

Geerrarsa as Instrument of Fighting against Injustice and Oppression in Ethiopia: Notes on Hachalu Hundessa's Performance on Three Concerts

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“Seenaa Rirmi hin nyaatu” (History doesn't eat by termite): Aartist Hacaaluu Hundeessaa

Abstract

This study is an analysis of Hachalu Hundessa's Geerrarsa (heroic poems) on three stages of the 'Lammiin Lammiif' concert, a concert held in honor of Eritrea President Esayas Afework's visiting Ethiopia after the end of Ethio-Eritrea border and 123rd Adowa Anniversary of which express oppression and discrimination of the Oromo and other nations and nationalities in Ethiopia and encourage potential action for a group to claim their rights. These 'Geerrarsas' are examined in the context of oppression and discrimination and how they relate to social Movements. The specific objectives of this research are interpreting Hachalu's Geerrarsa on stages of the 'Lammiin Lammiif' concert, a concert held in honor of Eritrea President Esayas Afework's visiting Ethiopia after the end of Ethio-Eritrea border and 123rd Adowa Anniversary, contributions of Hachalu's Geerrarsa's in bringing political reform in Ethiopia and raising popular political consciousness and collective identity against the power of domination and role of Oromo in state and nation building in Ethiopia in the context of Hachalu's Geerrarsas. To achieve these objectives, critical discourse analysis was employed to interpret Hachalu's 'Geerrarsas' in three stages. The findings of the study showed that music functions as an informative tool that can spread awareness and encourage people to pressure authorities and fight for their rights and freedom. The selected three-stage performance had tremendous underlying messages meant to raise the citizens' political consciousness and bring people's marginalization to the world's attention and the role of Oromo in state and nation-building is too high.

Keywords: Hachalu Hundessa; Oromo; Geerrarsa; Injustice; Oppression

1. Introduction

The power of music in politics was recognized by Plato in *The Republic* when he warned that any musical innovation that endangers the State must be prohibited because 'when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State always change with them' (Kemp, 2014). The art of music permeates many aspects of human societies including the politics and governance arena. One of the most important aspects of music in politics is that it serves as a popular means to express societal issues and communicate political messages (Abdoulie, 2020) and is a tool for opposing societal injustices such as racial discrimination and combat oppression and very important to be a voice for the oppressed. By identifying people's dissatisfaction through music, we can locate certain issues or occasions when people's human rights are violated (Sadikovic, 2019). Moreover, music can serve as a means of empowerment for marginalized communities, providing a platform for their voices to be heard and their stories to be told. In many cases, music has been used as a means of resistance, with artists and musicians using their talents to defy oppressive regimes, challenge stereotypes, and promote cultural diversity (Elaloui, 2023).

Music can raise awareness of movements that aim to work towards social change, can drive political protests aimed to create solidarity between those who experience injustices and raise awareness of the harm

done by those injustices (Torrey, 2021). Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The freedom songs are playing a strong and vital role in our struggle. They give the people new courage and a sense of unity (Humphrey, 2021)

McDonald (2013) cited in Tesfaye (2019) 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.

Different African countries used music to fight against oppression and injustice. In South Africa, music played a central role in the struggle for liberation from white domination. Segun (2012), cited in Tesfaye (2019) in his short article, he produced on Nigerian protest songs, recognized 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 emphasizes that the role of the arts of song in linking and creating consciousness in a powerless society against suppressors and exploiters is universal. Music was

used as a culturally appropriate tool of political resistance

Music in Ethiopia's political struggle can be seen as liberating, which uplifts, inspires, and shows the way for the people to take part in the struggle against injustice and inequality. Through music, artists have revealed and developed their social political and moral identities (Allo, 2017).

Folk literature and resistance songs have historically been used to tell the story of the Oromo people's political struggle against the feudal Imperial regime (Assafa, 2015). Beginning in the 1960s, the Oromo struggle for emancipation from authoritarianism in Ethiopia took dimensions of peasant uprisings, liberation movements, and everyday forms of resistance through which discourses and institutions of domination have been resisted and defied. As part of their resistance strategies, the Oromo use art to defy political oppression, economic inequalities, and sociocultural marginalization. From legendary musicians to amateur singers, Oromo artists have been speaking to power and inspiring the people in the struggle for freedom.

A different form of documentation of the struggle against the Ethiopian regime has been provided by the variety of Oromo protest music, which first appeared in the 1960s and 70s. These types of protest music were first popularized by the early Arfan Qallo band. To promote Oromo music and culture, the Arfan Qallo was a cultural musical group founded in Harar in the early 1960s (Teferi, 2019). Arfan Qallo's musical productions played a crucial role in the initial resistance movement against the feudal system. More significantly, resistance songs in Oromia have been used to positively mobilize the populace in support of political change by delivering a political message (Fekadu, and Fekadu, 2023).

The musical lyrics of young Oromo artists have influenced and mobilized Oromo against injustice and oppression. Among young Oromo artists, Hachalu Hundessa was an influential and fearless Oromo political singer, whose songs echoed the voices and hearts of young Oromo people in Ethiopia (Fekadu and Fekadu, 2023). He was a young Oromo artist and resistance singer who garnered a reputation as an icon within a short time, was murdered on 29 June 2020 – is one of those whose works revolutionized modern Oromo resistance music (Asebe, 2023). Geerrarsa song requires high

creativity with good quality of tone. Consequently, everybody doesn't sing Geerrarsa (Alemgena, Abdeta, Gutema (2024). Hachalu was very popular for his Geerrarsa which is very important for expressing feelings, aspirations, and achievements artistically. He used Geerrarsa as a medium for expressing political aspirations, socio-economic status, and culture.

According to Bessa (2013), Geerrarsa plays an important role in the socio-political, economic, and cultural struggle of the Oromo people. Thus, the Geerrarsa genre is a peculiar experience that serves as a platform for critiquing social and political phenomena. It targets social ills perpetrated by those in power (Zelalem, 1996). The main function of Geerrarsa is to serve as a vehicle for delivering messages about different issues; such as grievances that arise from political, social as well as economic circumstances. Hachalu's Geerrarsas conveyed a powerful message to the audience that the past and present situation of the Oromo people demonstrate political injustice, pervasive corruption, and widespread cultural malpractices that urgently require bold political actions. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to analyze Hachalu Hundessa's Geerrarsa (heroic poems) on three stages of the 'Lammiin Lammiif' concert, a concert held in honor of Eritrea President Esayas Afework's visiting Ethiopia after the end of Ethio-Eritrea border and 123rd Adowa Anniversary.

2. Statement of the Problem

Several scholars like Gada Malba (1984), Mohammed Hassan (1999), Asafa Jalata (2005), and Mekuria Bulcha (2011) elaborated on the contribution of Oromo resistance songs to the Oromo struggles. Their works explained how the Oromo, who were irritated by long-lasting grievances, organized themselves and contributed to the overthrow of both the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie and the Derg. In this respect, they produced eloquent and well-articulated works on the Oromo resistance struggle against cultural, political, and economic impositions from the consecutive Ethiopian governments.

As a society in a continuous struggle to determine their destiny, the struggle of Oromo artists has never escaped the attention of scholastic studies. The artistic role of Oromo songs in resisting the powerful has been significantly high since the ancient history

of the Oromo (Tesfaye, 2019). Fekadu and Fekadu (2023), the role of protest songs in the fight of Ethiopian youth against authoritarianism, using the example of youth protests in Oromia from 2014 to 2018 conducted in Burrayu Town in Ethiopia's Oromia Regional State. They tried to analyze poems and some selected songs from young Oromo artists including Hachalu's song '*Maalan Jiraa*'. Alemgena and Kassaye (2024) conducted their study on the Social political, and didactic functions of '*Geerrarsa*' among Hababo Guduru Oromos. Kena (2021) studied the role of the Oromo nation in the Aduwa Victory: A discourse analysis of Hachalu Hundessa's song, Sofiya, Alemitu and Abduselem (2021) researched the analysis of Hachalu Hundessa's protest songs, and Asebe (2023) researched the single released audio music of Hachalu Hundessa's '*Jirra*'. Hachalu Hundessa played a tremendous role and engine in the 21st-century Oromo struggle particularly with his last three *Geerrarsas* on stage which increased his popularity.

However, there is no study focused on the details of the song and recent incredible *Geerrarsas* Hachalu performed at the '*Lammiin Lammiif*' concert, a concert held in honor of Eritrea President Esayas Afework's visiting Ethiopia after the end of Ethio-Eritrea border and 123rd Adowa Anniversary which is broadcasted Live via government media. No comprehensive work is produced on this issue. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to show how Hachalu Hundessa used *Geerrarsa* in fostering the Oromo struggle against injustice and oppression in Ethiopia on these three stages.

3. Research Objective

The general objective of this research is to analyze Hachalu Hundessa's *Geerrarsas* on three stages of the '*Lammiin Lammiif*' concert, a concert held in honor of Eritrea President Esayas Afework's visiting Ethiopia after the end of Ethio-Eritrea border and 123rd Adowa Anniversary and its impact on the Oromo Movement against Injustice and Oppression in Ethiopia

4. Methods and Materials

The research approach used in this study is qualitative research. It is appropriate and used to find the message of three *Geerrarsa* Hachalu performed on stages. The design of this research is discourse Analysis. Discourse analysis can reveal how music is

used to resist oppression and promote social change. It can also help us to understand the power dynamics at play in the production and consumption of music (Talbot, 2010). Again, discourse analysis can help us to understand how music is used to construct and challenge identities. For example, a discourse analysis of protest songs might reveal how they are used to create a sense of solidarity and community among those who are oppressed (Kassaye, 2022). Therefore, the researcher used discourse analysis to know more deeply and in detail about Hachalu Hundessa's *Geerrarsas* performed at the '*Lammiin Lammiif*' concert, a concert held in honor of Eritrea President Esayas Afework's visiting Ethiopia after the end of Ethio-Eritrea border and 123rd Adowa Anniversary.

5. Review of Related Literature

5.1. Music as an Agent of Change

Music has historically been used by movements seeking social change, particularly during the 1950s and '60s, when successful musicians openly inspired social progress (Reese, 2015). It has always been an integral part of our culture and society. From the earliest times, it has been used to express the deepest emotions, to bring people together, and to create a sense of community. Today, music continues to be a powerful tool for social activism and change. Musicians and artists across the globe have used their platform to raise awareness about various social issues and bring about positive change in the world. Musical arts are a significant agent of change with the power of recasting social reality (Rabinowitch, 2020, Tesfaye, 2019). It has been a long time since art has been used to criticize injustice (Milbrandt, 2010). As McDonald (2013) stated song is an important instrument for the powerless to fight the powerful.

5.2. Resistance songs among the Oromo

Resistance art among the Oromo has a long history (Tesfaye, 2019). The political struggle of the Oromo against the feudal Imperial regime has been traditionally told through folk literature and resistance songs (Assafa, 2015). The array of Oromo protest music, which emerged as early as the 1970s has provided alternative documentation of the struggle against the Ethiopian regime (Fekadu and Fekadu, 2023). The early Arfan Qallo music band set the ground for these forms of protest music. The

Arfan Qallo was a cultural musical group established in Harar in the early 1960s to promote Oromo music and culture (Teferi, 2019). Music produced by Arfan Qallo came to be instrumental in the early opposition against the feudal regime. Among the Afran Qallo band, Ali Birra was the leading member of the group.

Hamma hardhaa tooftaa sobaa uumtee,

Uummata saamudhaan lafa waalitti qabattee,

Qotee bulaa roorroodhaan dhamaaftee ,

In this song, Ali expressed his frustration, anger, and grievances towards the landlord of the feudal system. He further exposed the feudal system and its ruling structure depravities that led to its downfall. This song indicated the parasitic nature of landlords at that time in Ethiopia that contributed nothing but the oppression and exploitation of farmers (Fekadu and Fekadu, 2023). In addition to exposing the old feudal oppressive rule, Ali's songs have played a crucial role in articulating and creating the ideas of Oromummaa—Oromo nationalism (Mohammed 2013; Hess, 2019) cited in (Fekadu and Fekadu, 2023).

In the later period, the younger generation of Oromo singers (Qubee generations) who are inspired by the political songs of Ali Birra played a key role. These groups of artists include Hachalu Hundessa, Galana Garomsa, Chala Bultume, Chala Dagafa, Ittiqa Teferi, Sena Solomon, Jafar Yusuf, Hawi Tezera, Falmata Kebede, Kekiya Bedhadha and others (Asebe, 2023). The Oromo artist's powerful lyrics have given voice and significance to the group's insufferable indignation (Asefa, 2015; Asebe, 2023). The music has become a strong tool for the Oromo community to express their discontent with the TPLF/EPRDF government's economic policies, which have come at the expense of the Oromo society (Fekadu and Fekadu, 2023).

6. Result and Discussions

Geerarsa holds a significant place in Oromo culture, serving as a traditional poetic form used for various purposes throughout history. It serves as a tool for conveying historical narratives, critiquing oppressive systems, mobilizing and uniting communities, raising awareness about social injustices and resisting external influences, expressing societal values, and a platform for social commentary in general. Artists like Hachalu Hundessa have used Geerarsa to voice the grievances of the Oromo people and advocate for

Ali in 1971 produced the first Album in the history of Oromo Music. Ali Birra was known for criticizing the incumbent government of Ethiopia in the 1970s and fighting against the feudal system of Ethiopia. In his 1975 musical Album, he strongly condemned the feudal system and its landlords. He eloquently expresses his anger and frustration by saying:

You employed false manipulation strategies

and exploited the people Grabbed their land

make the Oromo people being sad and aggrieved.

social change, making it a powerful medium for political activism in Ethiopia. Here below, Hachalu Hundessa's Geerarsa on the concert of 'Lammiin Lammiif', a concert held in honor of Eritrea President Esayas Afework's visiting Ethiopia after the end of the Ethio-Eritrea border and 123rd Adwa Anniversary were critically analyzed.

6.1. Hachalu's Performance on Concert of 'Lammiin Lammiif'

Hachalu's songs became the anthem of the protest movement which emerged in 2015 to demand an end to the displacement of Oromos. At a time of heightened protests at the end of 2017, Hachalu was invited by the Oromia regional state to collect funds for the project 'Lammiin Lammiif' for nearly one million Oromo evicted from the Somali regional state when he was in Hararge to visit displaced people from Somali regional state. Then, he accepted the invitation after he was informed that the concert would be broadcast live through OBN (Oromia Broadcasting Corporation). He started to write lyrics for the concert.

In December 2017, Hachalu delivered a monumental performance at the Millennium Hall in Finfinnee, which was attended by high-ranking public officials from the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), including Abiy Ahmed, Lemma Megersa (Former President of Oromia Regional State) and others. His defiant musical performance, infused with a call to resistance, in the Millennium Hall at the risk of his life, resonates well even today among all Ethiopians. His songs have become the soundtrack of resistance, justice, unity, and freedom.

During the concert, Hachalu with his amazing stage performance, started the stage with a greeting to Oromo "Jirtuu? Ijoollen Oromoo Jirtuu?" (How are you? How are you Oromo youth?). Actually, 'Jirtuu'

is the catchphrase Hachalu is always remembered among the Oromo and other nations and nationalities. He was never afraid about the situation of the time to make his voice heard.

6.1.1. Being a Voice for the Prisoners

During the Oromo Protest particularly in 2016-17, several opposition political leaders including Prof.

*Ani maalin geerraraa,
anoo yaadan yeellalaa
dhiirri geeraree hin quufne,
hidhaa Qaallittii jiraa,
dhiirri geeraree hin quufne,
hidhaa Qilinxoo jira
hidhaa Karchallee jira,
Karchallee Amboo jiraa*

In the fearless performance, he became the voice for those opposition political leaders and members arrested without due process for several years during the concert of *'Lammiin Lammiif'*

6.1.2. Mobilizing Youth and Community to Fight Against Injustice and Oppression

Hachalu sang this song when the Oromo movement skyrocketed to strengthen its unity against injustice, forced displacement, killing, arresting civilians and

*Gameessa koo yaa Abbaa Daamaa
Oromookoo yaa Abbaa Daamaa
Oromookoo yaa Abbaa Daalee
Oromookoo yaa Abbaa Shaanqoo
Soori Farda kee qopheessii
Eeboo kee qarii sororsii,
Gaachana fannoo irraa buusii,*

*Roorroo didee sirra marsee
Maalif duuta mana teessee?*

Hachalu's songs have been closely linked with the anti-government resistance that started in 2015 and the 2016 Ethiopian protests. Hachalu helped galvanize the groundswell of movements from 2016-2018 or the Oromo protests that forced former Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn to resign. He criticized fragmentations among Oromos in his songs as *"maalif duuta mana teessee?"*. Because of a lack

*Alaa eegaa,
Hin abjootin abjuun taane,*

Merera Gudina and members jailed and detained by the ruling party EPRDF in Kaliti, Kilinto, Karchalle Ambo (where Hachalu himself was jailed for five years without ever being charged with a crime) and other unknown torture sites. He chanted as follows;

*what am I singing,
I am ashamed of my thoughts
the man who sang and was not satisfied,
he is in the prison of Kallitti,
the man who sang and was not satisfied,
he is in the prison of Kilinto,
he is in the prison of Karchale,
he is in Karchalle of Ambo*

opposition political leaders and members, inequality, land grabbing, and oppression in general. His songs have played a significant role in encouraging the Oromo people to resist oppression and stand up against injustices and had a significant impact on the ruling party known as EPRDF.

Again, he chanted as follows on the stage to overthrow the oppressors and bring justice, democracy, and peace to the country;

*My hero, owner of Dama (name of the horse)
my Oromo, owner of Dama (name of horse)
my Oromo, owner of Dale (name of horse)
my Oromo, owner of Shanko (name of the horse)
get your horse ready,
sharpen your spear,
take off your shield,*

*enemy refused and surrounded you
why are you dying at home?*

of unity, Oromo are dying at our home. Hence, through his *Geerrarsa*, Hachalu tried to unify the Oromo people and encourage them to resist oppression.

Hachalu Hundessa's song on the concert made dread in TPLF. He told to Oromo as solidarity and fighting against the oppressor is the only way to freedom as follows;

*Do not wait for help to come from outside,
a dream that doesn't come true.*

*Kaasi Farda keen lolii,
Arat Kiilof situ aanee”.*

After he expressed all the persecution of his people by the regime overtly through OBN live to the public, one of the TPLF founders and Former Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority Director Zaray Asgidom called a media conference and he highly criticized OBN after the song broadcasted live. Zaray said, “How does Oromia television [OBN] broadcast as Oromo oppressed and such kinds of songs through public media?”. Former Oromia Broadcasting Corporation board chairman and Amhara regional state communication head reacted to the critics of Zaray and other media-related issues.

Consequently, Hachalu’s song increased the tension between the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) dominated by TPLF, and ODP (Former OPDO) because the song was broadcast through public media. Hachalu is a hero who speaks the truth to his people without fear. Just before his death, on June 22, Hachalu gave an interview to the Oromia Media Network (OMN). He said “*ani sodaa qofan sodaadha*” means “I fear only fearing itself”. He never relied on the interests of individuals or parties other than his people. So, that is why Hachalu left in the heart of all Oromo.

6.2. Hachalu’s Geerrarsa on the concert held in honor of Eritrea President Esayas Afeworki’s visiting Ethiopia after the end of the Ethio-Eritrea border war

It was the time after Dr. Abiy Ahmed was elected as Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 2018. Within months, he had released thousands of political prisoners; unbanned independent media and opposition groups; fired officials implicated in human rights abuses, and made peace with neighboring Eritrea. However, after Abiy

*Akkamiin rafnee bullaa,
Fulduraan osoo eegnuu,
Diinni boroodhan galee.
Kunoo Mi’eesson galee,
Rasaasan nu waxalee.
Kunoo Cinaaksan galee,
Rasaasan nu waxalee -----”.*

*rise, make your horse ready and fight,
you are the one close to Arat Kilo (the palace).*

came to the office, the displacement of Oromo from the Somale regional state and the Somale special force attack on Hararge Oromo intensified.

Two months after Dr. Abiy took office, Hachalu was invited by the government to perform at a concert held in honor of Eritrea’s President Esayas Afeworki, who was visiting Ethiopia for the first time since the end of a border war between the two neighboring states. Hachalu proved to be as independent and fearless as ever, singing the single song “*Jirtuu?*” about the need to achieve justice for people who had been killed in conflict in eastern Ethiopia between the Oromo and Somali ethnic groups, and questioning how a concert could be held when families were grieving. This work makes more it increased his popularity (Gemechu, 2011).

6.2.1. Addressing Displacement and Human Violations of Hararge Oromo

When President Esayas Afeworki visited Ethiopia, Hachalu performed at the Millennium Hall (the same hall where Esayas beat his chest to chants of “Issu! Issu!”). Many expected Hachalu to stick to the script and sing praises to the new prime minister and his guest, and not air his grievances in the presence of a foreign dignitary. But Hachalu sang songs about the continuing oppression of the Oromo People, particularly Hararge Oromo. Hachalu considered that stage as a good and biggest opportunity to address the pain of his people. Hachalu made history again at a concert held in honor of Eritrea’s President Isaias Afeworki in Millennium Hall. He addressed by his song and activism what was ongoing in Hararge by the Somali regional state special force of that time. He said in his song;

*how do we sleep,
while we wait ahead,
the enemy entered through the backyard.
here comes Mi’eesso,
they struck us with a bullet
here entered Cinaaksan,
they struck us with bullets*

This Geerrarsa highlights land dispossession and human rights violations faced Oromo of Hararge in the Somali and Oromia-Somali border. Through powerful lyrics and emotional melodies, he amplified the voices of the

marginalized and oppressed, bringing attention to their plight and demanding justice and equality. Hachalu sent a great message to the government as follows on the stage;

*“Nurraa dhoowwi yaa Lammaa Stop it from us, Lema
Nurraa dhoowwi yaa Abiyi stop it from us, Abiy
Nurraa dhoowwaa yaa biyyaa stop it from us, you all
Yookan Qeerrotan iyyaa” unless, I shout at the Qeerroo (Youth)*

Hachalu said, “If the government couldn’t stop ongoing displacement and human rights violations on Oromo of Hararge and others, I will invite Oromo Qeerroo (a group of youth who played a great role in sweeping the oppressor group Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) from office and brought political reform in Ethiopia)”.

Finally, a day after this message, the Federal government jailed the President of the Somali Regional State for the ongoing human rights violations in the region and the displacement of the Oromo ethnic group from the region.

6.2.2. Revealing the Role of Oromo and Oromo Heroes in Nation and State Building

Hachalu also addressed as Oromo has been playing a tremendous role in building and keeping the

*Manni keenya holqaaree,
Tabba guddaadha malee,
Oromoon yoom biyya diige,
Biyya ijaare malee.*

The Oromo have been at the forefront of political movements in Ethiopia. Particularly, the recent Oromo protests, which began in 2015, played a significant role in the political reform in Ethiopia. The protests were sparked by the government’s plan (Master Plan) to expand the capital city, Finfinne

*Dhiigni Qeerroo inni jige, The blood of the Qeerroo (youth) that fell,
biyya jigde kaasekaa, raised up a fallen country,
Galma dhugaa ijaaruf, to build a common consensus,
Galma sobaa raasekaa, it shake the false narration,*

Qeerroo from the whole parts of the Oromia region emerged to stop the accumulated humiliation, decimation, and marginalization of Oromo people through strong peaceful struggle in the Oromia region particularly since 2014. Qeerroo sacrificed their unreturned soul to voice the accumulated grievances of the Oromo people and bring the current transition to Ethiopia. The Qeerroo movement was instrumental in enforcing a change in leadership in Ethiopia,

sovereignty of the country. Some of Hachalu’s songs were political in their orientation, arguing for or advocating political change and reform in Ethiopia, some of them arguing more specifically for Oromo concerns, Oromo grievances, and Oromo rights.

Hachalu spoke truth to power, sang truth to power, and had the distinct ability to read the political landscape and come up with a language and poetic expression that spoke to people in a way that no single artist has done in the past. Hachalu was the brother of all Oromo youth and the son of all Oromo fathers and mothers. He became the voice for all Ethiopians in general and Oromo in particular regardless of color, zone, and religion. He sang as follows;

*our house is not in a cave,
It’s on a big mountain, though,
when did the Oromo dismantle the country,
they built it*

(Addis Ababa) into Oromia by displacing Oromo farmers around the city. The protests quickly spread to other parts of the country and eventually led to the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in 2018.

resulting in the coming to power of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

He was Oromo’s tank to fight against injustice and marginalization. He was too much brave. He never feared to talk about the oppression of his people. Hachalu Hundessa’s works are long-lasting. They live through generations and forever. Their basements are the truth and feelings of the Oromo people. Even, I understood the power of art from his

works. Hachalu, to show his love for his people, sang

*Lubbuu biliqa baatuf,
Maafan gola naanna'aa,
Saba koof falmee du'een,
Taddasaa Birruu ta'aa,
Waaqoo Guutuu koo ta'aa,
Biyya koof falmee du'een,
Oliqaa Dingil ta'aa,
Balaay Zallaqaa ta'aa,
Zallaqaa Qilxuu ta'aa,
Biyya koof falmee du'een,
Abdiisaa Aagaa ta'aa,
Saba koof falmee du'een,
Bakar Waaree koo ta'aa,
Laggasaa Wagii ta'aa*

These above-listed heroes in Hachalu *geerrarsa* have played a significant role in bringing democracy and protecting the sovereignty of their country. They have fought against oppression and injustice, and have worked to promote peace and unity. Hachalu praised these heroes who lost their lives while dreaming and fighting for freedom, justice, democracy, and the development of their people and their country. Hence, it is our historical obligation to continue the struggle that these heroes started. According to the message of Hachalu's *Geerrarsa*, we have moral and national responsibilities to achieve the objectives for which our heroes sacrificed their lives.

7. Hachalu's song on the 123rd Adowa Anniversary

Adowa's victory is considered one of the great symbols of African Independence which Ethiopia got victory over Italy. As Pankhurst, (1990) and Jeff (2017) cited in Kena (2021);

The year 1896 was considered by historians a decisive year for both Europe and colonial powers in general and Italy and Ethiopia in particular. It brought the end of "the might is not right" for the reason that Italy was defeated by Ethiopia at the battle of Aduwa. As far as Aduwa is concerned, it is the March 2nd holiday on which Ethiopians both abroad and internally commemorate Ethiopia's victory over Italy in 1896, at a place known as

the following;

*for a soul that dies suddenly
why am I going around the village
I struggle for my people,
to become Taddasa Birru,
to become my Wako Gutu
I struggle for my country,
to become Olika Dingil
to become Belay Zeleke
to become Zeleke Kiltu
I struggle for my country,
to become Abdisa Aga
I struggle for my people
to become my Bakar Ware
to become Legesse Wegi*

Aduwa, securing Ethiopian sovereignty. The victory had different political and historical significance for being the first overwhelming defeat of a European colonial power by African forces during the colonial era.

Even if Adowa's victory was a victory of a Black African force over a White European army globally, there are disparate views regarding its interpretation in general and the contribution of the Oromo people in particular. The conquered peoples had paid a high price for Ethiopia to preserve its independence. However, existing literature suggests that all Ethiopians, nations, nationalities, and peoples did not get equal recognition even if they had their contributions and roles in the Adowa victory. Mostly, even if marginalized groups played a pivotal role in the battle of Aduwa, historians have hidden the contributions of historically marginalized groups including the Oromo. Concerning this, some argue that the contribution of non-Abyssinian ethnic groups to Adowa victory is minimized and this brought an absence of clear understanding of the issue. However, the reality on the ground is that all Ethiopians had contributed their roles in reality but historians fail to give equal recognition. This brought confusion and debates which varies from place to place and from time to time (Kena, 2021).

Paradoxically, the roles of the Oromoo ethnic group in the Adowa victory were not recognized in the past.

Due to this, Adowa's victory has contradictory meanings as it has different connotations for different people (Kena, 2021). The narration of this history is full of bias and the role of Oromo war leaders in the Adwa war is miscalculated for century. However, there has been a significant change over time, particularly, between the Pre-Hachalu song (pre-2018) and Post Hachalu song on the 123rd Adowa victory celebration. His *geerrarsa* told us about the contribution of the Oromo in nation-building and keeping the sovereignty of the country.

Hachalu is a much-matured artist in reading and understanding about the politics and history of Ethiopia. He used his music and lyrics to commemorate the historic battle of Adowa, which resulted in Ethiopia's victory against Italian colonial forces in 1896. Hachalu's songs inspired unity,

Garasuu yaa ilma Dhukii

Ilma Walee Walisoo

Eenyu abbaa ishee irraan dheensaa

Sittan ba'e anisoo

Daj. Geresu Duki was born in Waliso which had been the epicenter of the Oromo Protests in December 2015. Daj. Geresu Duki is remembered as a patriotic leader who fought bravely against the Italian occupation and he was a military commander who played a significant role in fighting against Italy's

Balaay Zallaqaan kaasaa

Dhiira Roorroo hin sarminnee,

Alagaa garaa gubeen,

Lammii koo garaa raasaa

Belay was born in Wollo, Ethiopia. In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia. Zeleke felt the need to defend his country and led a heroic movement against the occupation in Gojjam. Belay Zeleke used various military strategies to fight against the Italians, including ambushes, raids, and hit-and-run tactics. He also established a network of informants and spies to gather intelligence on Italian movements (Samson, 2019). Belay Zeleke, also known as Abba Koster by his horse's name. He fought valiantly in the war

Ka'een Baalchaa koo faarsaa,

Gootaa biyya isaaf duulee,

Isa Tuulamaa ka'ee

patriotism, and pride among Ethiopians, reminding them of their rich history and the sacrifices made. His contributions helped keep the memory of Adowa alive and strengthened the Ethiopian national identity.

7.1. Lion Share of Oromo Heroes in Battle of Adowa

The Oromo horsemen played a crucial role in defeating the Italian forces at the Battle of Adwa. Led by Oromo military leader Gebeyehu Gurmu, they contributed significantly to the Ethiopian victory (Kena, 2021). Their bravery and determination helped to ensure the independence of Ethiopia (Fana and Yonas, 2021). Hachalu revealed the role of Oromo generals (war leaders) in the battle of Adowa as follows;

Garasuu, a son of Duki,

the Son of Walee Walisoo,

from whom I flee,

I look like you

invasion. Daj. Geresu Duki was known by the nickname Abbaa Booraa (the name of his horse).

Hachalu added the role of Belay Zeleke who is widely remembered for his courageous efforts in defending his country from the invading Italian forces during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War as follows;

I talk about Belay Zeleka,

A man who does not say okay for enemy,

I burned the heart of the foreigner,

to makes my citizens happy

against the Italian forces and became a symbol of resistance, inspiring the entire country with his courage.

Hachalu mentioned in his *geerrarsa* about the role of Dejazmach Balcha Safo known by his horse-name Abba Nabso was an Ethiopian military commander who served in both the First and Second Italo-Ethiopian Wars. Hachalu sang about Dej. Balcha Safo as follows;

I rise up and praise my Balcha,

A hero who fought for his country,

He went from Tulama,

*Isa Finfinnee ka'ee,
Reenfa faranjii tuulee.*

Despite being retired, Dejazmach Balcha Safo returned to active duty and led Ethiopian forces against the Italian invaders. He commanded the Ethiopian army in several key battles, including the Battle of Adwa in 1896. Dejazmach Balcha Safo's (Balcha Aba Nabso) bravery and heroism led the Ethiopian army to the symbolic victory of Adwa which ignited resistance all over Africa.

Another Oromo war leader who participated and fought valiantly in the war against the Italian forces

*Ka'een Abdiisaa kaasaa,
Abdiisaa Aagaa koo kaasaa,
Isa Macca irraa ka'ee,
Isa Wallaggaa ka'ee,
Diina biyya weerartee,
Haleelee bakkaan ga'ee,
Gaafa Faranjiin qabdu,
Tooftadhaan jalaa ba'ee,
Maalifan faarsuu didaa,
Qooda isaatu adda ta'ee*

Colonel Abdissa Aga was born in Welega. He joined the Ethiopian Army around the age of 14 and fought against Fascist Italy in 1936 in Ethiopia. Unfortunately, Abdissa ended up in the hands of the Italians, who were armed with weapons far superior to his own. Consequently, he was taken as a prisoner of war and transported to Italy through Asmara. He was captured and imprisoned in a concentration camp on the island of Sicily in Italy. He broke out from prison and recruited other POW prisoners to fight Mussolini's Fascist regime (Taylor, 2022).

More importantly, Colonel Abdissa is well remembered for leading a multi-nation resistance movement in Italy. Abdissa Aga not only worked to protect Ethiopia from the Italian forces but also was a leader in the effort to weaken fascist Italy during the

*Eenyu paastan gowwoomee,
Eenyu buuphan gowwoomee,
Akka biyya gurguree,
Eenyu isa irra ce'ee
Akka Aduwaa dhaqee,*

*He went from Finfinne,
He piled up enemies' death*

and became a symbol of resistance, inspiring the entire country with his courage was Colonel Abdissa Aga. Oromo International Hero Abdissa Aga, led the Allied Forces in Italy, Germany, and Yugoslavia during World War II, liberating cities and earning international recognition as a hero (Tola, 2009). Hachalu Hundessa explained the role of Abdissa in his Geerarsa as follows;

*I rise up and praise Abdissa,
I praise of my Abdissa Aga,
he went from Mecha,
he went from Welega,
the enemy invaded the country,
he attacked and back to their home,
even when the enemy arrested him,
he got away with it tactfully,
why do I refuse to praise?
his part is unique*

Second World War. Abdissa was hailed as a hero for his courage and leadership during the war. Even more, Abdissa is a great hero who waved his country's flag proudly while entering and capturing the city of Rome. Even after his death, the unsung hero Abdissa is still remembered for his acts of bravery, heroism, and patriotism (Chala, 2022).

For many years, the role of the Oromo in the battle of Aduwa has remained unrecognized. It was raised in various songs and writings as a certain group's victory. Before Hachalu's song, Adowa victory is considered as it has no relation with the Oromo ethnic group (Kena, 2021). In response to such biased history that was being written and sung, he listed his bold and hollow words and sang as follows;

*who was fooled by pasta,
who fooled by egg,
and sold the country,
who crossed over him,
and went to the battle of Aduwa,*

Eenyu akka baandaa ta'ee *who became a gangster and*
Dhiiga dhiiraa gadi naqee, *shed the blood of heroes,*
Har'an falmee sirreessaa, *I'll resist and fix it today,*
Seenaa karaa irraa maqee *a history which is biased*

The Oromo people played a significant role in the Battle of Adwa, but their contributions have often been overlooked or downplayed in historical accounts. This has led to accusations of bias and erasure. Some historians deliberately minimize and sometimes even hide the active roles that Oromoo heroes played in Adowa victory. These historians try to argue that Adowa victory belongs to Abyssinians only.

Hachalu Hundessa and his friends accompanied the celebration of the 123rd anniversary of the Aduwa festival with horses and celebrated in a unique and unprecedented manner. Hachalu brought back the history of Oromo heroes that had been hidden for many years. Hence, to correct such biased history, the generation should play its part rather than expecting unbiased history from outsiders. He sang as follows;

Seenaa ofii himannu malee, *Unless, we tell our history,*
ormi nuuf hin himu *outsiders will not tell for us,*
Ni du'a malee *they will choose to die than tell us the true*

Hachalu stated that unless you tell your history, no one else can tell for you and this is true particularly as far as the nexus between Oromoo and Adowa victory is concerned. If one talks about the Adowa victory, it would be impossible to forget that they are Oromos who fiercely fought the force of Italy.

Oromo have been playing a major role in building this country and protecting it from the enemy by shedding their blood and breaking their bone. To reveal this, Hachalu sang at the concert as follows;

Biyya dhiigan suphinee, *we repaired the country with our blood,*
Biyya lafeen ijaarree, *we built a country with our bones,*
Kanaaf ciccinee lollaa, *that is why we fight hard,*
Akka Diinni nu hin nyaarree *to not be defeated by an enemy*

Oromo paid a price in state formation in several ways. Hence, the current generation is responsible for protecting its sovereignty and pass to the next generation.

7.2. Horses as a Tank on Battle of Adowa

As Dereje (2022) stated at the battle of Adwa (1896) Oromo cavalry horses were also on the frontline at the battlefield as generals and soldiers against Italian imperialism which finally concluded by Ethiopian victory. Oromo used horses in great battles. Horses

made a marked shift in the course of Ethiopian history during the European colonization of Africa. Ethiopian particularly Oromo horsemen and patriots defeated a well-armed European power at the battle of Adowa on 2 March 1896 as demonstrated in the 123rd Adowa anniversary organized by the prominent Oromo singer Hachalu Hundessa at Meskel square in Finfinnee on 2 March, 2019. Hachalu songs about the role of Oromo horsemen in the battle of Adowa in the Concert 'Lammiin Lammiif' as follows;

Nuyii miti Farda keenyaa, *not only us, even our horses,*
ni beeku bareechanii, *they know accordingly*
gaafa gaarren Adowaa, *when the Aduwa mountains,*
gaafa lola Adowaa, *when the battle of Aduwa*
gaafa Maqalee sanii, *on the day of the Mekele*

The Oromo horsemen and war leaders played a crucial role in the Battle of Adwa. They served as skilled cavalry units and provided mobility and

maneuverability to the Ethiopian forces. Their knowledge of the terrain and their prowess in horseback combat were vital in navigating the rugged

terrain and launching strategic attacks against the Italian troops.

Conclusion

The power of music to fight discrimination is a testament to its ability to connect and inspire people, promoting empathy, understanding, and social change. Whether through its messages and themes, its ability to empower marginalized communities, or its role in promoting cross-cultural understanding, music has the potential to play a vital role in the fight for equality and justice. As artists and musicians continue to use their voices and talents to fight against discrimination and promote social justice, the power of music to inspire and transform the world around us is sure to continue for generations to come. Hachalu effectively utilized his songs to promote unity, love, and solidarity among Oromos. has no expired works. All of his songs are long-lasting because of their basements. All rely on the truth and his people. Since his childhood, Hachalu Hundessa has paid the price to fight against injustice and oppressive regimes of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) which was dominated by the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). His songs which captured the displacement, loss, and subjugation of the Oromo nation within modern Ethiopia galvanized a generation of youth into resistance.

Hachalu was considered as the father of 'Geerrarsa. He has used Geerrarsa to voice the grievances of the Oromo people and advocate for social change, making it a powerful medium for political activism in Ethiopia. The recent incredible Geerrarsas Hachalu performed at the 'Lammiin Lammiif' concert, a concert held in honor of Eritrea President Esayas Afework's visiting Ethiopia after the end of Ethiopia-Eritrea border and 123rd Adowa Anniversary enhanced the popularity of Hachalu among the Ethiopian people in general and Oromo people in particular. In these *geerrarsas*, Hachalu elucidated the oppression and violation of human rights of his people, the role of Oromo in state formation, and the protection of the independence of the country and the value of unity. At all, he was preaching unity, crying for Oromo unity. It's almost impossible right now to think of somebody who could fill his shoes. His music offered roadmaps of resistance and struggle for self-determination.

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