



Full Length Research Paper

Orality, power and Resistance: Reconstructing the Social History of Hararge Tenants, Ethiopia (1887-1975)

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Abstract

Hararge was one of the regions where tenancy was predominantly practiced as a form of rural production relation during 1887-1975. Since the hardship of tenancy was difficult to bear, tenants were resisting the landlords and the state who sought to extract meager products from their labor, rent, food and taxes in different ways. One of the mechanisms through which opposition against the system articulated through oral poetry was 'weapon of the weak'. This paper deals with the resistance of Hararge peasants against the exploitative landlords by employing oral songs, sayings and proverbs in the form of verse and prose. Taking oral poetry as a resistance weapon performed mainly in the form of songs by Hararge tenants during social gatherings and cooperative works, this paper argues that Hararge tenants have been constantly expressing their grudging and oppositions against their landlords' insatiable appetite for resources. The paper privileges tenants as historical actors having their own power and oppositional culture and identity rather than mere victims of historical processes. Data for this work is generated through an extensive interview conducted with Hararge peasants, most of them are former tenants. These oral data are crosschecked and validated with available literature collected from different libraries. It argues that topical and political songs with authorship being associated with the mass are one arena through which the weak express their resistance and defiance to the system.

Key Terms: *Exploitation, landlord, oral poetry, power, resistance, tenant, weapon of the weak*

Ogafaan, Aangoofi Diddaa: Seenaa Hawaasa Ciisiiwwan Harargee Seenessuu (1887-1975)

Axareeraa

Gabbaarummaan bara 1887-1975'tti baadiyaa Harargee keessatti hariiroo oomisha baadiyyaa isa ijooture. Yeroo sanarraa jalqabee, ulfaatina gabbaarummaa dandamachuun ulfaataa waan tureef, gabaartoonni abbootii lafaafi mootummaa kanneen oomishaalee isaanii gahaa hintaane karaalee garagaraatiin humna isaanii, kiraa, nyaataafi gibira isaan irraa walitti qaban didaa turani. Maloota sirnicha dura dhaabbataniin keessaa tokko karaa 'Waraana Laafa'aa' jedhamee waamamuuni. Afwalaloon gabbaartoonni Harargee irra caalatti bifa sirbootaatiin yeroo hawaasni wal gahuufi gamtaan waa hojjatan hurruuban akka meeshaa diddaatti fudhatame. Waraqaan kunis yaada gabbaartoonni Harargee quuqqaa isaanii walitti fujiinsaan ibsataafi bololiinsa qabeenyaa abbootiin lafaa agarsiisan/qaban dura dhaabbataa turan jedhu akka falmiitti kaasa. Waraqaan kun gabbaartota akka miidhamtoota adeemsota seenaatti osoo hintaane, akka taatota seenaa aangoofi aadaa wantoota isaanii hintaane dura ittiin dhaabbataniifi eenyummaa mataa isaanii qabaniitti mirga addaa kennaafi. Ragaan qorannoo kanaa karaa afgaaffii bal'aa gabbaartota Harargee kan irra caalaan isaanii dur gabbaartota turan irraa kan maddeedha. Ragaaleen afaanii kunneen barruulee manneen kitaabaa garagaraa irraa walitti qabaman waliin kanneen walbira qabamaniifi mirkaneeffamanidha. Goolabni isaas, sirboonni yeroo sanaafi siyaasaa kanneen mirgi abbeentaa isaa hawaasa bal'aan wal qabatuufi waltajjii lafaan diddaa isaaniitiifi sirnichatti harka kennuu dhabuu isaanii ittiin ibsatan kan jedhuudha.

Jechoota Ijoo: *Saamicha, abbaa lafaa, afwalaloo, aangoo, diddaa, gabbaarii, waraana laafa'aa*

1. Introduction

During the imperial period, Hararge is one of the largest provinces located to the East of the Great Rift Valley which dissects Ethiopia roughly into two halves. It is characterized by diverse physical features including rugged terrain, steep hills and mountainous landscapes. Hararge plateau as a geographical region extends from Chercher Mountains southeast of the Awash valley to the planes of Hargeisa in Northern Somalia. The highland of Hararge consists of three major geographic regions: the Chercher, the Garamulata and the Harar highlands. By far the greater part of Hararge is waynadaga or temperate. But there are also Daga (high altitude) and Qolla (low lowland) which cover a considerable part of Hararge (Brooke, 1956; Emiru, 2008).

Agriculture has always been the mainstay of the population in the daga and waynadaga parts of the province. The cultivators produced different kinds of cereals for household consumption. They also cultivate tree crops such as coffee, and chat to generate income. These agriculturalists also used to practice animal husbandry before major transformation took place that forced them decrease the number of their cattle due to the shortage of pastureland (Brooke, 1956).

It is interesting to note that the settler community, mainly the Amhara, in the wake of the conquest, settled in Hararge on the daga and waynadaga parts. They have settled in nearly all parts of the central highlands. Many reside in towns and small market centers, but most are cultivators in hamlets and rural villages. Their settlement resulted in a large number of native cultivators who were evicted from these parts of Hararge (Brooke, 1956; Emiru, 2008).

It was also in these parts of Hararge that tenancy (landlessness) became the predominant feature of rural life. The overwhelming majority of these native cultivators who became victims of eviction were Oromoo belonging to the Afran Qallo sub groups (Obora, Daga, Babile and Alla); Aniya and the Ittu. (Bedri, 1995; Informants: Abdulatif Ahmed, Siraj Kodhele).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the lives of Hararge tenants, their relations with the landlords and most importantly how they reacted to the unending demands of their masters through oral poetry both in the form of verse and prose. Data for the study are culled through interview from former tenants, landlords and their descendants collected through interview. To conceptualize their resistance to the demands of landlords, pertinent literature are used in the study. The study has a temporal limitation between 1887 to 1975 for some logical and practical reasons. Logical for 1887 since Hararge was incorporated into the expanding empirical state of Ethiopia after the battle of Chelenqo. Of Course tenancy as a predominant and a full-fledged form of rural production relation in rural Hararge was observed after the restoration of the imperial regime in 1941. But in an attempt to trace the genesis and growth of tenancy, the period of conquest is taken as the starting point of the study. Practical for the upper limit, i.e 1975 since Ethiopia's most radical land reform proclamation of March 1975 altered the nature of agrarian relations by abolishing tenancy and its associated rural exploitation.

2. Tenancy and Tenant Production Relation

After the conquest and incorporation of Hararge in 1887 into the imperial state, property rights in the form of land and tribute to individual ownership was transferred through different mechanisms to the settler community. The nature and degree of transfer differed spatially into three geographical spaces of Hararge: Chercher up to the river Burqa, the area to the south of the Burqa and Harar proper (Mahtama Sillase 1962 E.C.; Dessalegn, 1970;). The degree of confiscation and the establishment of tenancy as a form of production relation differed from region to region depending on the degree of resistance waged by the indigenes and the political decision of the Shewan military feudal state.

In areas like Chercher, where land confiscation was undertaken vigorously, land transfer to the settler communities took place through different mechanisms and the natives were reduced into tenancy (Ministry of Land Reform and Administration ,1969; Dessalegn, 1970). But tenancy (the condition of landlessness) as a form of rural production relation did not become a predominant form of property appropriation until the post 1941 period.

The term tenant translates in Amharic into Chisagna, derived from *ṭis*. The literal meaning of the term *ṭis* is smoke. It can be assumed that Chisagna is a derivative of *ṭis*. The Amharic dictionary by Dasta Taklawald traces the etymology of the term Chisagna i.e tenant from *ṭis*., i.e. smoke. (Desta Teklewold, 1970). Here, there are different traditions that try to trace the genealogy of the term and its meaning. One of these traditions claims that *ṭis* refers to the homestead where tenants live, which is symbolized by the smoke that it emits. Another less plausible tradition applied a metaphor of smoke for Chisagna. Just as smoke disappears in the thin air immediately, so was the Chisagna evicted at the whim of the landlord and disappeared from the landlord's estate since the place on which tenants constructed their homestead belonged to the landlord.

It is not exactly known when landlord-tenancy relationship originated in Ethiopian history. The Ethiopian chronicles which have detailed description of the political and military events around the court and about personalities do not say much about this basic issue of socio-economic relation of peoples from below. Although they are not specific in discussing the conditions of tenants, there are some descriptions in the northern part of Ethiopia by early Portuguese priests about the plight of the

agricultural producers of which tenants were also part. Alvarez, the chaplain who accompanied the Portuguese mission to Ethiopia in 1520, suggests that the ordinary people were in a depressed condition which hindered agricultural production. He expressed the view that "... there would be much fruit and more cultivation in the country, if the great men did not ill-treat the people, for they take what they have and the latter are not willing to provide more than they required and what is necessary for them." (Alvarez, 1961, pp. 515).

Another Portuguese priest, Barradas, also ascertains that the peasants paid a fifth of their produce to the landlord and claims that he had tried to plead with the governor on behalf of the peasants. (Barradas, 1996). According to Pero Paez, as discussed by Pankhurst, during the reign of Sarsa Dengel (1563-1597), the peasants were protesting against the lords and were hiding a considerable proportion of the harvest, thereby increasing their share of the produce. It is interesting to observe that after the king appointed a committee to visit the crop before harvest and assess the yield, it was decided that the share of the lords be 1/5 instead of the commonly accepted tradition of 1/3 of the produce as well as some presents during holidays (Pankhurst, 1966).

In northern Shawa, Atsme Giorgis gives us a passing reference to the existence of tenants. He indicates that the governor of Manz, Negasi Kirstos, redistributed land to the tenants towards the end of 17th century. Probably, Negasi Kirstos took this measure after realizing the plight of the tenants. This redistribution was made after conquering new lands in the area of Yefat and Tarma Bar (Bairu, 1987).

Coming nearer in time, in the 18th century, there are indications of the existence of tenancy at least in the northern parts of Ethiopia. For instance, James Bruce cites the existence of tenancy in Tigray. He claimed that it was a common practice for the landlord to supply seed provided that he received half of the produce. However, he indicated that "He [the landlord] is a very indulgent master that does not take another quarter for the risk he has run; so that the quantity that comes to the share of the husbandman is not more than sufficient to afford sustenance for his wretched family." (Bruce, 1790, p. 124)

This description of tenancy in the northern part of Ethiopia was not a major feature of landholding and did not affect more than 25% of the rural population. Here, if tenancy occurred it was among the Muslims and artisans, who were excluded from rest holding, and the newly formed households with small holdings. Although they described the peasant social group as a whole, there was no doubt that the minority tenants were living in conditions even worse than what was described above (Cohen and Weintraub, 1975; Gebru 1991.; Pauswang, 1983). But the condition of tenancy in the north was instructive in view of the effect of land alienation that occurred in the southern regions following their conquest.

Thus, in the southern provinces, tenancy became a major phenomenon only after the conquest of the regions by the Shawan forces. The internal socio economic and social dynamism had not brought about the appearance of private property in land. It was after occupation that private land ownership developed in Hararge, with the concomitant rise in tenancy. Of course this does not mean that tenancy was not known before in Hararge.

Private property had already developed in the emirate of Harar long before its incorporation into the imperial state of Ethiopia and small scale landlord-tenancy relationship had already developed between Harari landlords and Oromoo tenants. In this tenancy- landlord relation, there were two types of tenancy arrangements: oyna and garbangereb (Yusuf, 1961). (the latter hirta in Afaan Oromoo).

According to Yusuf Ahmed and evidence from oral informants, oyna is the older system and regulated the shares of tenants and landowners on the basis of the division of the farm land that was cultivable. Apparently, oyna was similar with labor tenancy as the tenant was required to cultivate the land separately set aside for the landlord just like the hudad.

In fact, hudad, lands owned by landlords was a transformation from government land. It is claimed that the landlord reserved the best land as his hudad (Kudada in Hararge palriance) and often harvested teff for his home consumption. In some parts of Hararge like Qersa, hudad is called Ye eje erash,i.e something that remained in the hands of the landlord for his household consumption. Yä eje erash was cultivated so well and prepared for the cultivation of teff and other grains for household consumption of the landlord.

During the period under study, there were three broad forms of tenancy arrangements in Hararge. These were Share tenancy, Contract tenancy and Labor tenancy. In practice many contractual arrangements combined these in different ways at different times depending on available and relative value of access to land (for the tenant) and labor (for the landlord). From these forms share cropping tenancy is the most wide spread form of tenancy in Hararge. It is plausible to argue that this was so because, due to the precarious existence of tenants, they were not in a position to take the risk of a fixed payment contract either in cash or in kind. Sharecropping in Hararge is divided into erbo (division of the produce into $\frac{1}{4}$ between the landlord and the tenant); ekul or hirta (division of the produce on equal basis) and qurt (division of the produce on fixed amount agreed upon by the two parties (Draft Legislation on Landlord Tenancy Relations, 1963 E.C; Informant: Zegeye Asfaw).

While these were the commonest rental arrangements, variations in the sub-provinces on these rental arrangements depended on combinations of inputs, animals, and implements provided by the tenant. The contract agreements were more of personal nature and depended on the relative power of the two sides. No commonly applied rules were found for these arrangements and their applications were left at the discretion of the two parties (Draft Legislation on Landlord Tenancy Relations, 1963 E.C; Informants: Ayub Abdullahi, Abdusemed Idris, Zegeye Asfaw).

In evaluating the distribution of tenancy in the province, available evidences indicate that the distribution of tenancy differs from awraja to awraja. Accordingly, based on the 1968 sample survey report of the CSA, Chercher Awraja has the largest concentration of tenants with 89% of full-fledged tenants and 2% of tenants who have partly owned their own plots and partly rented from landlords. Adal Issa Awaraja and Gursum Awraja have 62% and 60 % full-fledged tenants respectively. Other awrajas like Garamulata and Obora have also a considerable percentage of full-fledged tenants (Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, 1969).

Incidentally; evidence from oral informants attest the prevalence of full-fledged tenancy in the rest of the provinces implying that landlord tenancy relation was the most pervasive form of rural production relation affecting peasant productivity (Informants: Ayub Abdulahi, Abdusemed Idris, Siraj Kodhele).

Although payment of the produce on the basis of the agreement between the two parties is normal there were other forms of unrecognized and hidden forms of exploitations in which tenants were exposed and became unbearable. Sundry labor demands, different kinds of payments in holidays, works on hudad etc. (Kebede, 1969; Bizuwork, 1992) made the living condition of tenants unbearable. The labor services given by the tenant and his family members for the landlord and his household were completely in contradiction with the tenancy bill of 1963. The bill in its article 15 sub articles 2 and 3 indicated that except for the agricultural rent agreed upon between the tenant and the landlord to be paid either in cash

or in kind, the landlord was not entitled to any services and indirect payments by way of gifts such as barca (Draft Legislation on Landlord Tenancy Relations, 1963 E.C.; Dessalegn,1970).Here it should be clearly stated that there is no relationship between barcha as a gift to landlords (either in cash or in kind like fattened sheep) and barcha as a chat ceremony. Currently, barcha is a chat chewing ceremony in which relatives and friends chew chat in group often in the afternoon.

The document by the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration stated above further indicates that, if the landlord was found violating this article, he was forced to pay back to the tenant two fold of what he had received. However, this was not observed by the landlord who exercised supreme power over the tenants and it was this form of exploitation that affected the livelihood of tenants .Because any default of the tenants in fulfilling these services would result in the eviction of tenants from the plot of land they were making a living. In fact no legal procedure was established to follow up the implementation of this act.

3. Conceptualizing Resistance, power and Orality

Tenants in general should be understood with in the social category of peasantry. The peasantry was the largest and in many ways the most significant class in Ethiopia. For centuries it has been the chief bearer of the country's economy and the main repository of its culture. Conversely, the peasantry was the class most exposed to multifaceted exploitation and excessive harassment by different regimes.

The situation of tenants was so sever especially in areas where the military feudal regime extended its tentacles through incorporation like in Hararge. Even so, however, the peasants did not suffer all the calamities meted out to them by the feudalists and their accomplices passively. Many times, they fought and resisted their enemies in ways they saw fit and expedient.

This often times resulted in conflicts between the subordinate and superordinate groups. Conflicts between the subordinate like peasants and superordinate groups of societies like landlords were commonly described and analyzed by scholars by giving emphasis to open and often violent political actions. Thus, in the historiography of the peasantry and other subordinate groups, some violent forms of political actions like riots, uprising, rebellions, and revolutionary movements have dominated standard political analysis rather than the less violent forms of resistance.

These less violent forms of political actions by the subordinate groups like the tenants can be unraveled through a careful historical investigation to grasp how certain social structures, state systems, cultural values and historical practices help shape political actions of a given society in time and space. One of the few contributions in this regard was made by James Scott who has studied Malaysian villages through an extensive fieldwork (Scott, 1985; 1986).

According to James Scott, much of the politics of subordinate groups falls into the category of what he termed as "Every day forms of peasant resistance" or "weapon of the weak." He argues that peasants engaged in these activities to challenge and lessen the exploitation and the flow of resources to the superordinate groups and their techniques should definitely be considered political. They constituted a form of collective action and any account which ignored them was often ignoring the most important means by which lower classes manifested their political interests (Scott, 1985; 1986).

These everyday forms of resistance were integral parts of the small arsenal of relatively powerless groups. They included actions like foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, pilfering, smuggling, squatting, arson, slander, sabotage, petitions, rallies, peaceful marches,

expressing grievances , anonymous threats, clandestine attack, mockery of power, insults and oral offences through proverbs, during collective works, ridiculing oppressors through songs etc.(Ibid).

These techniques were prosaic, ordinary means of class struggle in which open defiance was impossible or entailed fatal danger. When they were widely practiced by members of the subordinate class against landlords or the state, they might have cumulative effects for the interests of subordinate groups. These forms of resistance were devised to thwart appropriation of property imposed by claimants who have superior access to force and to public power, often the landlords and the state. Scott's analysis focused on the class nature of resistance, particularly on the encounters between poor peasants and landlords. His study asserted that the disadvantaged were conscious of their exploitation and even under the most oppressive conditions they resisted in various forms. This passive form of resistance as discussed by James Scott could be extended and given resonance as tenants are not passive spectators of their own destinies rather they were active agents having the power to shape their fate.

Here, the concept of power comes to the center. As discussed by Michel Foucault, 'power is everywhere', diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and 'regimes of truth' power is diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them, it is exercised rather than possessed. Foucault challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of 'episodic' or 'sovereign' acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. 'Power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure' (Foucault,1998).

In Hararge, I argue that everyday form of resistance was commonly applied by tenants against the landlords. Informants explained, even during normal times when it appeared that tenants and landlords were living smoothly, there was no time that tenants accepted their subordinate status and their economic exploitation, cultural peripheralization and political subjugation. They always had a latent claim on their land and took every opportunity to oppose the landlord and expressed their displeasure with the system in various ways and at various times. In most extreme cases, tenants employed aggressive methods against landlords. In fact in rural Hararge the most acute area of social tension was the tension between the landlord who rented the land and his tenants who had to remit almost half the value of the crop and free labor.

There were incidents as narrated by informants when tenants rose against the landlords and took violent measures. Informants in Garamulata discussed that some tenants uprooted the cultivated crops from the fields before they were ripe for harvest whilst some set fire on the houses of landlords and fled to distant places. Prominent locals in the study area, claimed that some tenants were very aggressive towards their landlords and took measures like destroying crops and taking refuge in the surrounding forest (Informants: Siraj Kodhele, Jemal Abdurahman and Mohammed Adem).

The nature and scale of implementing the various techniques of everyday resistance varied depending on different contingent factors. For instance, in areas where clan ties were strong they used every opportunity to resist the demands of the landlords. On the other hand when the number of settler communities was significant and clan ties were not so strong, the implementation of the techniques of weapons of the weak was not successful. On the whole, the majority of tenant disturbances remained traditional in nature, taking the form of complaints, petitions, pilfering, settling on government reserve lands and flight just before rent was due to be collected.

These everyday resistance forms can also be subsumed and expressed through oral literature. Of course there are a number of examples among African societies representing oral literature like love songs, narrative stories, proverbs, cradlesongs, eulogies and hymnes (poems of praise), epic verse, dirges (Jeilan, 2005). This is also true among the Hararge society where there are burgeoning fields of oral literature in relation to wars, social conflicts, funerary rites, symbolic expressions, everyday practical advice, sublime religious ideals, etc that need to be studied and reflected as the custodian of the peoples' philosophy and worldview. However, in this paper only aspects everyday forms of resistance expressed through oral offences like ridiculing power holders, insults of landlords in songs and proverbs are given attention.

Oral poetry has broader implications, implicitly touching every aspect of the economics, politics, institutional development, and human development of oral societies. Ruth Finnegan who has widely studied African oral tradition has examined the nature of oral literature in the African society and maintains that various forms of oral literature have their own objective among the societies they were practiced and perpetuated. One of the themes was topical and political songs (Finnegan, 2012). Finnegan argues that in societies where written culture is not well established, oral poetry takes the place of newspapers. Oral songs could serve as effective instruments through which society report and comment on current affairs, for political pressure, for propaganda, and to reflect and mold public opinion. She added that

... [Oral] poetry can also be used to pressurize those in authority or to comment on local politics. Songs of insult, challenge, or satirical comment also have a long history, and can function not only on a personal level but also as politically effective weapons (Fennegan, 2012: 266).

Oral history is inherently part and parcel of societies with no developed tradition of written culture which is also the case with some Ethiopian societies. Discussing the place of oral tradition in constructing African history, Bahru claims that "The value of African oral tradition for historical reconstruction attests to the contemporary relevance of orality," (Bahru, 2000 p. 34).

A somewhat similar understanding of oral society's resistance employing orality from a cultural perspective is indicated by Assefa Tefera when he studied Salale Oromoo oral poetry. He presented an alternative approach on how the Salale Oromoo cultural resistance against the mainstream culture worked and offered more hope for challenging the dominant social discourse in constructing a strong sense of social cohesiveness. His discussion focused on three oppositional cultures namely, guma (blood feud), wada (Covenant) and arara (Peace-making) which are all transmitted orally among the Oromoo (Asefa, 2014). Assefa's work on Gerera on Selale also depicts how power is exercised by the subordinate groups against the superordinate through oral songs which is political in content.

Similarly, among the Hararge Oromoo, different sorts of oral arts and songs like miryssa, shobdo, darashi, geersarsa etc are sung while practicing different agricultural activities like cultivating, weeding and harvesting. In these songs messages were deliberately transmitted either in prose or verse and indirectly told the landlords the tenants have their grievance. The tenants voiced their grievances against the system and openly expressed the fact that the subordinate too have power exercised through oral poetry. I will demonstrate that the Hararge peasants used these forms of oral arts to depict their sufferings in the hands of the landlords in an imaginative way.

Therefore, this work attempts to unravel the most common form of resisting the system through songs, proverbs, and folklore. These resistance forms have given power for the tenants since tenants have exercised them on authority in their own realm. These forms of resistance through oral poetry expressed

both in verse and prose forms were articulated during occasions such as community labor mobilization, the landlords' visit of cropped fields and when the tenant and landlords came in direct confrontation. The contents of these oral oppositions are diverse in nature ranging from political to gender; economic to social (Informants: Umar Haji Ahmed, Teha Abdella).

4. Forms of Everyday Resistance Expressed in Oral Poetry

The conquest and incorporation of Hararge after the battle of Chalanqo was regretted by the Oromoo. The aftermath was accompanied by the harsh treatment and cultural dislocation of the Oromoo. They expressed their grief in the following poem:

Afaan Oromoo

Adareen lolakaate, yoom Bishaan Bunaa geesse,

Amaaraan lolla jettee, Jajjabaa irratti wal geesse,

Warri Mudhiin rasaasaa, yoom falli dandeesse

Jara lamaan wal lole, awwaarti samii geesse,

*Fardi lamaan wal lole, kan gadii duraa dheesse
Jam'iin dura salaataa, jarri harreedhaan geesse*

Quxbaan dura azaanaa, jarri qeesiidhaan geesse

Ya rasuula Nabii dirmadhu, lubbuun qeensa nugeessee

Gloss

The Aderi [Harari] decided to fight and rushed to Bishan Buna [place] they got together at Jajaba [place] to discuss about the battle

The Amhara had firearms that could not be repulsed even by magic Two warriors [Menelik and Abdulahi] fought a bitter battle

Two horses fought and the *Amir's* fled first In the good old days Jami (the big mosque in Jagol) used to be a prayer house, now the newcomers filled it with donkeys

In the good old days we only hear call for prayers five times a day, now the priests and deacons took that role.

Oh! Allah, we need your divine intervention before we vanished

(Informants: Mohammed Adem, Umar Haji).

Similarly, the Oromoo have started resisting and expressing their hatred to the new comers through oral poetry right after the conquest. The following poem indicated the opposition against the newcomers:

Afaan Oromoo

Amaarranii, Amaarrani,

Ufiif gaangeerra teessanii,

Giiftii teessan fardarra gootanii,

Nurraa galaa Shawaan miraaza keessanii. leave us;

Gloss

you people, the Amhara
you yourself ride on your mule
as for your consorts on a horse back
your home [rest] is Shawa, leave Us

(Informant: Hassen Beker)

Afaan Oromoo

Amaarri Qunnee [place] hinbeekuu, Mucee santudaddabeenii,

Rabbiin jazaa hinballeessuu, Muceen yoggasuu dhaqqabeeni

(Informants: Hassen Beker, Umar Haji).

Gloss

The conquering Amhara forces did not know the terrain and the place [Qunne], where they later established their seat, had it not been for our treacherous man. Mucee, was responsible for guiding them. Divine intervention uncovered the truth thence, claiming Mucee's life.

Incidentally, there is a village called Muce named after Muchee and is still recognized after him.

After the conquest, the Shawan rule has established its tentacles in different parts of rural Hararge in a few decades and established landlord tenancy relations. As a result, peasants who lost their lands, could not escape tenancy. But in the meantime they expressed their grievance in different forms. Given the fact that resisting the exploitative system through conventional confrontation was a limited option, the tenants' important instrument was denial of their labour which was made effective by flight into remote areas from patrons' supervision (Informant: Mohammed Adem). Since Harar's agricultural zone was far from the international boundary the only feasible option for flight was retreat into the lowlands in Chercher, Hanchar, Gubaqoricha, Aniya and into the forests. But there too, the system was in operation as the following poem indicates.

Afaan Oromoo

*Sisoo feetu Karaabuma,
Naxxaa feetu Hancaarumaa,
Achiinis Amaaruma.*

Gloss

If You want *sisso* stay at Biyo karaba [place]
if you want to cultivate for free go to Hančar [land is abundant]
But, there too are the Amhara

(Informants: Aliyi Mume, Salih Adem, Taha Abdella).

A similar sort of denial of labour by tenants through flight to remote areas was also expressed as an option but that was also compounded by lots of problems as the following poem succinctly indicates:

Afaan Oromoo

*Biyya taa'uuf wakiillan hammaatee,
Anniyyaa ce'uufis buseetu hammaatee,
Biyya Hancaari immoo karaatu fagaate,
Kan hiyyeessaa garuu rakkinuma taatee.*

Gloss

to live in my village the agent of the landlord is wicked
To cross to Anniyya valley malaria is hostile
To go to hanchar , it is too far
for the poor it became too problematic

(Informants: Jemal Abdurahman, Hamza Ali).

While the landlords were demanding the fruits of their tenants through sharecropping and free labour services in various forms, they did not contribute anything in production processes. Sometimes landlords would come to supervise their *hudad* when tenants were working through *guza* (Informant: Jemal Abdurahman).

Even then the landlords could only take rest under the shed of trees and supervise their tenants. Upon observing the landlords luxury and failure to take part in agricultural activities. Realizing the landlord was not conversant with Afaan Oromoo, tenants around Chiro have sung the following during *guza*.

Afaan Oromoo**Gloss***Kaasa kee adii laalii, kiyya gurraacha ilaali*You are drinking *hujja* [traditional tea] mixed with milk while mine is without milk*Ufiif gaaddisa teessaa, aduu keessa nalaali*

You are sitting under the shed of a tree while I am working being exposed to the heat of the sun

Addunyaan numadhuntii, aakiraa boruu ilaali.

Earthly life is short lived, think of the hereafter where we belong equally

(Informant: Mustefa Jemal).

Landlord exploitation demanded not only the labor of the tenant himself .it was indicated that the children of tenants were also expected to execute some activities as demanded by the landlord such as keeping cattle, collecting firewood etc. Because of this some believe that the tenant's child was benefiting not his family rather the landlord. The following poem aptly indicates how tenants deeply lamented their children's live and future.

Afaan Oromoo**Gloss***Okkolaan farda bitee, adii caamarra taa'aa, Ilmi tokkoof dhalatee, tokko caayaa itti taa'a*

The lame [landlord] bought and rides a white horse While a son born to the tenant was laboring for For the land

(Informant: Abdosh Mussa).

There were also cases whereby the landlord did not take part in any production process like in preparation of fields, cultivation; weeding and harvesting .But he supervises the field while tenants were laboring on his field. To express their grievances tenants played by using the following poem.

Afaan Oromoo**Gloss***Garaadan tarree galee kan hadaa tokko hinfiuinee*

The Garada [local landlord] lined up, and

instructing tenants while not picking a single weed.

Alla Nabii Rasuul dirimmadhuu odoo miskiinni hindunee

Alla Nabii Rasuul [May Allah, the Almighty Lord] bring your mercy before the poor die in the hands of the landlord.

(Source: Ahmed Mumed)

Similarly, labor exploitation was common practice on the wives of tenants especially whenever the landlord has events to celebrate like Chrestdom, celebration of the saints' date etc. During these times the wives of the landlords were expected to contribute their own share. Women labor was also conscripted by landlords in cleaning the kraals of animals. However, there were occasions when the appetite of the landlord for the unpaid labor was insatiable and broke the established customs in division of labor. As a result a landlord called Dessalegn in Doba was said to have forced his tenant to clean the animal dung in the kraal, which was customarily the preserve of women. The following couplet by a witness to the event as narrated by informants in Doba, near Hirna illustrates the landlord breaking this tradition.

Afaan Oromoo**Gloss***Akka jeedala roobaa sassakan sibarsiisaa, Dasseen, dhiira qisaasa godhee faltii harsiisa*

Let me coach you how a jackal caught by rain runs See how Dassalagn [landlord] undermined the tenant and made him clean the kraal

(Informant: Ahmed Mumed)

Tenants believed that the wealth of the landlord was accumulated by exploiting the tenants' labor and produce. But for all these to happen land expropriation was the starting point. To indicate his wealth was not purely his genius but through some corrupt and illegal exploitation of their resources tenants sang the following.

Afaan Oromoo**Gloss**

*Abbaa lafaa yaa originaalee,
Lafa gurguree bite bolaalee.*

The landlord who occupied land at the earliest stage
He sold our land and bought clothes

(Informant: Taye Bedhane)

On the eve of the revolution, when tenants were sensing a wind of change in the system, they started to express their hope that they will be liberated from the onerous demands of the landlords in the near future. This was expressed in the following poem

Afaan Oromoo**Gloss**

*Abbaa lafaa yaa girgirteessaa,
Amma rabbiin walnuqixxeessaa*

you the landlord who make [us] trembling
God will soon make us all equal

(Informants: Taye Bedhane, Ahmed Mumed)

With the progress of time tenants were becoming weary of the exploitation and were expecting something miracle would happen that can free them from the exploitation of the landlords. Hence they expressed their feeling with the following song:

Afaan Oromoo**Gloss**

*Abbaa lafaa yaa bofa duuluu
Singabbaruu kan rabbi jedhe hin ooluu*

Oh! You, the landlord, the invading snake.
I would no more pay *irbo* and *sisso* for whatever God
says will happen

(Source: Taye Bedhane)

With the 1974 revolution and its attendant land reform proclamation, tenants in Hararge felt that their expectation for divine intervention was realized as the decree made them free from the shackles of the landlord's exploitation. They felt the landlords were powerless and started to mock at the landlords recalling their wrong doings. They reflected the same through the following verse.

Afaan Oromoo**Gloss**

*Abbaan lafaa kangodhe gaabbee,
Irra bu'ee harkise gaangee.*

The landlord regretted by his own misdeeds
He dismounted from his mule to walk on foot

(Informant : Ahmed Mumed).

Sometimes, the emperor himself became the subject of ridicule and insult by tenants. In their oral poetry they indicated that it was the Student movement that ultimately liberated them from landlord exploitation. This was expressed in Hararge with the following poem.

Afaan Oromoo*Haylasillaasee gogorrii**Godaansa mislanae baqarrii**Nu nyaatee nu fixe barrii**Qalaadaafi erboo safarrii**Gibiraafi hidhaan nu haree**Way Haylee kun nurra turee**Kan Hayleen shumannaa maree**Jajjabaa gubbaa dongoree**Tamaarin qarreerraa nu haree***Gloss**

Hailesilase, the shrewd one

we have passed through hardship under the governorship of
The *Mislanae**Oh!* we have experienced agonies of exploitation by the regimeWorking on the *qalada* land for the landlord and paying *irboo*

Being harassed by taxes and imprisonment

Oh! King Hailesillase, this kind of misery stayed upon us

The one, king Haylesillase appointed on Us

He [the landlord] tills on top of Jajaba [fertile land, a
place around Falana gate]It was students who saved us from being
Vanished.

(Source :Mohammed Nur Adem,)

Lastly, informants expressed their joy to the proclamation by the *Dergue* that made them owners of the land in the following way:

Afaan Oromoo*Darguu qoobiin saleenii,**Abbaa lafaa nyaate sareeni**Darguu yaa daragamaa**Lolan malee lafti hinargamaa?***Gloss**You *dargu* [a person on the spot] with hat crow plate

you made the landlord scoffed by dogs

You *Dargu* who clutched the landlord

How can one secure access to land without revolt?

(Informants: Ahmed Mumed, Abdosh Musa)

Similarly, tenants started to insult the children of landlords upon the proclamation of the land tenure. Here is one example of offences against the daughters of the landlords

Afan Oromoo*Yaa intala baalabbaataa,**Fuulli kee daaraa fakkaata***Gloss**

you daughter of the landlord,

your face became pale and white like ash

(Informants: Taha Abdella).

5. Conclusion

Among the Hararge peasants, oral traditions in the form of *miriyissa*, *Shobdo*, *darashi* and other forms of songs have served as resistance songs against the exploitative feudal system of the Imperial state. By replicating the past, these oral traditions were in an endless flux. They were the mediums through which the peasantry expressed their self-conscious commentary on the patterns of their life and relationship with the landlords. Everyday forms of resistance as waged by peasants are dynamic. It changes over time with the coming of new events based on the changing local power relation. Since power is relational and does not have center, the tenants have expressed their own grievances and offences in a way they found it realistic. In Hararge one way of this resistance is expressed through oral poetry. The tenants expressed

their opposition against landlords for the exploitation of their products, exploitation of their labor along with the family labor and unequal relations in determining their landlord tenant relations. They expressed these in the form of verses and prose. Sometimes especially towards the end of the old regime oral resistance became outspoken and openly ridiculed the landlords and their associates. When the land reform was proclaimed the resistance became violent and turned into an outward confrontation resulting in destruction of property, lootings of agricultural products from farm fields and deaths of scores of peoples from both sides.

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List of Informants

1. No	2. Name of the informants	3. Age	4. Place & date of interview	5. Remarks
6. 1	7. Abdosh Musa	8. 71	9. Hirna 10. March 11,12/2014	11. Personal servant of Fatwrari Taklahawariyat. He had been with his master until the death of the later in DireDawa. He knows a lot about Fitawrari Taklahawariyat's life.
12. 2	13. Abdulatif Ahmed	14. 61	15. Haramaya 16. June 2/2014	17. A son of damina in Haramaya. He went to school at his early age and got the opportunity of modern education. He specialized in plant science and is working as an instructor in Haramaya University. He knows the genealogy of Afran Qällo. He also narrates land tenure dynamics in Härärgé in general, the cultural practices, community labor mobilization and other details.
18. 3	19. Abduseme d Idris	20. 69	21. Harar 22. November, 24,25/2013	23. He is considered as oral historian among the Harari. He knows details of Harari land tenure,culture,and history.
24. 4	25. Ahmed Mumed	26. 63	27. Hirna 28. March 3,4/2014	29. He used to be former tenant under a landlord called Dassalagn. He narrated how the landlord treated his tenants .The relation between tenants and landlords is described in detail. He also remembers the different poems, songs, satire etc tenants sung which were oppositional in content and described their grievances against the system.
30. 5	31. Aliyi Mume	32. 59	33. Chiro 34. June 6,7/2014	35. He is knowledgeable on the genealogy of the Ittu Oromo and their relation with other Eastern Oromo groups. His knowledge on folklores, songs and satires poems recited by tenants and other members of communities is also insightful.
36. 6	37. Ayub Abdullahi	38. 67	39. Harar 40. December 2/2013	41. Knowledgeable on Harari agriculture, land tenure and culture. He had served as an agricultural expert in Galamso Awraja during the Darg regime.
42. 7	43. Hamza Ali	44. 66	45. Hirna 46. August 16,17/2014	47. He had been a clerk as self-employee. His major task was writing petitions, litigations, appeal letters and other related letters for tenants and other groups of people who have court cases. Through his interaction with peasants in general he came to realize the overall feature of tenants. When land reform was proclaimed and when tenants militancy targeted against landlords, he fraternized with the cause of tenants and participated in the

				confrontation against landlords and graphically describes the scale of the confrontation. He also mentions the names of persons who died, wounded, and the types of properties robbed from landlords. He describes the meaning of sisso as purely a labor requirement not a crop sharing arrangement.
48. 8	49. Hassen Beker	50. 56	51. Dadar 52. April 13,14/2014	53. He is now a tailor but was a son of a tenant who worked on his own family land. He described the social inequality in terms of education and other opportunities. He was a teenager when the land reform was proclaimed he remembers the general turmoil ensued in the area.
54. 9	55. Jemal Abdurahman	56. 64	57. Chiro 58. June 20/2014	59. Former tenant when he lost his land to commercial farmers around Asabot, he learnt driving a tractor and was employed on the commercial farm owned by Lagasa Tsadiqu. He closely knows and remembers the processes of eviction in Asabot area when commercial farming expanded. He is also knowledgeable in oral literature and folktales that tell the condition of tenants in Chercher. He describes the meaning of sisso as purely a labor requirement not a crop sharing arrangement.
60. 10	61. Mohammed Adem	62. 84	63. Galamso 64. May 27/2014	65. He is considered as an oral historian among the community and indeed is knowledgeable on the history of the Ittu Oromo, His narration on the communal land ownership and the transformation attended by the conquest is valuable. He discusses how landlord tenancy relation evolved in Hararge in general and the general feature of the relationship. He also remembers the names of different landlords in Galamso and the differing treatments these landlords implemented on their respective tenants.
66. 11	67. Mustefa Jemal	68. 63	69. Suqul, Hamaresa 70. November 21/2014	71. He is a well informed oral historian. His narration on the genealogy of Eastern Oromo in general is attractive.
72. 12	73. Salih Adem	74. 89	75. Hirna 76. August 6/2014	77. He was a personal servant of Fitawrari Taklahawariyat. His job was to tend animals and milk them twice a day. He narrates the personality of his master. Fitawrari was described as generous, carrying and greatly admires hardworking men and women. He thought them basic skills in life ,childcare, modern agricultural practices , environmental protection etc.

78. 1 3	79. Siraj Kodhele	80. 65	81. Gerawa 82. July 8,9/2014	83. Knowledgeable and well informed oral historian among the Abadho sub clan of the Alla. He used to be a teacher which helped him collect a considerable amount of oral traditions among the Afran Qallo in Garamulata. He is also an eye – witness for some of the events related with land eviction, tenancy and mal-administration of the government. He describes the meaning of sisso as purely a labor requirement not a crop sharing arrangement.
84. 1 4	85. Taye Bedhane	86. 84	87. Hirna March 8/2014	88. He went to Hirna from Shawa as a migrant daily laborer. His comparison of tenants under Fitawrari Taklahawariyat and other landlords is found to be in line with the discussion of other informants who narrated their experiences working uner their respective landlords. He describes the meaning of sisso as purely a labor requirement not a crop sharing arrangement. He also remembers the names of landlords in Hirna, Masala, Biyo Karaba and Doba.
89. 1 5	90. Teha Abdella	91. 61	92. Chiro 93. June 16/2014	94. Knowledgeable on the traditions of the settlement of the Ittu Oromo. He had collected lots of the folklores, songs and oppositional oral literature of Eastern Oromo. He closely knows the landlord tenancy relations, the nature of exploitation, the cultural subjugation of tenants by the ruling elites and rural protest movements.
95. 1 6	96. Umar Haji Ahmed	97. 98. 64	99. Chiro 100. June 12, August 7/2014	101. The son of Dajazmach Ahmed Ali Ṭese, who used to be a long time vice governor of Chercher Awraja and a landlord with a considerable amount of land in different parts of Chercher . He narrates in detail the experience and the challenges his father faced while serving the government.
102. 1 7	103. Zegeye Asfaw	104. 6 6	105. Addis Ababa 106. January 27/2014	107. A former vice-minister of Land Reform and administration and during the early years of the revolution he served as a Minister of the same ministerial office. He shared me a lot of his experiences on the political struggle in the parliament during the discussion of the draft legislation of landlord-tenancy relation. According to him the government, especially the upper circle, was full of reactionary forces that thwarted the draft legislation. Now he established an NGO called Hunde Grassroots Initiative working on land related issues in Oromia regional state