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Original Research

A History of Domination and the Arts of Resistance: An Experience from Oromo Artists, 1962-1991

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Abstract

The period from 1962 to 1991 witnessed the development of resistance songs by the Oromo artists against the severe and long-ranged imperial domination in Ethiopia. The purpose of this study is to show how the Oromo artists used songs to mould the Oromo struggle against this domination from 1962 to 1991. It argues that Afaan Oromo song (music) was used as the most powerful form of chimerical power in speaking across age, class, region, sex, power, and even ideology in resisting the domination of Imperial rule while striving to sustain common Oromo unity. However, the roles of Afaan Oromo songs in maintaining Oromo national identity cohesively and how they were boldly maintained in the contested national question of the 1960s and 1970s have not been investigated from a historical point of view. For the study, extensive available but pertinent data were collected from the areas where the activities of these artists were predominantly undertaken and were interpreted and analysed qualitatively based on historical research methods. The analysed and interpreted data show that the lyrics, melodies, and contents of the Oromo songs were artistically organised, with every word and line of satirical poems affecting emotion. The contents were checked for messages that could have the power to covertly express the idea of advancing self-awareness, social cohesion, and group solidarity. The study reveals that a lifetime of degradation of serfdom cannot be overcome without the high costs of unwavering commitments and sacrifices. The Oromo artists themselves have been characterised as dissident opponents and threats to the unity of Ethiopia. Their struggles for thetransformation of imperial and dictatorial rules into the essence of democracywere portrayed as narrow nationalists, and consequently, they were thrown into jail, and their songs were locked into drawers. The efforts combined together and contributed a lion's share to the development of Oromo consciousness and the resistance movement against the Imperial domination.

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INTRODUCTION

It has been a long time since art has been used to criticise injustice, reinforce values and ideas, empower, and deepen commitments under the shadow of providing aesthetic joy

(Melody Milbrandt, 2010, p.8). These functions are more significant when there is an idea or action of domination and subordination between groups and even between individuals. Persons with artistic skillhave explored and reconceptualised tensions of domination and raised questions about contemporary issues in a way that their works could be a voice for individuals and collective needs (Ibid.). With regard to this, music or song is the most powerful chimerical power inspeaking across age, class, region, sex, power, and even ideology. Music functions in a politically effective manner because it isexpected to do so by both rulers and subjects. Nations around the world are saturated with a history of utilising music to challenge the status quo (Eesuola 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this article is to show how Oromo artists used songs (music) in moulding the Oromo struggle against the domination imposed on them from 1962 to 1991.

The Oromo were one of the major ethnic groups seriously dominated in all aspects of life, mainly beginning in the 1870s, when Menilek II imposed the Naftegna administration system on them. The domination was characterised by not only territorial occupation but also the imposition of social, economic, and political subordination (Mohammed Hassen, 1999, p. 114-115). However, the Oromo did not remain silent in serving the domination. They put up resistances, which varied from bloody battles as in the case of Azulee and Calanqoo (Abbas Haji Ganamo, 2014, p. 151–158, 142–160) to acreep but continuous resistance as in the case of Leeqaa Naqamtee and Jimmaa (Mohammed, 1999, p.133–146). Besides, they also used all forms of resistance in their culture. Among all, however, at the forefront were their folksongs. The Oromo in all parts of the country under the domination of the imperial forces used their songs in one wayor another to pose resistance against first the expanding forces and later the continuous dominations. In fact, they did not develop the movement into a more organised form in a way that could create networks among the Oromo from east to west and north to south until the early 1960s.

Moreover, the Oromo protest songs have mostly evaded critical interrogation and significant historical studies. Their roles in maintaining Oromo unity cohesively, especially in the contested national question of the 1960s and 1970s, have not beeninvestigated from a historical point of view. The contextual analysis of Oromo protest songs is not analysed in relation to events in historical development. In their roles in pointing to popular sentiments and political atmosphere, the artists were simply termed domestic entertainers just for the purpose of earning their daily incomes. The position they were given in a society was extremely low, and usually they were considered a social group to be served last (Tesfaye Tolessa, 2009). Their contribution to Oromo consciousness for unity and the struggle for freedom, as well as the severity of their experiences and their attempts to share their experiences of their endeavours with others in a scientifically organised way, have not yet gotten scholarly attention. What currently dominates media airings is not supported by

evidence collected from historical sources. There are also several times when current singers performed the songs of past Oromo heroes and heroines as their own newly composed songs. Therefore, the objective of the study is to investigate and document these extraordinary contributions to the political struggle of the Oromo.

Review of the Related Literature

Globally, the roles of artists and their songs in the creation of consciousness and mobilising the suppressed have generated and continue to generate a lot of literature. Most of them agree that music is the nerve centre of the societal network. They have emphasised that songs are a significant agent of change with the power of recasting social reality, provoking thecounter-hegemonic voice of the mass, a powerful vehicle for political and social ideas, and an influential instrument for fostering national sentiments in the service of political contradiction. Particularly worthy of citationsare the works of James Scott (1985), David McDonald (2013), and Eesuola (2012).

After criticising the overdue attention given to a movement led by a kind of organisation with which the West was most familiar, James Scott (1985: i–xvi)) tells the readers that his account focuses in contrast on everyday forms of peasant resistance. He gives us painstaking details on how Malaysianpeasants have utilised rumour, gossip, disguise, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemism, folktales, ritual gestures, sculptures, paintings, scripts, etc. According to Scott, among these everyday forms of resistance, songs took the lead in creating implicit understanding and an informalnetwork among the subordinates.

Another work that discusses the artistic role of song as an important instrument for the powerless to fight the powerful is the work of David McDonald. Blending historical and ethnographic methods of research modalities, McDonald (2013) has provided us with the experiences of the Palestinians that music or song has the power to foster belonging, activate structure, and articulate common national questions of the nation. He illustrates that music or song is a portal through which the contour of past perceptions is imported from the past into the present national imaginary. He argues in his finding that music is a process in which the question of self-determination is cultivated and harnessed.

Segun (2012), in his short article, which he produced on Nigerian protest songs, recognised the relationship between song and protest politics. Beginning with musical impacts in the protest movements of some African countries, Segun informed us that music and musicians have the power to push political engagements from criticism to confrontations. In his argument, he emphasises that the role of the arts of song in linking and creating consciousness in a powerless society against suppressors andexploiters is universal.

As a society in a continuous struggle to determine their own destiny, the struggle of Oromo artists, especially in folkloristic style, has never escaped the attention of scholastic studies. Yet none of them has focused on the comprehensive essence of the movements.

Many cited as backgrounds to their central arguments; some focused on specific localities, and others generalised the successes and drawbacks from studies conducted on individual biographical experiences. Nonetheless, they are contributory, and some of them are informative to this study.

The collections of Oromo gabbar songs by historians Negaso Gidada and Alessandero Triulzi from Qellem Wallagga and linguist Tamane Bitima from central Oromia are the good beginning to study the Oromo arts as vehicles of resistance movement. As the collectors confirmed, the collections were not the ones that were composed during the collection but recited by the Oromo minstrels from societal folksongs. Thorough contextual examinations of the collections show that the songs were composed as a reaction to the conquest of the imperial and their subsequent brutal administration. The collections are informative to learn how the Oromo used their folkloristic arts in the struggle against the notorious imperial administration. Nevertheless, the collections of songs from specific localities and the authors' emphasis on the collections as historical sources andliterary values limited our ability to learn how the composers, reciters, and minstrels performed their resistance songs under the very noses of their suppressors.

The contribution of Oromo resistance songs to the Oromo struggle also appeared in the works of Gada Malba (1984), Mohammed Hassan (1999), Asafa Jalata (2005), and Mekuria Bulcha (2011). Their works elaborated on how the Oromo, who were irritated by long-lasting grievances, organised themselves and contributed to the overthrow of both the regime of Emperor Haile Sillasie and the Darg. In this respect, they produced eloquent and well-articulated works onthe Oromo resistance struggle against cultural, political, and economic impositions from the consecutive Ethiopian governments. Although these qualities have made their works the most cited in the study of the Oromo resistance struggle, the coverage they extended to the works of Oromo artists andarts cannot be equaled with the movements they practically deserve.

As to my knowledge, the first major study devoted to the subject is the dissertation of Shawn Mollenhuaer (2011). He explored the role of Oromo artists and arts in consciousness creation in both the forms of individual folksongs and more organised ways, which appeared after 1960. His attempt to give contextual analysis on some of the poetics of the songs published on cassettes in relationto practises in Oromo culture and the imposed domination from the consecutive Ethiopian governments These well-informed methodological approaches and his attempt to assess some areas where the practises of the movement were dominant, like Finfinnee and Harar, have made his work a majorcontribution to the Oromo study. Otherwise, his negligence to visit other areas of Oromo regions where the struggle through the performance songs was similar and his presentation of Oromo artists as only a mouthpiece of other organs, overlooking the situations when the artists themselves were among the freedom fighters, have kept his works in major criticism.

In spite of this interesting development,the attempt to write a history of Oromo artistic songs as a vehicle of the resistance movement is insignificant. No comprehensive work is produced on the theme, or works that contain such themes are characterised either by a short article that deals with specific localities, periods, and themes, or by books that use them as passing references. Therefore, it is in this aspect that this brief study aims to fill the gaps.

Material and Methods

For the study, pertinent available data were collected, interpreted, and analysed qualitatively based on historical research methods, mainly narrative and descriptive styles. Materials that were produced in relation to a history of Oromo artists and their contributions during the study period were identified using the method of darbaa dabarsaa (snowball method) and then collected and examined. Oral traditions and information were also collected, especially from the areas where the activities of these artists were predominantly undertaken. For this, Addis Ababa, Dirre-Dhowaa, West Shawa, Jimmaa, and Wallagga were visited. In these areas, extensivebut relevant data collection in both written and oral forms would make the study comprehensive and meaningful. The Finfinnee archives, books, or any other reports written on them were assessed and used for the study's data. With these, the following outcomes are achieved:

Results and Discussions

The Oromo Cultural Troupes and Their Resistance Songs, 1962–1974

Resistance art among the Oromo has a long history. It was over a long period that the Oromo started using the arts in the socialisation of the generations into their set of distinctive values, to report what challenged their common interests, to create awareness, and to encourage heroic deeds. These were made possible by the performances of tales, poems, songs, epics, riddles, demonological legends, ballads, anecdotes, proverbs, lullabies, history, and others. However, among the Oromo oral literature that is commonlyused because of its heightened emotional expression is the song. The artistic role of Oromo songs in resisting the powerful has been significantly high since ancient history of the Oromo (Tesfaye Tolessa, 2019, 251).

Scholars in the field argue that musical performances, especially in an organised way, are weapons to inject the ideology of the weak or subordinate while performing that of the powerful (Allen, 2008: 2–3). More than other forms of art, music and its lyrics speak beyond the surface meanings of the contents of poems set to music. It plays a vital role in rousing emotion and stimulating ideological cohesion and it fuels excitement and ensures the sustainability of nationalist identification. Especially during the revolution, its role was beyond one's expectations (Aleme Eshete, 1979, p.5). For this purpose, in most countries, competition to win over a group of artists or individual artists has been a common practise. Those who are powerful organise their own artists, whereas those who are subordinate try their best to infiltrate the organised groups.

This way of winning over the artists among the Oromo was also common. However, until 1962, the Oromo resistance songs were not beyond the efforts of individuals in a variety of social roles and were not works of an organised group that stood together towards

the inspired objectives. It was since 1962 that the Oromo artists began organising themselves to perform full-fledged artistic resistances against the domination the Oromo were forced to bear for almost a century at the time.

The instant cause for the immediate establishment of the troupe was the struggle over whether to use Afaan Oromo equally with Harari in the wedding ceremonies of both Oromo couples. This was added to the myth that created and disseminated that Afaan Oromo would break the radio and other musical instruments and could not be tuned into them (Asefa Jalata, 1993: 186; Shawn Mollenhuaer, 2011: 60–63). It was this event that attracted the attention of Oromo elders in Dirre-Dhowaa, who swiftly discussed how to establish a more organised and modernised Oromo cultural troupe. During the discussion, the organising committee that first organised the troupe and later gave superintendentservice was established. The members of the committees were recruited from senior elders based on their political determination and activities for leadership. Within itself, the committee organised three sub-committees: Koree Tiksituu (Security Committee), Koree Gargaartu (Fund Raising Committee), and Koree Goristuu (Advisory Committee) (informants: Ibrahim Haji Ali, 2017; Mahd Hamid, 2008; Yonis Abdullah, 2018).

The committees immediately organised groups of cultural troupes collectively named after the Oromo clans of the area, Afran Qalloo. The first was from senior youths, named Urjjii Balkkalchaa (Morning Star), and the second was from younger youths, named Hiriyaa Jaalalaa (Junior Peers). The second was from the younger youths (informants: Abdi Buhi, 2008; Adam Ibsa, 2008; Ibrahim Haji, 2008; Musa Ahmad, 2008).

The composers, the organisers, and the reciters were experts who were gifted withsuch profound knowledge of the history, psychology, and value system of Oromoculture that they were very careful in using issues common to all Oromo people. They were those who deeply felt the wound of the suppressions and who were involved in relationships of power themselves. They were very careful in drawing attention to the antagonistic relationship between the Oromo, who were reduced to a subservient position, and the dominating neftegna system (Ibid.).

As the troupe was established with the purpose of defending the Oromo interest, the lyrics, melodies, and contents of the songs were carefully organised in a way that they could grapple with the fundamental issues of what it means to be Oromo and what it means to resist. Almost most of the songs were carefully coined artistically with every word and line of satirical oral literature, with the affecting emotion that a lifetime under degradation of serfdom cannot be overcome without the high costs of unwavering commitments and sacrifices. The contents were checked for messages that could form the basis of resistance and cultural survival in their inner meanings. Therefore, each song was said to have been coined with theideology of the moment in a way that could covertly express the idea to advance self-awareness and political identity. Therefore, it could form the basis of resistance and cultural revival while advancing self-awareness

towards social cohesion and group solidarity (Ibid.).

To evade easy security detection, the texts were artfully interwoven with subtlety and ambiguity, which only knowledgeable and attentive listeners could translate meaningfully. The purpose was to furnish emotion and ideological cohesion and fuel the excitement and sustainability of nationalist identification. Mainly, it was to profoundly shape the goals and objectives of a people moving towards collective identity, cultural nationalism, and political independence. As a result, informants who were participants in the event confirmed that the troupe was able to win the affection of the audiences on its first day of the show when the attendeesabandoned their seats and circled the stages within minutes after the performance began (Informants: Ibrahim Haji Ali, 2008; Mahid Hamid, 2008; Hallo Dawwe, 2008).

The movement did not restrict its sphere of influence only to the township of Dirre-Dhowaa. They moved outside the town and continued their awareness-creation through their performances. Within three years of its foundation, the troupe travelled to placeslike Haro-Mayaa, Awaday, Dadar, Qobboo,Hirnaa, Ciroo, and several other places in Hararge and performed music and drama in Afaan Oromo. In all the places, they used all forms of social gatherings, performed their shows, and communicated with their targets using their penetrating melody, captivating lyrics, and well-informed contents of songsand dramas. In doing so, the artistic movementmobilised the Oromo in all walks of life and even produced fellow poets, singers, and militant Oromo nationalists (Ibid.).

Nonetheless, one should not think that process was free from government security surveillance. The surveillance began at the very beginning of the movement. It was from that early day onward that the government security agent extended its tentacles to every member of the cultural troupe and other supporters and put them under everyday forms of repression. Although the worst was to come three years later, the local and national governments, who were shocked by the unexpected outcome of the movement, began taking strict measures. They alleged the members of the movement and its supporters as narrow nationalism and the agents of separatist movements and dissolved the cultural troupe in 1965 (Mollenuaer, 2011, p. 25–28).

After the dissolution, some of its members were detained and either killed or tortured to reveal the civilian coordinators of the band. Some fled to Mogadishu to continue their struggle through their nationalist songs on the Afaan Oromo Programme of Radio Mogadishu. Others joined the armed struggle in cooperation with the Baalee Oromo movements. Very few escaped to Addis Ababa. The rest were silenced to live with their families (Informants: Ibrahim Haji Ali, 2008; Mahid Hamid, 2008; Hallo Dawwe, 2008).

The harassment and subsequent repression of the troupe did not bring to an end what was already ignited by the movement. The movement was clandestinely continued by those who survived and who were already

inspired to follow in the footsteps of their seniors. They had the determination to continue to voice their views through songs ofmetaphor and allegory. Informants unanimously agreed that this individual Oromo continued composing their own poetic songs and reciting them at any occasional festival (Ibid.). Later on, some of these individuals got the opportunity to send their poems and songs to the Afaan Oromo Programme of Ethiopian Radio Harar Station. The station, which was opened by the government itself on November 1, 1972, to counteract Afaan Oromo broadcasting from Radio Mogadishu, intensified exposing the maladministration of the Ethiopian government. There were also those who went in person to the station and had their music recorded for the purpose of radio transmissions (A Report from Harar Radio Station, Tir, 1965).

The Oromo Cultural Troupes and Their Resistance Songs against the Darg, 1974–1991.

The movement during the Emperor's regime laid the groundwork for the struggle to be continued under Darg. Most Oromo intellectuals who came into the scene of Oromo politics under the Darg used the experience for mass mobilisation towards theirown political interests. Following the outbreak of the revolution in 1974, they did not take time to infiltrate Abiyotawi Kinet. [1] The organisation of Abiyotawi Kenet among the Oromo was positively received by both members of the Darg and POMOA-infiltrated Oromo nationalists. Both of them were interested in it because they believed that music was a powerful medium that could be utilised to convey lessons in an attractive and enjoyable form. While the Darg needed it to publicise its revolutionary actions, the Oromo activists needed it to expose the Darg's selloutof the proclaimed "Socialist Republic" of Ethiopia to the general public and to the public in general and to the Oromo public in particular (Informants: Zerihun Wadajo, 2008; Kebede Firissa, 2008; Esayas Hordofa, 2019; Lencho Leta, 2019).

Therefore, the Darg interest in having Abiyotawi Kinet and the Oromo activists desire to have singers of Oromo nationalism resulted in the formation of several Oromo cultural troupes in different parts of theOromo region. Local agents of Oromo cultural associations encouraged and assisted the formation of several Abiyotawi Kinet in different Oromo areas. The organisation of theAbiyotawi Kinet in this form was made from the Qabale levels up to the upper administrative hierarchies. There were no Qabales, districts, sub-provinces, or provinces that had not organised Abiyotawi Kinet (Ibid.). Informants state that it was common knowledge to hear and see singers on any occasion of gatherings. Political clubs, sectional assemblies, anniversary festivals,etc. were the stages frequently used for the purpose (Ibid.).

The Qabale was the first stage to recruit the politically informed and best vocalists for the districts. From the districts, vocalists that are more outstanding were again taken to the Awraja (sub-provinces). The provinces

recruited the outstanding ones from the sub-provinces under their respective administrative structures. Finally, the national- level revolutionary bands apparently employed the best of the best. Accordingly, in the early era of the revolution, Oromo artists came of age in an outburst of creative songwriting in Afaan Oromo. Even if Oromo history shows that the Oromo singing about politics was not new to the Oromo, the early period of the revolution witnessed an outpouring of political songs (Informants: Ejeta, 2017; Ziyadin, 2017; Kuma Eda'e, 2007).

The Oromo singers and performers were recruited from Oromo social elites who had already experienced exposing societal and political injustices in their localities through their lyrics. The recruiters were the Darg-infiltrated Oromo political elites who organised themselves from the top governmental structures down to the Qabale levels. Using their positions in all the structures, these Oromo political agents supported Oromo singers and performers to covertly convey issues of Oromo politics (Ibid.).

Although there were songs and secular hymns that were spontaneous expressionsof popular feelings or were to appeal tothe market created by those feelings, many were inspired by a conscious desire to propagate a specific message. The songs followed the development of the revolution, and hence their content was topical anddepicted events in the revolutionary process. These forms of folkloristic presentations of the songs were important because they reminded the Oromo to recall misdeeds of the past towards them and to alert them against the anticipated recurrences of the same linguistic and cultural dominance (Ibid.).

During the composition of the songs, care was taken to provide the Oromo mass with insights into the nature of the historic struggle. In case there were newly created songs and dramas, care was taken to produce them almost in the same types and forms as theprevious songs, while the focus of the contentsmainly represented the sentiment of Oromo nationalism (Oromo TV interview with Artist Gaaddisaa Abdullah, on January 20, 2018). Care was also taken to remind the Oromo that the revolution was going to be against them. Almost all the songs are not free from such indoctrination, but they could be the best example to remind us of Gaaddisaa Abdullah's Qeerroo Mataa Tuutaa, which was composed one year after the revolution in 1975.

The central message of the song is an expression of profound grief and sorrow over the suppression, extortion, and dispossession that the Oromo underwent and theperpetration of the same tendencies under the Darg. It also pointed out that the songindirectly referred to EPRP as Qeerroo Mataa Guftaa, which was named after their hair style,were the children whose fathers were suckers of Oromo blood under the imperial regime. It also expounds that not only the policies they adopted but also they themselves were the descendants of those who had divided the Oromo, deprived them of the right to use their language and the right to rule themselves and their country. In his song, Gaaddisaa underlines that if there is any Oromo who expects change and hospitability from the

revolution, it is just like a wish to see themoon in daylight and to get sunlight at night. Gaaddisaa warned the Oromo public that there is a new oppressive system in the making,using a different tactic and strategy to achieve the same result as its predecessors. Therefore, the singer advised the Oromo of his generationnot to be enslaved by the enslavers whose predecessors enslaved their fathers. It was also one of the fascinating songs presented at the Oromo cultural show of the National Theatre in 1977.

This organised way of creating consciousness on Oromo national issues attracted Oromo political elites, who had already established underground organisations that aimed to facilitate the development of national consciousness. This underground Oromo organisation invited members of Afran Qalloo Cultural Troupes who remained in the country to Addis Ababa with the purpose of disseminating similar movements to otherparts of Oromo areas. The members came to Addis Ababa from Harara and established another cultural troupe known as Aduu Birraa (autumn sun), which means the beginning of vivifying. The organiser of the frontline was Ali Birraa, although the underground Oromo cultural organisation had heavy hands indirecting the whole system of the troupe's movement. To the amazement of many, this cultural troupe had established itself in a matter of only a few months and began performing their shows in Afaan Oromo at some nightclubs in Addis Ababa (Informants: Ibrahim, 2017; Ziyadin, 2017; Ejeta, 2017).

The most popular song Ali frequently aired on the show of the club was the song Sooshalisimii Jechuun Walqixxummaa Sabaa (Socialism is the equality of the nations) (Oromia TV interview with Ali Birraa, accessed on June 7, 2015). The song was composed with layers of meaning in all its stanzas. Its covert meaning elaborates on the necessity of equality for all the nations and nationalities of Ethiopia, whereas its covert meaning shows support for Darg's socialist ideology. The inner meaning is an elaboration of the Darg failure to condemn or defend expressly issues of the national question. Ali found the Darg propaganda about socialism ironic and skeptical. Therefore, it was a call to expose the true nature of Darg's "socialist" revolution.

In doing so, this cultural troupe played three major roles in consciousness creation among the Oromo. One was that they had broken the silence of singing in Afaan Oromo in Addis Ababa. The second was that they became exemplary for the other Afaan Oromo vocalists in and around Addis Ababa to sing boldly in the city without giving due regard to those who harassed them. The third was that in making their centre at Addis Ababa, they undertook extensive tours of cultural shows to several towns in the Oromo areas and inspired other Oromo vocalists to follow their model (Gada Melba, 1988, p. 100–101; informants: Lencho Leta, 2019; Kuma Eda'e, 2008).

The major and most important wasthe cultural tour they made to some major towns in West Shawa and Wallaggaa provinces. They visited all the towns along theroad from Ambo down to Mandii. It is stated that in all the towns the troupe visited, they were received with overwhelming enthusiasm.

The informants tell their witnesses that their cultural shows in all the towns drew several hundreds of thousands of attendees. The visit was so fruitful that the cultural tour aspired many youths and made them join Abiyotawi Kenet in their districts, sub-districts, and provinces. These cultural troupes of Abiyotawi Kenet soon followed the footstepof Aduu Birraa and transformed themselves tothe level that would enable them to undertake the same tour of cultural shows. This was clearly demonstrated when the Wallagga cultural troupe visited Shawa on the Gadaafestival of Bokkuu Xollee and the Jibaat and Maccaa cultural troupe of Wallagga on the Gadaa festival of Odaa Kaarraa in November 1977 (Gada Melba, 1988, p. 100–101).

The Oromo activists tirelessly worked on such and other activities that sought to develop Oromo nationalism. The rise of Oromo nationalism was much needed becauseit was seen as an indispensable weapon to fight against the militarised rule of the Darg. The songs of the time reflected social reality and were an effective way of acknowledging and protesting against an unjust political system (Informants: Zerihun Wadajo, 2008; Kebede Firissa, 2008; Dima Nogo, 2008; Lencho Leta, 2019).

These Oromo activists desire to have singers of Oromo nationalism combined with the Darg interest in having Abiyotawi Kinet resulted in the formation of several Oromo cultural troupes in different parts of the Oromo region. Local agents of Oromo cultural associations encouraged and assisted the formation of several Abiyotawi Kinet in different Oromo areas. The organisation of the Abiyotawi Kinet in this form was made from the Qabale levels up to the upper administrative levels. There were no Qabales, districts, sub-provinces, or provinces that had not organised Abiyotawi Kinet. Informants state that it was common knowledge to hear and see singers on any occasion of gatherings. Political clubs, sectional assemblies, anniversary festivals, etc. were the stages frequently used for the purpose (Ibid.).

The hidden development of Oromo nationalist songs and dramas at different administrative levels made a more impressive leap forward in January 1977. Encouraged by the widespread organisation of the cultural troupes in different localities and different administrative structures, the Oromo elites living in Addis Ababa organised a nationwide Oromo cultural show at the National Theatre of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa on January 13 and14, 1977. Although the reason presented to the government was to raise funds for Bariisaa Newspaper, the secret and real purpose were to link the Oromo cultural singers from east to west and north to south and use them as the most important instrument to promote Oromo nationalism (Bariisaa, Year. 2, Gurraandhala 10, 1969, or February 18, 1976).

On the cultural show, a hundred and fifty performers were recruited from the cultural troupes of Aduu Birraa from Finfinnee, Shawa, Wallagga, Iluu Abbaa Boor, Jimmaa, Arsi, Baalee, and Hararge. The attendees were reported to have been several thousands, and as a result, the compound of the National Theatre was extremely overcrowded and overpowered with emotion to the extent that it put government security and military

personnel under pressure (Mollenhuaer: 62–70; Gada, p. 102).

Informants attested that almost all the artistic performances presented at the cultural show were a response to the hypocrisies of the Darg and its élite advisors (Informants; Kebede Firissa, 2008; Esayas Hordofa, 2019; Dima Nogo, 2019). In addition to the songs quoted above, many politically overtonedsongs and dramas were performed. Some of them were patriotic, others were expressions of passion for liberty, and very few were purely cultural in nature. In fact, the majorfocus of the show was on a protracted period of political oppression, economic exploitation, cultural alienation, and linguistic subjugation of the Oromo.

One of the songs that best represented the Cultural Show and the most exalted poetical efforts that put into words the idea of the continuity of the Oromo suppressionextending from the past regimes into the revolutionary Darg period was Qawwee MaleeMaaltu Bilisa Nubaasaa (Armed Struggle isthe Only Remedy for Oromo Liberation). The song was composed by Abraham Lataa, who is popularly known as Abbaa Caalaa Lataa, and it was sung by Ilfnesh Qannoo. Ilfnesh had sung this song at Aggaaroo (one of the towns of the then Kafa Province) in 1976, just a few months before she presented it at the national cultural show of the Oromo at the Ethiopian National Theatre in January 1977 (OMN interview with artist Ilfinesh Qannoo, on November 9, 2016).

This musical reaction was fully open,direct, and aggressive. The central message of the song revolves around four major areas. The first one is a condemnation of the past consecutive Ethiopian imperial regimes for their attempts to break up the central unity of the Oromo and, consequently, for their attempts to nurture different Oromo clans into independent ethnic groups. In connection with this, it also pointed to the distortion of cultural identity, which went as far as the replacement of Oromo names by those of Amharic. The second is the reluctance of the Darg to take clear and serious measures, and as a result, the continuity of the same system could extendthe serfdom status of the Oromo in the future itself. The third message is the existence of prodigious hope for the persistence of the Oromo unity, regardless of the long-lasting efforts to destroy it. The fourth is a call for the Oromo to continue the armed struggle, which was already started, as it was taken as the only and best method to come out of such anguishing relationships with the usurpers.

The show lasted for two days and was attended by 150 performers and large crowds. Informants who shared with me their reminiscences were eyewitnesses to the event state that the crowd overflowed thehall of the National Theatre and congested the compound to the point that one could not see the ground. It is said that all the attendeesfilled with tears and weaved their hands from corner to corner to the point where they feared the security agents for another outbreak of mass instability. In spite of this great mob, no one was reported for misbehaving (Informants: Lencho Leta, 2019; Ibrahim, 2008; Kuma Eda'e, 2007).

The songs of the cultural show loudly reacted to Darg's restrictions on the development of

Oromo nationalism. They produced and performed strong political awakening songs and dramas, despite the danger posedby the state security structure and individuals with hatred towards the use of Afaan Oromo. They were a reflection of the feeling of rage against cultural, linguistic, economic, and political oppression under both the imperialand Darg regimes.

In Oromo history, the cultural show has been described as unique in its nature for its contribution to the rise of Oromo nationalism. It illustrated how cultural forms, like music, are important forces in shaping a collectivenational consciousness. It evoked the attendants' awareness of socio-structuralrealities and their own cultural tradition, whilethe attendants in turn imbibed the message andthe rhythm from the music in their everyday lives. It also demonstrated vividly that the Oromo came together from distant places, communicated, and understood each other without cultural and dialectical barriers, perhaps after a century of isolation because of political suppression (Informants: Zeyadin Yusuf, 2017; Mahdi Hamid, 2008; Zerihun Wadaajo, 2008).

Nevertheless, producing or singing such songs was not without risk. Informants recall that the Darg response to the movement was swift and strong. First, the government media boycotted attending and broadcasting the show. This was soon followed by the intimidation of the surveillance and the harassment of the artists, producers, recording companies, and politicalintermediaries. As a result, some of the performers on the show were killed. Others were sentenced to not less than eight months of imprisonment. A few were able to escape. Bariisaa newspaper was nationalized and became the government's Afaan Oromo newspaper. Heavy and double censorships were imposed on the rest of Abiyotawi Kinet from the top down to the Kebele level (Ibid.).

In spite of these challenges, the Darg continued to organise and use Abiyotawi Kenet in order to mobilise the mass and create solidarity within the framework of socialist ideology. The Darg intensively used the shows on all the important occasions. The invitation of the cultural groups with the best performances from one province to another, to and from sub-province to sub-province, and district to district was made a usual practise. The practise also benefited the Abiyotawi Kenet, which was organised by the Oromo. As usual, the Oromo singers and performers continued to link issues of Oromo nationalism covertly to their audiences. However, since double censorship was imposed and one suspected of acting out of the imposed objectives was purged out, cautious consideration of the hidden meaning was critically evaluated (Ibid.).

The first was self-censorship, which all the singers and performers were advised to conduct to avoid any ill-treatment from the Dar. The second was made by the censorship authority. In the latter case, all singers or performers were ordered to translate their songs or plays into Amharic and to get censorship approval from the censorship authorities. Here, the purpose was to avoid thecooperation of the Oromo in authority with the singers and performers. However, the

censorship in the Amharic translation became an open opportunity for the Oromo singers. It was because ordinary translation could not import politically subversive meanings into Amharic (Ibid.).

The Oromo performers of Abiyotawi Kenet were not alone in the struggle for Afaan Oromo and Oromo nationalism. There were also some Oromo singers and players who were competent enough to join the Ethiopian National Theatre, Hager Feqer Theatre, Addis Ababa Cultural Theatre, and the bands of various military divisions. Ali Birraa (for some time), Hailu Disasa, Admasu Berhanu, Taddasa Cuqee, Daraj Zamadu, and Sahile Dagaagoo were among such employed artists (Informants: Zerihun Wadajo, 2008; Mahid Hamid, 2008; Kuma Eda‟e, 2007).

Some artists were also there who included at least one Afaan Oromo song on their Amharic cassettes. Unlike those who sang only in Afaan Oromo, these artists introduced the lyrics and melody of Afaan Oromo songs to non-Afaan Oromo speakers together with the Amharic songs. In doing so, they helped many non-Afaan Oromo speakers learn about Oromo and Afaan Oromo. In this case, theroles of Tilahun Gessesse, Bizunesh Bekele, Hamalmal Abate, Abebe Tesema, Hibist Tiruneh, and others are worth mentioning (Tesfaye Tolessa 2009, p. 87).

However, some of the artists whom I interviewed claim that they were rarely invited to people's gatherings and were allowed tosing only one or two songs. They also claimedthat they were not allowed or invited when Ethiopian cultural shows went abroad. Instead, they argue, the opportunities were given to those who did not know both the culture and the language of the Oromo (Informants: Zerihun Wadajo, 2008; Kuma Eda'e, 2007).

Nonetheless, many of these songs and plays, especially those that were purely in Afaan Oromo, remained unpublished because of either strict censorship or a lack of resources. The only significant recording of Afaan Oromo songs on cassette was after 1985. It was after this year because it was the time when the Darg infiltration by Oromo nationalists became stronger. It was also a time when access to recording materials beganto improve in quality and to be lower in cost than before. Subsequently, a significant number of Oromo vocalists were able to publish one or more cassettes for listeners after 1991. Yet, the return from the sale of records had never supported their daily consumption, and as a result, the lives of many were ended without seeing a better life.

Conclusions

Musical arts are a significant agent of change with the power of recasting social reality, provoking the counter-hegemonic voice of the mass, a powerful vehicle for political and social ideas, and an influential instrument for fostering national sentiments in the service of political contradiction. This was also true for the Oromo. The Oromo in all parts of the country under the domination of the Naftegna forces used their songs in one way or another to pose resistance against first the expanding forces and later the continuous dominations. The Oromo song clearly emerged as one of the tools with which the Oromo were bonded

together to oppose the unjust restriction ontheir right to self-rule. The songs were a direct expression of the Oromo life situation on the one hand and attempts undertaken to revive Oromo culture, songs, and traditional dances on the other.

The conscious efforts to connect the Oromo for unity and the continued efforts to silence the Oromo put the arts of the Oromo culture, especially the songs, at the centre of the struggle. Therefore, this short study clearly shows that the Oromo arts and artists played a significant role in informing, teaching, and motivating the Oromo.

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Media Interviews

A first quarter report of the Harar Radio station on 30 July 1965 E.C.

Oromo TV interview with artist Ali Birraa on June 7, 2015

Oromo TV interview with artist Gaaddisaa Abdullah on January 20, 2018.

OMN interview with artist Ilfinesh Qannoo on November 9, 2016

Oromo TV interview artist Shantam Shubbisaa on September 12, 2013

[1] Abiyotawi Kinet (revolutionary troupe) was a phrase introduced to the Amharic vocabulary during the Darg regime. It was a name given to a group of singers and performers who were organised among the youth, women, and peasant associations. The Darg's plan is to use it to mock antagonists and make fun of their failures, to urge people to sacrifice for the cause of the Darg, and to give information about important events through the songs and performances.

Informants

No.	Name of Informants	Age	Place and Date of Interview	Remarks
1	Abdi Buh	65	Dirre-Dhowaa: July 18,2008	Formerly, he was one of the members of Afran Qalloo Cultural Troupe. He served the troupe by composing poems and singing. He has good memory of how the troupe had mobilized the Oromo against the oppressors.
2	Adam Ibsa	60	Dirre-Dhowaa: July 17, 2008	Formerly he was the member and player of musical instruments for Afran Qalloo Cultural Troupe. He narrates how the audiences were absorbed into their shows and gave their applauses. He also recalls the repression they were underwent.
3	Diimaa Noggoo (PhD)	70	Addis Ababa: February 15, 2019.	He is a reputed Oromo politician and among the founders of OLF. He provided his lived experiences in the Oromo struggle.
4	Ejjetaa Tolasaa	72	Naqamtee: March 5, 2008; January 13, 2019	He was one of the students of government school during the imperial regime and faced discrimination because of his unarticulated Amharic. He also served the *Darg* government. He explained how the Oromo were treated by both the imperial and the *Darg* regime and how *Afaan* Oromo was systematically suppressed from written status by both governments.
5	Esayas Hordofaa	65	Addis Ababa: August 28, 2019	Formerly he was a teacher in Wallagga and had affiliation with Oromo oriented MEISON members. Later he joined Radio Ethiopia as a journalist of *Afaan* Oromo. He provides his rich knowledge on the struggle by *Afaa*n Oromo.
7	Halloo Daawwee	53	Dirre-Dhowaa July 16 /2008: December 20, 2015	She was one of the members of *Afran Qalloo* cultural troupe and participant of the 1977 Oromo cultural show at the National Theatre of Ethiopia. She is also one of the Oromo singers who was repeatedly imprisoned because of singing Oromo nationalistic songs.
8	Ibrahim Haji Ali	65	Addis Ababa August 26, 2008; October 26, 2016 and January 19, 2019	Formerly he was member of the *Afran Qalloo* cultural troupe. He was also among Aduu Birraa troupe who moved from one Oromo region to another to inspire the other Oromo into the same engagement. Later, he served as proof reader of *Bariisaa* Newspaper. He provided his Encyclopedic knowledge on these issues.
9	Kebede Firrisaa	65	Addis Ababa: July 30, 2008	The late Kebede Firrisa was from Iluu Abbaa Boor and one of the Oromo students who participated in *Fedel Serawit* (Literacy campaign). He was one of the editors-in-chief of *Kana Beektaa* Newspaper. Thus, he provided his rich knowledge of literacy activities in *Afaan* Oromo.

10	Kumaa Eda'ee	65	Dukam: April 22, 2008	The late Kuma Eda'e was one of the founders Harar *Afaan* Oromoo radio broadcasting and served as a journalist both at Harar and Addis Ababa. He was also among those who organized the 1977 Oromo cultural show at National Theatre of Ethiopia.
11	Leencoo Lataa	76	Addis Ababa: February 15, 2019.	He is a reputed Oromo politician and among the founders of OLF. He provided his lived experiences in the Oromo struggle. His information on how the use of *Afaan* Oromo helped them in the linking of the Oromo from one area to another is really remarkable.
12	Mahdi Hamid	60	Addis Ababa: August 27, /2008	He was founder and editor-in-Chief of *Bariisaa* Newspaper. He also served as producer of *Afaan* Oromo literacy materials for the *Darg* literacy campaign. He was one of the Organizers of the 1977 Oromo cultural show at the National Theatre of Ethiopia. Later he served as a journalist at Harar radio station.
13	Musa Ahimad	77	Dirre-Dhowaa: July 18, 2008	He was one of the elders who organized the *Afran Qalloo* Cultural Troupe
14	Rashid Buuba	77	Dirre-Dhowaa: July 18, 2008	He was one of the organizers of the Afran Qalloo Cultural Troupe and has good memory to narrate all the activities of Oromo struggle in *Afaan* Oromo
15	Yonus Abdullah	77	Addis Ababa February 22, 2019	He was one of the early Oromo musicians at Radio Mogadishu during imperial period and passed almost his life in the struggle for Oromo issues
16	Zerihun Wadaajoo	57	Addis Ababa: September 1, 2008	He is an Oromo singer from Wallagga. He participated in the 1977 Oromo cultural show at the National Theatre. Since then he has continued singing Oromo nationalist songs. He also recalls the punishment that followed.
17	Zeyadin Yusuf	60	Addis Ababa: January 29, 2019	He is a composer of Oromo songs especially during *Darg* period and exiled as a result. He has come back home recently. He provides data on how the Oromo cultural performance was able to reach the status of this day.