



Full Length Research Paper

**The Role of Oromoo Nation on Aduwa Victory: A Discourse Analysis of Artist
Hachalu Hundessa's Song**

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Abstract

Even if Adowa victory was a victory of a Black Africans force over a White Europeans army globally, there are disparate views regarding its interpretation in general and the contribution of Oromoo people in particular. Paradoxically, the roles of Oromoo ethnic group in Adowa victory were not recognized in the past. Due to this, Adowa victory has contradiction meanings as it has different connotation for different peoples. Based on this, this study had two fold objectives. It narrated the role of Oromoo ethnic group in Adowa victory based on artist Hachalu Hundessa's song. It also examined how Adowa victory is interpreted from Oromoo perspective. The study used mainly secondary data source and purposeful interview based on the principle of saturation to determine sample size. After critically examined how Adowa is interpreted from Oromoo perspective, this study showed that there is a significant changes across time, particularly, between Pre-Hachalu song (pre-2018) and Post Hachalu song on 123rd Adowa victory celebration. The study as well revealed that though the Oromoo nation played central role for the victory to be achieved, there is failure in giving realistic recognition and this leads to echoing uncertain thoughts intentionally for one's own personal purposes, particularly by ethno-political elites.

Keywords: *Adowa Victory, Hachaluu Hundessa's Song, Oromoo Nation, Ethiopia, Colonialism*

1. Introduction

As different researches^a and legends from Oromoo and others reveal, the Oromoo nation is indigenous to Africa who are big in population size occupying a large expanse and sanctified with enormous natural resources. Oromia, on the other hand, is the land of Oromoo located in the horn of Africa occupying large area. The year 1896 was considered by historians^b 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’^c for the reason that Italy was defeated by Ethiopia at the battle of Aduwa. As far as Aduwa^d is concerned, it is March 2nd holiday on which Ethiopians both abroad and internal commemorates Ethiopia's victory over Italy in 1896, at a place known as 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 Aduwa victory is historical and need to be studied by historians, the focus of this paper would be on the political significance, interpretation and implication of Aduwa victory in today's Ethiopian context. There is common understanding that it is an emblem and sign of unification in Ethiopian history. However, the dilemma here is that whose history has relation with this victory. It is true that today's Ethiopia is made through the process of expansion and nation building project applied by the then emperor. The conquered peoples had paid high price for Ethiopia preserving its independence. But, existing literature^e suggests that all Ethiopian, nations, nationalities and peoples didn't get equal recognition even if they had their own contributions and roles in Aduwa victory.

Mostly, even if marginalized groups played a pivotal role in the battle of Aduwa, historians have hid the contributions of historically marginalized groups including the Oromoos.^f Concerning this, some argues^g that the contribution of non-Abyssinian ethnic groups on Aduwa victory is minimized and this brought absence of clear understanding on the issue. It is obvious that Ethiopia is a mosaic state and due to this when we talk about Ethiopian history, literally it is the history of many nation, nationalities and peoples and the history of some is not necessarily the history of others. However, as far as Aduwa victory is concerned, all Ethiopians had contributed their own roles in reality but historians fail to give

^a Dirribi Damisie. 2011. Oromo wisdom in Black Civilization. Finfinnee: Finfinnee Printing and Publishing Share Company Press, P.321

^b Richard Pankhurst (1990). ‘Social history of Ethiopia,’ Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University Press, P.84

^c Pearce Jeff. 2017. Prevail: The Inspiring Story of Ethiopia's Victory over Mussolini's Invasion, 1935-1941. Skyhorse Publishing, P.169

^d Most existing literature uses ‘Adawa’ alphabets where as some use ‘Adowa’. As far as this study is concerned, both are used to refer the same meaning.

^e Mohammed Hassen. 2000. A Short History of Oromo Colonial Experience: Part Two, Colonial Consolidation and Resistance 1935-2000. The Journal of Oromo Studies, Vol.7, No. 1.

^f Ibid

^g Richard Pankhurst. 1990. Social history of Ethiopia. Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University Press. P.329-331

equal recognitions.^h This brought confusion and debates which varies from place to place and from time to time.

As mentioned earlier, academic works that critically examine how Aduwa is used or abused in political debates and exchanges from different ethnic group's elite perspective is rare. In addition to this, there are limited scholars and historians as well as Oromoo narrative on Aduwa (maybe changing across peoples and also time (pre-2018 and post-2018). This and other related factors necessitated to undertake this study on Oromoo nation, one of the largest ethnic groups in Ethiopia. It would focus on discourse analysis of Hachalu Hundessa's song by giving attention on the roles that Oromoo peoples played on Aduwa victory.

Methodologically, this study is based on qualitative method. Back up by secondary sources, it also depended on data gathered from primary source which is obtained through the use of structured interview on phone. It is drawn by purposeful (non-probability) sampling technique. As far as sample size is concerned, the interviewees were selected to ensure variety of understanding on the history of Oromoo roles, but not statistical representation, as the aim of this study is discourse analysis of Hachalu Hundessa's song on specific concern. It is not to measure opinions on the issue under discussion. Before, starting the actual data collection, I had already defined peoples that I wanted to obtain information from. In doing so, the interviews include discussions with 3 peoples, each lasting a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 20 minutes. One informant name kept confidential due to the non-willingness of the respondent. Finally, similar values and opinions are systematically grouped under one category for better understandings and analysis.

2. Conceptual Sketch: The Nexus between Adowa and Oromoo Nation?

Even though Adwa victory is honored as a symbol of triumph in Ethiopia, there is no clear agreement on its implication for the marginalized ethnic groups in history. Due to this, it remains an important point of political and ideological debate between various ethno-nationalist groups. Some arguesⁱ that it is meaningful historic victory that defined Ethiopia to international community on the global stage where as others argues^j that it is unfortunate military achievement that helped Menelik II emperor to expand his empire southward.

According to the latter point, Adowa victory was an opportunity for the then emperor and his administration since it allowed the emperor to consolidate its empire through reducing the ability of ethnic groups to resist. This and other related factors have contributed in making Adowa victory to be considered different at different time for different peoples.

^hGemechu Megersa. 2005. The Oromo World-View. Journal of Oromo Studies, Volume 12, Number 2.

ⁱ Richard Pankhurst 'Social history of Ethiopia,' Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University Press, 1990. P. 176

^jPaulos Milkias; Battle of Adwa: The Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism; Algora Publishing, 2010. P.284-89

In other words, the battle of Adowa is an event that is impressed into the realization of important portion of the Ethiopian nation, nationalities and peoples, but it does not have similar meaning for all.^k Due to this, there are different interpretations based on different political and ideological considerations. Particularly, some ethno-elites aim to control the meaning of Adowa based on their ideological position and as a result there is no single interpretation on which one can agree. From this, we can argue that there is no doubt that one of the projects which Ethiopia failed to use for building national unity is Adowa victory.^l It is misused and misinterpreted from different people's perspectives. Some consider that it is a victory of Abyssinians over White^m where as others consider that the contribution of other ethnic groups is not less than that of Abyssinians. The differences between these interpretations are more noticeable as well as impactful today.ⁿ

As far as Oromoo nation is concerned, existing literature^o shows that there is no common understanding due to reasons discussed so far. In view of that, some informants who were selected for this study affirmed that the contribution of Oromoo ethnic group in Adowa victory is not acknowledged in the past. One informant on this issue affirmed that before Hachalu's song, Adowa victory is considered as it has nothing relation with Oromoo ethnic group. He expressed his view as follows:

I was one of those who were watching the live transmission that was from Meskel square concerning 123rd Adowa victory celebration, May 2, 2018. On the stage, Hachalu started to mention some Oromoo names who were involved in Adowa war. It is after that day I started to consider Oromoo nation has contributed a lot in Adowa victory. Before that, even I don't like to hear about the name of Adowa victory itself.^p

Apart from this, other respondent^q stated that Adowa victory became successful, because Oromoo nation from each corner became united. The dilemma is that however historians as well as some ethnic group's elites were/are not interested to converse this reality.^r From these points, it is possible to conclude that Adowa victory is a history that is misinterpreted in different contexts. However, the majority of the Oromoo have reason to feel that Adowa has negative connotation for the reason that Oromoo ethnic group was politically

^k Bahru Zewude. (2001). A history of modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991: Addis Ababa University Press, Page 241.

^l Interview made with one confidential informant selected from academic group for the purpose of this study, September 3, 2020.

^m Mesfin Woldemariam 2005. 'Mekshef Ende-Ethiopia Tarik'/መክሻፍ እንደኢትዮጵያ ታሪክ. Selam Printing Press. P.47. It is Amharic book which literally means missing the mark of Ethiopian history.

ⁿ Interview, September 3, 2020

^o Bahru Zewude. (2001). A history of modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991: Addis Ababa University Press, Page 263-66.

^p Interview; Gemechu Belay; September 5, 2020; Ambo, Ethiopia

^q Telephone conversation with Dr. Gemechu Megerssa, an Oromoo anthropologist and author; August, 2020

^r Ibid

marginalized in Ethiopia, particularly, at the closing years of 19th century. It is evident that due to the then emperor did injustice to Oromoo nation, some Oromoo encounter psychological unhappiness as far as Adowa victory is concerned. This leads young generation of Oromoo ethnic group to misunderstand and mistreat Adowa victory. Following this section, this paper would focus on the contribution of Oromoo in Adowa victory by giving focus mainly on artist Hachalu Hundessa's song.

3. Oromoo Nation and Adowa Victory: Evidence from Hachalu's Song

To answer the contending views regarding Oromoo contribution in Adowa victory, it is important to mitigate what non-Oromoo so called historians and scholars have attempted to create confusion. Even if there is clear agreement among Oromoo themselves as far as the contribution of Oromoo in Adowa victory is concerned, it is hardly possible to find its common implication and interpretation for Oromoo as a nation. Some informants^s who were selected for this study affirm that in the past, the Oromoo contribution to Adowa victory was not recognized paradoxically but brought into light after the song of Hachalu Hundessa.

There are historians^t who deliberately minimize and sometimes even hide the active roles that Oromoo heroes played in Adowa victory. And these historians try to argue as Adowa victory belongs to Abyssinians only.^u Basically, from the beginning like other Ethiopian nations and nationalities, the contribution of Oromoo nation in Adowa victory is high.^v Practically, the Oromoo horsemen played critical role in defeating Italian force at Adowa.

Existing literature^w reveals that in order to appreciate the courage of Oromoo, it would be sufficient to analyze their role at the battle of Adowa. When Italy invaded Ethiopia, it was the force that was led by Gebeyehu Gurmu, an Oromoo military leader, which contributed much to defeat Italians. Concerning this, in his song, Hachalu stated as follows;

*Kara deemtuun ni wacci, waa'ee gootaa haasofna, waa'ee Gabayyoo haasofna,
waa'ee Gabayyoo Guurmuu haasofna.*

Which means we talk about hero, we talk about Gebeyehu, We talk about Gebeyehu Gurmu, the lion of Adowa. In addition to this, in order to explain the role of Gebeyehu Gurmu in leading the Adowa victory, there is Amharic poem which reads:

^s Purposeful interview with confidential respondent; September, 2020

^t For instance, Ethiopian historian Bahiru Zewude! For more, see Bahiru Zewude (2002). *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia; the Reformist intellectuals of Early 20th century Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa university press, P. 123-138

^u Many of the Ethiopian generals in Adawa were in fact Oromos: including Fitawurari Gebeyehu Gurmu who led the Raya Oromo forces, Dejzmach Balcha Safo, Ras Gugsa Welle of Yeju Oromo who led the Gondar troops, and Ras Mohammed Ali who led the Wollo Oromo horsemen into Adwa.

^v Purposeful Interview on phone with Gemechu Megerssa (PhD), August 12,2020; 8:11

^w Mohammed Hassen. 2009. *Oromo nationalism and the continuous multi-faceted attack on the Oromo cultural, civic and political organization*. Report from Oromo workshop and its after-effects 26- 39, Chr. Michelsen Institute.

Yadiwaa sillaseen talati arakesewu

Gebeyu be mote Gibana Kadisewu

This means ‘The enemy desanctified the Trinity Church of Adowa and please Gebeyehu go in and sanctified it’.^x Gebeyehu Gurmu was one of Oromoo generals who actively and fiercely participated in the Adowa war. Apart from this, Hachalu affirmed that history remembers not only Oromoo generals and peoples but also Oromoo horses which read:

*Nuyi mitii farda keenya ni beeku bareechanii gaafa lola Aduwaa
gaafa Maqalee sanii, gaafa Maqalee sanii, gaafa Maqalee sanii.*

The translation of this song is that not only peoples who participated in the war are well known but also horses participated in the battle of Adowa, the cavalry of that battle day, the horses of the war of Adowa. Here, in his song artist Hachalu Hundessa tried to describe that not only Oromoo peoples participated in Adowa are well known but also Oromoo horses were famous.^y

As Wendy pertinently pointed out that the battle of Adowa might not have been won without the contributions of Oromoo and southern peoples.^z Concerning this, in his song Artist Hachalu make it known the active roles Oromoo heroes and heroines played in Adowa victory. He 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 Adowa victory, it would be impossible to forget that they are Oromos who fiercely fought the force of Italy. Obviously, in his song Hachalu Hundessa calls the name of these Oromoo generals and war leaders who played the lion’s share role on Adowa victory.

As historian Raymond Jonas points out, the facade of Oromoo horsemen at the Battle of Adowa had a conspicuously hopeless outcome on the Italian soldiers.^{aa} The Oromoo peoples participated in the war with such grim efficiency that they speed up the discouragement of the collapse of Italian army. On the other hand, some argues that Oromoo people had actively participated on the Battle of Adowa even if they fought not to defend the state but

^x Ibid

^y He expressed this by his song on 123rd Adowa victory celebration held at Addis Ababa, Meskel square. In his song Hachalu Hundessa stated that it is possible to talk about existing evidence known as Adawa Bridge, a place found in Finfine/Addis Ababa where Oromo came together and discussed strategic operation and plan on how to fearlessly fight Italians moving to Adawa.

^z James, W. “Preface” in Donham, D. & James, W. (eds.), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. xiv as cited in Mekuria Bulcha “Adowa and Abyssinian participation in the scramble for Africa: Has that relevance to the ongoing Oromo protests?”

^{aa} See Raymond Jonas. 2011. *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire*, University of Washington; Belknap Press. Pp.146

the emperor, Menelik-II.^{bb} Mostly, perhaps, the association of Adowa with Menelik II by historians is the single most important reason behind Oromos' hesitant towards the historical event of Adowa victory.

As pointed out above, a couple of points could be raised to conclude this section. Some historians have tried to minimize the significance of Oromoo nation in Adowa victory^{cc} by hiding the enormous participation of Oromoo generals and Oromoo horsemen's. It is this reality that a hero^{dd} Oromoo artist, Hachalu Hundessa used his song to bring this hidden truth to international community.^{ee} And Adowa victory is misused and due to this there are different interpretations as well as connotations. However, it became possible due to participation of Oromoo and other southern ethnic groups.

4. Conclusion

In remembering the contribution which the Oromoo had made in the victory of Adowa war cannot be hesitated and it has nothing relationship with past injustice done to the Oromoo as a nation by the then emperors. In this study, we have seen that different groups of people give different interpretations to Adowa victory which is due to political and ideological perspectives of elites and historians. As far as Oromoo's contribution to the victory of Adowa is considered, Oromoo artist as well as activist Hachalu Hundessa has narrated in his song that they were part and parcel of the war, particularly Oromoo horsemen and Oromoo generals. In addition to this, the study showed that the contribution of Oromoo nation in Adowa victory is not less than that of other Ethiopian nations, nationalities and peoples. It is possible to conclude that even if there is different interpretations of this victory, it is wise to acknowledge and recognize that the Oromoo nation played a central role for the victory to be achieved as also narrated by artist Hachalu.

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^{bb}, p. xiv in Mekuria Bulcha "Adowa and Abyssinian participation in the scramble for Africa: Has that relevance to the ongoing Oromo protests?" as cited in James, W. "Preface" in Donham, D. & James, W. (eds.), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986

^{cc} Some argues that Oromo has participated in the war but they didn't consider themselves as Oromo rather than Abyssinians. In this regard, a prominent historian Bahru zewude states that Oromo peoples living in northern Ethiopian provinces fought Italy as Abyssinians, since Oromos were major players inside the Abyssinian Solomon dynasty for centuries before. Bahru Zewde. 2001. *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991*, Ohio University Press. Pp213-218

^{dd} In this study, the word hero is used just to express the significance of Artist Hachalu Hundessa for Oromo nation by being a symbol of hope, unity and strength using his song.

^{ee} Hachalu Hundessa at Meskel Square Addis Ababa on Adwa victory celebration which is found through the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiJw989tBTM>

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1. List of Informants

- A. Telephone interview with Dr. Gemechu Megerssa. August 2020, Washington DC, USA
- B. Interview with Gemechu Belay. September 5, 2020, Ambo, Ethiopia.
- C. Anonymous respondent (Academic group), September 2020.