

Post-Empire Events and Relocating African Protest Literature: The Analysis of Heroic Genres in a Historical and Political Context

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In their attempts to classify mankind in different types, the early Greek philosophers gave a special place to the men and women who lived for action of bravery and gained a wider distinction from that remarkable performance. They believed that heroism is an important element in the human soul. Similar notions are shared by many nations of our time because the life of heroic action is always superior within the context of the pursuit of human dignity. We do not reward people because of their being warriors, but because of the just cause they stand for. This is what we call the gratification of the senses. A particular heroic event leaves everlasting memories and every generation looks back to epic poetry with delight and admiration. Homer made it clear that heroic achievement was of a superior value in his time. The critical philosopher, Heraclitus, sees the heroic age as impressive and a pursuit of great reputation. Aristotle viewed honour not merely as a reward given for the noblest deeds, but as one of the greatest human virtues, as well.

The heroic narrative is regarded by many societies as something of immortal glory among mortals. A literary epic is inspired by the belief that the immortal heroic action and the honour the heroes and heroines bring to their fellow men are caused by a real superiority in natural endowments. He who died for the dignity of his people is sometimes more admirable than he who is alive. Bowra (1952: 4) argues that “heroes are honoured because they have made a final effort in courage and endurance, and no more can be asked of them.” The heroic poetry is essentially a historical narrative and has always been remarkable for its national character. It usually creates its own world of imagination in which men and women of principles celebrate the greatest historic mission that has been achieved. There is nothing greater in human history than the dignity achieved through risking life; and such a story must be told and retold so that it can appeal to us in its own right. The heroic epic cannot exist unless we believe that human beings are in themselves sufficient objects of interest and that their main claim is the pursuit of honour through heroism and risk. In a country where the notion of

patriotic pride is either suppressed or not to be found as part of cultural prestige, Protest narrative can hardly flourish and/or make sense to the succeeding generations.

In the context of the demand for the independent existence of societies, the heroic epic is associated with the rallying cry of the patriotic generations and has marked the growth of national pride. The themes of heroism and human freedom are closely related : “A hero is a man of distinguished courage or ability; admired for his brave deeds and noble qualities” (*Websters’ Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 1996: 665). The protagonist hero figure in war times is a person worthy of veneration, regarded as a model or ideal, and his life exhibits valour and fortitude. The heroic epic has a long history in human societies and it goes parallel with the survival of mankind. For instance, the period of popular heroic epic in Europe goes back to ‘Trojan War’ of 1250 B.C, the time when a conflict between Greece and Troy is made famous by Homer’s *Iliad*. Paris, son of Priam of Troy, carried off Helen the wife of Menelaus of Sparta, and took her to Troy. The Greeks led by Agamemnon, Menelaus, Odysseus, Achilles and other heroes, swore to take revenge and besieged Troy. In apparent defeat, they pretended to sail away, leaving a huge “Wooden Horse” (‘Trojan-Horse’) outside the city, with Greek soldiers concealed inside (in its belly). The Trojans took it into the city, and that night the soldiers opened the city gates to the Greek army. Most of the Trojans were killed, the city burnt, and the kidnapped Helen reclaimed. The centrality of this narrative is that heroism plays a crucial role in the making of human history. This heroic achievement has continued to be one of the popular masterpiece narratives in European traditional literature. There are many dramatic heroic performances of this kind throughout the globe. Both the traditional and the modern societies continue to celebrate the remarkable achievements of their heroes because of their instructive appeal and historical significance. Most of the colourful events in human history have been built by the immense contributions of the brave men and women of our world and their valuable works must remain with us throughout generations. *Geerarsi sagalee saba jannaati, jannummaan hundee jireenya biyyaati*. Literally, ‘the *geerarsa* is the voice of a hero society, and heroism is the basis for national existence.’ Like the *Iliad* of Homer, the *geerarsa* is highly valued and remains a compelling subject in the history of the Oromo because of its educative role.

“In its standard sense, the term epic or heroic poem is applied to a work that meets at least the following criteria: it is a long narrative poem on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style, and centred on a heroic...figure on whose tribe, a nation or in the instance of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, the human race” (Abrams, 1993: 53). The epic poetry is thus a long poem, especially a poetic composition about the actions of great men and women in human history. In epic literature, a series of great achievements or events is narrated continuously at length in elevated language. Abrams’s research shows that the traditional epics were written versions of what had originally been oral poems about a tribal or national hero that emerged in the heroic age (warlike age). For instance, in European literary history, among these traditional heroic epics are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that the Greeks ascribed to Homer, the

Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, and the 12th century French epic, the *Chanson de Roland*. The oral epic is a war time narrative which reflects the trying circumstance of a particular period and how those who are tested by that circumstance proudly describe the violent chain of events in a dramatic form.

The heroic poets as critical observers of every passing episode make us aware of the major critical issues of war times and the pressures to which poets as critics have to respond. In the analysis of the *Geerarsa*, we have to begin with the broad idea of heroic literature by raising some of the intriguing questions to be answered during the crucial moments in human history. Oral literary epic aims at moving its readers or listeners to wonder and emotion. It is a subject dedicated to nobler actions, narrated in the loftiest style, with an intention of moving the mind toward the concreteness of the events. In order to grasp the reality of our time, we need to learn through examples, one that can incite us to good works by showing the reward of excellence. In reading and writing the *Geerarsa*, as we do in other heroic narratives, we have to set before ourselves an excellent purpose; and that purpose is to help the next generations by showing them the exemplary human deeds. Every action is performed with some reflection and choice, and the epic literature calls for moral courage and thought, which the Oromo call *abbaan falmatu (iyyatu) malee ollaan namaaf hin birmatu*; meaning a neighbour will not be on your side unless you fight for your dignity.

Several forces converged to create the outpouring of Oromo poetry, especially the *Geerarsa* genre, which plays a significant role in the cultural tradition of the society. The political and social upheaval brought about by activists and non-violent movements for *Civil Rights*, like *Macha- Tuulama*, ushered in dramatic development in protest literature. The term *Geerarsa*, which probably is equivalent to ‘defiant metaphor,’ refers to telling or narrating heroic story. In Oromo history, the *Geerarsa* narrative is one of the defiant responses to eviction and a call for resistance against master-tenant relations created by the *Gabbaar* (serfdom) system of 1880s-1970s; the time when the absence of alternatives was compounded by offering only tragic possibilities for the subaltern group. In the traditional setting of the Oromo, the *Geerarsa* poetry is associated with the image of social prestige; and its producer, who is seen as a custodian of national heritage, enjoys the greatest reputation and high social status.

As in the rest of Africa, anti-feudal domination and anti-colonial influence in East Africa has tended to fall within two categories: the resistance movements based on cultural nationalism on the one hand, violent rebellion against colonial rule and the native autocrats on the other. For instance, the 1880s-1970s Rebellion against the *gabbaar* system in Ethiopian empire, the 1900s Maji Maji uprising in Tanzania and the 1950s Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya are remembered not merely as forces against marginalization, but also is followed by the flourishing of Protest literatures, both oral and written. The development of the *Geerarsa*, as we shall see later in the subsequent parts, is therefore, closely connected with the growth of the renaissance and *Black Consciousness movements* of the 1800s-1980s in the African continent. The revival of indigenous literature or what is known as black arts or aesthetics of the 1960s-1980s

in East Africa reinforced dramatic performances, particularly heroic epics. From the beginning of the oral form of literature to the present, the *Geerarsa* narrative continued to be powerful as it increasingly addressed the issue of humanity and the restoration of dignity. As a form of artistic expression, it has the potential to play the important role in Oromo resistance history, especially in a political landscape where civil liberties and many other forms of expressions are proscribed or curtailed.

The need to challenge the conditions confronting the Oromo has strongly influenced the *Geerarsa* during the catastrophic events of 1886, 1887 and 1960. It may be argued that by its very existence as a literary form, Oromo heroic literature, which is a response to repressive demands and the denial of post-conquest civil rights, historically represents a rejection of the violent system of ruling. Several themes have dominated the *Geerarsa* poetry from its beginnings. Often drawing on the dominant values and ideals, the epic poets have focused on the issue of survival. They aimed at criticizing the absurdity of the nationalist leaders and have taken ironic stance toward aggressiveness and the absence of forbearance, contrasting political rhetoric of totalitarian regimes with the realities of indirect slavery or serfdom. Having roots in African tradition, satirical allusions had been the key elements in the Oromo Protest literature through much of its long history.

The “Eviction Periods” (1872-1974) in the feudal empire, which created the condition for the growing of cultural activists and rebellion movements against land expropriation of the *gabbaar* period, which will be discussed in detail later under *Macha-Tuulama* and *Arsii* protest narratives, the *Geerarsa* remained popular instruments of resistance until the late 1960s. It achieved new levels of importance because of its quality of energizing people’s solidarity. The late 1890s in Oromo history also saw the development of substantial body of heroic epic in which the poets contrasted the devastating effects of transferring richest farmlands to the warlords and feudal gentry with the freedom and prosperous life of the pre-conquest. In terms of human predicament, the emergence of Oromo epic poetry may be compared with the new vision embodied in *Harlem Renaissance* of Langston Hughes (1921) and many others, when great self-awareness, high cultural ambitions and literary movements brought about the new role of Protest literature in the African American community. The Oromo epic narrators set in motion a poetic tradition characterized by furious pursuit of freedom from the repressive feudal system in all its dimensions, as well as the cultivation of heroic visions authenticated by its own distinctive literary forms and perpetual communal values. In short, the idea of human dignity marks Oromo oral literary consciousness from the early period of serfdom (1872) to *the Mutilation of Hands and Breasts* (1886), *Massacre at Calanqoo* (1887) and popular uprising of the 1960s and 1970s. During these periods of turbulence, the epic poets were popular critics of social values as they envisioned a world of justice. Furthermore, as we shall see later in the documented poems, the *Geerarsa* of these particular historic moments reflected a widespread disenchantment with the values of the class in power and continued to embrace the egalitarian notions of discouraging wars and violence. In the

context of the socio-political and economic imbalance of the 19th century, the epic poets rallied the society in the cause of freedom; and dating back to the early 1870s to the present, their oral materials reflect Oromo concerns in a larger cultural and national identity. As I have mentioned earlier, the verbal artists tend to employ the heroic epic as verbal weapon against the status-quo and created a body of Protest narrative that grew out of Civil Rights movements and folk roots. The cultural and political movements of the 1960s and 1970s not only changed the way Oromo thought about their socio-political legitimization but also planted the seeds for new trends in the exploration of literary possibilities and aesthetic tradition.

One of the major common characteristics of the *Geerarsa* has been its response to specific historical events, as for instance, the years between the 1870s and 1890s: series of wars to impose feudal system, great famine (*rukkisa*), conquest, annexation, *Harkaa fi Harma Muraan Aanolee* (the Mutilation of Hands and Breasts at Aanolee), *Calii Calanqoo* (Massacre at Calanqoo) and land confiscation; the 1900s and 1970s: the partition of rich Oromo land among wealthy landlords (warlords), the imposition of serfdom (*gabbaar*), famine, and the eviction of rural population under the empire; the 1970s and 1990s: communism, the destructive settlement programme (*safaraa/yemandar misrataa*), wars, famine, unrest and the scenes of carnage. Most significant was the Arsii freedom movement of the 1880s-1890s led by Leenjiso Diigaa (see Abbas 1990), Rayya-Azabo revolt of 1928-1930 in Wollo, which involved Ras Gugsa Walee, the Wallagga independent movement of 1936, the 1960s-1970s Arsii-Bale and Macha-Tuulama patriotic movements, led by General Waaqoo Guutuu and General Taddese Birru respectively, the rebellion resistance in the east- Hararge (1970s-1990s) led by Jaarraa Abbaa Gadaa, reinforced protest literature in Oromiyaa. Altogether, waves of protests and uprisings of several decades for land reform and change in Oromiyaa contributed immensely to an atmosphere of creating new emerging forces of writers and scholars who insisted on the fundamental notions related to democracy: cultural identity, literary revival, equality of religion and socio-economic empowerment. The Protest narratives of these periods in Oromiyaa were mainly about the complex issues related to the burdened generations of the serfdom era- the evil aspects of wars, ruthless exploitation, man-made economic difficulties, the devastating effects of feudal empire and the necessity of changing the inequitable socio-economic structure.

The main features of the *Geerarsa* genres are patriotism and successful military careers which include celebration of the whole scenes or episodes, both the bright day of victory and the tragic laments drawn from different trying circumstances and horrendous war experiences. When battles are lost and won, the world is for the next patriots, and the young generation must take responsibilities to transmit the worthwhile achievements of the past heroes. The *Geerarsa* can be read or understood as a territorial history of post-conquest Oromiyaa in which it is set and as forward-looking reassurance. The issue of human right, the making of history, the tragedy of totalitarian powers and conquest, the carnage, and the questions of conflict resolution are at the heart of this epic poetry. In thematic terms, the Oromo protest narrative reminds us of the sordid

past, takes us to the present, calling for a proper human relations and the hope of the future.

The construction of a distant past, whether global or national, depends upon a method that relies on historical references to capture a vivid account of human achievements over centuries, which are handed down from generations to generations in the form of oral literature. In reading past events, we read the minds of people who lived centuries ago, and this kind of reading becomes productive if the oral material is perceived as part of a historical process. In a historical perspective, the *geerarsa* can be seen within the context of the background for the emergence of postcolonial literature in Africa, how it was perceived in the imperial political setting, the way it depicts the events and attitudes of its period, and the relevance of those events to the new order of our times. The traditional Oromo artists need appreciation for their ability of pressing a sense of the real and concrete presences. By means of his dynamic sense of creativity, they endeavour in all forms of combinations to make events or scenes more meaningful and lively. In their rhetorical techniques, the oral narrators often use an elevated and lofty style so as to exert a strong influence; and listening to the *Geerarsa* heroic performance leads the audience to a moving emotion and deep feelings. These feelings uplift the spirit of the listeners, filling them with unexpected astonishment and pride, arousing profound and noble thoughts and suggesting the prominence of self-empowerment.

In traditional societies where the vehicle for communication is mainly verbal, the central events of human life are invested with elaborated ceremonies by which the social organism empowers itself so as to make a meaningful journey that leads to success. In African tradition, the heroes are usually portrayed in superhuman terms. The heroic poets teach us that the days of brave men and women will never get old; and therefore, celebrating heroic events with extraordinary personalities is one way of giving their tales a unique appeal as well as ensuring that the great deeds of the past remain alive in the memories of the succeeding generations. The illustrious heroes Martin Luther King Jr, Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Waaqoo Guutu, Taddese Birru, to mention only a few, have become national symbols, consecrated with monuments and hagiographic literature. In the history of mankind, the heroes function in the national culture as standard-bearers of the values and goals of their nations. The Oromo heroic literature depicts actions that the oral poet recognizes as necessary and true. In this respect, the language of the patriotic narrator is almost similar to the language of the founding philosophers in that it infers universal facts from the observation of events and the relations of characters in a particular critical moment in the history of the nation. The *Geerarsa* narrative as the reflection of cultural tradition of the heroic age of the *Gadaa* aims at reinforcing self-assurance and social stability. It goes parallel with national history in celebrating a stunning victory of culture heroes of the country. This part discusses how oral tradition serves as a record of history and a timeless evidence of historic events to which the technique of New Criticism is to be applied.

“The man must in this case be praised through his ancestors. Their greatness must be established, and he must be shown to be their worthy descendant” (Adams, 1992: 510). Almost every man has a natural desire to empower himself, engross as much prestige and reputation as possible so as to build a popular image that would enable him/her to win the social and political fame. The successful and influential individual moves the nation and gains widespread popular supports, the triumphant fighter is not only decorated for his/her valour, but is likely to win political power as well. That is why the oral poet often tries to find the appropriate audience that can disseminate the fame of his achievements and the extent of his possessions. Most heroic tales look back to what is known as the *heroic age* when the patriotic heroes emerged to withstand the hostile environments and the domination of nations by the rising despots. Throughout the globe, the heroic age varies in different indigenous literatures. For instance, Homer’s epics of the 8th century, was about the war with Troy. The heroic poetry of German, Scandinavian and English peoples mainly deals with the great German migrations of the 4th-6th century A.D. The Oromo heroic epic deals with hunting and imperial conquest; and this ranges from the ancient pastoral and hunting period to the late 20th century; the latter marked by marginalization and resistance. In the heroic-age society, the main function of the epic poem in Africa appears to be to stir the spirit of hero nationals to actions, lauding their exploits and those of their illustrious ancestors by assuring a long and glorious recollection of their fame.

Like most technologically underdeveloped countries, African cultures are based on values that are fundamentally societal; the main functions of folk-literature are...to perpetuate the memory of its past...and so to bolster its sense of collective identity and dignity, to record the wisdom pragmatically accumulated by generations of ancestors in proverbs and gnomic tales and to celebrate the prowess of...warriors whose deeds have ensured...the glory of the group (Gérard, 1990: 124).

In its peculiar form, the *Geerarsa* poetry is a subject worthy of serious study. It is one of the popular literary genres which depicts manifold problems of the war times and the virtues of courage and strength to overcome those difficulties. The elevated metaphorical languages are used to give the hero great respect and verbal reward and this is usually accompanied by dozens of related references.

The heroic performances are often presented at a large gathering of people, and such recitation has tremendous effect on the morale of the combatants. The *Geerarsa* narrator recites some of phrases in a very high pitch. This convention of the Oromo epic poem shows that recitation, the swift change of the variation of voice and the speedy tempo create an atmosphere of emotional excitement in the audience. The phonic stylistic features of the narrators accompany their recitation to reveal dramatic movements, sometimes leaping about with gesticulations as the emotional feelings and excitement increase. The movements and the actions often suit the spoken words. Like the heroic song of the Zulu of South Africa, the *Geerarsa* mimetic features involve

dramatization of the scenes and events described by using formalized gestures, holding or carrying a ceremonial spear, gun or sword, and singing in a melodious voice so that the song inspires his audience. Employing derogatory remarks, heaping insults on the cowardice and adversaries, and diminishing their status are common in the *Geerarsa*. The use of direct references and lauding names characterizes this genre; and the praises are directed publicly to relatives, parents, companions, prominent community figures and the community as a whole. Eulogizing domestic animals such as horses and dogs, and inanimate objects like spear, gun or sword is also common in the *Geerarsa* poetry. “First, something must be said about the praise names which often form the basis of formal praise poetry. These most often are given to people, but may also describe clans, animals, or inanimate objects, and they are usually explicitly laudatory” (Finnegan, 1970: 111).

In the Oromo heroic tradition, the epic narrators are decorated with multitudes of heroic symbols and wear feathers of ostrich, mane-like coiffure, skins of leopards (*qeerransa Afrikaa*) and lions; that hang from their arms and shoulders. In their several ways, these decorations tend to reinforce the hero’s tremendous self-esteem and a sense of uniqueness. The *Geerarsa* poetry involves boasting marked by stirring emotions and romantic glorification of the patriots. The valour the victor demonstrates, the challenges he has faced, and the victory achieved in the course of battling with his adversaries are often expressed in such a way that his heroic action on the stage creates the image of a battlefield in which the audience is filled with great enthusiasm and courage. Generally, the story is narrated with blunt and descriptive language, sometimes trenchant and sometimes gentle. The singer criticizes harshly those who have no guts and elevates those who have demonstrated moral stamina in the face of dangers. The technique of combining both demerit and verbal rewarding creates a sort of balancing or equilibrium judgement in his poetic language. Like the heroic tales of other African societies, the Oromo epic literature does not merely deal with traditional national-pride, but also helps promote the new spirit of national feeling, which free societies of modern Africa need.

In form, style and content, the *Geerarsa* poetry has many distinguishing features. The language in which it is formulated is rich, subtly, and metaphorically used by the narrators. The structure of the constituents is terse, precise and incisive. The style is lofty and poetic in the narrative and all possible artistic effects can be drawn into the text. *The Violently Marginalized Identity: Post-Empire and the Historical Development of African Protest Narrative* The late 19th century could be defined as the age of dynamic movements wherein the force of nationalisms played the central role to move the world to a new order, characterized by polarization and animosity. It was also the period during which the great secular institutions and ideologies emerged. The turbulence and instability of the time which undermined the natural world order actually led many peoples of the globe to understand what was happening, to investigate the very foundation of the ideologies of the emerging forces and challenge the principles of new social and political forms. The economic, social and political gaps that had

been created by the totalitarian powers of the period terribly affected the multiethnic societies of the developing world, especially Sub-Saharan Africa.

The recent development of oral literary creativity and protest narrative in Africa can be attributed to the effects of post-colonialism, the continuing problems of decolonization and the building of democratic societies in the continent. Within the context of the postcolonial situation, the creative art in Africa is closely connected with the growth of a sense of national identity and such developments were anticipated during the late nineteenth century. The dominant themes of literary works of Africa, African American and the Caribbean are, therefore, studied as different responses to the problems of the new world order of post-colonialism. The past and present protest literatures in Africa are mainly the result of the rise of virulent nationalisms and the contradictory socio-economic structures they have created. The new African nations are the consequence of the expansion of empires and international events. The Oromo protest narrative, which is the outcome of militarism, annexation and the expansion programme of the nineteenth century aims at addressing the manifold problems surrounding the subjugated nation that has been trampled over by the empire-builders. "The rapid growth of empires was followed by settlements and the incorporation of many of African continents, either as crown colonies or through annexation" (King, 1980: 3). The emergence of new empire-builders in East Africa, the narrative construction of abstract images, a call for *homogenizing pluralism (heterogeneity)*, the conquest and direct control of other people's lands are the particular phase of colonial and postcolonial period marked by complex problems and catastrophic events. The penetration of previously a free region (Oromiyaa) and the dislocation of the egalitarian form of the social organization of the Oromo by Ethiopian warlords and Emperors are part of this historic moment. The consequences of empowering empires and docile kingdoms were dominance, destabilization, political and racial tensions. The coming into being of Oromo heroic literature as a huge compelling national saga and an instrument of resistance is to explain in social and political terms, the imperial histories, its negative legacy of war and destruction.

The growing consolidation of the new type of feudal empire in the Horn of Africa and its expansion to the South after the 1870s was paralleled by the development of nationalist cultural movements marked by xenophobia, ethnic friction and division. The Oromo epic poems dramatize the way those movements brought about ceaseless confrontations of several decades in the Horn of Africa. In the historical development of both African and English literatures, what we see is that expansion and settlements of postcolonial period contributed to the rise of extreme nationalisms that had grown strident throughout the globe. These coupled with the change of cultures in the Western world after the First World War, the global recession of 1926, the 'Great Depression' which began in 1929, and the growth of Socialist ideologies strongly influenced the protest literatures of the 1920s and 1930s, both oral and written. The force of heroic literary works of the period made the empires increasingly irrelevant. The Oromo traditional literature, especially the *geerarsa*, remained a relevant subject of discourse

because it shares thematic content with protest literatures of the world.

"The same modernization which created new nations also produced its emerging literary tradition" (King, 1980: 25). In his research of the historical development of English literature, Bruce King has made it clear that an early sign of rapid industrialization and nationalism, which generated the Second World War, was at the same time to produce a new type of literature that can be found in Africa; and presumably he was referring to the coming into being of protest literatures which the Africans were using as modern weapons. He cited Peter Abraham's *Mine Boy* (1946) and Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* (1948) as cases in point. These protest literary works were used in South Africa as transitional between an earlier kind of protest fiction and the new socio-economic and political conditions resulting from the themes of post-war times. The increased national and international importance of the mines of South Africa as a dominion of settlement may be compared with the gold mines and coffee production in Oromiyaa, which continued to be the centre of attraction for settlement. The protest idioms of the late Depression years (late 1920s) was transformed into the vocabulary of a search for national identity and we find striking similarities with the poetic language of the *Geerarsa of post-Rukkisa* (great recession and famine) of 1889-1892 in Oromiyaa.

As it often occurs in the early novels of protest in Africa, as for instance Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950), concerning the disturbing situation in former Rhodesia (present Zimbabwe) of the war period, the *Geerarsa* explores the problems of unequal socio-economic and political structures, and subsequently the study of identity set within the context of contextual and political crises in post-conquest Oromo. As it frequently happens in such early national literatures, folk-literature provides a means to record Oromo social consciousness and the issue of moral problems.

Like the modern fictions, in the oral literature of war-times, there is always a mood of cultural and identity assertion. The characteristics of oral literary tradition, particularly heroic epic, include the investigation of national history and the criticism of the ruling power structures; and in this respect, the complex relationship of the war period literary genres to a wave of patriotism means the struggle for cultural roots, national liberation and the search for a new code of values which would bridge the past and present. According to the Oromo folklorist scholars, the past heroic tradition always serves as the solid basis for a mass culture. They believe that heroic literary tradition as the centre of the image of the noble past is studied to overcome a modern sense of fragmentation and loss of identity. A tendency to associate or connect oral literary history with extremist nationalist position is, therefore, inaccurate.

"The political and cultural reforms proposed by anti-colonial movements in such countries as India, Egypt, Algeria, Ghana, Kenya, and in the Caribbean, therefore, formed the fountain-head of what we now call post-colonialism" (Waugh, 2006: 343). With the increasing momentum after the end of World War II (after 1945), anti-colonialist movements took a more confrontational and no compromise approach to decolonization. Where deep settler colonization prevails, as for instance in Kenya,

Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Nigeria, and many other colonized countries, the colonial powers clung on disparaging methods and exercised particular brutality. The political and literary movements in the violent world resulted in the retrieval and animation of the indigenous literatures as important vehicles of national self-expression and therefore, of resistance to the colonial exclusion of the natives as uncivilized irrational. In the process of the struggle for cultural and political freedom, or in one sense, decolonization, the revolutionary leaders and patriotic intellectuals such as Ghandi in India, Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya (see *Mau Mau Uprising*), Frantz Fanon in Algeria (*The Wretched Earth*), Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Ngugi Wa Thiongo in Kenya (*Decolonizing the Mind*), Chinua Achebe in Nigeria (*Things Fall Apart*), Steve Biko in South Africa (*Black Consciousness*), and many others helped define the essence, the broad concepts and paradigms of what has become the study of colonial empire. These, together with *Orientalism* (1978) of Edward W. Said and *Negritude Movements* led by immigrant writers, like Aime Césaire, Albert Memmi and Senghor in the 1920s and 1930s, provoked a widespread colonial discourse, which reinforced protest literature of postcolonial periods. By and large, these literary movements and influences in Africa have made a significant contribution to the growth of Oromo protest literature, the *Geerarsa*. One of the major characteristics of this heroic epic is that it is a reaction against the disruptive influence of the feudal system in Ethiopia. Many heroic poets still believe that it is part of their historical mission to write and reach back to the poetic tradition of their hero ancestors so that they can give a new life to the treasured oral art of the past.

To be marginalized is to be removed from history. Post-conquest literature or more appropriately protest literature of postcolonial is often a painful and highly complex means of fighting one's way into empire-made *reductionism theory*. The optimism and traditional egalitarian processes of post-conquest Oromiyaa (see Legesse's book 2000) were increasingly threatened by worsening developments in unhealthy ethnic relations marked by friction, misunderstanding, wars and bitterness; and these were eventually attended by the literary epic of the oppressed group. The new wave of migrant settlements, the mounting of militarism in the Horn of Africa after the 1890s and empowering the rising feudal overlords continued to corrode Oromo social cohesion, cultural and literary heritage. Thematically, post-empire protest narratives and writings in Oromiyaa are, therefore, deeply marked by the experiences of cultural and economic exclusions.

In this chapter, I have tried to examine the way a challenge to feudal empire and literature of imperial and post-imperial reveals itself. Notoriously, following the conquest of the 1880s, the great plight of the Oromo began. The conquest and the whole image of the powerless population can be summarized as scenes of carnage, devastation, falling apart, eviction and displacement.

If anything else, by offering us insight into the imperial imagination, the texts of empire give some purchase on the occlusions of human loss

that operated in colonial representation. The effects of empire on the colonized peoples, and colonized responses to invasion, usually appear as mere traces in the writing of the time. Reading of imperial texts suggest, therefore, how it was possible for a world system which presided over the lives of millions to legitimate itself by way of myth and metaphor while at the same time masking suffering. Colonial writing is important for revealing the ways in which that world system could represent the degradation of other human beings as natural (Boehmer, 2005: 21).

For those of us who by force of circumstances have continued to live under the stifling feudal empire of *reductive polarization* as it entails gabbaar-landlord relations, I am fully convinced that there is always a sense of moral and historical responsibility which is attached to the literature and culture we write as scholars and humanists. I also believe that it is incumbent on us to alter or dismantle abstract formulas which dichotomize humanity; dismissive and potent kinds of thought that take human mind away from truths about human history, literature and culture into realms of fictitious ideology, irrational and commanding discourse, confrontation and sophisticated treason.

“The nationalism the empire generated, the race antipathies, played a critical part in British society...as empire grew, identity was defined against the inferior state of being which the colonized were said to represent” (Boehmer, 2005: 31). Within the context of colonial and postcolonial times and influences, African empires of the past can be understood as the extension of other virulent empires of the world wherein broader imperial identity superimposed the identity of the oppressed and amalgamating or as Boehmer says, bracketing together different ethnic groups that serve the interest and will of the dominant. This kind of social stratification in the developing world eventually generated what is known as postcolonial identity of contradictory form marked by cultural strife and social disharmony. The Oromo heroic literature is part of African protest discourse and it offers us a detailed account of the complex antagonisms which led to human predicament.

Heroic literature is mainly the consequence of marginalization and economic disempowerment. It is a criticism of empire and its aftermath. The protest literary theory and practice reveal that post-empire discourse covers the distinctive problematic issues inherent in contradictory socio-political structures. These issues encompass the emerging fields, like minority studies, Gender studies, African studies, African American studies, Caribbean studies, Latin American studies, Third World studies, Chicano studies and others. This aspect of literature thus includes all peoples, literatures and cultures that have been affected by imperial movements and hegemonic control from the moment of colonization to the present. This means, the *Geerarsa* in its content is the narrating back to the crisis of the empire with an emphasis on the correction of the socio-economic, political and cultural problems it has created.

Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize,

bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires, as if one shouldn't trust the evidence of one's eyes watching the destruction and misery and death (Said, 2003: xvi).

With the passing of time, the Ethiopian empire, like other empires of the past, developed its own forms of self-validation and created a momentum to justify a widely pervasive sense of correctness. "Bowling to the prerogative of uniqueness, both lay and scholarly writings on Ethiopian politics generally eschew the conceptual tools and the theoretical apparatus that govern an inquiry into social process in the developing countries and discard the conventional standard and criteria normally applied to other African societies" (Markakis, 1974: 2). The Ethiopian empire enjoyed the stereotyped construction of uniqueness and similarly the sanctity of the imperial office was an antique theme derived from the ideas of divine kinship-*Seyuma Egziabher* (see Levine 1965: 151). Throughout its periods, the imperial writers borrowed sophistications and many tempting ideas from others that would serve imperial ideology, exaggerated more than ever, the angelic stories, supremacy and the mystic power of the makers (autocratic rulers); as well as the importance of living up to their abstract myths and *utopian visions*. In essence, the *Geerarsa* narrative captures these dominant moods and the ideology of greatness of post-empire times.

Literary History: The Geerarsa as a Genre of the Heroic Age

"If literature has become important to the study of Africa's history and culture in a variety of disciplines ranging from anthropology to natural sciences, it is because it constitutes an indelible record of the continent's long past, its complicated present and its future possibilities" (Gikandi, 2003: xii). The protest narratives are subject to historical conditions and become prominent in specific circumstances at particular times. The major historic episodes of Oromo literary history have been linked with a turning point in the protest movements of the late 19th century in East Africa. The *Geerarsa* poetry as a powerful and compelling subject is often viewed by the Oromo as an instrument of creating the willing acceptance of people to make their own free world; and to me that is what human greatness means. In much the same way as other African countries, Oromiyaa remained a politically vibrant region in the Horn. This chapter depicts the way politics draws on the art of rhetoric and how the heroic narrative within this paradigm has been exercised as a powerful weapon of resistance.

The hurrahs, the cries, the injuries, the encouragements, the allocutions, confound with the noise of the cavalry, the buzzing of shields, the grown of horns, the rattling of iron which come sparkling into collision with each other. The dying muster, their last strength to animate their side insult their enemy: *Oh! you, true sons of man, brothers of my blood, true children of my mother, alelli, aleli [haleeli-literally, no retreat]... courage to the death!*

Avenge the blood that is flowing out of my veins; avenge my life that is going under my eyes....Be jealous of honor of my name; protect my widow and my orphans (Kanno, 2005: 324). The extract reveals mixed feelings: great pleasure, the lament,

the bitterness of the war times and the undiminishing heroic spirit of the Oromo as witnessed by Martial de Salviac in 1901.

For the last one-century, many heroic narratives of the Oromo focus on protest in which the eminent hero nationals, who demonstrated great courage and patriotic feelings, have been highly eulogized and honoured. It presents the valour in flashbacks when the resistance was based on a truly heroic character and almost every generation is moved by the vibrant tone of defiance and brave spirit. Each hero poet fights gaily and gallantly and many of the poems of the *Gadaa* age reflect their confidence and national pride. The description of the natural setting helps the hero poet as a background when he wants to expand its special function in historical terms. The portrayal of the natural scenery suggests some grave situations that need prompt response. Therefore, the background of the mountain, the soil and the landscape in general, is to call up the difficult scenes the nation has been facing and the long journey to be made to reverse those violent scenes. The noun phrase *gaara* (mountain) is connected with the hero narrator to underline points concerning the issue of offering protection to the society that has fallen into dungeons of despair.

gaara gaaraan yaamanii
dafa dafaan yaamanii
biyyee biyyaan yamanii
biyya maqaan yaamanii
guyyaa dubbii ulkaa [olkaa], guyyaa dubbii ijaa, dhiira lolaaf yaamanii

a mountain is called by its name
urgent action requires urgent call
the soil is called by its country
a country is called by its name
in times of prompt action, in times of life and death, it is the heroes who answer the call.

This may be properly called a literature of combat in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence. It is a literature of combat because it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space (Fanon in Leitch, 2001: 1589).

The personal urgency and the narrator's self-assurance were attended by keen anxiety that a heroic poem boldly assumes a prophetic stance at a moment of national emergency. The poet paints a view of the countryside. He uses the attractive landscape as the background to describe the natural world of freedom and the beauty linked with that world when one's land is protected at the cost of the life of the rising generation. The portrayal of the mountain, the urgent action, the soil and the homeland is to inform the audience that everything has its own beauty in its balanced form. This is connected with the vivid account of the hero combatants, without which the dramatic

landscape of Oromiyaa cannot maintain a perfect fascination and the society seldom enjoys independent existence.

the Lord has made the dawn appear
the day that will brighten my victory
at the back of the frightened and the fugitive!
bring me into the rank of heroes (Kanno, 2005: 331)

Heroes are born, not created. The poem depicts the promising hope and the bright day of victory to come through heroic action. The term *dawn* is to refer to freedom and the great joy connected with it. When we probe into the historical elements of protest literature, we find that the patriotic poets never allow themselves to be suppressed or dictated by fear; and thus they air their views freely without concealing every single event. Moreover, the epic poetry, which reflects the existing social and political situation of a particular country, is presented to the audience in a form of dramatic narrative. Since the audience may not have full access to the whole events of the battlefield, like historians and journalists, they are more interested in the dramatic performance of the hero actor or singer and the way he projects objective reality. In listening to their work, we must always use reasonable judgement and critical analysis so that we will be able to shape the material on the basis of artistic criteria.

The essential benefit of the poets is not to have the ready-made world with which to deal; rather, to be able to see in depth its complexities and contradictions: the beauty and ugliness, the boredom and the liveliness, the atrocities, the horror and the glory, which ultimately define its true image. These complexities characterize the subject matter of poetry in general and the protest narrative in particular.

The outstanding episodic events of a particular battlefield are often carefully united so that the heroic story will be more powerful and plausible. The oral artist has made a vivid description of the great battle of *Calanqoo* between the Oromo and settler soldiers or *Nach-labaash* in which enormous damages occurred and hundreds of thousands of civilians and great men were killed. He has portrayed the horrific image of this battle in which the tragic experience of the martyrs has been recorded. The dead bodies of his fellow men and women that had been stretched upon the ground moved the poet to deep emotion. He has strongly emphasized the spirit of the late 1880s in the history of the Oromo when the *Nach-labaash* army decimated civilian population to ensure autocratic hegemony in the South. In the following verse passage of the *Geerarsa*, the whole scene of tragic grief rises before our eyes and remains with us through the long account of the fight. It is appropriate that such resistance should take place in this wild surrounding, the mountain, which is displayed by the narrator as the graveyard for hundreds of thousands of the massacred civilians.

The First World War created a horrifying image across the globe. In four-years (1914-1918), over nine million lives were lost. Similarly, the wars in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Congo, Uganda, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia and other places are also the worst nightmare scenarios in the modern history. The Mutilation of Arms and Breasts at

Aanole in 1886 and the Massacre at Calanqoo in 1887, and many more untold bitter stories of the Oromo people are the outcome of unjust war waged by the ambitious warlords and virulent despots. In general, the *conflict model pluralism* in Africa and the wars it has created not merely resulted in human tragedies of years, but also caused the psychological wounds in the minds of the survivors. The socio-cultural dislocation of war times very often gives rise to political narratives or more appropriately to literature of resistance. Like the unjust wars elsewhere, the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s wars in Oromo homeland, Oromiyaa, were marked by the death of more than *five million* Oromo civilians; it also saw the death of the *Gadaa* democratic conduct, literary expressions and the traditional values. On the other hand, it gave birth to the struggle for Oromo nationhood, the determination of the next generations to face the facts of the modern world and narrate the stories about them in vibrant voices.

*Lola Calii 'Calanqoo' himadhu moo ni dhiisa
manguddoo keenya gatee arriwaan gaara ciisa
dardara keenya fixee filaawaan gaara ciisa
hayyoota keenya gatee bokkuwaan gaara ciisa
kabiirran keenya gatee tasbiwaan gaara ciisa
shamarran keenya gatee calleewaan gaara ciisa
eessaanan galee rafa dhiigatu garaa naciisa.*

the battle and the massacre at Calanqoo, may I tell the story or not
exterminating our elderly men, their grey hairs lay in the mountain
exterminating our young men, their combs (usually wooden combs)
lay in the mountain exterminating our wise men, their sceptres lay in the mountain
exterminating our religious scholars, their religious ornaments lay in the mountain
exterminating our young ladies, their ornamental beads lay in the mountain
I have an immense amount of blood in my stomach,
and so how can I go home and sleep.

As Levine (1965: 3-4) argued, one needs not to be blind to the drawbacks of feudal dominance and to recognize these and other important benefits for the Ethiopian empire of the past in which many peoples were maltreated, free peoples reduced to slavery and unique cultures decimated. The unfavourable reputation of the totalitarian rulers in the South has been due largely to the example of the unscrupulous governors and soldiers whose worst impulses were at times allowed free play.

The hero narrator laments the destruction of his homeland and the loss of lives during the invasion and conquest of 1886-1887. Misery, trauma, grief, frustrations, in short, the tragedy of contradictory pluralism are the most affecting touches in the *Geerarsa* poetry. As the revolt against the subversive land reform had fallen through, the hero poet recorded the lament of the time without, of course, forgetting to mention the tragic dignity of those brave men and women who in the end failed. The poet keeps his eyes on his characters and their actions without wasting energy on irrelevant detail. He concentrates on the concise theme, which is pertinent to the situation and provides the authentic image of the whole episode. In general, the protest poem of "*Calii*

Calanqoo” brings the event closer to the people’s life and makes it substantial.

It may not be enough for the poems to be interesting unless they depict where the intent of the heart and mind goes, and unless they lead the heart of the reader as they want. Explaining the appropriateness of the language of poetry, Adams (1992: 69) says, “As people’s faces smile, in a similar way they sympathize with those who weep. If you wish me to weep, you must first feel grief yourself....Sad words are appropriate to a sorrowful face; furious words are fitting to the angry ...serious words to the solemn. For nature first forms us within to meet all the changes of fortune.” The skillful poets are endowed with the qualities of creating the concrete image within the power of their art; they encapsulate many of the central themes of every passing scene and make people rejoice or impel them to outrage, burden them down to the ground with a heavy grief or lift up their spirits to celebrate euphoric occasions.

War and tyranny are the ugly aspects of human experiences which great civilizations of our time and modernity have failed to abolish. Its destructive effect has left the unhealing wound in the minds of the new generations. The poet expresses his outrage at the harsh realities and agonizing situation he witnesses. He shares with us his observations so that we may be able to grasp as clearly as possible the feelings of deep sorrow and despair evoked by the subject. These feelings could better be thought of as meaning evoked by careful contemplation of the poem in its manifold and somewhat subtle ways of treating the text so as to lead the audience on to a view of war and the melancholic state intrinsic to an art. The poem, which powerfully mirrors the awful nature of war and conquest of 1887 at *Calanqoo*, is at the same time a forceful subject which reconstructs the horrible image in the conquered land, Oromiyaa, and the way the indigenous population has been trampled over by the tyrant rulers.

This heroic narrative reminds us of the worst case scenario of the late 19th century when the Oromo not merely faced enormous challenges, but also were decimated when they resisted a utopian approach to pluralism. It describes the horrendous episode the poet has experienced during the battle of *Calanqoo*. The term *Calii* refers to massacre. The poet’s anger finds expression in words such as *arriwaan*, *filaawaan*, *bokkuwaan*, *tasbiwaan* and *calleewaan*; and they mark the actual meaning of the lost battle and the painful experience. The situation is described with realism, which not only influences the audience, but also moves them to tears and action. The oral artist employs these allusive terms in order to illustrate the horrifying vividness of the situation. He narrates the whole situation by unfolding the clear image of the massacre at *Calanqoo*, together with the heavy damage inflicted on the society. The expression *dhiigatu garaa naciisaa* (line seven) reveals total rage and a sense of revenge without which the combatant hero cannot get mental peace. The extent and the horrors of the catastrophic situation are depicted as great darkness in the history of Oromiyaa.

“Wealth without bravery has little right of consideration by the Oromo. This great esteem for military feats tends to increase the power of the state” (Kanno, 2005: 333). The *Geerarsa* narrative is usually linked with specific socio-political and historical

contexts, as well as a particular turning-point within which it is to be narrated. There are direct references concerning the Oromo history, the social and power relationships, the system of values and ideas. In terms of form, style and thematic content, the Oromo heroic epic has various distinguishing characteristics. The language, the rich vocabularies in which the poem is formulated, the variations and the dramatic scenes created by those variations are marked by imagery and flashbacks. The mode of presentation of the literary epic has special features. Invariably, the narration of the *Geerarsa* is accompanied by a participating crowd in which the narrator who is surrounded by families, fellow friends and lineage groups is applauded and received with dignity. The problem of complex hegemony in Oromiyaa during the feudal empire of several decades (1889-1974), the painful life of the *gabbaar* society, the revolt to get back the expropriated land, lamenting the destruction of the rich countryside and the hopelessness of the periods are all brought to the open on the stage of performance.

In historical and political terms, the *Geerarsa* narrative reveals the struggle against indignity, a style of domination and having authority over the disfranchised. A wave of revisionist writings and repression in Oromiyaa was also compounded by the total distortion of the image of the society; and this fuelled the confrontation of the rulers and the ruled in a changing political market. The evolving of *Civil Rights* and the ever increasing of protest movements has now re-directed heroic literature and cultural awareness in an extraordinary manner. Modernity, then has come to acquire a positive and negative narrative: the first insists on the ideals of self-conscious subjectivity and the desire for freedom; the other is driven by an acute sense of disenchantment.... In Africa, these two narratives have been complicated by the experience of colonization, since it was colonialism that introduced what were considered to be the institutions of modern life in many African communities, while at the same time depriving people of the rights that were associated with the project of modernity. In these circumstances, the ideals of modernity were bound to run into conceptual problems, because if colonialism was to be the major agent for transforming

pre-colonial societies into modern polities, it was difficult to reconcile the notion of free self-conscious individuals with colonial domination (Gikandi, 2003: 337).

The extract encapsulates the problems of imperial narrative and the controversy of modernity in postcolonial Africa. The narrative construction of the greatness of Ethiopian empire and the excessive force used against the oppressed people to justify the uniqueness of that empire are not only contradictory to modern thinking, but also have created many untold tragic events in the Horn of Africa in general, and Oromiyaa in particular. As I have repeatedly stressed, subsequent to the rejection of multiculturalism and the plural principle of mutual respect and tolerance, the Oromo entered a new phase in the troubled history marked by economic disempowerment, cultural sinking, the gradual disintegration of social structures and the established egalitarian institutions; the time when a sense of loss of national identity fractured the nation. The *Geerarsa* thus appeared in ‘*an age of national struggles*’ as a response to

the unsuccessful imperial modernism when the whole issue of national culture and national entity was under discussion throughout the Sub-Saharan Africa. In the analysis of protest oral literature, *we have to go back and put in place the dislocated African sense of history and nationhood*. This can happen only if the heroic poetry is understood *as identity marker and a tool of enforcing the existence of an alternative*, which can help the society to grasp the true meaning of freedom.

The heroic narrative has a considerable value for history because it is part of the struggle for survival and reflects some of the strongest aspirations of the human spirit. It still remains of permanent value in the history of many nations. The heroic success that demands honour and distinction can be gained in many fields of action. Heroism in a wider contemporary concept may not only be limited to the combatant nationals in uniform. Rather, it also encompasses all dedicated professionals: *sportsmen and women, musicians, singers, artists, academics and many others who bring home greatest triumphs and are lauded, loved, honoured and rewarded by their nations as heroes and heroines*. Since honour is often achieved by demonstrating superior devotion and performance than other men, there is essentially an element of fierce struggle and confrontation. This is why a lot of poems reveal themselves in the form of boasts and panegyrics, which have to be translated into actions. For the successful function of his poetry, the narrator must pick the core events with skill and identify issues that will capture the imagination of the living audience.

The antagonistic human relations and the *conflict-based pluralistic formula* that have been imposed by militaristic governments reinforced self-assertion of the Oromo society and this assertion is represented by the wise poets who serve as keen observers of events. The amalgamation of different cultures without considering their equal status and the emergence of oral narrative as a powerful arm of maintaining the cultural identity characterize a process of resistance narrative in Sub-Saharan Africa, of which Oromiyaa is the part. After the 1870s imperial period and the Arab expansion programme, numerous antithetical co-existing cultures and traditions emerged in the African continent; and African folklore has grown out of those cultures as the identity marker of diversified groups. Therefore, the indigenous genre as social protest represents the African voice against the new order of polarization, which is the breeding ground for indignity and corrupt economic structures. Within the context of the growing of antithetical traditions and the *mechanical homogenization of pluralism*, the *geerarsa* narrative is an expression of socio-political problems, the contemporary challenges and contradictions, which need sensible solutions.

“Heroes are champions of man’s ambition to pass beyond the oppressive limits of human frailty to a fuller and more vivid life, to win as far as possible a self-sufficient manhood, which refuses to admit that anything is too difficult” (Bowra, 1952: 4). The admiration for great deeds, especially heroic performance, lies deep in the human heart. The epic poetry is always remarkable for its unfailing objective character. It is not only objective, but also devoted to unfolding the historical truth validated by its audience.

*ammallee koofii lolaa
ammalllee koofii lolaa
qaataa abbaa Abdellaa
hojjaamessa makkallaa
qabbanoofnee dhumannee yaa goojee abbaa farraa
nurratti murteessinaan, murtii du’aa namarraa
yaa garaa jabeenna isaa abbaa murtii farrisaa
nama dhibbaa fi soddomaa seera malee fannisaa?*
once again, the hero of war time
once again, the hero of war time
the trigger of the gun of Abdella’s father
the unshakable pillar with great energy
we were totally frozen oh, the king with demonic spirit
we are under the sentence of death; and how horrible it is!
oh! a treasonable judge, how cruel he is to pass the death penalty!
you hanged hundred-thirty men unlawfully

The demand for the abolition of the master-servant type of human relations often leads to the creation of what is known as a new literature of the marginalized people. From the 1870s onward, the entire continent of Africa was in political upheaval and rocked by a series of wars. As the natural boundaries of nations ceased to exist and the new empire builders emerged from the ruins of *old* empires, the continent faced the dark era in history. The economic momentum generated by modern capitalism in its powerful prime also fuelled raw aggression and the naked imperial expansion. The poem unfolds this historic moment in East Africa, Oromiyaa, during which the Oromo people experienced cultural shocks and the devastating effects of the new global order of post-empire.

Every Oromo is a soldier. The warrior temperament is born with him; he does not at all have the need for our system of conscription and raise the troops to enter into the military profession. A child...longs for the day when his father puts a spear in his hand, as much as the gentlemen of the Middle Age wished to be armed knights. A grown man...invests with the need of his own defense as that of contributing to the common defense. He has his own person, his family, his relatives, his country [in this context Oromiyaa] to protect and to cover with glory of his high feats. He lives to bequeath to his children a name illustrious and feared by enemy (Kanno, 2005: 308-309).

As Kanno has put it, the Oromo nation is endowed with heroic spirit in the highest quality. The *geerarsa*, which contributed immensely to the survival of the society, has continued to be a unifying image and is a medium of transmitting a strong sense of self-possession.

The functions of literary nationalism in the regulation of social order, needs to be qualified by taking into account cultural and historical circumstances. If we examine in political terms, folk traditions in different historic periods, that is, the 'Old World' of pre-capitalism and the 'New World' marked by capitalist domination and power imbalance, it is clearly evident that friction occurs between the co-existing cultures and traditions in the countries that are modelled on the colonial system. In the polarized societies of unequal power, heroic literature reveals the adverse effects of cultural dichotomy. The North and South Americans were colonized by the Europeans who transported millions of African slaves to their overseas empires. As the result of this, the country experienced co-existing and interacting traditions, which eventually generated the folklore society and *patriotic nationalism*. The indigenous Indian, the colonizing Spanish, Portuguese, French and English; the African-Americans, together with the 19th and 20th centuries immigrants from Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East, in short, the national and regional socio-cultural and political situations have been shaped by the new historical and environmental factors. Being the member of the New World, the continent of Australia also experienced cultural barriers; and its folklore literature has been divided between the Aborigines and the others. After the 1880s postcolonial events and settlements, the African continent experienced similar historical situation. The protest literatures in modern Africa are, therefore, the result of global historical and cultural changes.

A hero poet must not compromise their moral or political position by concealing or negating the truth. It is, therefore, necessary to unveil vices with a view of dissuading so that the work of art he produces is not merely allowed to grow, but also popularized. The oral artist tries to paint both the chaotic world of war and the euphoric times of victory and peace. He celebrates the triumph achieved and at the same time laments the tragic effects of unjust war and the human tragedy resulted from that disorderly world led by perverse governments. With regard to this, Noakes (1988: 168-169) says, "Emotions are emitted in sounds and when sounds form a pattern, they are called tones. The tones of any orderly world are peaceful and lead to joy, its government harmonious; the tones of a chaotic world are resentful and lead to anger, its government perverse; the tones of a doomed state are mournful to induce longing, its people in difficulty. Thus, in regulating success and failure...nothing comes to poetry."

The expression *qabbanoofnee dhumannee* "we were totally frozen" illuminates the entire picture of being under the sentence of death and a pervading mood of fear and tension the Oromo nation experienced during the arrival of the empire builders. In lines three and four, the poet discusses his own physical stature and charisma by using figurative language. He emphasizes the significance of building self-esteem and defines himself by using allusive phrases, *qaataa* "trigger of a gun" and *makkallaa* "the unshakable pillar with great energy;" and these descriptive words are alluded to him to clarify his great personal quality, charm and fitness. The last four lines (5-8) are heavy criticism of the irrational judge who passed death sentence against 130 Oromo nationals.

Though heroic poetry has not flourished and persisted in the same old way, it still plays a great role as instructive subject in many parts of the world. There has never been and will never be a perfect nationhood without the transmission of heroic values. Thus, the protest narrative presupposes a view of existence in which the hero figures play a central role and exert their powers to ensure that existence. "But after all national pride is a legitimate pleasure and heroic poetry cannot fail at times to promote it" (Bowra, 1952: 30). The protest narratives express defiance, outrages, discontents, grievances, success, failure or misfortune, sadness and a state of euphoria. The verbal artist often uses a trenchant language of a defiant. In postcolonial terms, the *geerarsa* captures the problems of imperial modernism, the violently marginalized identity, and the changing scene in the conquered land in course of the struggle for self-realization.

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