the imperial regime during which *fitawrari* Mulu served as a member of parliament.

¹⁰¹ Alemseged Dabale, “History of Kuyyu,...” Ibid., p32.

Revolution/Counter-revolution

Following the 1974 revolution led by the Derg military junta that ended the monarchical rule, wide-ranging resistance erupted in rural Ethiopia. Led by local notables, i.e., former MPs from the monarchical rule, peasants in Shawa and other locales put up armed resistance as a counter-revolutionary attempt, but it did not inspire wide enthusiasm over a long time. In Salale,



Figure 6.6: A cliff in Darro Daannisa where Mulu and Balaacho Asanu and their ancestral heroes took refuge against enemies. It links a long way with the Mogor gorge. My informant, watching the cliff, is Mulu's close kin.

fitawrari Mulu Asanu was an iconic rebel bandit of the time (1974-1977), until the peasant defiance was subdued after a short period. The Salale commented thus on the morbid situation of the time, analyzing Mulu's confusion—sinking to being an ordinary plain individual after being an MP:

Muluun Shaggari gala
dirribii kutaa gadi dhiiseetoo,
garaan nan bada jedha

Mulu is coming home from Shaggar
clad in a cotton shawl,
his heart is throbbing to run away

shiririi duraa itti dhiiseetoo. leaving behind the good old days.¹⁰²

Now, the “good old days” were gone, and Mulu returned home from Shaggar, also called Addis Ababa, the capital, not knowing for sure what the future holds for him as bandit. Dajane, the minstrel/bard, praises Mulu thus:

Falaxaan boba’ee,
dhumaa fiixee ga’ee!
Gisee Xaayilaanii
Faashiftoonni dhufnaan
egaan akka gootuu
fuuldura dhaabbattee
kooltii Darro Goshu!

A piece of chopped wood is burning,
a cinder remaining!
During occupation,
under Fascist rule,
you fought boldly
defied the enemy
Like your ancestors, the Darro!¹⁰³

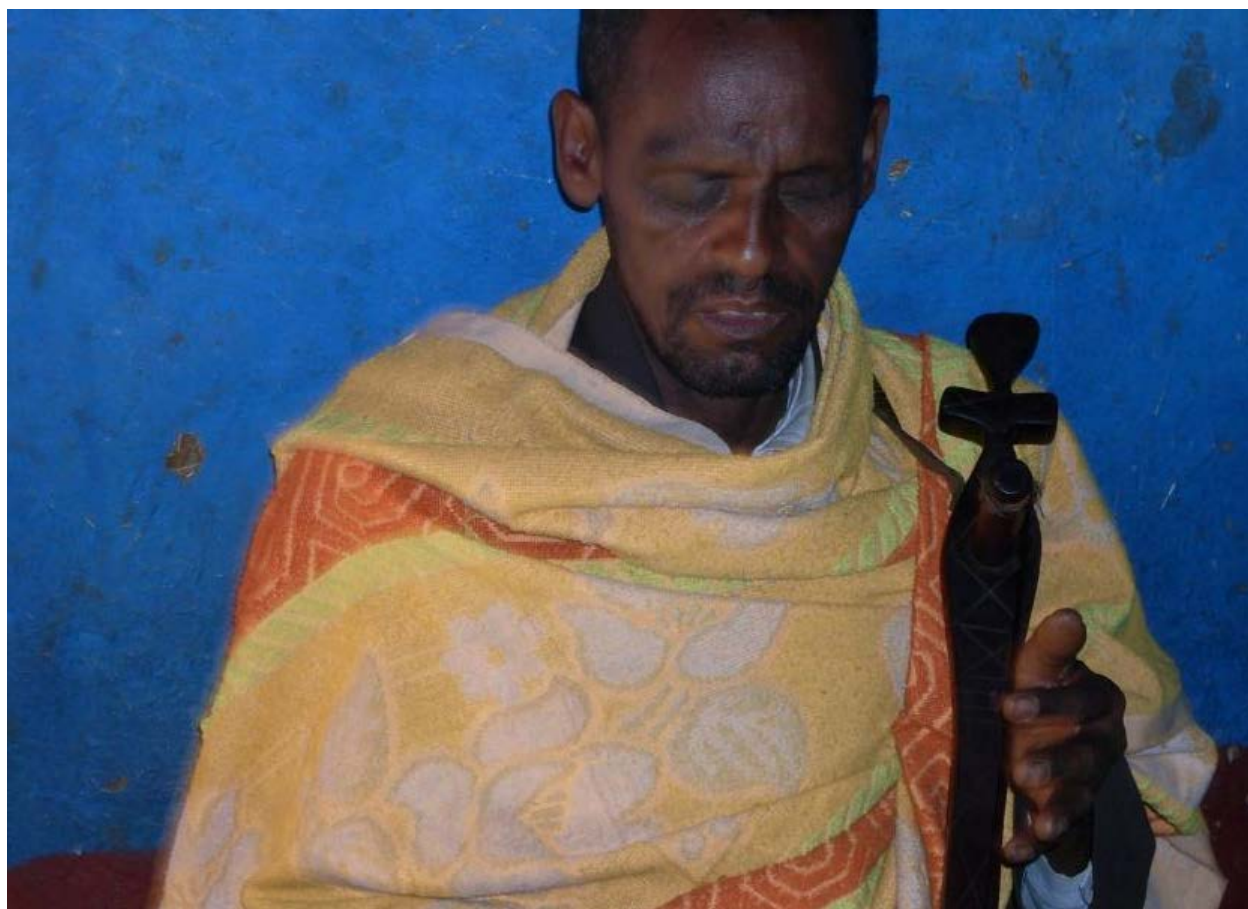


Figure 6.7: Dajane, a Salale bard who recounts Mulu Asanu’s heroic deeds. Dirre Baantu.

¹⁰² Mulu Asanu, *faarsa* #1.

¹⁰³ Mulu Asanu, *faarsa* #11.

After three decades when the Italian occupation was over, now at an old age, living as a bandit in the rough terrain of Mogor and Jama was unlikely to be stress-free. Knowing that this moment of impact would affect and transform their lives radically, the Salale portrayed their fear of the unknown as follows:

Ya mishingaa gammoojjii
maali midhaanni hin biille
warri Mulu Asanu
Jamaran waan isaanii
maali zariin hin jiillee

Oh, lowland sorghum,
what a grain that never buds!
Mulu Asanu's folks,
they began once again (banditry)
what a folk that never pauses!¹⁰⁴

It seems that the repeated violence led by Darro, Mulu's lineage, exhausted the people in Salale while the human condition was getting harsher. In this song, the analysis of bandit texts and folkloric representation of banditry brings us to the issue of accessing subjugated knowledge and the lived experience of those who were disenfranchised. In the case of Mulu Asanu, the social class he came from as a former MP and the motive of his resistance was markedly different from that of Hagari Tullu and Midhe, who represented the interests of the oppressed. When Mulu had deployed forces to hunt down Hagari Tullu and his band, Hagari met Mulu in the town and tricked him, which was a humiliation for the governor. Unlike General Taddasa Biru, who served the same monarchical rule as Mulu, and later rebelled and joined the Oromo cause for national liberation, and also rebelled against the Derg military rule as a bandit and was executed, Mulu remained loyal to the imperial rule. It was to nudge Mulu to turn to his people, it seems, that the Salale sang the following:

Balaachon daggala ciisaa
simbira seetee hin darbatini
halagaan boru si dhiisaa
kun fira seetee hin abdatini

Balaachoo lives in the bush,
do not think it is birds that rustle in.
A stranger betrays you soon,
do not trust a stranger as close kin.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Mulu Asanu, *faarsa* #16.

¹⁰⁵ Mulu, *faarsa* #17.

Balaacho Asanu was a bandit during the Italian Occupation with Mulu and was loyal to Haile Selassie's rule. Thus, in the history of Salale resistance culture, Mulu remains a controversial figure better treated by a social historian. Whether or not he meets the definition of the traditional *shefta* (social bandit) paradigm, it is not easy to determine here. However, during the three years until he was shot and captured in 1977, he was confined to the rough terrains of the Salale (Kuyyu) in a band that included his close family—his daughter, Kababush, his son-in-law, Taddasa Hordofa, and his grandchildren (Maride and Fiqiru). To make it more explicit, what makes Mulu distinct from his ancestral heroes (e.g., Goshu Gissilla) and other bandits is that he had close ties, like his elder brother, *qanyazmach* Balacho, with the imperial ruler deposed by the revolutionary military Derg. Unlike Hagari and Midhe, Mulu had land, rank, and prestige.

The Moment of Impact

The theme of *faarsa* songs commemorating Mulu as a folk hero overlaps with the tragic ends of those bandits before him who fought for the marginalized and voiceless. The heroic songs and narratives presented in this chapter are paramount in interpreting the voices of the marginalized population. Underneath the texts, the subtexts shape our perception and understanding of the social reality the folk heroes represented—those forced to the peripheries of the dominant order, outside the trajectory taken by the heroes. Morning is a sign of good omen in the Oromo worldview. The common Earth Worship, *Dachi nagaan bultee*, "Good morning, Mother Earth," is a typical example of a morning ritual.¹⁰⁶ For Mulu it was not. One cloudy morning, dark as night, and when the rising sun was lost from sight, Mulu rose out of his hideout to see face to face the Derg forces only a few yards away, as the cloud cleared. He was shot in the right arm

¹⁰⁶ Informant, Dajane, *shaai*, Fieldnote #4, p82, Dirree Bantu, 2010.

and left helplessly to bleed.¹⁰⁷ An instance of *faarsa* text below recounts this unsettling moment of impact:

Uddeellaa sibiilaa	Bundle of steel
Fitiraarii Mulu	was <i>fitiraarii</i> Mulu,
ya biiftuu Oromoo	our rising sun
ya urjii Salale	our shining star
Giddi ya Balaacho	oh, Balaacho
ya birbirsaa Geto	Geto's sacred tree afar
qe'ee Goosee Gijo	in Gissillaa Gicho's abode
baqaqsaa tarsaasee	darkness is torn asunder
tiifuu keessa ajjeese	in mild rain, he fell, he was killed,
Fitiraarii Mulu	Mulu, unseen, unheard, and sudden
bakakkaa fakkaatee!	like thunder! ¹⁰⁸

There is a monument in the town of Gabra Gurraacha, which Shaaro Lammi, a bandit who fought with Mulu, showed me. The monument is symbolic of the ancestral heroism which Mulu and his descendants exhibited in Salale history.¹⁰⁹ The bandit lore presented here shows that a bandit's deeds have powerful symbolic meaning to the public, even after his death, irrespective of his/her social status; this emphasis on heroism is present throughout the spectrum of Salale bandit lore.

¹⁰⁷ For Baqqala Badhaadha and Mulu Asanu rising against the Därg regime in 1970s, see Ethiopian News Agency, "Adhariw Wänbäde Bä Gäbare Tibäka-Guad Tägädälä," *Addis Zaman* (Yakatit 16, 1969 E.C.), p.3; Idem, "Bä Salale Kändägna Yä E. D. U. Wäkil Ena Leloch 11 Tsärä-Abiyotägnoch Tädämasäsu," *Addis Zaman* (Nahase 29, 1969 E.C.), pp.1,7. Trans. In Salale the leader of bandits and representative of the E.D.U rebel group was killed with 11 other anti-revolutionary armed forces by peasant militia, *Addis Zaman*, February 23, 1967.

¹⁰⁸ Mulu Asanu, *faarsa* #9.

¹⁰⁹ Informants, Shaaroo Lammii and Endalibbu who fought with Mulu Asanu, Fieldnote, #5, pp17-25, Kuyyu, 2010.



Figure 6.8: Shaaroo Lammii, ex-bandit with Mulu Asanu, by Mulu's ruined memorial in Garba Gurraacha town

Farewell

The Salale sing for their folk hero, social bandit or not, and commemorate him as he walks from one end of the world to another and continues the tradition of ancestral heroism through *faarsa*.

They narrate that he/she travels day and night until his feet blister, until the sun turns dark, until the shadow sinks over the hilltop, until the shooting star cools, and until the slip of his last breath swishes. In addition, the Salale caution not just the folk hero but also *ilmo namaa*, humanity in general, to stand firm in the face of adversity:

Kurfaa Jaanka Nagawo,
in koran malee bu'a hin oolanii,
jabaadhu yaa ilmoo-namaa!
In turan malee du'a hin oolanii!

Kurfaa of Jaanka Nagawo is such a mystery,
one rises to the hilltop only to fall,
to rise, then to slip, up and down.
Alas! What a moment of impact to be human.
Never give up, advance! Death is certain for all!¹¹⁰

According to the Salale minstrel, after repeated and failed attempts, the trials and tribulations, ultimately, will initiate the mythic hero (or anyone determined) into a higher level of personal identity earnestly sought. The journey is toward a new sense of awareness, self-consciousness, to know oneself and see from the hilltop (Kurfaa) the world around, to know the “unknowable,” the inexplicable abode of folk heroes, “Kurfaa”; one ascends to the peak, only to slip and fall away. The moment of impact is the inevitable period of spiritual and emotional doubt and despair in life and fear of the unknown that may precede the breakthrough of insight, wisdom, courage, and transfiguration. This heroic journey is the period of the sublime to rise to the peak and then to sink, as if by an inescapable irony of fate. Mulu Asanu’s fate was no exception.

¹¹⁰ Informant Gurmu Badhaadha, Fieldnote #2, p119, Shararo, 2010.

Hagari Tullu

In this study, the ethnographic and folkloric examples obtained from Salale validate that the successive Ethiopian rulers displaced and impoverished the Oromo by expropriating their land, and, in so doing, denied them basic human rights. Against this economic exploitation, cultural domination, and political exclusion the Oromo in different locales put up stiff resistance at different times; there was scattered banditry, but they did not have unified leadership and a clear organizational and ideological program until the 1970s. Among a few of the early loosely organized movements include the intensification of cultural resistance under the Macca-Tulama Self-help Association in central Ethiopia in the 1960s and the musical groups newly launched in different towns, such as the Afran Qallo in Hararge, and Guddattuu Wallagga in Naqamte. Following cultural resistance, examples of armed resistance were the Bale movement and the Salale resistance led by bandits. Hagari Tullu came to the forefront as an eminent figure in Salale ethnohistory toward the end of the 1960s. However, the history of his exploits has been marginalized in mainstream discourse.



Figure 6.9: Hagari Tullu, photo courtesy of *Opride*.

One lucky accident: the heroic journey

Hagari Tullu was a member of the Macca Tulama Association while he was serving in the Imperial Bodyguard in 1966. Under the leadership of General Taddasa Birru, president-elect of the association established in 1963, also from Salale, the assassination of the emperor was plotted, though recklessly. The plan was to be executed on the anniversary of the emperor's coronation in 1966 but was "foiled by the security force."¹¹¹ Bahru Zawde claims that following "a bombing incident in one of the downtown cinemas in which members of the association were implicated...the association was disbanded," the general was captured from the bush and sentenced to death; the sentence was "later commuted to life imprisonment" until he was freed during the 1974 revolution. He rebelled again and was executed in 1975 by the Derg regime.¹¹² This failed coup d'état became a happy accident for Hagari who now had military training, and was armed and well-equipped with military technique to avenge his father who passed away in poverty as a tenant and sharecropper, and also to free the Salale Oromo people living under subjugation.¹¹³ The abortive coup d'état had hastily organized a military wing and Hagari was in the shooting squad.¹¹⁴ However, when the assassination plan failed and the association was banned, Hagari escaped imprisonment and made his way to the Salale forest, to Yabbanno, Raaso, and Lemman, in Dagam, with his M-1 gun. Hagari became a celebrated social bandit through his tricks, military courage, and commitment; he was feared widely in Salale and beyond.¹¹⁵ His heroic deeds became a subject of work songs, love lyrics, and *faarsa* narratives.

¹¹¹ Bahru Zawde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1991*, Ibid. p261.

¹¹² Bahru, Ibid. p262.

¹¹³ Informant, Gurmu; Sisay Nugusu, "The Salale Hero," Ibid., pp210, 212

¹¹⁴ Sisay Nugusu, "Ye Salalew Fanno," *Terarochin yanqaxaqaxe tewled*, trans. "The Salale Hero," in *The Generation that moved mountains*, vol. 2, (Addis Ababa: Mega Publishers, 2001,) pp209-257, see 218.

¹¹⁵ Informant, Magarsa D., Fieldnote #7, pp. 114-124, 2010.

He evaded and survived repeated state counter-bandit campaigns for three years until he was captured in Wallagga and hanged with his two elder brothers in 1970 in Dagam, Salale.¹¹⁶

Gurmu pointed out to me during the interview that Agari Tullu's journey from the early days of his serfdom to banditry was part of a change in his individual life to avenge his father's premature death caused by wretched poverty and inequity.¹¹⁷ As the following song shows, Agari's journey from Imperial Bodyguard to banditry was a symbolic social transformation from a collective life experience of servitude, which is an uncritical life, to taking charge of one's fate by any possible means. The song represents this heroic vision, an unending journey along the bumpy winding road:

Irranaan gad dhufaa	The road descends,
Waabee marfata karaanii.	and winds round the Wabe River.
Yo abbaan du'ellee	Though the father passes away,
ilma jabaa jiru hin badu maqaani	a strong breed keeps his name to endure. ¹¹⁸

In this song, Hagari is not just the "avenger" of his father's death and the poor at large; he also represents "a strong breed," the generation that sought to bridge the disconnected ancestral heroic tradition, to fill the generation gap, and in so doing, to constitute the missing local ideological space connected to the nexus of the ongoing pan-Oromo movement that underwent a revival during the 1960s. In the *faarsa* song above, the "road that winds round the Wabe River" symbolizes the heroic journey the Oromo pursued to seek justice and self-determination in Bale, Macca and Tulama, Hararge and other places about the same time. As part of a metaphysical quest, Hagari Tullu's heroic journey also allegorically symbolizes, beyond its literal meaning, the awakening of spirit. As the above song indicates, the mission "descends and winds round,"

¹¹⁶ Informant, Gurmu; Sisay Nugusu, "The Salale Hero," Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Informant, Gurmu Badhaadha, Fieldnote #2, pp61-64.

¹¹⁸ Hagari, *faarsa*, #5.

i.e., *irranaan gad dhufa*, meaning, “it comes from above.” Traditionally, among the Salale, it is believed that the hero possesses a mythic power that leads him through ups and downs, through severe tribulations and tests, so that, at last, he survives, remaining in the memory pool of his people.

Before the heroic journey

Hagari Tullu, best known in Salale as “the angry young man,” was born and raised in Lemman Selassie, Dagam, in a poor farming family, probably toward the end of the Italian occupation (1941).¹¹⁹ According to available sources, his father passed away when Hagari was very young, and he and his siblings were left in the care of their widowed mother. Hagari Tullu had two older brothers, Jima, the oldest and Hirko, the middle-born. Whether or not Hagari had sister(s) or any other living siblings has not been verified. What is obvious is that, living under the unbearable pressure of poverty and observing the oppressive system, which enormously contributed to their father’s premature death, the three brothers worked for landlords in the neighborhood, sometimes on farms and sometimes as herd-boys. According to all available sources, to farm and to settle down the brothers did not have a plot of land, since the *nafxagnas*, i.e., settled Shawan Amhara landlords and their followers, expropriated the Oromo ancestral land.¹²⁰ As Gurmu Badhaadha affirmed to me, the difficulties, conflicts, hunger, and stress Hagari suffered at a young age prepared him to be persevering, tolerant, and visionary as a bandit. To Hagari, it was neither good nor bad being poor, but he asked as a rebel: “Why should one oppress the other?” There was no direct answer for that kind of puzzle, but one should seek to solve it in life or stain it in death. Sisay Nugusu writes,

¹¹⁹ Informant, Gurmu Badhaadha, Fieldnote #2, pp61-64.

¹²⁰ Raggasa Badhiye, Field Journal, p. 51, Dedde Xiggi, Ilu, 2010; Sisay Nugusu, *Ibid.*, p. 212.

Like a child, Hagari never obeyed; like the poor, he never conformed. His defiance and pride most annoyed the masters. “Wretched!” they insulted him. They exploited his labor and beat him and left him starving to death or threw crumbs to him...Thus, he was made an unflinching bandit.¹²¹

Hirko, the middle-born was defiant but not fully committed to the hazardous life of a bandit.

Jima, the oldest, was a carpenter, and apparently he was a kind and well-liked man.¹²²

Hagari waited until he came of age, got military training, was equipped with arms, and was hired as a bodyguard; he finally escaped and became a violent bandit in Salale, moving from place to place. The song below is one of the typical examples of resistance songs the Salale composed and performed to invigorate resistance and challenge the unbearable human condition in which they found themselves. This particular song is about a helpless, passive milk cow representing Oromoland, which is fertile and has adequate natural resources, but its people are kept in abject poverty:

Burre yaa gaaddidduu
booso maa si elmatti
dhiittee hin didduu?

Oh, Burre, lactating cow,
how could a stranger milk you,
how could he, how?¹²³

According to Gurmu, to say violence, conflict, or stress is good or bad in banditry depends on how the hero deals with them to turn his fate into a negative or positive force. That is to say, self-discipline, ardency, and perseverance significantly alters the hero and his people. Agari Tullu chose the life of a bandit, as he strongly believed from the outset that it was by immersing himself in difficulties, tests, and trials and living an austere life that one could come up with creative and critical solutions to the sociopolitical and economic problems haunting him and his

¹²¹ Sisay Nugusu, *Ibid.*, p210, 211.

¹²² Sisay Nugusu, *Ibid.*, p210.

¹²³ Hagari, *faarsa* #6.

people. By avoiding real problems, there is no productive change; it is by confronting challenges that some progress is possible. In this *faarsa* song,

Hagari yaa Agarii, yaa tokkicha qixxee nama sagalii.	Oh Hagari, what a courageous hero you are, Hagari, not one, you are equal to nine. ¹²⁴
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the Salale perform resistance, and recount the deeds of their folk hero through songs and narratives, believing that it is important to reconstruct the journey if one is to direct the profusion of attributes that have been imputed to the hero, not as a single hero but as a representative of the Salale people.

The Salale folklore and resistance culture shows that the kind of bandit hero that the society looks up to in the time of acute need is motivated essentially by the tradition, which the hero supremely exemplifies. Those heroes are celebrated and their deeds are extolled and retold as a role model through songs and narratives, like those in honor of the African warrior heroes such as Sundiata of Mali, or Chaka the Zulu. Next, the singer compares Hagari to a lion,

Ya addeessa waaqarraa ya addeessa bariitti boo'uu Hagari Tullu dhufee leenci barahaa keessa bobba'uu	Oh, distant moon, creeping across the sky you are apt to watch me sad and crying Hagari Tullu has come, has risen, the lion who bounces out of his den. ¹²⁵
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Despite their peace-making principles of *araara* (conciliation), and *guma* (blood feud) validated by the *waadaa*, covenant, or solemn oath, among the Salale, there has been a resistance culture practiced mainly from their first encounter with the expansionist Shawan Orthodox Christians.

¹²⁴ Hagari, *faarsa* #17.

¹²⁵ Hagari, *faarsa* #17.

Deifying the bandit

According to Raggaasa Badhiye, when Agari Tullu shot himself with dummy bullets in public and did not die or bleed, he also asked the people to shoot him with the same gun, and the people shot at him but in vain, he did not die or bleed.¹²⁶ From that day on, people deified Hagari and considered him a demigod beyond Salale. During the heyday of Agari Tullu in the late 1960s, people said a prayer in his name, cursed or swore by his name, and composed and performed multiple songs and stories. There are other trickster stories Hagari is most remembered for:

When *Fitawrari* Mulu Asanau, an MP and deputy governor of Kuyyu deployed militia to search for Hagari Tullu in three districts (Dagam, Hidhabu-Aboote, and Kuyyu), Hagari was in the town, Gabra Gurraacha, Kuyyu. He heard of the secret campaign and planned to trick the governor. To do so, he disguised himself in shabby clothes, took a wet salted hide, wrapped it carefully around his gun, and carried it on the street on his stick like rural peasants on market days. When he saw Mulu Asanu and his guards, he bowed deeply and asked the governor for change, showing a \$50 note as if to pay for the hide. Mulu gave him change. Hagari bowed deeply, farted silently, and left the town. The scarier news of bandit in the town spread soon.¹²⁷

One can imagine how Mulu was humiliated when he heard that Hagari was at his elbow while Mulu deployed the militia, looking for him in three districts. When special police forces were deployed to Salale after repeated and failed attempts to capture Hagari, the Salale joked about it and attributed it to Hagari who, purportedly, slithered on his torso like a python to the Adalge hilltop. He watched, with field glasses, the police rushing in the bush and thus he sang:

Isinis dhuftanii	You have come indeed to Salale
nus isin agarree,	but in vain, and we have seen you as well.
hin jiru jettanii	Why not you make news out of hell,
hin galtanii maarree?	that I am dead, and you go home and tell? ¹²⁸

The government was desperate and finally assigned a security police officer who disguised himself as a church student (*qolo tamari*) and spied on Hagari, but unsuccessfully. Later, Hagari,

¹²⁶ Informant, Raggaasa Badhiye Dabale, Field Journal p. 53; Sisay Nugusu, *Ibid.*, p. 226.

¹²⁷ Sisay Nugusu, *Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹²⁸ Sisay Nugusu, *Ibid.*, p. 246.

after repeated warnings to a minstrel (*azamarii*) to stop spying on him, forced him at gun point to dig a hole and told him to get in it and shot him dead.¹²⁹ After Hagari was captured in Wallagga and executed in 1970, Mulu Asanu took to the Darro forest because of the revolution that took place in 1974 and he fought until 1977 when the Derg military squad shot him and later hanged him in Kuyyu.

Commemorating “a Strong Breed” and heroic deeds

Hagari’s legend is rooted in the events surrounding his tricks on government forces, landlords and local officials, and his heroic deeds. As an ex-bodyguard in the Imperial Palace, Hagari became famous as a Robin Hood-type figure, like Gregorio Cortez, who skillfully eluded authorities, evaded capture, warned repeatedly and killed only when his own life was threatened, and avenged wrongs with violence. Hagari’s legend was not confined to resistance in only one geographic location, i.e., Salale, but had widespread implications in other Oromo locales. Without having much formal education, Hagari became an icon of the Salale bandit myth through folklore and the resistance culture of the people. The singer claims that, though executed, Hagari is equal to the living through his historical banditry:

Baar-zaafii Salaal jalaa, in koran malee bu’a hin oolanii. In tolchite yaa Hagari, in turan malee du’a hin oolanii	Eucalyptus trees in Salale, one climbs, one comes down. You might as well, oh, Hagari, death is an inescapable crown! ¹³⁰
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The greatest significance of Salale bandits, particularly Hagari’s, is limited to the folklore of Salale Oromo, whose resentment and resistance they symbolized. Hagari’s heroic deeds were discounted and deliberately suppressed from public knowledge during his heyday. After nearly

¹²⁹ Sisay Nugusu, *Ibid.*, p236.

¹³⁰ Hagari, *faarsa* #13. The Oromo saying goes, “Duuti mataa hundaarra jira,” meaning, “Death is the inescapable crown of life.” That is, the end summit, the peak in life, is death. Death is not “down; it is a ‘crown’.”

three decades, his exploits were taken up by the national media and publications as a central figure in a mass cultural myth of social banditry.¹³¹ In a country like Ethiopia where freedom of speech is not respected, a bandit or an opponent of the current ruling party cannot be publicly acclaimed, as the hegemonic rule is not criticized without subsequent severe risk of loss of life. To evade the risk of being noticed or easily grasped uncritically by government agents, the people distributed the *faarsa* songs in praise of a particular bandit, past and present, across every folklore genre. Badhaadha Dilgaasa (Midhe), another bandit killed in 1994 in Salale, is a case in point. In most cases, the folklore of bandits of the past is revived when the government changes and is used proficiently to critique the present injustices by alluding to the past historical injuries. Folklore examples from Salale show that in the Ethiopian context, government changes after several decades but the injustice remains. In this song, four decades after Hagari was executed, the Salale lie awake and mutter, still waiting for the change which the bandits sought to bring about:

Wallaggaa dur in galtaa,	You used to come home, from Wallagga,
amma maa galuu didde yaa Hagari?	oh, Hagari, why not now, to see my plight?
garaa koo dur in raftaa	You used to sleep at peace,
amma maa rafuu didde halkani	oh, my heart, why not tonight? ¹³²

The historical significance of Hagari Tullu in Salale folklore and resistance culture is best represented by this song in which the people infuse their harsh human condition with symbolic meaning, citing the bandit's heroic acts as a liberator, not as a brigand. This assumption of idolizing a bandit as a liberator suggests that at some point in history the people invented the ideology of transient social banditry, adapted it to resistance culture, and replaced generic

¹³¹ The current ruling party in Ethiopia published Hagari's biography along with that of other youth martyrs of the 1960s and '70s those who fought monarchic and the Darg military rule. See *The Generation that Moved Mountains*, 2001, Ibid., pp209-257. The Fana Radio also broadcast a version of the same biography in 2010 in the Oromo language, written by my previous MA student of folklore at Addis Ababa University.

¹³² Hagari, *faarsa* #14.

mythologies of bandits and banditry with real historical events and political movements. The noble cause of protecting this people's interest and representing their voice is credited to a few determined individuals such as Hagari who lived for this cause and died for it, as well.

The symbolic meaning of the *faarsa* song below is not a onetime euphoric overflow of emotion; it is a powerful message of the all-time feeling of heroism held by "a strong breed:"

Garbuu mooyyeetti naqxee	You added barley into mortar,
misira dogoogootti naa gattee.	and lentils into granary.
In tolchite yaa Hagari	Of a strong breed, Hagari, is your birth,
du'a hin oolani baga dhalatte	lived like a hero, so you died, inescapable death! ¹³³

The notion of "ilma bahaa," "ilma jabaa," meaning, "a strong breed" (see Hagari, *faarsa* #7) is repeated in Salale folklore and represents continuity and change: fear of the unknown, negative social changes (oblivion, opportunism, betrayal, and corruption) that affects the youth and leading to a generation gap (differences of values and outlook), and ultimately, to social crisis. The different grains, "barley" and "lentils," are used above to show the existing social differentiation between the rulers and those who are oppressed, and the relative diversifications within the lower social class.

Tracking the folk hero

Throughout my research I found out that the Salale bandits had connections with urban dwellers, and Hagari was no exception. Thus, a bandit is a member of other bandit groups in rural or urban areas; he/she is linked with a band or with another single bandit. As my primary data shows, Hagari was living with other bandits, Baalchaa Gaarii and Alamu Fayisa, in the Qacane area in Finfinne, the capital, where they were living disguised as weavers, "weaving" banditry right

¹³³ Hagari, *faarsa* #12.

under the nose of Haile Selassie's security forces in the capital, coming and going as bandits, between 1966 and 1970. When the two other bandits were killed by police in Finfinne Hagari knew that it was almost impossible to continue banditry in Salale as bandit suppression was intense, Hagari moved to Naqamte, Wallaga, under a pseudonym, Berhanu Asfaw, which is an Amhara name. He was issued a pepper retailer license and continued moving from place to place as a businessman based in Naqamte city. However, the fatal mistake Hagari made was that he left a written note through his secret woman in Finfinne for the "weavers," which the woman, intentionally or unintentionally, showed to the authorities. The security force tracked Hagari in Naqamte and captured him on February 15, 1970 in a hotel. At that point, Hagari knew that he was done for!

The Tullu brothers: execution

In constructing Hagari as a folk hero, one can see that he stood out as a social bandit image, as "a man of the people," whom the Salale idolized in opposition to the established socioeconomic, cultural, political, civil, and legal oppressive system. The dynamic confrontation was not just between the folk hero and the system but between the oppressed common folk backing him on one side and the controlling, dominant system on the other. Out of this confrontation, Hagari emerged as a defender of the common man, "the avenger" of his father; *ilma jabaa* or "a strong breed" now fell into the hands of the enemy.

Strange as it might have seemed to many, the three brothers were hanged on the same day, at the same place in Hambiso Dagam, in Salale. The court process and legal procedure that led to the execution of Jima and Hirko alongside Hagari, all in less than a month's time, needs a separate

thorough investigation.¹³⁴ For now, suffice it to present some of the *faarsa* songs lamenting the tragic loss of Hagari and his two brothers. The song below, attributed to Hagari, shows that Jima was executed without any serious involvement in violent banditry like Hagari, and, to some extent, like Hirko:

Salale calleessanii	They harvested wheat,
qamadii Salale calleessanii	threshed and winnowed Salale wheat.
kan anaaf' Hirkoo tolee	They might as well hang Hirko and me
koodee koo Jimaan maal balleessani	but what wrong did Jima do?
(...jedhe Hagariin yo fannisani.)	(...Hagari said.) ¹³⁵

Jima's case has been widely acclaimed in Salale folklore a typical example of a miscarriage of justice or wrongful execution. Equally important, Raggaasa, my informant, told me that Hirko's cord was unknotted or broken twice and he fell from the pole before execution. Traditionally, if such a thing happens, the victim is not subjected to the death penalty twice but released and pardoned. The following song was a lament by the mother of the Tullu brothers not knowing what to *be*, but simply to grieve:

Oggaa dagalee guuranii	Seeing them chop and erect poles
mana ijaaranin se'e.	I thought they build a new house.
Oggaa barmeela bitani	Seeing them rent and carry barrels
bishaan waraabanin se'e	I thought they fetch water.
ogгаа wadaroo bitani	Seeing them buy cord after cord
farda sakaalanin se'e.	I thought they tie up a horse.
Gooba kormaa gooba kormaa	Oh, my bull, my vying bull,
balleessaa illee baayyee hin qabduu	I know you well, you are innocent,
si ajjeesan ka qooda hormaa	to let the guilty go, they kill you as a rule. ¹³⁶

In the history of Salale social banditry, the miscalculation regarding the enemy's surveillance, betrayal and the consequent capture and shooting did not sully the reputation and prestige the bandits enjoyed, but it weakened the continuity and constancy of the bandit tradition in Salale. Shaaro Lammii and Enda-lebbu of Kuyyu returned home from banditry and, now aging, they

¹³⁴ Sisay Nugusu, *Ibid.*, p250.

¹³⁵ Hagari, *faarsa* #18.

¹³⁶ Informant, Gurmu B., Fieldnote #2, p74, Shararo, 2010.

memorialize the past.¹³⁷ Hagari's tragic end shows that, once captured, those folk heroes idolized as demigods by their people, dropped down to the category of ordinary criminals in the hegemonic discourse, no longer regarded as supernatural or even bold figures. It is in response to this dominant discourse that the people compose and perform bandit lore, *faarsa*, as a counter-hegemonic discourse.

To sum up, in the Northeast African context, in Ethiopia in particular, when dialogue is difficult to achieve, people turn to resistance culture to seek an alternative political agency both through violent (banditry) and non-violent (cultural resistance) means. Thus, banditry, in Salale Oromo historical tradition, represented not only the struggle against contemporary socioeconomic problems. Unlike the Western model of social banditry, it is also an earnest plea for emancipation from domination. Drawing on the existing data, I conclude that Salale resistance culture (both cultural resistance and social banditry) is a means of exercising power and authority against any form of domination. Thus, where there is power, there is resistance.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Informant Enda-lebbu, Fieldnote #5, pp. 2-25.

¹³⁸ David Hoy, in his *Critical Resistance*, argues, citing Michel Foucault (1997:292), that "there is no society without power relations and without some domination ..." and emancipatory aspirations of resistance. Hoy adds that critical resistance involves effective use of the "very mechanism of power to destabilize and subvert domination." One such mechanism can be banditry to use extra-legal force to subvert injustice imposed by illegitimate power relations. See David Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 82-83.

CONCLUSION

Toward Ethnography of Resistance Poetics

The most salient points of this study I restate here have to do with the relevance of ecopoetic practices (traditional ecological knowledge, TEK),¹ strategic traditionalism, and social banditry, among other items, to the concept of resistance poetics and to contemporary folkloristics—not simply as creative ventures but as emancipatory acts of alternative political agency. This study has been an interdisciplinary folkloristic research endeavor about resistance poetics in Salale Oromo folklore and resistance culture, using both a diachronic and a synchronic approach. Salale resistance poetics reveals the historical, geographical, and cultural particularities of the people located in central Ethiopia in proximity with, historically, the expansionist Orthodox Christian Shawa state. The data obtained through interviews, participatory observations, group discussions, and in-depth individual interviews on life histories, shows that the meaning of resistance poetics in Salale transcends the ephemeral common understanding of the concept of “resistance,” the negative and reactionary view of resistance as opposition to change.

In this study, I argued that “resistance poetics” is not simply an archetypal concept underlying a momentary “social protest,” “peasant rebellion,” or even “social banditry.” Rather, it is the poetics of continuous emancipatory acts based in a particular place and rooted in *Oromumma* / Oromoness. Thus, the notion of “research as resistance” is based on this indigenous model of an “anti-oppressive” approach that considers folkloristic critical ethnography as socially empowering and counts the informant as a potential performer engaged in a creative act, acting

¹ Diane Goldstein, “Vernacular Turns: Narrative, Local Knowledge, and the Changed Context of Folklore,” *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 128, No. 508 (Spring 2015), pp. 125-145.

as both a social critic as well as a source of information. The theoretical underpinnings of this study rest on the notion of local “subjugated knowledge” of ethnic genres, strategic traditionalism, ecopoetic practices and rituals, and social banditry, which together constitute “resistance poetics,” i.e. *poiesis* being an action that transforms, ameliorates, and continues the world.

Drawing on the analyses of the previous chapters, I reiterate that the end goal of an emancipatory resistance culture is not merely to challenge the immediate power structure or to change the status quo. Rather, its aim is to continually empower the individual and the group as active social actors in the continuing human pursuit of freedom, progress, and justice. To fully come to terms with the ambiguous nature of resistance as “reactionary” or “emancipatory” acts, I argued throughout this study that there is “a multiplicity of points of resistance” playing the role of “adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations...present everywhere in the power network.”² The foregoing analysis has shown that in the Salale social world, according to the informants and my own observation, emancipatory resistance is rather a spiritual engagement and necessitates a poetics of making, transforming, and escalating the struggle in spirit as in “words” and “praxis” to facilitate cultural transmission and social transformation from “below.” Hence, the notion of “hidden resistance” is too simplistic and centers on “deterministic economism” about immediate needs and “pragmatic resignation” (strategic alliance) of the subordinate to the dominant class.

²Jose Median, “Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance...,” in *Foucault Studies*, No. 12, October (2011), pp. 9-35, see p9; Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1, An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990) 95-6.

Thus, in Chapters 2 and 6 I noted that “resistance” and “collaboration,” which can both take a plurality of forms, are determined by various factors at particular times in history. In Salale ethnohistory (Chapter 2) and in the biographies of the folk heroes (bandits) we have seen that throughout the successive regimes, Salale resistance took different forms of dissidence and collaboration. This is in accord with the Foucauldian thought that “there is no single locus of Great refusal,...Instead there is a plurality of resistance, each of them a special case.”³

The life histories of the Salale *shaayi* (folk artists) and the lived experience of the folk heroes (bandits) presented in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively, engage the historical tradition of the people with special cases and multiple forms of resistance at different times. It is worth mentioning an example, here, in relation to this argument in a wider African context. According to Lisa Gilman’s critical observation of the Malawi women political dancers, in Malawi resistance can be strategized to achieve an immediate particular political and economic end, or it can be “an aim in and of itself.”⁴ Such a strategic resistance to or collaboration with the existing unequal power structure may provide the social actor, temporarily, “with additional opportunities for political expression and material benefits.”⁵ I agree with Gilman’s observation that, in the Malawi context, “acts of resistance often do little to challenge power structures,”⁶ while not concurring with the idea that resistance generally fails. Close analysis of data from Salale indicated that the emancipatory potential of resistance transcends particular attributes of resistance strategies aimed at immediate goals.

³ Lisa Gilman, *The Dance of Politics: Gender, Performance, and Democratization in Malawi*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), pp155, 161.

⁴ Ibid. p161.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

This paradox of resistance and acquiescence in the verbal art may be seen in the organic processes of historical transformation over time; resistance and acquiescence inevitably keep on moving apart from each other as the state-structured violence escalates, and the divide-and-rule policy continues in Ethiopia. Thus, far from being a Utopia, a homogeneous space, historically the Tulama Oromo clan to which the Salale belong, was home to prominent Oromo war leaders who served different causes: those who spear-headed the Oromo conquest (Ras Gobana Daci, in particular) and who fought for sovereignty of the empire during the Italian Occupation (Ras Abbaba Aragay), and those who bitterly resisted the imperial project (General Taddasa Birru, Hagari Tullu among others).

In this back-and-forth journey between resistance and collaboration, the new cultural contexts and the old, and the new and old genres, a historical transformation of genres, meanings and functions is dictated by the people's urge for a particular poetics in history. What undergoes transformation is the social function of poetics. That is, the verbal art and acts (folk dances, rituals), beyond their aesthetic values, serve to help people endure life during hard times and to commemorate folk heroes, to mobilize resistance against oppressive power/social structures, and to critique injustices.

Using examples from Salale verbal art in Chapters 3 and 4, I paid particular attention to this controversy embedded in resistance that is full of conflicts and tensions about memory/oblivion, power/knowledge, and resistance/collaboration, as part of the ongoing epistemic battles throughout the successive regimes in Ethiopia. I also demonstrated the various forms of resistance. For example, as one aspect of resistance culture, following forced conversions, I

argued that strategic traditionalism offered the Salale a way of retaining their identity and practicing *Oromummaa / Oromoness*, thereby uncovering what Foucault calls *subjugated knowledge*, i.e. hidden bodies of experiences and memories“ rendered unqualified and unworthy of epistemic respect by prevailing and hegemonic discourses.”⁷ This practice of epistemic insurrection or folkloric insurgence is aimed at unearthing the *subjugated knowledge* to energize the ongoing vibrant power/knowledge struggle between the dominant culture and the marginalized.

The critical goal of Chapter 2 was to write a counter-history, particularly a critical and dynamic one, to reconstitute the disbanded grassroots resistance and put it on a par with the emergent Oromo knowledge construction. What this means is that, as I noted, the foreign scholars, travelers, missionaries, colonial ethnologists and chroniclers or imperial historians in Ethiopia wrote the dominant historiography from the perspective of the Shawan Amahara conquerors and of single great figures. In contrast, using the existing historical tradition and folklore data obtained from Salale, I aimed at an alternative Salale history, which is an unorthodox account of historical events and sociocultural movements from the perspective of the people rather than that of the political leaders. I demonstrated that the primary focus of the “history-from-below” theory, i.e., social history theory, is the poor, the oppressed, the disenfranchised and the otherwise forgotten people. By way of this historical revisionism, i.e., reinterpretation of history, the driving factor of social history is the daily life of the ordinary people, the ideas and events which push and pull their lived experience and allow for new trends to develop from below. This counter-history is also contrary to the view of those historians who are comfortable writing within the accepted paradigm. They come and go in every regime and have a body of works with

⁷Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*,” (New York: Picador, 2003), 7-9.

which to claim authority, and thus, they do not lose anything if the status quo is maintained—since they write the past in the present, they are safe! They write from the view that the past evils must be forgotten, twisted, or simply examined at a surface level; in so doing, they do not tell the truth—but rather offer a historical presentism. For the folklorist who does a critical ethnography among the marginalized group, it is risky since folklore can serve as a social critique of the status quo. Out of this tradition of the reigning paradigm, I argued, a reinterpretation of events and ideas from the peoples’ perspective is crucial. Thus, the alternative history I presented has included accounts of claim, reclaim, counter-claim, and debate between competing forces in the region over the fundamental values on which oppressive institutions have been firmly founded, namely, cultural domination, political exclusion, and economic exploitation.

In addition to the discontinuity and difference in history, I maintained that the notion of tradition is equally crucial if folkloristics is to continue as a critical discipline. The concept of strategic traditionalism here is not the same as strategizing tradition, inventing tradition for political ends, or reinventing the past to achieve indigenous rights. Rather, it is the use of historically situated specific discourses by the people as a conceptualization and representation of particular meaning. The questions are pertinent here: Whose meaning is it? Meaning generated by the ethnographer or by the people being studied (or both) are pertinent here. The meaning of Salale tradition and the shared moral ideology is embedded in the folklore tradition performed to express their predicaments or for some social, artistic or religious goal. I used the concepts of “traditional folklore” and “folklore tradition” to refer to the tradition-oriented folklore such as oral tradition, legends and mythical history of places or mythscape and folklore-oriented tradition to refer to traditional concepts, such as banditry, appropriated to modern social knowledge through current

discursive means, respectively. Tradition plays a central role in folklore studies as “in the development and practice of anthropology.”⁸ To use folklore in other contexts, such as in poetics and politics, as Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman suggest, by detaching folklore from particular contexts and attaching it to some other contexts, makes folklore usable and transmissible in social interactions.⁹

The peasants’ subversive imagination against domination presented in this study clearly depicts the resistance potential of Oromo folklore considered as “Kalevala for Africans.” What emerges in the songs, narratives and performances analyzed in this study is not simply the articulation of a politically resistant Salale persona but also a particularly precarious folkloric persona representing the people caught up in a perpetual embrace of, and conflict with, oppressive state and social structure. The resistance poetics articulated in their folkloric stance frees the people from boundedness and helps to claim agency, to find an outlet to escape disempowerment through expressive culture, while swinging between now and the unknown bleak future under one oppressive system after another.

In Chapter 6, I have shown that the Salale carefully knitted into their resistance poetics those violent experiences of wars of conquest, executions, and displacement alongside their counter-insurgency, i.e., banditry, against the brutal oppression and its aftermath under successive Abyssinian regimes from the first half of the 19th century to the present. The testimonies of the informants and folk artists (*shaayi*) presented in Chapters 5 and 6 are examples of folk narratives

⁸ Pertti Anttonen, *Tradition Through Modernity*, (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2005), p12, citing Richard Bauman, “Anthropology of tradition,” 2001, p15819.

⁹ Richard Bauman; Charles L. Briggs, “Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life,” in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 19. (1990), pp. 59-88.

and songs that feed into the cultural resistance and memories of the Salale Oromo culture-bearers. They recounted the bitter and outrageous experience of displacement, evictions and executions, which, in turn, prompted competing ideologies of resistance and acquiescence.

Primary sources presented in Chapters 1 and 4 indicate that there are clear correspondences between a sense of place and the composition and performance of verbal art, including the origin of folksongs, in Salale. Current experiences of social reality also show that places are sites of power struggle. That is, people do not simply live bounded in a given location; rather, they sing it, story it, imagine and remember it, hold and defend it, and hand it down to succeeding generations, modeled in culture.¹⁰ As I noted in Chapter 1, the Salale narratives and songs hinge on places rather than on dates and the artists exhibit a complex understanding of time as an endless journey in place, as time is frequently halted by unbearable human conditions such as violence, famine, and war. To fully understand how resistance poetics works when set in place, it is necessary to understand how a sense of place develops and changes over time under state influence, what the changes mean to the people, and how the people interact with the environment to sustain life. The local “subjugated knowledge” of environmental folklore is immense and can serve the cause of resistance poetics of environmental justice. The present study encourages scholars and students of folklore to consider in their studies “senses of place” as a social phenomenon relevant to the discipline and work on an ecopoetic stance as a competing representation of a strong sense of identity in place that is deeply felt by the people studied and conveyed in expressive cultures.

¹⁰ Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (eds.), *Senses of Place*. (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), p259. .

The ambivalent nature of folksongs discussed in Chapter 4 is a fundamental component of the exploration of the Salale people's lived experience and unequal power relations under the Abyssinian regimes, past and present, through expressive culture. The ambivalence is not of old men's confusion or youth's inexperience; it has been the predominant approach to evade risks while clandestinely supporting banditry. They kept on composing and performing resistance songs in different contexts, altering their form and content to match every genre, and, in so doing, covertly expressing their grievances and imparting their defiant messages while evading the risk of open defiance of the authorities. The ultimate purpose here was not a structural study of Salale folklore genres to determine their semantic qualities or semiotic relationships in the discursive endeavor but, using an ethnic genres approach, to explore their folkloric, historical and anthropological meanings in conveying the people's subversive attitudes. At this level it can be controversial to clearly identify and determine what semantic distinctive features and semiotic relationships are universal and common among the Oromo folklore genres and what qualities are particular to each dialect group. That research endeavor involves close examination of the people's culture system of communication within the totality of the Oromo folklore tradition. For now, using an ethnic genre approach, I chose to explore the contentious tendency of Salale folklore through examining their resistance culture, which involved folkloric, historical, and anthropological inquiries. In the ethnographic history of Oromo folklore study, Enrico Cerulli's contribution to the ethnic genre system is crucial. A similar ethnographic endeavor in the Kafa highlands of southern Ethiopia was Werner Lange's *Domination and Resistance* in which, like Cerulli, he minimized commentary of his own and emphasized an approach reflecting the people's perspective purposely so as "not to reduce the impact of the poems."¹¹

¹¹ Werner Lange, *Domination and Resistance*, (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1984), p2.

The folkloric examples presented in Chapter 4 indicated that the oppressed are situated in a contradictory position—between the “resister” and the “collaborator,” the “loyal” and the “traitor,” and “the living” and “the dead”—much as the poetic voice representing the marginalized is torn between divided loyalties. This strategic use of creative resistance against an oppressive state structure (police, media, corrupt local officials, and fraudulent election boards), in fact, goes beyond challenging or attempting to change the status quo; rather, it is a social critique of general oblivion or intense opportunistic tendencies in the public, particularly in youth subculture. In those examples of Salale resistance poetics the move is away from the self-alienating Abyssinian hegemonic standards to the affirmation of the embodiment of estrangement toward agency, subjectivity, and a denunciation of life that cannot be lived rightly. The assertive question, “how absurd it is / to cry over the dead / when the living are indifferent, hostile?” (Chapter 4) is a poetic contemplative stream flowing into the unfulfilled lives of the marginalized. Seemingly alternating between the conflicting schemes of resistance and “strategic pragmatism” or collaboration, the songs are aggressive confrontations of the oppressive state structure and affirmation of *Oromummaa/Oromoness* while showing overt, humble acceptance of the system.

I did my research in a situation where the rhetoric and strategies of local political activities were veiled in expressive cultures on both sides of the competing forces (peasants/resisters or bandits and state/collaborators) and the day-to-day life experiences and religious exercises were also less than transparent. The search for truth and reality is obstructed and lost in such opacity, and, to quote Edward Chamberlin, stories as metaphors are lies we choose to believe in. And lies, for Chamberlin, are as good as truth, since the world is arranged/storied and it is difficult to know

the difference.¹² By this postmodern account, a final truth, i.e. a “common ground,” is expressed through the stories people tell, the songs they sing and dance to it, and in their symbolic performances.

My expectation was that, as an insider researcher doing fieldwork among my own cultural group, I would already be familiar with many sociocultural and religious institutions and details of local political processes and activities. Since knowing the research language, the source culture, and coming from the same ethnic background, makes a huge difference in gathering data easily and maintaining originality during text rendition processes (transcription, translation, and analysis), I thought the above expectation was realistic. However, the issue of negotiating power, constructing and performing research identity among the research subjects as an insider, and from an emic perspective, is still a big challenge when doing resistance research among marginalized groups.

With the rise of new political configurations, to the postmodernist researcher, truth is grounded in everyday life involving social interactions. Context also plays a crucial role in the social construction of reality and knowledge. Thus, the present study, from the perspective of a postmodernist stance, emphasized the social nature of knowledge construction and reality. By postmodernist thought, critical ethnography is characterized by: contextual construction of meaning; validity of multiple perspectives; knowledge constructed by people/groups of people;

¹² Edward Chamberlin, *If this is your Land, where are your Stories?* (Vintage Canada, 2004).

reality as multi-perspectival; truth grounded in everyday life and in social relations; and life as text but thinking as an interpretive act.¹³

Thus, the motivation for analysis of folklore and resistance culture can take a variety of forms. However, the desire for more information may also be altruistic as we learn that forty thousand children die of starvation each day in developing countries. Ethiopia is among the countries below the poverty line, second after Niger. In a country like Ethiopia with abundant natural and human resources, resources are drained wretchedly by corruption, nepotism, and favoritism under the semblance of totalitarian government. A researcher interested in studying resistance culture and folklore of the marginalized in a country where people live in extreme poverty faces many challenges. Locating narratives for analysis is difficult and necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. The problem of what to select from the totality of human experiences in the field is expected, but the researcher is equally challenged by scant available literature, not to mention the unfounded suspicion and arrest by security agents.

Taking an offhand and thoughtless position aligned with one of the two contesting forces, namely, one that fights to maintain the old repressive order under the guise of democratic/pluralistic schema or one that resists this authoritarianism, can shockingly affect the folkloric ethnographic tour. In this study, the critical undertakings of “engaging contradictions,” analyses and elaboration of the notion of “critical resistance,” explication of “research as resistance,” the search for “common ground” through stories/narratives, and exploring the horizon of “social banditry” and resistance culture brought about the persistently

¹³Leslie Brown and Susan Strega, eds. *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches*, (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2005).

vexing inquiries of research activism and folkloristic ethnography. In so doing, the study brings to the fore issues of activism, social banditry/resistance, and activist folklore scholarship to understand the researching self and the researched, the various ways of knowing, being and doing through analysis of folkloristic research as an act of social empowerment, and for folkloristics to continue as a critical discipline.

Methodologically speaking, down the road, critical ethnographic investigation of folklore and resistance culture is a challenge to research identity, i.e., how the insider researcher's identity shapes the research processes and is also shaped by the research process. I hope this problem of research identity provides more insight into the phenomenological and ontological orientation of resistance poetics from the insider viewpoint and can awaken more understanding as it provokes more questions: How can one remain the "unknowing" self in a research field? How can one remain indifferent to one's research identity? Whose meaning and whose interpretation is it? As this study shows, "research identity" is one that fits well into one's way of thinking, and that cultivates the research goal congruent with one's methodological and theoretical orientations and with a substantive research phenomenon in the interdisciplinary field. I should add that an ethnography of resistance poetics is a self-conscious journey into the moral and dialogical world of more asking than telling, more creative than critical, along familiar and unfamiliar paths crisscrossing with different ways of knowing and living the knowledge.

In this study, I did not intend to commit myself to verify any preconceived analytic propositions, or to test any received theory, or to "discover" a theory out there. Rather, first and foremost, using a constructivist stance, I attempted at "creating/constructing" a suitable frame of analysis,

which I named here “resistance poetics,” by drawing on the Salale folklore and indigenous model of ecopoetic and dissident cultural practices. I argued that among the Salale, like as in most parts of Africa (e.g., the Jie/Turkana communities, the Bedouin community, and Kumasi/Ghana), those performances are not cynical opposition to social change, or as a strategy aimed at the immediate goal of changing the status quo. Rather, they are spiritual and persistent emancipatory act of earnestly seeking freedom, progress, and justice. The criteria for the selection of the data and the artists presented in this study included: the folkloric, historical, and ethnographic value of the songs and the artistic mastery of the singer.

This project attempts to juxtapose the implication of Oromo folklore and folklore scholarship, often marginalized and upended in mainstream Ethiopian Studies, with that of other African societies. It discusses various possible solutions to the methodological and theoretical problems of the field (folkloristics) and tests how such possible solutions work in studying the folklore and resistance culture of a non-elite, often non-literate group on the basis of oral literature. It is hoped that this study will also make a modest contribution to Oromo Studies in general, and to *folkloristics* and *resistance poetics* in particular, by filling the lacuna in the methodological and theoretical space in current Oromo folklore studies. It will also cohere the fragmentary nature of the interdisciplinary relationships between *folkloristics*, *critical ethnography*, and *resistance studies* into an integrated whole of comparative perspective, namely, *Ethnography of Resistance Poetics*.

As demand continues to know and to live the knowledge in this ever-fascinating and uniquely complex world we like to call “home,” the need to explore local “subjugated knowledges” of the

marginalized is crucial. This focuses mainly on their ecopoetic practices of environmental justice, among other things, and an “anti-oppressive” approach to domination (political/social justice), which has been presented here as *resistance poetics*. Thus, it is hoped that this dissertation will pave the way for further future research into *critical folkloristics* using interdisciplinary methods.

The present project has focused on a single ethnographic example of Salale Oromo resistance experiences by drawing on a synchronic and diachronic approach. The future Oromo folklore studies will benefit more from eclectic interdisciplinary methods of social sciences and humanities by reconsidering, I propose, two methodological fusions. First, a careful configuration of a synchronic and a diachronic approach around three major historical epochs:

- a) the “traditional,” that is, the pre-conquest period until the second-half of the 19th century; e.g., the Salale lost power to *ras* Darge and *ras* Goabana about 1870, the socioeconomic and political changes, the weakening of *gada* system, the rise of clan chiefs;
- b) the “transitional,” the period from conquest until 1974; the sociopolitical and cultural implications of the conquest of over a century as transmitted through folklore and historical tradition marked by defeat, resentment, poverty, tenancy, displacement, internal migration, and social inequality, domination and resistance; and
- c) the “contemporary,” the period from 1974 to the present; characterized by the end of monarchical rule, the military junta called Derg came to power, birth and intensification of Oromo liberation movements (and of the Somali, Eritrea, Sidama), domination and resistance continued, war, famine, banditry, global contact and its aftermath, land grab, displacement, migration, exile, political turmoil, and environmental impacts.

Second, to benefit from the growing global contacts and to improve resistance to the negative social transformations caused by rapid flow of hegemonic and toxic information, exploitative labor, material capital, and technologies destructive to human and nonhuman progress, and to address unequal distribution of resources, knowledge, and power, it is essential for African folklorists to put the discipline, i.e., folkloristics, on a comparative trans/national and international scale through institutional joint research projects and research sites and, in so doing, to envision an *African ecopoetics*, a part of the ongoing *resistance poetics*, as an alter/native harmonious ecological and human solidarity, focusing on youth as historical agents of change.

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APPENDIX

Glossary of Places and Oromo (O) and Amharic (A) Terms

<i>abbaa</i>	O	father, owner, title of respect
<i>aadaa</i>	O	culture
<i>Araddaa Nagaa</i>	O	Altar of Peace located west of mount Fittaal in Yaaya Gullalle
<i>araara</i>	O	conciliation
<i>ateetee</i>	O	goddess of fertility, birth rite, agricultural rite
<i>aannan</i>	O	milk
<i>asmaarii</i>	O	minstrel, bard, traveling singer
<i>ayyaantu</i>	O	ritual leader, seer
<i>baddaa</i>	O	cold central highland (e.g. Salale) 3,400 to 2, 700 metres
<i>bakkka waadaa</i>	O	also called <i>dhiiga boollaa</i> , sacred site near Saldhe
<i>bultoo</i>	O	a deity one adheres to
<i>buttaa</i>	O	Oromo festival taking place every eight year
<i>caffee</i>	O	the Oromo gada assembly
<i>Cabsa</i>	O	deity and deity warship, a shrine west of Shararo town
<i>Dabra Libanos</i>	A	-a monastery in Salale, established between 12 th and 13 th century. It is one of the largest monasteries located in north Salale about 65 miles from the capital. St. Takla Haymanot, the founder of this prominent monastery was born, it s believed, in Ittisa (Ettisa), Bulga, an Oromo locality in north-eastern Shawa.
<i>dejjazmach</i>	A	-commander of the gate. Other such ranks in Abyssinian hierarchy are: <i>qanyazmach</i> (<i>commander of the right</i>), <i>gerazmach</i> (<i>commander of the left</i>), <i>fitawrari</i> (<i>commander of the front</i>) -the name of the district where the monastery is located
<i>diddaa</i>	A	resistance, rebellion
<i>dagaa</i>	A	cold central highland (e.g. Salale) 3,400 to 2, 700 metres
<i>duudhaa</i>	O	tradition
<i>ejersa bokkuu</i>	O	sacred groves/tree near Saldhe
~ <i>taajjab</i>	O	sacred groves/tree in Gumbichu
~ <i>kaawoo</i>	O	sacred groves/tree in Giraar Jaarsoo
<i>ekeraa</i>	O	the spirit of a dead person believed to be a guardian care-taker of the living. The root-word “ <i>eker-</i> ” resonates in beliefs in ancestral spirits among other communities in East Africa as in the Jie communities’ <i>Moru Eker</i> , the phallic symbol altar around which annual sacrifices are offered to memorialize Orwakol, the ancestral father, and the grey bull Engiro, the father of their cattle (Mirzeler, 2014:147).
<i>Enxooxo</i>	O	the mountain northwest of Finfinne, where Menilek’s earlier palace is located
<i>Faannoo</i>	A/O	bandit, rebel. Bairu Tafla defines “ <i>faannoo</i> ” as youth warriors in youth sub-culture. He also uses the term “bandit,” “shefta,” “who

did not have an explicit political motive for his rebellion was also referred to by this name.” According to Bairu Tafla, “after 1941 (the Ethio/Italian war), “the term has been applied to guerrilla warfare” (Tafla, 1987: 911).

<i>Finfinne</i>	O	capital city of Ethiopia; heart land of Oromia renamed as Addis Ababa following the conquest in 1870s
<i>fitawrari</i>	A	‘commander of the vanguard,’ a title below <i>dajazmach</i>
<i>foollee</i>	A	-the Oromo gada grade where members are all at the 3 rd gada grade (age 24) following the <i>dabbalee</i> .
<i>gadaa</i>	O	-socio-political and egalitarian system of the Oromo -age grade among the Oromo
<i>gerazmach</i>	O	commander of the left; a politico-military title
<i>gumaa</i>	O	blood feud; traditional Oromo conflict resolution
<i>Haroo Calanqo</i>	O	a ritual site in Jama, like Odaa Jilaa, it is believed to be a site where shaayis (folk artists) take refuge to rehearse folksongs
<i>Jama</i>	O	River east of Salale, major tributary to Abbaya, the Blue Nile
<i>kaawo</i>	O	common cause, purpose and vision
<i>kebele (qabale)</i>	O/A	a local county (both rural and urban administrative divisions)
<i>luba</i>	O	traditional gada leader, circumcised and initiated to a gada past master stage, now elder and skilled in gada rituals
<i>mata-gurraa</i>	O	a Youth Squad organized into bandits’ or guerrilla under Mulu
<i>mogoro</i>	O	also called sheftaa, bandit
<i>Mogor</i>	O	River in west of Salale, major tributary to the Abbaya, the Blue Nile
<i>mootii</i>	O	king, literally, “winner”
<i>naftanga</i>	O	from “ <i>naft</i> ,” rifle, name given to Menilek’s warriors of northern origin later occupied and settled on Oromo land
<i>Odaa Jilaa</i>	O	a ritual site in Mogor valley; Odaa is an Oromo sacred tree; its shade is used for yaa’ii or gumi (assembly)
<i>oguma</i>	O	wisdom
<i>qaalluu</i>	O	a priest of the Oromo religion
<i>qagnazmach</i>	O	commander of the right; a politico-military title
<i>qe’ee</i>	O/A	-home;
<i>ras</i>	A	the highest traditional title next to negus; -in the Abyssinian history there are three top titles at the pinnacle: the Emperor (King of Kings) or the Empress; the King; and then <i>Ras</i> , literally, “ <i>head</i> .”
<i>Salale</i>	O	-the <i>region</i> northwest of Finfinne, the capital, also called Addis Ababa. Salale is a vast plain surrounded by three massive escarpments of Jama to the northeast, Mogor to the west and Abbay (the Nile) to the northwest. -the <i>people</i> are also known by the same generic name even though there are several clans, sub-clans, and lineages settled in the locale from the Abbichu of the Tulama Oromo branch. The Salale were largely displaced and internally migrated throughout Oromia, and rarely to other regions if any.
<i>shefta / mogoro</i>	A/O	bandit, rebel

<i>ujuba</i>	O	ancestral gravesite in Salale
<i>ulfaa</i>	O	goddess (<i>Ateetee</i>) heritage which mothers inherit primarily to the older daughter or son
<i>waa-beeka</i>	O	oracle
<i>waadaa</i>	O	covenant, solemn oath to bring to closure peace-making process or to make a pledge before entering commitment
<i>warra</i>	O	close kin
<i>-haadha warraa</i>	O	wife
<i>-abbaa warraa</i>	O	husband
<i>warra-afuuraa</i>	O	a mediumship shrine led by a woman priest in Gurura near <i>Warra</i> Cabsa.
<i>sallaattoo</i>	O	Italian soldier
<i>zamana (jabana)</i>	O	era, epoch

Historical timeline

NOTE

Here I attempt to outline briefly the Oromo historical timeline using examples of major events in Oromo historiography. I open up by the origin theory of the Oromo which has been debatable and is “a matter of speculation and of open-ended debate since the 16th century.” Among others, according to Fayisa Dame, studies by Greenfield and Mohammed Hassan (1980) “show that Oromo communities existed around Shawa by the 9th and 10th centuries. Paulitschke (1889) reported that the Oromo were in Northeast Africa at least during the Axumite period, i.e., about 200 B.C. – 800 A.D.” Against the outside origin theory, Fayisa argues that the Oromo as one of the Cushitic peoples, who settled on the central Ethiopian plateau as early as 5000 B.C., “originally lived on the current Ethiopian highland.” It took them about eight successive gadas, i.e. 64 years to fully regain their previous occupation in Mul’ata gada (1586-1594). Thus, the theory that the northward Oromo movement of the 16th century from Bali was a reclaiming of their homeland they once lost to the Abyssinians is a legitimate claim which I adhere to in the present historical timeline as in this study. See Feyissa Demie, “The Origin of the Oromo: A Reconstruction of the Theory of the Cushitic Roots.” in *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Volume 5, Nos. 1 & 2, (1998), pp155-172; Bahrey et. al., *History of the Oromo of Ethiopia*, (Oakland, CL: African Sun Publishing, 1993), pp22-27.

1522-1594: the period of eight successive Oromo gada wars of eight years each to regain the territories previously lost to the Abyssinians.

- *1522-1530*: during this eight-year Malba gada administration, the Oromo moved from their mythic homeland, Bali, crossed the Galana river northward to reclaim their land they lost to Atse Wanag Sagad or Lebna Dengel (1508-1540).
- *1530-1538*: during the Mudana gada, the Oromo are said to have reached the Wabi river and the frontier of Bali and to have attacked Abyssinian raiders and returned to their headquarters near Wabi.
- *1538-1546*: the Kilole gada invaded the lands between Wabi river and the Harar plateau.
- *1546-1554*: the *luba* of the Biifolle gada occupied Dawaro.
- *1554-1562*: during the Michille gada, the Oromo occupation of the Gibe region began, the time when they moved far from their traditional home in Bali, and now remained in the new territories occupied.
- *1562-1570*: during the Harmufa gada the Oromo invaded Amhara and moved to the extreme north to Beja-meder now called Gondor.
- *1570-1578*: Shawa was reoccupied by the Robale gada followed by series of heavy wars.

- 1578-1586: during the *luba* of the Birmaji gada, the Oromo settled in the regions of Lake Tana and Damot, in today's Gojjam.

1527-1543: the Christian-Muslim power struggle was brought to a climax by Ahmad Gragh, the leader of the Afar-Harar-Somale confederates, who invaded the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. He was killed by Ethiopian and Portuguese soldiers, which brought to end the *jihad*. It is widely agreed that the Christian-Muslim war left the political landscape open for the Oromo both to occupy land and to change the route of the hitherto exclusively Christian power ploy toward the Oromo for nearly one century (*ca.* 1755-1855), when the Yejju Oromo lords did have influence over the other lords. There are Muslim ethnonyms and toponyms in Salale to date, where the distribution of Islam is less than 5%. Most of my informants traced their line of descent to twelve generations or more and they bore Muslim names, which require research to find out what historical and folkloric significance it can have in Salale Oromo studies.

1532: Ahmed Gragh conquered Bali proper, the historical headquarters of the Oromo. His invasion could be one factor that stirred the Oromo out of Walabu to engage in a series wars to reoccupy the present Oromoland.

1554-1562: is the Michille gada, the historical period when the Boorana (Tulama and Macca) Oromo established their headquarters at Odaa Nabe, about 20 miles south of Finfinne, the capital, near the town of Dukam. Traditional Oromo local chiefs, including those from Salale, attend rituals and assembly to date to renew *heera* (laws) and sanction the existing ones. Tradition holds that guided by the *korma* (bull) known as *Gommol*, the different Tulama clans settled in Salale and in different areas where the *korma* rested after tedious journeys (Tsegaye, 2003: 13). Even though it is argued that the Salale incorporated a large Amhara population after the conquest, it is agreed that they “contain a strong element of the former pre-Oromo population” (Tsegaye, 2003:20; Ege 1996:91).

1570-1704: it is the time of social movement back and forth and settlement for the Oromo in the present Oromoland, Oromia, and beyond. It marks the time of Oromo encounter with the Abyssinians, and the continuous expeditions from the Abyssinian Empire in the north.

1691: According to Denis Nosnitsin, in his “A History that was Found,” (2006), Geragn Mohammad burnt Dabra Libanos, the prominent monastery in Salale, in 1531 which was abandoned for 160 years, i.e., until 1691 when it was settled by the Oromo (of Salale) (p 41).

1775-1809: Ras or Mared Azmach, like his ancestors expanded the kingdom of Shawa into the Oromo regions to the west, north and south of his kingdom.

1813-1847: Sahla Selassie’s campaign against the Tulama Oromo and the Salale. Missionaries, travelers, and colonial agents (Krapf, Beke, Harris) confirmed that during his reign Sahla Selassie made a series of expeditions to loot and eventually conquer the Salale and its environs (Ege, 1996). Ege states that the documents produced by the missionaries, travelers, and European colonial agents “largely concentrated to a few years of exploration on Shawa from 1836-1843” (1996:10).

Ca. 1837: both Abbaa Maallee and Camme (and her son, Jaarra), became allies to the king of Shawa, Sahla Selassie, through marriage and conversion. To this effect, Jaarra of Mulo Faalle became authority to the Oromo of southern Mogor, and Abbaa Maallee’s power greatly increased and extended to new fertile territories north of Mogor. Historically the submission of the two chiefs challenged significantly the Salale resistance and followed by several other campaigns to conquer Oromoland.

1840s-1870: -Attempts to consolidate the Salale (and Tulama Oromo in general) into the Shawan Kingdom, the emergence of local chiefs, and, as a result, the decline of the egalitarian gada system in Salale.

-Sayfu or Sayfa Selase, one of the sons of Sahla Selassie, and a military commander, was the governor of Marrabete and Salale during the reign of his brother, King Haile Malakot. He launched a series of campaigns against the Tulama Oromo, to which the Salale belong, and the Macca Oromo.

1865-1866: Sayfu founded the garrison town of Fiche, capital of Salale, and the rule of Oromo *balabbatoch* (chiefs) ended.

1870-1890: Ras Darge, one of the four sons of Sahla Selassie, king of Shawa, and was a provincial governor of Salale under the reigns of Haila Malakot and Menilek 1870 until he died in 1900.

1906: Tafari Msakonen, later Haile Selassie, was born in 1892 and assumed the titular governor of Salale, in a “realm of marginal importance” as it is said. It enabled him to continue his governorship practice until he was appointed governor over part of the province of [Sidamo](#) in 1907. There was a royal administrative gap in Salale following the death of Ras Darge’s and his two sons in 1900, 1905 and 1906.

Ca.1907-1936: Ras Kassa was governor of Salale until he was succeeded by his son Ras Asrate Kassa. His governorship in Salale was halted by the five-year Italian Occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941), when three of his sons, Abarra, Asfa-Wosan, and Wonda-Wosan Kassa were executed. It was a harsh moment in Salale history when the landlord-tenant system was consolidated under *ras* Kassa’s administration in the area, which faced resistance and banditry.

1931: *lej* Iyyasu escaped from the town of Fiche, Salale, in May and went to Gendabarat and he was arrested in Gojjam on Saturday, June 1931. According to Bairu Tafla, related to *lej* Iyyasu’s escape, *ras Haylu* of Gojjam forfeited all his wealth and was imprisoned. Many people who participated in the plan were financially penalized; many people were flogged, incarcerated and hanged. Two servants of *ras* Kassa named Yanta Haylu and Warqu Sanbate were hanged at Gabaa Araare.

December 19 and 21, 1936: On December 19 Fiche, the capital of Salale, was occupied. Tsegaye Zeleke Tufa, a historian from Salale, maintains that the Salale community chiefs “advised Abarra Kassa not to leave Salale and to surrender peacefully to the Italians” before the latter occupied Fiche (2002:111). The Salale were happy to see the end of the last “remnants of those who subjugated them and expropriated their land,” even though they sympathized with Ras Kassa’s

children since, as royal families, they were born and lived in Salale for a long time. When *dajjach* Abarra Kassa ordered the Salale to go up to Addis Ababa to fight with him the Italian force and left on July 23, 1936, the whole country resisted against following him, and he was defeated and returned to Fiche. According to Bairu Tafla *ras* Hailu and the Italian army entered Fiche on December 18 and on Monday, 21 December 1936, *dajjach* Abarra and *dajjach* Asfa-Wasan surrendered in the evening (Bairu, 1987b: 299).

1941: The Italian Occupation was over and Emperor Haile Selassie was restored to power.

1967-1970: Hagari Tullu rebelled and lived as bandit in Salale and in different parts of the country until he was captured in Naqamte, Wallaga, in 1970 and executed in less than a month.

1974: The Ethiopian revolution led by military junta, Derg, ended the monarchical rule. Mule Asanu, an MP from Kuyyu district in Salale during the former monarchical rule rebelled until he was shot, captured and executed in 1977.

1975. General Tadasa Birru Kenne was captured and executed with eight other Oromo rebels.

1977. Mulu Asanu, a Salale bandit, was shot, captured and later executed with his bands.

1991. The Derg fell and another round of banditry emerged led by Badhaadha Dilgaasa (Midhe) and Sheeka of Goto Yaasa Lami.

1994. Midhe (Badhaadha) was shot and killed and social banditry was controlled in Salale, even though there are sporadic violent movements in a form of banditry to this day.

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- 2011-2012 *Folklore Fellowship Award* from Folklore Institute, Indiana University
- 2010 *AFS Gerald L. Davis Fund Travel Grants*
- 2009/2010 *Scholars Fellowship Award* from *Institute of International Education (IIE/SRF)*

PUBLICATIONS

Articles

- “God Speak to Us’: Performing Power and Authority in Salale, Ethiopia,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 26/3 (June, 2014), pp287-302.
- <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2014.901165>

-“‘Great Man’ or ‘Great Myth’? Meles Zenawi: Historic or Mythic Ideologue?” *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1&2, (July 2013), pp 91-131

-<http://www.oromostudies.org/publications/osa-journal>

-<http://www.africabib.org/rec.php?RID=391204998>

-“Salale Oromo Women’s Songs of Resistance (Oromia, Ethiopia),” *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies*, Volume 7, Issue 3, (2014), pp.47-66.

-<http://ijicst.cgpublisher.com/>

Books

Decorous Decorum (2006), Anthology of my poems in English

Beyond Adversities (2010), by VDM Verlag Publishers, Germany

The Hug (2011), Collection of Poems (Resistance Poetry). X-Libris Publishers.

And other books in Oromo Language

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

-*American Folklore Society (AFS)*

-*Oromo Studies Association (OSA)*

-*Methodspace (Connecting Research Communities)*

-*Collaborative Peace and Development Network*

-*Resistance Studies (Goteborg, Sweden)*

-*Academy of American Poets*