

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

THE THEMATIC FUNCTION OF ORAL LITERATURE IN BIRHANE
ACHAME'S WODI WA-ERO

BY
FIKADU GEBREGZIABHER REDDA

JUNE 2010
ADDIS ABABA

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF REQUIRMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN LITERATURE

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APPROVED BY EXAMINATION BOARD:

ADVISOR

SIGNATURE

EXAMINER

Acknowledgements

First and foremost my acknowledgement goes to the Almighty God that helped me in all my ways and in all the process of my activities.

I owe my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Berhanu Mathews for his dedicated professional comments and assistance from the beginning to the end of the study.

My endless gratitude goes to my mother Amete Gidey who remembers me in her daily prayer and my wife Be-emnet Mesfin for her encouragement and taking care of my beloved children, Hanna, Nardos and Sirak, during my stay in Addis Ababa.

I am grateful to Daniel Teklu, Tesfay Mesele, Dr. Yideg Alemayoh, Waltanigus Mekonen and Tewolde-berhan Mezegebe for their sincere cooperation in sharing their private materials. I also want to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to Birhane Achame the author of the Tigrigna novel under discussion for his unreserved help in providing some information about the novel.

Last but not least, I would like to appreciate to my sister, Lemlem Hagos, together with her family and my intimate friend, Abriha Zeru, for their continuous moral and material assistance throughout the years of my study.

Abstract

This research aims at examining the role of incorporated oral literature in Tigrigna historical novel entitled Wodi Wa-ero. The study tries to identify the importance of the employed forms of oral literature to the theme of the historical novel. The study has five chapters. The first chapter gives introductory statements about oral literature and its limited studies. In this chapter it has been tried to reveal the magnitude of the problem, the purpose, the significance and the method of the study.

In the second chapter, an attempt has been made to give a theoretical review and previous studies have been assessed. The concept of oral literature, the forms, the social significance, and oral literature and African literary works are the main points discussed in this part. As the historical novel dates back to the northern Ethiopian colonial era, the historical condition of the time is briefed in chapter three.

Analysis of various forms of oral literature employed in the novel is made in chapter four. In here, adequate genres of oral literature that are used in the novel like naming, proverbs, historic legends, tales and oral poems are taken and endeavors have been made to analyze and inquire the relevance of their presence in relation to the dominant themes of the novel. Focusing on transferring the intended idea, the selected forms of oral literature are translated into English and the contexts the oral literature used have been considered in analyzing them. Thus, in the last chapter, the researcher has arrived at the conclusion that the various forms of oral literature are not put for their own sake but the author has deliberately employed them to amplify the issues in the novel and as the result the themes are concretized and enlarged.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The saying, 'In Africa if an old man dies, it is like a whole library is burnt' has direct relation with African dependency on oral transmission of history, culture, value and the like. Concerning this Melakneh (1999:11) says "Oral literature is used as means of preserving, traditional wisdom, recording history, social harmonization and opening of wits for ages as it flourishes in pre literate societies." In the quoted idea, Melakneh stated the use of oral literature and the sort of communities that use oral literature using the expression preliterate societies to denote for societies who did not use writing and reading to record and tell their traditions.

Strengthening the above idea, Fekade (1984) has discussed in Journal of Ethiopian Languages and Literature "... specially African, Latin American and Asian have rich unwritten verbal arts reflecting their past history, way of life, culture and values of their society ..." in here, both scholars stated similar idea about the function and general setting in which oral literature is used.

In addition to preserving oral history, people use stories, proverbs, tales, jokes, etc while working, in communal meetings, in public speech and in other places as well to convey their message colorfully so that it would be clear and understandable. People in real world of course use oral literature in their day to day lives and this assists to understand the people. And researchers especially graduating students have conducted research for their B.A or M.A thesis on different sorts of oral literatures such as proverbs, heroic poems, marriage songs, funeral dirges etc. The studies referred to different languages and cultures of our country. But apart from a few works in Amharic, it is uncommon to get researches of oral literatures, relating with written literature especially in Tigriyna. So,

this research will focus on how oral literature is used in Wodi Wa-ero, a historical novel of Tigriyna.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Oral literature has strong relationship with written literature. The former has been used as a rich source for the latter. Regarding this both Melakneh (2005) and Elias (1997E.C) say that oral literature has been exploited as a rich source of written literary works. According to them, even the widely known master pieces like Oedipus Rex, Hamlet, Macbeth and Pushkin's poems have all used oral literature as the base.

Indeed, in modern western literatures it is not common to find oral literature entertained in novels and other works. In Africa, however, it is fashion to incorporate the ancient African wisdom which is found in the form of oral literature in written literary works. Citing Obiechina, Melakneh (2005:26) suggests that unlike Western novelists, African novelists incorporate oral literature in their novels; the modern African writer is to his indigenous oral tradition as a snail is to its shell, even in a foreign habitat, a snail never leaves its shell behind. Among the African authors, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o are the ones who are famous for incorporating oral traditions in their literary works. By doing so, the authors have been able to show what the philosophy, history, belief etc. of the society look like and enriched the central idea of their novels.

Based on the literary works that employed oral literature of the stated and other authors, a lot of researches and literary criticisms have been conducted and published in journals like Research in African Literatures. The researchers and literary critics have explored how the oral traditions are exploited, the sort of oral literature used, the purpose

of employing, the contribution of the oral tradition to the novel and other similar things. Such studies benefit a lot to the development of literature and improve the cultural awareness of the people.

Indeed, there are several literary works in Ethiopia whose settings are in rural and incorporated different sorts of oral traditions. Hadis Alemayohu's Fekir Eske Mekabir, Dagnachew Worku's Adefris. Abbe Gubegna's And Le Natu Tsegay Gebremedhin's Esat Wey Abeba are but few examples of Amharic literary works that consist of oral traditions.

But, apart from some researches by B.A Graduating students of Addis Ababa University, Ethiopian literary works are not examined sufficiently in terms of the oral literature they accommodate within them like that of other African countries literary works. In other words, researches done in this area are still limited.

This issue is even worse in Tigriyna. Despite the presence of Tigriyna literary works which incorporated oral literature like Wodi-Wa ero (ወዲ ዋዕሮ) and Marqosay Woyni Mis Himbashay, (ማርቆሳይ ወይኒ ምስ ሕምባሻይ) very little endeavors have been made to assess the oral traditions found in the literary works so far. So, to fill this gap this research has considered a Tigriyna historical novel entitled Wodi Wa-ero and tried to investigate the oral literature incorporated in the novel and its values to the theme. As the historical novel is about the Italian invasion and the Northerners' struggle against the Fascists an attempt has been made to reveal the then social, political, economic and historical conditions of the time based on the oral literatures deployed in the novel. Besides, this research has also attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What sorts of oral literature are employed in the novel?
2. Do the oral literatures used cement the theme of the novel or simply placed as a decoration?
3. Do the oral literatures depict the then society vividly?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The study has the following general and specific objectives:

1.3.1. General Objective

The main purpose of this study is to assess how oral literature is used in Wodi Wa-ero and examine the role of oral literature in relation to the theme of the historical novel.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

In addition to the stated main objective, this research has the following specific objectives:

- ❖ To identify the types of oral literatures employed in the novel
- ❖ To state the subject matters of the oral literatures used in the novel
- ❖ To indicate the rationale for using the oral literatures
- ❖ To illustrate the situation /context/ in which the oral literatures used.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The researcher believes that this study will be important in the following ways: First and foremost, since this research tries to relate the oral literature and written literature it would enable readers to realize the advantage of deploying oral literature in writing literary works.

Secondly, as oral literatures are public and refer to people's concern, readers would have the opportunity to understand the reaction of the people that the story addresses to the situation encountered in the first

three decades of 20th century based on the oral literatures found in the historical novel. This in turn assists readers to have better understanding of the theme of the novel.

Thirdly, the study would motivate and inspire other researchers to explore how oral literature is used in other novels of Tigriyna.

Last but not least, understanding the benefit of deploying oral literature in written literature especially in novel, local writers will give due attention to their oral literature and make use of them in their future literary works.

1.5. Limitation of the Study

Oral literature and culture are two faces of the same coin. And both languages, Tigriyna and English, are quite different languages that have almost no common culture that they both share. So, there will be a problem in translating the oral literature into its equivalent English keeping its cultural value and naturality. The other problem lies on the dependency of oral literatures of one novel only as this may limit readers to focus on specific oral literatures.

1.6. Delimitation of the study

Indeed, Tigriyna consists of various indigenous oral literatures which are used in different contexts and for different purposes. Besides, Tigriyna authors may use their indigenous folk literatures in their literary works. But this study will only examine oral literatures used in the Tigriyna historical novel, Wodi Wa-ero, in relation to its themes.

1.7. Methodology

As the concern of this study is the oral literature and their thematic contribution in a given novel, textual analysis will be used. In analyzing

the oral traditions put in the novel, the researcher will translate them into English and analyze them qualitatively based on their function and contribution to strengthening the theme of the novel.

In fact, the researcher has not chosen the material randomly. There are two main reasons that made this historical novel to be taken into account. Fore one thing, the story of the novel happened in rural areas of Northern Ethiopia and folklorists believe that such places are ideal for indigenous oral literatures and other traditional practices on various occasions. And this situation makes oral literatures to exist in the novel as necessary items if not mandatory.

The other thing that made the novel to be chosen is that the story of the novel dates back to the early Twentieth century and history tells us that in that time modern schools were not accessible to the people. Most people were illiterates; hence the author is probably expected to create illiterate characters that represent the society. And it is in such condition that oral literature is widely used as communication was mainly verbal.

To have general concept, the subsequent chapter will present the review of literature that discusses oral literature in general and its relation to written literary works in particular.

Chapter Two: Review of Related

Literature

The review section will begin by giving brief explanations about concepts of oral literature, its forms and social functions. It also seems important to explore the interface between oral and written literature and assess some prominent figures that incorporate oral literature in their literary works. In the last part of this chapter, the points that make this thesis different from the previous studies will be stated.

2.1. Theoretical Review

2.1.1. Concept of Oral Literature

In An Encyclopedia of African Folklore (Peek,P. and Yankah, K.2004:310-3312), it is indicated that by the mid-nineteenth some scholars like Finnegan (1970) and other collectors were using the term ‘oral literature’. The word was often felt to provide a more accurate and dignified approach than other currently available terms of western colonizers which are derogatory and ill-founded such as ‘primitive mentality’ passive tradition’, ‘tribal customs’ and ‘artless nature’.

Indeed, there are also other alternative terminologies like oral tradition, folk art, verbal art, performed art, folklore etc. which are free from derogatory implication. Every term, however, contains its own positive or negative associations when it is examined closely. For instance, the widely used word ‘oral literature’, overemphasizes textual features, downplays the magic moment of performance and introduces potentially misleading parallel to genres from the western written canon. On the other hand, using the concept of “literature” has been helpful in relating African forms to a widely recognized scholarly tradition, rather than, marginalizing it as something ‘different’ and ‘other’. And it also

encourages an interest in literary and artistic dimensions, (ibid). It is such advantages that make the term to be preferable to other alternative terminologies.

Taking all the controversies, competing terminologies, and broadness into consideration, it is not an easy task to produce a single definition of oral literature which is accurate and accepted by all scholars. By considering the main features of oral literature, however it is possible to list certain definitions of some scholars. Finnegan (1970:14) states, “oral literature is something that arises communally, from the peoples or the folk as a whole so that there can be no question of individual authorship or originality.” And Dorson (1972) also says that oral literature is popular and used in a day to day life of any society. In defining the concept, Okepwho (1992:3) points out, “oral literature simply means literature delivered by word of mouth.” Similarly Melakneh (1999:11) notes, “Oral literature (folk literature) refers to the verbal heritage of mankind transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth.”

Relating with literacy and peasant life Dundes (1993:1) indicates that folk literature refers to people who could not read or write. In other words, it is a literature that addresses to the community who lived in a society which has no written language.

Despite the fact that the above definitions reveal what oral literature means they all have not the same idea. Some stress on the verbal nature, but others focus on the popularity and still others describe it in relation to the sort of people who use it. Focusing on the definition stated in Melakneh (1999), the term ‘oral literature’ will be used mainly in the study.

2.1.2. Genres of Oral Literature and Their Social Significance

Oral literature includes a lot of genres and sub genres under it. Because of its enormous sub-categories, it is difficult to get a list of all the genres and sub-genres in a text. Thus, scholars discuss the commonly known categories. Citing Dundes, Fekade (1991E.C:38) writes:

Myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessing, curses, oaths, insults, taunts, teases, toasts, tong-twisters, and greeting and leave-taking formulas ... folksongs (lullabies, ballads), folk speech (e.g. slang) folk similes e.g. as blind as a bat, folk metaphase nick names, place names, folk poetry limericks, ball-bouncy rhymes, jump-rope rhymes, finger and toe rhymes, and nursery rhymes

Similarly, in a web site <http://www.Oral literature.Org info/oral literature.html>, ritual texts, curative chants, epic poems, musical genres, folktales creation tales, songs, myths, spells, legends, proverbs, riddles tong-twisters, word games, recitations, life histories or historical narrative are included under oral literature. Since, it is very difficult to deal with every genre of oral literature, it is worthy to classify and treat them easily. Concerning the ways of categorizing the genres of oral literature Ben-Amos (1975:168) under the sub-topic 'Taxonomy of Genres' has indicated, "There are three ways for designating the category of a form: cognitively, by naming it, pragmatically by performing it in particular context, and expressively by formulating it in a distinctive language which is peculiar to the genre." So, in this paper taking the form and rhythmic language, but not content as feature, all genres of oral literature are categorized under two taxonomies: prose narratives and oral poetry.

2.1.2.1. Oral Prose Narrative

Oral prose narrative is the most commonly found genre and includes prose forms like myths, legends, fables, proverbs, riddles Jokes etc. Based on different yardsticks, scholars have considered the question of categorization and a number of systems have been suggested. Citing Bascom (1965) and Okpewho (1980) Yehenew (1996) has showed how the two scholars are different in classifying it. Bascom has categorized prose narratives into myth, legend and fiction based on the beliefs of the people and the setting.

But for Okpewho, according to Yehenew Jembere (ibid), classifying on the basis of beliefs has been groundless as the belief of the people towards a story may vary from narrator to narrator. Instead, Okpewho has come up with a 'Qualitative Approach' that emphasis on the scientific recognition of the relative weight of fact and fiction of the story. So, based on the time scheme and purpose he has categorized oral prose as legend, (historic legend and romantic or mythic legend), etiological tale and fables (ibid).

In his book ,African Oral Literature ,Okpewho (1992:183) has discussed the legend; the historic legend occur mostly within memorable time the visible present or recent past and narrating this is careful not to engage flights of imaginations as many people are familiar with the personalities concerned. The romantic or mythic legend is, on the contrary, not subject to any such restriction because of the remoteness of the events.

Concerning the social function of this form, Finnegan (1970:329) has explained that the prime concern is with functioning of society, the narrations are assumed to be no serious interested in themselves. She further discussed that stories, for example, are told to educate and socialize children or by drawing a moral, to warn people not to break the

norms of the society. And stressing on didactic functioning and cultural records of oral prose narratives Miruka (1994:184-186) has explained that narratives are not just told for their own sake but have some important pieces of social instruction to impart. The narratives give us guidelines on what is cherishable. And by being didactic, the stories present the philosophical essence of the society, that is, how do they look at life issues? What do they value or decry? etc. The content of the oral traditions of a people epitomize the foundations of that group.

Similarly, discussing the context where African parents told their children various types of tales, Ojaide (2005:327) has stated the function:

...the tales especially the myths and epics, likewise inculcate the value and morse of the group into young ones, who imbibe the consciousness and sensibility of the race ...while legends and epics are told to inspire youngsters into heroic deeds, proverbs, riddles and other forms are learned to enhance verbal communication, and to sharpen one's thinking skill.

To deduce, for societies who depend on Oral communication like Africans, oral narrative links the generations and plays a pivotal role in smoothening their day to day lives. In addition to social function, oral narratives have literary function that is they can be used as a rich source of written literature, (Melakneh, 2005).

2.1.2.2. Oral Poetry

Oral poetry which is also regarded as 'traditional poetry' and 'folk poetry' has no distinct definition as it includes various forms and due to its occurrence in many kinds of settings. For fear of misleading, even the authoritative author of African oral literature, Ruth Finnegan, has not dared to provide a definitive delimitation. Finnegan (1977:22) suggests,

“Because of this relative and often ambiguous nature of ‘oralness’ I need make no apology for not producing a clear and precise definition of oral poetry.” She further elaborates that it is unrealistic and unhelpful to confine oneself to more restrictive definitions, (ibid).

Certainly, Finnegan has said the right thing. Instead of leaving oral poetry undefined or open-ended and in order to create common understanding, however, it is good to define it based on the qualities that most ,if not all, forms of oral poetry share in common. In his book, (የሰነድ ምግባር) Introduction to Oral Literature, Fekade (1991:86) puts an operational definition of oral poetry in Amharic and Meseret Delesa (2004:19) has translated it as follows:

Oral poetry is folk poetry which is composed, performed, transmitted and recorded orally, and mostly occurs along with songs, laments, and other musical forms.

The definition reveals that oral poetry can be found in different forms. But to be oral poetry the creative, imaginative and rhythmic piece should be familiarized by most people of the society that owns the oral poetry.

Oral poetry consists of many genres and sub-genres within it. To treat easily, however, most scholars deal with the major components so that the minors are studied within them. Based on subject matter, function and occasions, Finnegan (1970) has categorized oral poetry: Panegyric which includes praise poetry: Elegiac refers to those poems performed at funeral or memorial rites such as dirges; Religious embraces hymns, prayers, praises possessions and songs, oracular poems; Special purpose poetry such as war, hunting, work, etc, Lyric, Topical and Political songs, and Children’s songs, and Rhymes are the main forms discussed in her book.

Regarding the social function of oral poetry, Miruka (1994:118-121) has suggested that social commentary, and cultural and historical record are the social functions to be worthy of mention. Human feelings range from the extremes of exuberance to dejection and melancholy depending on the experience behind them. Hence, using oral poetry, they express their feelings and ideas about life whether it is fulfilling or discouraging experience. And concerning the cultural and historical record, certain forms like war songs praise poems of kings and heroic poems particularly abound in historical allusions about people, events and places. Similarly Melakneh (2005:23) also notes:

...the spoken/performed word animating the creative process is considered to have special powers to evoke spiritual and communal forces and ferment inner life. African oral arts often combine religious, artistic as well as social functions such conveying wisdom teaching ethics and social codes of conduct, religious beliefs and communal values, celebrating cultural heroes and revered ancestors, and explain the origins, history and developments of states, clans, and other important social organizations.

Focusing on the function of oral songs to children, Abu Abarry (1989:202-203) has revealed that the traditional children songs have educational, aesthetic and recreational values and in addition to the moral social and emotional development, the oral songs interplay the child's individual knowledge, creativity, skills, and preferences, on the one hand, and traditional mold, themes and procedures on the other hand.

Moreover, based on the contexts in which it is delivered, Finnegan (1977:243) has mentioned the use of oral poetry, "oral poetry can be used to reconcile, divide, maintain established authority or undermine it,

propagandize, innovate, conserve, cajole, entrance, scandalize, attack soothe ...or a hundred other things.” Finally, describing the endless use of oral poetry Finnegan concluded that the effect of oral poetry is infinite and as wide as the use of communication itself, (ibid).

2.1.3. The Interface between Oral and Written Literatures

As the study refers to the oral literature employed in written literary work, it seems important to explore the points of interaction between the two disciplines. Both oral and written literatures are literatures in their own right. Kaschula (1997:174), citing Horton and Finnegan, has reminded that one must remember that oral literature preceded writing, lives along side writing, influence writing and yet also manages to stand alone. He further noted that oral literature is a well developed, firmly established form of literature.

Be it oral or written literature, each possesses its own peculiar qualities which distinguish it from the other. Citing Finnegan, Kaschula (ibid: 197) has stated the four basic presuppositions about the nature of oral literature that distinguish it from written literature as follows:

- 1) The text of oral literature is variable and dependent on the occasion of performance, unlike the fixed text of written book,*
- 2) Oral literature is composition in performance,*
- 3) Composition and transmission of oral literature is not through word for word memorization,*
- 4) In oral literature there is no concept of an authentic or correct version*

In the same vein, Okpewho (1992:70-105) has explained the distinctness of oral literature. His basis has been the stylistic qualities, namely, repetition, parallelism, piling and association, tonality, idiophones, digression, imagery, allusion and symbolism. Okpewho has, of course,

indicated that the last three stylistic qualities, imagery, allusion and symbolism appear in written literature also. Examining Mungoshi's literary style, Makamani (1978) has also witnessed that alliteration, repetition, praises, allegory and symbolism are qualities which are commonly seen in Shona* oral poetry.

Indeed, written literature has some advantages which are not shared with oral literature. Written literature gives permanence to verbal expression and it allows for an independent author because of the divorce between reader and author. Besides, the written form can be thought as structured unit with structured paragraphs, sentences and over words. In here, the author can get the opportunity to edit and correct errors and omit redundancies, Kaschula (ibid).

Though there are differences in their underling modes of communication, oral and written literature are but two sides of the same enterprise. They have some common points to meet. Using verbal facility, man engages in creating and recreating in order to share experience, express feeling, observe surrounding, sense life, entertain etc. This function can then be attained by written and oral literature. In explaining a point of interaction Kaschula (ibid) has noted, "Oral and written are literature interacting at some point ... backed by the same culture and society, and performing the same function of commenting on that society and the world in general, (ibid)". To achieve the purpose intended by an author or oral composer, rhetoric language is their main device which is another common point.

On this issue, Makamani (1978:147) has remarked that literary styles such as repetition, tones and moods which are initially alien to Shone oral literature and culture are common in Zimbabwean English poems, at present. On the other hand, some early Zimbabwean poets in both

* Zimbabwean Indigenous Language

Shona and English have been highly influenced by the English sonnet which is unAfrican and sophisticated literary style. Arguing in the same line, Kaschula (ibid) has noted that the influence of oral literature to written literature and vice versa is uninevitable. The traditional style and techniques, repetition, personification, opening and closing formulas and formulaic expressions are permeated in written literature.

The above idea clearly illustrates that the interaction of oral and written is not only confined in content and function but also in other matters. Supporting this, Swanepoel (1997:120) has confirmed, "In a diachronic perspective we may observe a continuous interaction between not only the contents but also textures of oral and written sources." Moreover, focusing on the computability between written and oral form Finnegan (1997:165) has argued, "There is no basic difference in compatibility between written and oral forms, so there is no reason why poet should try to keep his art free from their influence of oral modes nor why a local singer should refuse inspiration from a poem just because it happens to have been printed."

To sum up, oral and written literatures are viewed as autonomous when the mode of delivery is considered but complimentary as their common points are taken into account. In term of the aims and functions of literature, there is no clear difference, and they are both fuelled and moulded by the culture that underlies them

2.1.4. Oral Literature in African Novels

Since the times of Sophocles, oral literature has been used as a rich source of written literature. As indicated in Owomoyela (1971:121) the ancient Greek dramatist relied heavily on folklore for their material, that Shakespeare found European Folklore useful, and that the theaters of

the East-Japanese, Chinese also make extensive use of folklore. Although the modern written literature has come to exist with certain feature of its own, oral literature served as a base for the emergence of written literary work. So, written literature in general and short story and novel in particular are indebted to folktales, epics and oral history.

In modern times, however, the Western writers have showed less interest in employing oral literature in their written works. The Westerners and other Eurocentric scholars discourage incorporating oral traditions in novels and other sorts of literary works. Tradition has been portrayed as negative force. Regarding this, Adu-Gyumfi (2003:104) has noted, “This use of African oral tradition is abundantly evident in the works of major African writes. However, Some Euro-centric scholars have blamed African Orature (oral literature) for contributing to shallow plots and less developed characters in novels.”

But no matter the blame, the Afro-centric modern writers have showed inclination in employing oral literature in their literary work and using it as a source. George (1991:107) has illustrated that the employment of the artistic resources of the African oral tradition in addressing the contemporary social history of African continues to engage African writers concern with creating an artistically authentic African literature. Concerning this issue, Melakneh (2010: 87) has suggested as follows:

Unlike their European counterparts, African novelists, justifiably incorporate folkloristic details like proverbs and mythological stories in their modern narratives. One cannot study African literatures without studying the particular cultures up on which African writers draw for their ideological and formal elements.

Arguing in the same line, Adu-Gyamfi (ibid) has confirmed that a new literary orientation exists in contemporary African literature that can not be doubted. African writers who use and expand oral traditions are enormous. He further explained that the oral emphasis is not restricted only to western and southern Africa but there are also in other parts of Africa like P'Bitek and Jared Angira from the East.

Basically, the difference of the Western and African modern writers on using oral tradition originates from different viewpoints. Bamikunle (1991:73) and Melakneh (2005) have briefed these points on the basis of the purpose and the content of the written literature. Unlike most Western writers who believe on the autonomous existence which is independent of historical and social realities, African literature mainly relies on historical, political and social events. And the aim of this literature is to aware and teach the society, not individuals, technically to respond for or against the socio political situation around them. So, this aim makes African literature to have contact with oral traditions.

The second point is content which is determined by the purpose the writers wanted to achieve. Themes like love, personal feeling to nature's beauty with out relating its use to human life, loneliness or social alienation are not mostly the primary concerns of Africa literature. African writers are seized by the themes that arise from the living forces around them and have been immersed in a life where politics embattled daily. Thus, colonial exploitation, cultural destruction, political oppression, corruption, economic exploitation, race discrimination, disillusionment are some examples of African literature's subject matters.

To convey the stated themes and attain the purpose, then African authors who are considered as 'spokes men' or 'secretary' of their society

observe the social activities keenly. In addition to their insightful observation, however, they use people's opinion and reflection as a source and create it by adding aesthetic features. Like the hard science researchers, however, they do not obtain the society's opinion and reflection through the interview or questionnaire. Instead, they examine and detect the traditional expressions like oral literature which is closely related to life of African society. Concerning the lifeness of oral literature to African societies, Makamani (1978) has pointed out that Orature (oral literature) is intricately tied to history, politics, wealth, poverty, happiness, misery, victory, defeat, in fact, everything concerning the African people. Orature gives meaning to life much as it is life itself."

In addition to using oral literature as instrument for obtaining information, African writers employ various oral traditions that show African wisdom and philosophy as a counter for European Chauvinist thinking. The European colonizers consider Africa as dark and primitive continent which owns no literature. For such degrading Brown (1971:30) has put, "what the colonial in common with prospero lacks, is awareness of the world of others, a world in which others have to be respected."

African writers, therefore, incorporate oral literature in order to prove that Africa has never been a historical or cultural desert. *Achebe's Things Fall Apart (TFA)*, for instance, was a response to a European writer. Based on Achebe's confession, Wole Ogundele (2002:137) has asserted that to recall what Achebe motivated to the writing of *Things Fall Apart*: the need to counter the image historical cultural tabula rasa waiting to be inscribed with Europeans creations by Christian missionaries and colonial adventures. It was also a reaction to novels like Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Joyc Cary's Mister Johnson, which depict Africans as helpless, primitives and delinquent adult

respectively. To make the idea concrete; Wole Ogundele (ibid) quoted Achebe's succinct expression about the theme of TFA like the following:

This theme- put-quite simply is that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and above all, they had dignity. (qtd in Ogundele, 2002).

In this regard, African writers especially Nigerian authors like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka have made relentless effort in introducing African art which is mainly oral to the rest of the globe.

Another Important reason for employing oral tradition is technical. Melakneh (2005:26) has listed the reasons for incorporating folklore:

- Recreating the traditional African wisdom
- Clarification of meaning
- Summation of a point under discussion
- Amplification of meaning
- Ornamentation of style
- Drawing an analogy to stimulate associations aid emotions

Certainly, African writers who have incorporated oral traditions in their literary works due to the reasons stated above or others are many in number. But, to deal with every author's work and realize who is who and which is which would be beyond the scope of this research paper. By considering the work of some writers, however, it would not be difficult to see the sort of oral traditions accommodated and the literary advantage in brief.

What ever African literature and culture is raised, the Nigerian literary genius Chinua Achebe is the first figure to come to everyone's mind.

Melakneh (2010:88) has indicated, “Almost all African novelists invariably incorporate folkloristic elements in their modern narratives in which case Achebe stands out as outstanding practitioner.” Out of his six novels, Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God are the two rural novels which are rich in Ibo oral literature. Both, Gupta (2006) and Gebi Misha (1985) have stated the significant forms of oral literature included in both novels: Folktales, myths, proverbs, legends, songs, oratory, verbal formulae, praise-names and proper names. Gebi Misha (ibid) has noted how the forms are used and their contribution.

The legends in both novels are concerned with the past historical accounts of the Ibo society and these many instances of legendary advance the narration. Myths are also one of the forms incorporated in the novels. They establish the religious doctrination of posterity. The myths are not placed for their own sake but they are systematically inserted into the plot. On the same vein, Jabbi (1980:133) has discussed about the myths in Arrow of God and their function:

...Myths may, for example, serve dramatic, structuring or minor myths and rituals in Arrow of God tend to function at this additional aesthetic level in process. For instance, they sometimes afford enabling dramatic occasions for enacting crucial tendencies of character or personality and for anticipating subsequent action or event where by they may also help shape tone and response in advance.

Folktales, especially didactic animal tales are also other flavors in the novels. In describing their function Gebi Misha (ibid) has noted that the folktales narrated in either novel are not merely for entertainment but to exemplifying and give clarity to the themes.

The widely exploited oral traditions in the two novels are proverbs. The male elder characters use proverbs frequently in their conversations and speeches. Achebe employed the proverbs as the landmarks in the development of conflict, Getachew (1985) and Obiechina (1975:157) sum up the use of proverbs in the novels:

As well as conveying linguistic reality [as local flavor] proverbs can become an artistic device for giving complexity to narrative, unity to form, coherence and pattern to action and direction to moral and social insight.

Using the listed forms of oral literature Achebe's novels develop the theme of traditional verses change. He has been able to illuminate two emotionally irreconcilable facets and form unity. Gupta (2006) puts Robert Mc Dowell's remark, "There is an artistic unity of all things in these books which is rare anywhere in modern English fiction."

Among the African writers, Ngugi wa Thiong'o is another known African author. Ngugi has used various oral traditions in his novel. In The River Between and The Devil on the Cross myths and legends that reveal the harmonious past of Gikuyu community are incorporated. In The River Between, for example, the first chapter introduces the history of great ancestry heroes like Murungu, the savior of the people; Mugo, the great seer; Wachiore, the glorious warrior; and Kamire, the powerful magician. The stated figures had administrated Gukuye long before the advent of colonial with out dividing Gukuye into pieces of villages. And Nugugi's speech quoted in Gray (1988:456) "I talk about past mainly because I am interested in the present" justifies the role of the oral traditions in the novels.

Besides, Nuruddin Farah's third novel, Close Sesame is one of the African novels that have exploited oral history. As Ntalindwa (1999:187) has discussed, Farah employed stories that demonstrate the harmonious pre colonial Somalia. The stories are disclosed by an old hero character 'Deeriye' to his immediate family specifically to his grand children. Similarly, Thomas Mofolo's Chaka and Kwei Armah's Two Thousand Seasons are also African novels that accommodate African tales.

To summarize, many African writers employ African oral traditions that go in line with the themes of their works. The longing and incorporating of African pre-colonial oral history seems to be rooted from the authors' dissatisfaction on present realities. And by employing oral literature the writers cemented their themes and achieve the dual role of African literature.

2.2. Review of Previous Studies

Conducting researches on the area of oral literature is not strange phenomena. A lot of graduating students of Addis Ababa University have carried out researches for their B.A and M.A theses based on Oral literature. In his M.A thesis, citing Fekade (1991E.C), Binyam (2005:20) points out that until 1990, there are around 243 B.A theses in various genres of oral literature of Ethiopian languages.

In addition to B.A theses, there have been M.A theses which have been conducted on oral literature of various Ethiopian languages. Abdulkadir Haji (some cultural Elements as Reflected in Somali Folktales, 1982), Abraham Alemu (Jima Oromo Oral Prose narratives: A Preliminary Descriptive Analysis, 2000), Binyam Yakob (An Analysis of some Gender Based Kambatta Proverbs, 2005), Birhanu Gebeyehu (Islamic Oral Poetry in Wallo: A Preliminary Depletive Analysis, 1998),

Berhanu Mathwes (An Analysis of Kambatta Proverbs, 1986), Daniel Legesse (Thematic Approach to Amharic oral Poems Associated with Derg's Red-Terror in Gondar and Gojjam, 1998) Melkneh Mengistu (The Major Themes and Natives of Southern Agew Folktales, 1990), Sahlu Kidane (Borona Oromo Prose Narratives a Contextual Study, 1996), and Tesfay Mesele (Subject Matter Analysis of Amharic Oral Lyric Poetry in Raya, 2007) are some examples to be mentioned. The common tasks of those M.A researches have been analyzing the collected oral literature from its real contexts thematically, structurally and examining their subject matters based on different issues.

Though it has now attracted a growing number of researches in both B.A and M.A levels, studying oral literature in relation to written literature has not been given due attention.

Indeed, there are some studies which are conducted on the oral literature employed in foreign novels, to mention some examples Debebe (1984) in his B.A thesis has assessed the oral literature employed in four novels of Achebe. He indicated that Achebe used various oral traditions like proverbs, tales, love songs, work songs, legends and myths and they served as keys to understanding of the novels.

Dealing with proverbs used in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, Getachew (1985) has examined that Achebe's characters use proverbs to fulfill various purposes and the author uses the proverbs as land marks in the development of conflicts.

Similarly, Gebi Mishe (1985) has studied the significance of oral literature in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God. Gebi then concluded that the different genres employed in the two novels function as unifying

device not in themselves but hand in glove with the technical conventions of the novels.

In this area, there have been very limited B.A theses conducted on Oral literatures in Amharic literary works. Taking oral expressions as part of oral literature, Tesfaye Tibebu (1989) has revealed that in four poems of Mengistu Lemma and four poems of Tsegaye Gebremedhen oral expressions played a pivotal role in the overall development of the poem and especially for sustenance and reinforcement of the themes.

Besides, Tinsae Birhane (1986), as cited in Elias (2005), has dealt with oral literature in Adefris (አደፍርስ) and Fekir Eske Mekabir (ፍቅር እስከ መቃብር). Tinsae has finally asserted that the various genres of oral literature used in both novels have helped in developing characters, strengthening the conflicts and understanding the theme.

The present study is, however, different from Tesfaye's (1989) and Tinsae's (1986) for two reasons: the language and the novel to be treated. It is designed to investigate the role of the employed oral literature in relation to the dominant themes of the rural historical novel, Wodi Wairo. And based on the brief discussion of the theoretical review, an attempt will be made to analyze the thematic function of the employed oral literature following a brief historical background.

Chapter Three: Historical Background

After the battle of Adwa, the fascist Italians were forced to be confined in 'Mereb-Milash' the present Eritrea and for some decades Eritrea became their colonial state. As most imperialists do, the main concern of the colonial government was to secure settlements and vast agricultural areas to produce raw materials for Italian Industries. As noted in Tekeste (1987:122) more than fifty percent of all cultivated land in Eritrean high lands was confiscated by the colonial state and set aside for Italian colonialists.

During its stay in Eritrea, the colonial government was in a great preparation to invade Ethiopia and to take revenge for the former battles. As the result, a great number Askaris, native regular soldiers, were recruited willingly or forcefully to fight against their brothers beyond the Mereb. The Military camps were filled with Italian soldiers, Askaris and Bandas, irregulars, and for years a great deal of arms were shipped from Europe and stored until the war was started.

In addition to recruiting Askaris and Bandas, the colonial government was dividing the people on the basis of religion, ethnic, and geographical location to avoid mutual cooperation among the people. Hence, some Eritreans became loyal to the government. Besides, the high officials of the colonial government were having secret contact with some local chiefs of Tigray to disrupt cooperation between the highlanders of Eritrea and Tigray-Ethiopia.

Despite the huge military force, however, the oppressed people of Mereb Milash were not sitting idle. They were opposing the colonial government using different mechanisms. For instance, as illustrated in Amanuel

(1988:257) carrying their guns, many Askaris crossed the boarder to join their brothers in their hour of need.

This historical novel, then, dates back to the time of colonial preparation, and the five years of fighting against Italian fascist. Thus, heroism, patriotism, colonial resistance on one hand and betrayal, colonial cooperation, fascist atrocity on the other hand, are among the main issues raised in the historical novel.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Thematic Function of Oral Literature in Wodi Wa-ero

As Wodi Wa-ero is a rural historical novel which addresses mainly to the historic events that took place before several decades, the place, the people and the time make oral traditions to exist as important constituents in the novel. To deal with every aspects of oral literature found in the novel is not an easy task as the study is limited. So, the commonly known forms, namely, naming, proverbs, legends, tales, myth, and oral poetry will be analyzed respectively in order to look into the purpose of their presence.

4.1. Thematic Function of the Proper and Praise Names

The proper names of most characters are not something which is irrelevant to the issues of the novel. Rather the names are closely associated with the manners and actions of the characters. In Wodi Wa-ero the Ge'ez saying, 'ሰም ይመርህ ለግብር' 'A name precedes an action' seems to be true. In here, the names of five characters, namely, Embaye, Father Mehari, Kidane, Kindihafti and Te'ame are good examples.

አምባየ (Embaye) is linked with አምባ 'Emba' means mountain. In Military science a mountain is strategic place that can be used as a fort and protects from enemy's attack. So, the name of the venturesome character that defend his country and his people from the agony and repression of colonizers is symbolized by a mountain. To add a point, his grandfather's daring speech before Italian soldiers and military officials which was some minutes before his (grand father) death assures this idea:

“አምባየ ወደይ አምባ ሃገሩን አምባ ደቂ ሃገሩን እዩ ... ጥልያን ክድይቦ
ዘይኸእል ዓቢይ አምባ እዩ ... ነዚ አምባ ክድይቦ እየ ዝብል ናብ ፀድፊ ምዕዳፋ-
ይፋለጦ”(P.247)

My son, Embay is a mountain (defender, protector) of his motherland and his compatriots ...he is a huge mountain that an Italian could not climb up ... He who tries to climb up to this mountain should know that he would fall off a cliff. (P.247)

መሐሪ (Mehari) means ‘one who saves’ from a sort of risk or danger is indirectly related to the story of the novel. Indeed, he saved the people as he brings up, gives lesson, embolden and blessed the adventurous character, his grandson. Finally, Abboy (father) Mehari was killed awfully by the shameless fascist in front of spectators. He was scarified to save his fellow countrymen like that of Jesus who has been crucified to save human beings.

Next is ኪዳኔ (Kidane). This name is related with ‘Kidān’ means ‘pact’ or ‘treaty’. This character promised in front of Embaye and another character not to betray his country and his friends even in the hard times. And as his promise, he remained honest and fought bravely till the end of the war. In Tigray, the name kindihafti means (literally) ‘in the place of sister’ or ‘as a sister’ is given to a female whose father or mother has no a sister or sisters. In a family a sister is a beloved member who cares her brothers and parents. We observe when the female character kindihafti is doing the same thing. When Embaye and Seleba were in a desperate situation betrayed by Dadjazmach Hailesilassie Gugsa, chief of Eastern Tigray, it was kindihafti who comforts and provides them foods and drinks. She told them every thing about the chief and his decision to arrest them secretly. Later, based on Embaye’s request, she becomes his intimate friend’s (Kidane’s) wife:

ኪዳኔ ሓዱሽ ህይወት ጀመረ፤ ክንዱ ሓፍቲ፣ ሓፍቲ ኮነቶ ካልኣይ እተፈጥረ ኮይኑ ተሰመዖ (P. 258)

Kidane has begun a new life kindihafti became his sister and care taker and he felt as if he was reborn (P. 258)

Lastly, we see an antagonistic character which is tall, a skinny and promiscuous man. He is called by the name Te'ame means 'delicate' or 'soft'. In the patriarchal society like the people of Kurbariya a man is expected to be courageous, brave and strong. But, Te'ame has no such qualities. Carrying his lords' gun and wearing their uniform, he pretends to be fearless soldier but the native people know him very well. In his youthhood, he was usually beaten by his friends. He was even hit by his wife. The people knew this story. In battle fields, he trembled with fright and ran away without shooting a single bullet.

In addition to the proper names, this novel also comprises a determinant praise name which addresses to the hero character- Embaye. His compatriots mostly called him 'ወዲ ዋዕሮ' 'Wodi Wa-ero' means 'the son of lioness'. As a female lion is more energetic and impudent than that of proud but sleepy male lion, Tigreans nick name 'Enda Wa-ero' means 'the race of lioness' for the heroes who fight gallantly against external invaders. The name passes to their grand children and their grandsons and daughters are expected to be like their descents to maintain the praise name. In the same vein, Embaye gains the name from his antecedents who were brave warriors. Since the praise name is a key word in the novel, it is used as the title of the historical novel.

Generally, the discussed proper names and the praise name are strongly associated with the subject matters of the novel. The proper names tell the manners and the qualities of the characters and this in turn enables some one to identify the characterization and then the theme.

4.2. Thematic Function of Proverbs

In Africa proverbs play a significant role in conveying one's message efficiently. Miruka (1994:47), for instance, has explained the attitude of Nigerian societies, specifically the Ibo and the Yoruba on proverbs. The Ibo saying "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" reflects the view of the society on using proverb. The Yoruba also have another saying that carries similar notion like that of Ibo's " a proverb is the horse which carries a subject under discussion along; if a subject under discussion goes astray, we use a proverb to track it." In the two sayings proverbs are considered as a 'palm oil' which makes food tasty and a 'horse' that transports man and loads from place to place. This reveals the position of proverbs as the facilitators of communication during speech delivery.

In the same vein, Ethiopian societies give due attention to the using of proverbs in conversation. For instance, in Tigriyna there are proverbs for every occasion. The people say proverbs which suit to the situation they encountered. Among the people, those who speak eloquently are highly respected. They catch their listeners' attention and convince them easily. Thus, the elders who have the ability to use the right proverb for the right purpose are regarded as wise and experienced persons. On the contrary, people are blamed and considered as slow minded for their inability of using proverbs. The following Tigriyna proverb justifies this idea: ብይኹምስዕ ኣድጊ ዘይምስልንክ ኣብዲ' ***He who does not ruminate is a donkey and he who does not use proverb is a simple headed.***

The proverb illustrates that a man that uses no proverb in conversation is compared with a donkey which is, according to the culture, an animal that has less thinking ability. So, it is evident that the Tigreans give a great value to the use of proverbs.

To come to the point of my discussion, in the historical novel, Birhane Achame has incorporated more than thirty proverbs from the stack of proverbs in the language. Of course, it should not be surprising if the author employed such number of proverbs due to the three points: the time, place and people of the novel. In the novel the proverbs are said by the characters and the narrator who is an invisible person and has no part in the story. Most proverbs used by the narrator have summative function 'He' uses them to summarize the messages of the narratives that preceded or followed them. The following proverbs are some examples:

ጭጥራፍስያ ባዕላ ወቺዓ ባዕላ ተአዊ (P. 196)

A whip beats itself and cries

ግዘን ከልብን ከይፀዋዕኻዮም ይመፁ (P. 207)

Time runs fast

ብተመንያ ዝፈርሐስ ብልሕሂ ተድሃለ (P. 287)

***He who is scared by snake panicked by bark or
A burnt child dreads fire***

In addition to the summative function, some proverbs have been used as the vehicles of the society's perception and reflect the accumulated wisdom of the society under discussion. The proverb Embaye used after he told a lie to the Dadjazmach Haile-Sellasse Gugsu that he/Embaye/ knew 'Wodi Wa-ero' became a ranked native colonial soldier of the Italians in Dekmehare while he himself is 'Wodi Wa ero'. The proverb is like the following:

ካብ ዝብኢ ዝበልፀካ ዝብኢ በሊዕኻ ተነሳህ (P.275)

Eat hyena and get confessed than to be eaten by hyena

In a society, there exist certain standards that the society cherishes and wishes to be attained. To be honest, respect elders and do right and legal

action are some examples of the standards. But, these may not be true always. There could be times that one may violate the norms and standards of the society. What Embaye said using the proverb is this; to eat hyena's flesh, as Christian, is condemned, and results excommunication. Similarly to lie is also unethical but no matter the norms where there are no options one abrogates them and confesses than to die. So, the hero's lie is normal and acceptable in that desperate situation.

Moreover, there are many proverbs in the novel which are strongly associated with the historical facts of the colonization. And when these proverbs are closely examined, one realizes that the proverbs empowered the subject of discussion. Besides, the attitude of the characters and the people they represent them towards the colonial situation can also be detected based on the proverbs they say in the course of conversation. Here are some proverbs from the novel and context they are used.

ለሚኒ ሽካ ሓምሊ ሽካ (P.11 and 102)

Those were the days

ወጮ እንተገልበጥካዮ ወጮ (P. 41)

***It is six of one and half a dozen of the other, or
Two blacks do not make a white***

ዝብእስያ ኦብ ዘይፈልጥዎ ዓዲ ኸይዱ ማእሲ ኣንፅፉለይ በለ (P.55)

A hyena ordered sheepskin to be spread out for him, in a country where he is not known

These three proverbs are said by Embaye's grandfather, Mehari who is an old and seasoned patriot. In addition to narrating various heroic legends to Embaye and others, Mehari has used proverbs that demonstrate his extreme hatred upon the Italian colonizers. He

repeatedly uses the first proverb that translated as ‘those were the days’ to celebrate the past glorious time when he together with his fellow Ethiopians defeated the Italian invaders in the battle of Adwa. On the contrary he uses that proverb to disprove his current status that he is very old and uses walking stick to walk and hence no more fighting against the fascist. Besides, he repeatedly says it to blame the colonial time that many Ethiopians gave up their hands and knelt down to the Italians.

In the colonial era, Ethiopians were working in different fields. Some were regular soldiers or Askaris and others were attendants. Some people prefer to be an attendant to an Askari for the reason that an attendant stays at home, that is, carries no gun and he could get the opportunity to eat and drink the leftover of his Italian lords. But, for Mehari, all are the same. He says these works are nothing but serving the enemy in different forms and it is to say this that he says the proverb ‘It is six of one and half a dozen of the other’.

The colonial government boasts that Italians are very great and from a powerful nation. Taking this propaganda, there were also native colonial soldiers, Askaries, like Te’ame the antagonist who preaches the greatness and the supremacy of the fascist. The old patriot, Mehari, however, denounces such politics. Instead, he explains the cowardice of the fascist soldiers when they see the sword of Ethiopian heroes. To say that Italians mean nothing in battle fields and degrades their propaganda, Mahari says the proverb ‘A hyena ordered sheepskin to be spread out for him in a country where he is not known.’ Indeed the proverb is also an insult to the seemingly valiant character, Te’ame.

Te’ame on his part uses proverbs that amplify the supremacy of Mussolini and his men. For him, the past Ethiopian victories are

nothing. Rather, he warns the natives not to be against the colonial government. He also attempts threatening the local people that unlike the past the present Italy is strong. To warn, he says the proverb:

ከም ቀደም ይመስለክን ውሕጅ ይወስደክን (P.37)

The days are changed or

Things are not the same as what they were yesterday

He has also another saying to criticize those who resist Italians. He wonders why some Ethiopians refuse their supporters and why they prefer ignorance and backwardness to literacy and civilization. As he becomes amazed by the rejection of Italian help he uses the following proverb in the middle of conversation.

ሓጋዚታ ዝረኣየት ንልቤት መዲዳ ተሓብኦ (P.41)

A maid hides her upper grinding stone when some one would offer her help.

The hero character, Embaye has used proverbs in different situations. As the historical novel reveals the division among the people was not restricted to Te'ame and his likes only. There was also disagreement even among the priests on national matters.

The strong argument between the two priest characters, priest Walday and priest Gerima was a reflection of the discrepancy. In the argument, while priest Walday, who sides the Italians, was arguing that the people should accept the situation with patience even if it is a misfortune; Exploding with anger, Embaye interfered and told the priest that he should stop his informal provoking and concluded his speech saying:

ቀሺ ብፀሎቱ

ጅግና ብኦሩቱ

ንፀላኢ ካብዓዲ የጥፍኡ P. (91)

***A priest by his prayer
A hero by his spear
Destroys invader (p.91)***

His second proverb has been said when he was in desperate condition. As he entered home, Embaye was told that his beloved grand father was taken by Italian soldiers and Askaris to Dakimehare, the military camp, in his place. As he heard the bad news he grew numb and he decided to join the colonial military in order to free his grand father. In this condition, he says the following proverb hopelessly:

ዝበሉኻ ዝበረሎም ወይ ዓዶም ግደረሎም (P.90)
When in Roma do as Romans do

As Embaye became an Italian regular soldier, a lot of native soldiers were surprised. Many of them got offended as they had expected him to fight against the Italians. But Hailu an intimate friend of Embey knows why the valiant character joined the military and while conversing with an Askari he tells him the proverb:

ኣንበላ እንተ ደቀሰ ዝሞተ ይመስል (P.133)
When a lion is asleep, it seems dead.

Indeed, the above proverb also addresses those native soldiers who enlisted to be Askaris for temporary economic benefits but secretly waiting for the right time to cross the Mereb and become part of the Ethiopian patriots. The next proverb which was said by a female character, Kindihafti illustrates another unexpected misery. Destroying and robbing the arm stores of Italians, Embaye and Seliba escaped and arrived at Adi-grat which they thought an Ethiopian free zone. Unfortunately, they encountered with another devil, the local chief who established hidden communication with Italians. Kindihafti expresses this saying:

ካብ ዝብኡ ሃዲመ ላብ ኦሞ እንተሓሸርኩስ ነብሪ ፀንሓኒ (P.254)

From Frying pan to fire

Last but not least, the historical novel comprises proverbs that show the Italian limitless expansion and greediness. Historically, Mussolini had a dream to put most part of East Africa under his colony and confiscate large farmlands to develop his nation by enslaving the natives. This foolhardy ambition of the expansion and greediness is explained in the following proverbs:

ዝበልዐስ የብላዕል? (P. 196)

Give him an inch, he will take a yard

ሰብአዩይ ይደረሩ ሰብአይክን ፀጥም ይሕደሩ (P. 196)

Let my husband dine and yours starve

To conclude, most of the proverbs included in the historical novel touch every issue entertained in the novel. And using the proverbs the author amplified the topics raised in the novel.

4.3. Thematic Function of Oral Narratives

The historical events that give the frame work for Wodi Wa-ero are closely related to the issue of military preparation and invasion of Mussolini. Despite the main framework, however, various historical events and other related stories are employed within the matrix. The oral narratives found in the historical novel are mainly historic legends that are told by the hero's grand father, Mehari, and some other tales by the narrator.

4.3.1. Historic Legends and Their Thematic Value

Regarding the importance of the past in contemporary historical novels, Cowart in Tagoe (1999:155) has drawn a distinction between two contexts of the historical novel: the historical novel in an age of stability

in which the past may be constructed as part of the stability of the age and the historical novel in an age of anxiety where it may provide clues for understanding the instabilities and crisis of the present. Thus, if Wodi Wa'ero is closely examined it matches with the latter content of the historical novel because the historic legends told by Mehari demonstrate that the Italian colonialists were whipped in two battle fields which is the first in black history; hence, their great military preparation was not only for expansion but it was also to take revenge and regain their solidarity.

The historic legends that are employed in the historical novel are used as an effective linkage between the past and the present. Mehari recalls many historical land marks and acts of betrayal and heroism that the present would wish to gloss over. And most oral histories told by Mehari have direct relation with the main issues of the novel; so, the stories enhance the themes. The act of betrayal for instance, is one of the dominant themes in the novel and concerning this, the hero character, Embaye, asks his grandfather if there were traitors in the old times like the present. Then to answer Embaye's question, his grandfather recalls historic legend of Emperor Sertse Dingil and the traitor headman Bahri Negassi Isiac as follows:

ወለድና ቀደም ቀደም እዩ ይብሉ፣ ሃፀይ ሰርፀ ድንግል እተብሃሉ ምስ ነገሱ ባሕሪ ነጋሲ ይላቅ እተባህለ ገዛኢ ቱርኪ ምስ እተብሃሉ ሃገርና ክወሩ ዝመፁ ኣዕራብ ውሽጢ ውሽጢ ኣሻረወ። መራሒ ዓዲ ተባሂሉስ ክንዲ ንዐኡም ዝወግእ ምስኦም ኮይኑ ንሃገርና ክወግእ ተልዓለ። ሃፀይ ሰርፀ ድንግል ከዞም ቱርኪ እተብሃሉ ወረርሽኡ ነቲ መሻረዊን ዝኾነ ባሕሪ ነጋሲ ይላቅን ክወግኡ ተበገሱ። እኒ ከንቲባ ሓሊቦ መረታ እኒ ኣዛቢ ብኢዱ ፅልማ እተብሃሉ ዓበይቲ ዓዲ ንሃፀይ ኡብ እግርም ወዲቆም ለመንዎም፣ ንባሕሪ ነጋሲ ይላቅ ምስ ንጉስ ክንፃርቅ ኢና ኢሎም ናብ ከተማ ድባርዋ ብምኻድ ምስ ንጉስ ንክዕረቁ ተማሕፀንዎ። ባሕሪ ነጋሲ ይላቅ መጀመሪያ ሕራይ ኢሉ፣ ፀኒሑ ግና ጠለመ። ካብ ምጥላም ዝገደደ ድማ ዕቡይ ስለዝነበረ ነቶም ክፃረቁ ዝኸዱ ሸማግለታት ሓንቲ ጥይት መድፍዕ ሂቡ ነቲ ንጉስ ንክሪእዎ ለኣኹም። ሃፀይ

ስርፀ ድንግል ነታ ንሱ ዝላኣኻ ጥይት ናብ ኣኽሱም ፅዮን ልኢኹም «ኣቦታተይ ኣነ ምስ ኣርማውያን ኩናት ክገጥም እየሞ ሰራዊተይ ኣኸቲተ እብገስ ኣለኹ፤ ንእግዚኣብሔር ቀኖና ሓዘለይ፤ ዓወት ከይክልክሰኒ ኢሎም ንትግራይ ገዳም ሰገሩ። ብድሕሪ እዚ እቲ ብቱሪኪ እተመከሐ ባሕሪ ነጋሲ ይላቕ ወግእ ገቢሙ ቱርኪ ተሳዒሩ ምስረኣየ ገፁ ንድሕሪት መሊሱ ፈረሱ ሓዘ እንትሃድም ሓደ ጀግና ፈረሰኛ ኣርኪቡ ብጉራደ ክሳዱ ኣንቀፆ (P.15-16)

Our forefathers say it was a long time ago, under Emperor Sirtse Dingil that there lived a local governor called Bahri Negassi Isiac. Instead of Protecting his country and countrymen, the local headman secretly sided with the Turkish that came to invade Ethiopian territory. He decided to fight for the Turks. To defeat the Turkish and punish the traitor, the Emperor along with his groups started journey.

Before the war, respected elders like kentiba (Mayor) Halibo Mereta and the governor Bi'edu Tsilma appealed the Emperor for reconciliation and going to Dibarwa the elders urged Bahri Negassi Isiac to make peace. At first the traitor accepted the conciliation but later he refused. As he was very arrogant he sent one cannon bullet to the Emperor.

Sending the cannon bullet to St. Mary of Axum, Emperor Sertse Dingil requested for the elderly people to recite prayer to God not to forbid victory in the war against the Armenians. The Emperor together with his troops headed towards Tigray. In the battle, Emperor Sertse Dingil won a victory. The traitor local chief who relied on the Armenians began to flee as he observed the defeat of Armenians. But he did not escape; an intrepid Ethiopian cavalryman cut off his neck with a sword. (P. 15-16)

The above historical legend which happened hundreds of years ago is related with the local Bandas and some ranked Askaris such as Te'ame who betray their native mother land to get material rewards. Based on

the narrated oral history then it would not be difficult to anticipate the end of those traitors who are loyal to the colonial government of Italy.

Betrayal, however, is not the only historic event accounted in the novel. Heroism is also another issue raised in the novel. As an old patriot, Mehari narrates the oral history of immediate past like the battle of Dogale in the second half of nineteenth century. Mehari's father made a military expedition with Alula in the battle of Dogale. To gathered members of family and neighbors, then, Mehari tells the historic legend of Alula.

“እኒ ሄልኩም ደኣሲ ጥልያን ባሕሪ ሰጊራ ባዕዕ ሰፈረት። ፍሑኽ እናበለት
ሰሐጢት በፅሐት፤ አሉላ አባነጋ ድማ ከም መሸላ ዓፂዱ ዓፂዱ ሰደዳ ...
አይተሐፍርን ድማ መሊሳ ንሐማሴን ክትድይብ ደልያ ንእንግሊዝ ሽማግሌ
ትልእኽ በሉ መሓሪ
« ውኻርያን ዝብእን » በሉ አይተ ግርማይ
« አሉላኽ 'ሞ ሓፋር ድዩ 'ኣነ ገዛኢ ርማ ምስኮንኩ ሻቡ ጥልያን ናብ
ክትመፅእ እያ' በሉ ነቲ ሽማግሌ።” በሉ መሓሪ (P:159)

“Here the story is, first, crossing the Red Sea Italians settled in Massawa. Gradually, they arrived at Sehtit. Alula Abanega, then, mowed them as millet and sent them back. Despite the defeat, however, the Shameless Italians sent an Englishman to arbitrate their need to reach Hamassien,” Said Mehari.

“A fox and a hyena,” said Girmay.

“But the daring Alula replied ‘You would come to Hamassien when I became the governor of Rome,’ ” Said Mehari. (P.159)

From the above oral history, one can learn the heroic deeds of the legendary Alula in the battle and his wise response to the arbiter. Interestingly, however, in the middle of the narrative an audience called

by the name Girmay interfered and said ‘A fox and a hyena’ to indicate that both Italy and Britain are the same company. The old man’s traditional metaphor represents the imperialists approach to Africa in general and Italian colonization to Ethiopia in particular. In fact, this approach is one of the concerns of Wodi Wa-ero.

To deduce, there are many historic legends which deal with the distant and immediate history of the society. Like the examples, all the historic legends are not put for their own sake and not for a pass –timing entertainment but to enlighten the present history and this in turn leads to the empowerment of the central idea of the novel.

4.3.2. Thematic Function of Tales

A part from the historic legends, there are some tales incorporated in the novel. Indeed the tales are not about Emperors, kings or known warriors. The agents are ordinary persons and animals. Some of them are told to teach the importance of being wise and prudent in one’s life. In here the story of an observant blind man who is called **ገብርኤት ዕውር**/ Gebrihet the blind) and escaped from trap of death set by a robust young man called Jergedella (**ጀገጃላ**) which means the killer of his kinsmen is a typical example, (P 68-70).

Unlike the story of Gebrihet the blind, some tales are directly used in the course of conversation of the colonial issue. The known tale teller in the novel, Mehari, in commemoration of a saint for example, tells the summary of a camel and a small hut of a sincere man. In brief the tale goes like this:

« ከምታ ግመል ዝገበረቶ እኮ እዩ ... ከዕቅል ኢላ ርእሳ ኣብታ ኣጉዶ ናይቲ ለዋህ ሰብ ዝእተወገጉ ግመል ዕንሕ ኢላ ሙሉእ ነፍሳ ናብታ ኣጉዶ ምስ ኣእተወታ እታ ኣጉዶ ፈረሰት። እቲ ለዋህ ሰብ ድማ ኣጉድኡ ሰኣነ (P.105)

“It is like what the camel did...to be saved from cold and rain, first the camel begged and put its head and neck to a small hut of a sincere man. Later, the camel made enter all its body. Consequently, the small hut fell apart. At last, the meek man left homeless.” (P.105)

The tale of the camel exactly matches with the proverb ‘Give the camel an inch, and it will take an ell’. The hero’s grand father delivered eloquent speech to the people in the religious party. Using the analogy, he discussed vividly the past and the present condition of the colonizers, that is, the gradual progress of Italians .Besides, the tale hints the future of the natives. As the meek man in the story lost his hut, the natives would be land less when the colonizers fully controlled the country and took away the fertile lands of the natives.

Indeed, the tales incorporated in the novel are not only Mehari’s. In the course of narration the narrator narrates a traditional tale to elaborate the point of discussion on page 195. The anecdote is put:

ቀደም ቀደም ይብሉ ወለዱ፤ እንደርታ አብ ዝብሃል ዓዲ ሓደ ሰብኣይ እንደሓንቲ ኮማሪት ስዋ ክሰቲ ኣተው። ኮማሪት ስዋ ብሻሻት ቀዲሓ ጥዲማ ሃበቶ ። ሰብኣይ ስውኡ እንዳሰተየ ነታ ኮፍ ኢሉላ ዘሎ ገዛ ረከደ። አብጎድኑ ጡጥ ዝመለአት ንእሽተይ ለቆታ ኣላ። ኮማሪት መጠቓ ትስንክት ነይራ ምስኡ ኮፍ ከይበለት እትው ውፅእ በለት። ሰብኣይ ካፍቲ ለቆታ እንዳውፅእ ናብ ነፀልኡ ገብሮ--ነቲ ጡጥ።

« ጡጥ የደልየንዶ እምበይተይ? »

« ተለየኸቢርኩምዎስ ምገዛእኸኹም »

ሰበይቲ በገዛ ጡጣ ስዋኣ ሸጠትሉ። ሰብኣይ ስወኡን ብጡጡን እንዳበለ ስውኡ ሰትዮ መገዱ ቀፀለ (P:195)

Our fore fathers say it was in the olden times, in Enderta district a man dropped in a tavern (local bar) to have native beer. Taking a taste, the local bar tender gave him the drink

with a tumbler. Since the woman was baking Meteqa* outside, she did not sit with him. The man sat alone and observed the house where he sat in. Beside him, there was a small skin bag filled with cotton. The man, then, took out the cotton and filled into his shawl- Like garment. As the woman came in to the house “Madam, would you buy cotton?” asked the man.

“If it is not expensive, I would buy,” answered the woman Then she bartered her cotton with her local beer. Drinking the beer, the man left the house saying: ሰውአን ብጡጡን (her native beer by her cotton). (P:195)

The above anecdote is not inserted for nothing, it rather flares up the narration about the double repression of colonialists discussed below the tale, that is, the colonizers take away the fertile lands of Africans and produce raw materials like cotton, gums sesame, minerals etc. Taking the raw materials to their countries, they process the raw materials in industries and manufacture finished goods. Then, Africa becomes the market place of their ready made goods. Africans buy them paying unfair cost allotted by the white producers. So, for the imperialists Africa is a source of raw materials and a market place where they unload and sell their goods. From Africa to Africans exactly like the woman in the story who exchanges her cotton with her local beer.

In Wodi Wa-ero, there is a myth which illustrates the origin of Romans. It is forwarded in colonel Meravigna's threat. The official of the military camp in Dekmehare and antagonist character, colonel Meravigna hears the rumor that Embaye would probably be an out law and fight against Italians and the colonel also learns the praise name of Embaye and its meaning 'the son of lioness.' Knowing this all, the colonel threatens by saying:

* Dried, thin and flat bread made from mainly millet and sorghum flour used to brew local beer (Tella)

« ድሓን ... ወይ አንስተይቲ አንበሳ ወይ አንስተይቲ ተኸላ አየነህ ከፖ
 ዝስዕራ ክንርኢ ኢና» (P.23) *“Well,... we will see then, which one
 of them, the lioness or the she-wolf, would win a victory”
 (P.23)*

The colonel does not mention the she-wolf randomly from other wild animals. It has, rather, mythological background. The twin brothers Romulus and Remus, who were thrown by their father is believed that they stayed under the care of a she-wolf which fed them with her milk till they are found by a shepherd who brought them up. In Roman mythology then, the twin brothers are founders of the present Italians who have due respect to the she-wolf. The lioness and the she-wolf in the threat, therefore, do not represent for the wild animals which are normally live in a bush, but they are symbols of the two different races. The lioness stands for the Ethiopians and the she-wolf for Italians. So, the female animals are symbols of the two opposite forces that confronted each other.

Generally, the employment of the past historic legends and the tales has great significance to the historical novel. The legends and the tales make the story to go forward, as they are the ‘fuel’ for the young hero to have persistent character and increase his hatred upon the Italian fascist.

The presence of the oral histories serves as a mirror in which the present generation sees the heroes of their past and follow their footsteps in accordance to the conditions of the present times. Besides, readers of the novel can grasp the central idea of the historical novel because the legends and tales accentuate the main themes of Wodi Wa-ero.

4.4. Thematic Function of Oral Poetry

Names, proverbs, historic legends and tales are not the only forms of oral traditions incorporated in the novel. But, various oral verse traditions

which reveal the condition of the colonial era are also the exploited genres in the novel. Work poetry, panegyric poetry, Elegiac, lyric, topical and political songs are the forms that have been used in Wodi Wa-ero.

In Tigriyna there are a lot of verses which are performed in different contexts and situations. *Masse*, for example, is one sort of cultural performance which is performed in festivals and cultural celebrations by popular performers. The topic of masse folksongs are, indeed, not bounded to specific issues. They include praising, warning, commenting in political and social issues, criticizing etc. Regarding this traditional performance, Girmay (1999:98-99) has noted that the masse poetry, performed by highly respected oral poets, is produced at social gatherings. It is usually reserved for special occasions of importance in society.

He further explained that the typical settings where the masse poems are performed are during the commemoration of local chiefs or national figures and during marriage festivities, they have a function of artistic entertainment, but other messages considered of social importance can also be delivered by the performing poets depending on their mood and that of their audience. The masse poems of commemoration are as a rule more serious in tone. Essentially, they are intended as panegyric poems, and do concentrate on praising the main hosts and their heroic deeds

In addition to praising the hosts and their extended family lineage, the masse poems are also aesthetic objects in which the collective concerns of society are expressed. Wishes, expectations, fears and hopes of their communities are given by the performing poets to the commemorated chiefs and leaders. Thus, the poems can serve as important opinion formers in cultural and political discourse especially in times of new social and political changes. It is from this traditional performance that

the author of Wodi Wa-ero has drawn some oral poems that demonstrate the condition of the colonial period.

But, the oral poems incorporated in the novel are not all taken from highly celebrated festivals like those of masse poems. Some of them are performed in local bars where the natives gather to quench their thirst and share ideas while they are having the home made beer (Tella). Certainly, the historical novel has no a full description of great commemoration, cultural celebration like marriage and no character who is respected popular poet. The characters and the narrator, however, say the oral poems in accordance with the topic of their discussion as they heard them from others.

As indicated earlier, the novel consists of various oral poems that illustrate different issues of the period. There is, for instance, an oral poem of praising an 'ox'. In fact, the poem could assist to the understanding of the livelihood of the people which is the socio-economic condition but it has no direct connection with the political milieu of the colonization which is the main concern of the historical novel. Thus, in analyzing and investigating their association with the themes of the novel, the traditional poems that show the historic and political events of the colonial period are taken to be analyzed and checked their relevance to the central idea of the novel in the next topic.

4.4.1. Social Responses of Colonization in the Oral Poetry

Under the previous sub-topic, an attempt has been made to show the presence, the forms and the source of the oral poems employed in the novel. And in here, as folksongs and some other traditional poems are the common means of expression regarding various situations and historic events, the oral poems incorporated in the novel are to be

examined closely to detect various aspects of the society in relation to colonization.

Since every oral poem whether recited, declaimed or sung, has got certain ends to meet, the social function criterion that prioritizes the end is the main concern in examining the oral poems. In fact, the oral poems speak a lot about the economic and socio-political context of colonization. But, as Finnegan (1970:15) has summed up that in the case of oral literature the bare words can not be left to speak for themselves. Hence, various historical circumstances and social-political contexts, as depicted in the novel are to be considered in analyzing and checking their relation to the themes of the novel.

Despite the fact that the novel concerns with the issue of colonial matters, a number of topics are put under the umbrella of colonization. In addition to the characters and narrator's explanation, the topics are also well elaborated by the oral poems incorporated in the novel. The folksongs like most other forms of oral literature manifest the credible reflections of the colonial society. Instead of dealing with each societal reflection and aspect, however, some major aspects that are revealed in the oral poems are chosen to be points of discussion. The principal aspects are categorized as cooperation, opposition, political repression and viciousness of the war.

4.4.1.1. Cooperation

The 'divide and rule' tactic is a means by which the imperial powers use to control the people under their colony. The colonizers exercise the system to disintegrate the unity and weaken the power of the people. As a result the colonized people become paralyzed and shoulder the yoke of colonization without or with less resistance from the natives. Giving material reward and rank for some groups and biased treatment of

religions are typical examples of the basis. In the historical novel the native colonial soldiers like Te'ame are good bad examples who sell their identity and become adherents of the colonial government to obtain money and materials like clothes and shoes.

As some sections of the society become loyal to Italians, suspicion predominated among the native people. The colonial adherents appreciate Italians in singing and performing oral poems **“ጠዓመ ይኹን ዋላ ከምጠዓመ ዝበሉ ጥልያን ምስ መፀ ከምዚ ኢሎም ተቀነይሉ” (P.36). “With the advent of Italians Te'ame and his likes perform poem like the following” (P.36).**

እንቋዕ ድሓን አቶኻ ጎይታ ምስላኒ
ኪለው ዝፈትወካ ከሜስ ቀርኒ
አምላኽ ዝመረፀካ ከምፍረወይኒ
ፅቡቕን ከፉእን ትፈልጥ ከምዓይኒ
ፃዕዳ መዓር ዘይብል ሃቡኒ
ቀይሕ ጠስሚ ዘይብል ሃቡኒ
ሓሻኽርካ ዘይብሉ ምርሑኒ
ፀብሒ ሓሚቕኒ ስዋ ቀጢኑኒ
እንታይ እሞ ክወፃ ግዝአት መለላኒ (P.36)

**Welcome back Lord Marrazani
Who is liked by all as especial mead
Chosen by God like the fruit of wine
Who like intelligent eye distinguishes good from evil
Who does not demand white honey
Who does not demand butter
Whose troops do not need a guider
Who does not complain on foods and drinks
It is absolutely good the rule of Marrazani (P.36)**

The above oral poem which is performed in admiration of the Italians demonstrated the view of the sections of the society who are in favor of the colonial government. These people are the adversaries of their country men who abhor the colonizers. Indeed, the above poem is not the only instance which is sung in admiration of Italians. The narrator explains the identity of those colonial loyal and states another folksong Saying , “**ሶልዲ ጥልያን ዝለመዱ ... ካብኩሉ እተኹርዕ ሃገር ዘላቶም ምኻኑ ዝረከቡ ... ንርእሶም ኣቅሊሎም ንጥልያን ክብ ዘበሉ ኣብ መንጎ ህዝቢ ተፈጠሩ**” (P.49) **‘Within the society, some individuals, who adopted the habit of obtaining Italian ‘lire’ ... who forgot that they have great and glorious country ...who belittle themselves and glorify Italy, come to exist. (P.49).** These groups to express their loyalty, they sing:

ዘበን ጥልያን ኩላቱ ክቢሩ

ከም ጣልያን ዝበለ መን ተፈጠሩ (P. 49)

In the reign of Italy every one is respected

As Italy, no government is formed (P. 49)

The excerpt and the oral poem highlight that the colonial adherent are those who get material rewards. From the oral poems discussed above, then, it is possible to conclude that no matter the injustice of the Italian colonization there were individuals who welcomed Italians open heartedly and collaborate with them to get economic benefits.

4.4.1.2. Opposition

Despite the presence of some colonial collaborators, there were different forms of colonial oppositions. Majority of the native people reflect their ill feelings on the colonizers in various ways. Singing traditional songs that consists of anti-colonial subject is one means. The opposition folksongs contain various themes within them. Awarig the society not to be deceived, disclosing the trick of Italians, warning the native heroes to be

fully aware and criticizing the social disorders caused due to the emergency of colonization are some examples.

Regarding the responses of the patriots to the stated folksongs under cooperation, the narrator remarks, **“ግናኸ እዞም ከምዚ ዝበሉ ኣኽልብቲ እምበር ሱብ ኣይኮኑን ዝበሉ ለባማት ብኣውሎ ገይሮም ህዝቢ ካብ ፀላኢኡ ንኸጥንቀቅ ይነግርዎ” (P.49).** ***‘The attentive patriots, however, say that the traitors, who sing in admiration of Italians are ‘dogs’ and using Aw’llo (masse) they (attentive patriots) alert their country men to be careful from their enemy (P.49).***

The following is a widely known masse oral poem:

**ዝጠዓመ እንተጠዓመ ዓናን ነይምሹ
ኣንታ ሰንጋል ሓወይ እምብዛ ኣይተዓሹ
ወደይ ገብረ መድህን እምብዛ ኣይተዓሹ
ገመድ ኣሎ ቅሩብ ተፋሒሹ
ባፅዕ እግሩ ዓለም መተርኣሉ
ዓዕዳ ተመን እንድሕር ነኺሉ
ደላሊኻ ዘይርከብ ፈውሉ (P.49-50)**

***What so ever it is kind
An outsider does not last
Oh, Sengal my brother don’t be a fool
Gebremedhin my son don’t be a fool
There exist an already ‘twisted rope’
That extended from Assab to Massawa
If a white serpent bites
There is no cure for it (P.49-50)***

The above historic folksong has various functions. It warns the native heroes, Sengal and ‘Gebremedhin’ Bahta’s brother and son respectively, to be conscious. Besides, the two metaphors ‘twisted rope’ and ‘white serpent’ disclose the foxiness and dangerousness of the Italians. It also awakens the native people to fight against the Imperial power. Tekeste (1987:46) has noted that the saying which is found in the last two lines of the above oral poem ‘There is no medicine for the bite of white serpent became historical idiom’. It is visible, then the role of the oral poem in

alerting the people and fostering the struggle against colonization. Similarly, Miruka (1994:122) has noted, “one of the best example of historical events recorded in poetry is the struggle against colonialism.”

Here is also another oral poem that condemns the ruling system of the colonial government. Concerning the translation of the following poem, except lines five, six and seven the rest part is taken from Girmay (1999:105).

መንግስቲ ጣልያን ታይ መንግስቱ
ንሱ ሰይጣን ስረኤል ንል ሓውቱ
ክልቢ ኣጋፋሪ ህበይ ዝፋን ቤቱ
ፍትሒ ዘይመልስ ዘይኣስኩቱ
ብጀካ እስላም ክርስትያን ዘይፈቱ
ወዲ ጭዋ ኹሉ ተሃንኩቱ

በዓል ሽመት ስኢኑ ሽመቱ
በዓል ጉልቲ ስኢኑታ ጉልቱ
በዓል መሬት ስኢኑ መሬቱ
መቓብር እኳ ብዋጋ ተኻፂቱ
ተፈጢርና ብዘበነ ኮንቱ
የውፀእና ካብ ሰሪ መዓቱ
ደጊም ምድሪ የለን ተባሒቱ (P.80-81)

*What government of a kind is this
A devil it is, its sister an evil fairy
The dog an usher, its guard a monkey
Never does it respond, except shut up
Who does not like Christians except Muslims?
All the Gentlemen have been exterminated*

*Deprived has become a title- possessor of his title
Deprived has become a fief-holder of his fief*

***Deprived has become a land owner of his land
Even graves are dug with money
Created we are in times of folly (P.180-81)***

The description above denotes the injustice of the colonial administration. The natives got irritable mainly because of the favored treatment of Muslim over Christians and monopoly of the land. The former issue which is uneven treatment of the Christians is a tactic made by the colonial powers to predominate distrust among the Christians and Muslim Ethiopians. As clearly explained in Wodi Wa-ero the Italians suspect the Christian Askaris to have relations with their brothers beyond Mereb. So, giving some privileges, the Italians set Muslims to spy and follow the activities of their Christian brothers attentively (P. 179). In fact, this system causes to exist doubts among Ethiopians. What Hajji, a Muslim character in the novel who is a true Ethiopian but doubted as spy, says “አወ፣ ንሕና ፎርማቶሪ ተባሂልና እንዲና ዝበልና እንተበልና ኣይንእመንን (P. 180) ***“Yes ... we all are categorized as secret agents, we are not believed whatever we say (P.180).*** Taking the discussed points into account, it can be deducted that the oral poem depicted the devastation of the imperial.

In the colonial era, the living system of the indigenous people was not like in the time of pre-colonial. Colonization disturbed the old norms and practices of the society. In the historical novel the narrator tells us what a minstrel sings against the unusual situation created. The English part of the folksong is presented here as translated in Gebreyesus (2008:163):

**ዘበን ጥልያን ዘበን ትልንቲ
ሰብ ኣብ ግዳም ከልቢ በዓል ቤቲ
ሰብኣይ ውፃእ ህበይ መዛርብቲ
ንጎበዝ ዶ ትኣሰሮ ሰበይቲ
ሰበይቲ ናብ ባይቶ ሰብኣይ ይስንክቲ**

ጋዶ ኸ ረኽብና ሰብኡቲ
 ናብኡን ተመሊሱ ኹርንዕቲ
 ምናዳ ምናዳ እተን ቅያሕቲ
 ንሰብኣይ ዘበልኦ ንድሕሪቲ
 ሓሊፈን ዝመግታ ቤተ መንግስቲ (P. 171)

During the reign of Tininti Italian
Come home a dog and stay a side my man
Get out man come and woo me baboon
Can a man be fettered by a woman?
Shall he cook food as she is in a congregation?
Alas! We men are doomed to such tribulation
These days to instigate a quarrel is their turn
Especially those who are fair
They order a man to come later
And moves fast to win the heart of the court's chair (P.171)

The minstrel's song above demonstrates that the traditional norms particularly the patriarchal system turns upside down. So, the local men reflect their depression on the strong social life in the colonial social environment. To sum up, no matter the ways, denouncing the colonial system is what all the oral poems under this sub-topic share in common. Using the oral poem, then, it would not be difficult to understand how the people react to colonization. And this in turn leads to the understanding of the themes of the novel.

4.4.1.3. Political Oppression

In the historical novel, the characters and the narrator express various sorts of socio-political repression which are shouldered by majority of the people. Depriving the freedom of speech, for instance, is one kind of repression discussed in the novel. During the colonial period the natives have no right to criticize, comment and express their feelings on the

ruling system. While having conversation, with priest Gerima, the hero character Embaye expresses the situation “ኣየ ኣቦይ ቀሺ ... መዓስ ጠፊኡኒ ኢልኩም ኢኹም፤ ሎሚ ድኣ ፎርማቶሪ ጥልያን ኣብ ገዛን ድሕሪ ገዛን መሊኦም ከመይ ጌርካ ናይ ልብኻ ይዝረብ (P.97)” *“Oh, yes respected priest ... I understand, now days how can we speak freely as the secret agents spy our house and its surroundings, (P.97)”*. In the novel this suffering is also demonstrated in oral poem. In a local bar, one who gets irritated by the Italian war planes sings:

ኣንታ እንታይ እዩ ብላዕሊ ዘጉረምርም
ካብ ሎሚ ጀሚሩ ዶ ማይ ክሃርም
ካብ ሎሚ ጀሚርና ኹ ኣቦይ ክንከርም (P. 97)
Alas! What is thundering up above in the sky
Hence forth, would there be rain?
And where are we going to spend the time now on? (P.97)

While the man is singing, accidentally a Banda enters into the local bar. Terrifying, the singer changed his mind and sings:

ወዮም እንዳሙሶሊኒ ዱቺ ዕሉም
ጓል ይኹን ባንዴራ ዝጠልም
ነዐኡም ዝጠለመስ ይበል ህልም (P.97)
The duke Mussolini's trained soldier
He who betrays a girl and your flag as well
And he who betrays you, let him go to hell P. 97)

Listening to the latter song, then the Banda says “ኅፍስኻ ኣውፃእኻያ፤ P.97” *“you saved your life P.97”*

The above extract reveals the agony of the people vividly. The oral poems (songs) witness that to survive, they had to glorify and worship the colonizers but commenting and criticizing the real situation exposes one's life to risk.

4.4.1.4. The Devastation of the War

In Wodi Wa-ero, not only political repression and economic exploitation but the wickedness of the Ethio-Italy war is also depicted. In fact, the war was different from the former wars. The fascist uses poison-gas which is internationally banned not to be used in battlegrounds. The disastrous condition of the war is clearly illustrated in an elegy of a female character, kindihafiti. As she along with three other characters travels from the Eastern to the Western of Tigray after some time the war begins, kindihafti gets the opportunity to observe the ugly face of the war. And using a rhythmic elegy she described the horrific situation and the oddness of the war equipments like war vehicles and aircrafts introduced by the fascist. Taking Gebreyesus's (2008:146) translation, here is kindihafti's rhythmic elegy:

ዓዲግራት ብኸያ ሕዘናየ
ዓድዋ ኮይኑ ዲሄናየ
መቐለ ብኸያ ሕዘናየ
ተምቤን ኮይኑ ዲሄናየ
ብመሬት ምስ መፀት መኪናየ
ብሰማይ ምስ ኾነ ጎደናየ
ኣሸምባይ ንጉሰ ኣደም ዝኸማናየ
እዝጊ'ውን ኣየፍለጡን ገናየ (P. 314-315)

*Let you woe, be wail Adigrat
For Adwa has become
A land of innumerable fight
Let you grieve Mekele cry
As Temben is in invasion
As cars come through land
When an avenue is made on the sky
Let alone the king a person like us
God seems to be under threat. (P. 314-315)*

The demolition of districts due to the furious war is indicated in the elegy. Moreover, examining, the last line of the verse 'God seems to be under threat' one can understand that the war had been beyond one's imagination.

To summarize, the incorporation of all the oral poems under 4.2 really helped to describe the colonial situations and events vividly. They even go beyond magnifying the themes of the novel. The oral poems in Wodi Wa-ero enable readers to sense the situation and share the feeling of the Ethiopians under the colony.

4.3. The Impact of Oral Narratives on the Behavior of the Hero Character

In the foregoing topic the main task was looking at the significance of the employed oral literature to the major themes of the historical novel. The activity is direct, that is, screening the different forms of oral literature and examining its role in relation to the central idea. In here, however, it is the impact of the employed oral literature on the personal make up of Embaye to be accounted.

As briefed in chapter two, Africans use oral literature to shape the young generation in accordance to the rules and regulations of the society. Most of the time, elders take part in narrating stories that discourage the vices and encourage the virtues. By narrating stories, the elders sharpen the critical thinking of the youngsters and gradually the young become mentally and emotionally matured person. Regarding this, the grandson of the old patriot is not different.

The protagonist, Embaye, has some personal qualities that distinguish him from other persons in the novel. Patience, prudence, virtuousness, bravery are the main features of the hero character and they have close

relation with some issues in the novel. But, these qualities are not acquired due to genetic endowment. Rather the way he brought up enabled him acquire the stated qualities. For him his grandfather is not only a person who provides him, paternal care and love but the old Mehari is also his teacher who is an umbilical cord that connects the past with the present.

The tales his grandfather narrates like the story of Gebrhihet the Blind (ገብርኤት ዕውር) makes Embaye to be prudent. As he joins the Italian military camp in Deki-Mehare, for example, he asks numerous questions about the storehouse, arms and the relationship of the soldiers' systematically. As he sees tanks, he gathers information about them, that is, how they can be driven, number of soldiers drive a tank, how the tanks can be burnt down, and other things from his Askari friend. And as the result of his prudence his plan of destroying the store house has not been aborted.

Another fruit of his farsightedness is that when the Ethiopian brave fighters have been fighting, the Italian tanks disturb the patriots as they (tanks) are strange. In the course of the furious war the narrator presents the dialogue conducted between Ras Emru, and Embaye about the tanks as follows “እዘን ሓፃውንቲ ሸይጣን እንታይ ይኸልክለን?” ኢሎም ሓተትዎ ራእሲ እምሩ---ንእምባዩ፤ ኣብ ገፆም ጭንቀት እንዳተነበበ። “ቀሊል እዩ!” በሎም እምባዩ። “ልዕሊ እቲ እግረን ሳንዱቕ ዝመስል ሓፂን ኣሎ። ብኡ ናብ ደገ ዝሪእሉ ኖኻል ኖኻል ኣለዎም... እንድሕር ጨሚትና ናብቲ ነኳል ወቂዕና እቶም ዘወርቲ ታንክን ተኮስቲ መትርየስን ክንቀትሎም ንኸእል ኢና” በሎም። (P.278), *“What stops these devil metals?” asked Ras Emru in a worrying sprit, “Its is easy!” replied Embaye, “above their wheels there is a box-like metal that has holes and if we shoot targeting the holes we can kill the drivers and the artillery shooters,” Said Embaye, (p.278).*’ The patriots are told to shoot right into

the holes and they destroyed the tanks. This is an evident of the hero's farsightedness.

As far as Embaye's bravery and victorious qualities are concerned, there might be various factors. But, Mehari's adventurous narrations which concentrate on the bravery of Ethiopian noble warriors of the past are the main causes.

In his childhood, the hero character, sitting with elders, used to listen the narration of heroic acts attentively. The story of Ras Alula and his gallantry fight against Italians was his favorite. The courageous and witty Alula becomes his model. The flash back story that discusses what Embaye says when he was a child justifies this point:

“አባይ” በሎም እምባየ ንግሆ ተሲኡ

“አህ እምባየ ወደይ” በሎታ

“እነ ራእሲ አሉላ እየ” በሎም እታ ክንዲ ሞኸሰ ትኸውን በትሩ ሒዙ

“ንዓ ስዓመኒ እዚ ወደይ”

“ንምንታይ ኢኻ እምባየ ወደይ ራእሲ አሉላ ክትኮውን ደሊኻ ?” በሎታ

“አሉላ ጅግና እዮም ትብሉ ነይርኩም ትማሊ” በሎም (p.159)

“Father” said Embaye waking in the morning.

“Yes... Embaye my son,” said Mehari.

“I am Ras Alula” said Embaye carrying his thin stick

“Come and kiss me my son” said Mehari and asked

“Why do you like to be Ras Alula?”

“Because, yesterday you were saying that Alula is gallant” replied (p.159)

This excerpt portrays that the child Embaye has been impressed by the oral history of the known figure. Thus, it would be possible to say that

the bravery of the hero is mainly due to the influence of the oral literature in general and oral histories in particular. So, the issue of heroism and the fully grown hatred of the hero character, planted in his childhood make the story of the novel to go through. Heroism which is an issue in the novel, then is related with the personality of Embaye who is shaped by the oral tradition empowered some themes in the novel.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

So far, an attempt has been made to reveal the thematic function of oral literature in Wodi Wa-ero. The novel consists of some major forms of oral literature: Naming (proper and praise), proverbs, tales, legends, myths and oral poetry are the sort of oral literature employed in the historical novel. Some of the oral literature is used by the narrator and others are by the persons of the novel who have different motives and goals to achieve and this made the employed oral literature to have different functions.

Proper and praise names are the oral traditions used in the novel. Out of many characters, five characters owned proper names which demonstrate their manners and actions. For those who are brave, wise and honest names that reflect their bravery, wisdom and honesty and for those who are coward names which are related with cowardice are given. The characters have not been observed as they perform activities that contradicts with their names. Concerning the praise name in the novel, most people called the hero character by his nickname 'Wodi Wa-ero' which is the title of the novel and means 'the son of lioness.' Indeed, the praise name has an impact on his heroic deeds. Both the proper and praise names hint the identity of the important characters, then, one can guess what the story of the novel is all about by implying and associating the names and their deeds.

Proverbs are also the exploited form in the historical novel. Most proverbs used by the narrator have summative function. They are used to summarize the points of discussion (narratives) that come before or/and after them. In addition to the summary, some other proverbs have been used to reflect the society's perception, historical fact,

heroism, confusion of the natives, and the limitless greediness of the fascist. The incorporated proverbs have come in touch with most issues raised in the novel and they enlivened the issues very well.

Besides, oral narratives which included the oral histories and tales, is one of the genres employed in the novel. The historic legends which mainly appeared in the novel and narrated by the hero's grandfather are about the celebration of the past glorious wars. Mehari has narrated such legends to inspire the hero character, avoid generation gap and compare and contrast the past with the present. The tales and anecdotes have been exploited to deliver moral lessons and to convey the desired topics simply and eloquently. Meravigana's threat led us to refer to the mythological concept. The threat included to female animals, the lioness and the she-wolf, which are the symbols for the Ethiopians and Italians respectively.

Moreover, many oral poems have been incorporated in the novel. Most of the poems are drawn from the oral cultural performance; *masse*. Based on their content, the poems are categorized under four sub-topics namely cooperation, which includes all the folksongs that are sung to admire and glorify the colonizers and the situation, political repression that mainly refers to the poems that reveal the political oppression, opposition which included oral poems that oppose colonization and its result, and the poem that express the holocaust and wickedness of the war. The oral poems assist us sense the colonial situation and imagine the colonial social environment.

Wodi Wa-ero is written in one of the Ethiopian local language, Tigriyna. So, the reason for the incorporation of the oral literature is not to show Ethiopian richness in verbal art to the outsiders. The employment is technical. Thus, by knitting the oral literature within his creative work;

the author has conveyed the intended message vividly. The proverbs, the narratives, and the oral poems are all aimed at enlarging the central idea. So, the presence of oral literature in the novel helped a lot in concretizing and magnifying the themes of Wodi Wa-ero.

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Online resource

<http://www.oral literature.org info/oral literature html>.

Appendix

Synopsis of Wodi Wa-ero

Embaye who is commonly called by his praise name 'Wodi Wa-ero' is a robust and newly married young man in his village 'Kurbariya' a suburb of Dekmehare which is the main military base of the colonial government. In his childhood, he is fond of listening to various oral histories of his fore fathers' heroic deeds. Indeed, this makes Embaye love his mother land and developed hatred up on the fascist colonizers and their native followers. Knowing that Embaye is a magnificent shooter and brave hunter, the Italian military commander colonel Maravigna sends his men repeatedly to arrest Embaye. Since he hides himself in his secret hay covered hut, they faile to find him. As the Italian officials hear the rumors that 'Wodi Wa-ero' would decide to be an outlaw, they prison his amiable grandfather.

To free his grandfather, Embaye goes to the camp and after short but secret discussion with his grandfather he joins the Italian army. Within a short period of time, Embaye learns all the ins and outs of the camp and their military weapons.

Hearing the fame of 'Wodi Wa-ero' a ranked native colonial solider who is called Seleba Aka from 'Senafe' meets Embaye clandestinely and discuss about their plan of action. Hence, in the eve of the war, Embaye together with his loyal friends burns the arm store down and escapes at night. At the same night, Seleba Aka along with his men robs the arms store and escapes from Sen-afe. Meeting at a village called 'Mihrad Lam' Embaye and Seleba reach Adigrat. The people of Adigrat appreciate their heroic

achievements. The local chief, Degezimash Hailesilassie Gugsu, however, welcomed them half heartedly. When Embaye gets information from an insider that the selfish chief communicates confidentially with Italian officials, he becomes disappointed and tells Seleba. The chief confiscates all the weapons. Leaving all their arms behind, Embaye and Seleba depart to each other. Embaye to Adwa, and Seleba to Addis Ababa.

Taking some solidiers from Ra-esi Seyoum a governor of Adwa, Embaye attacks Italian base at Adikuala. When the invasion begins, his brigade carries out a sudden attack in Mereb. Later, retreating his men, he joins the Ethiopian patriots led by Ras Emuru in Selekleka. He and his men fight bravely in Selekleka and Mountain Qoyetsa. The fascist, however, disbanded the Ethiopian armies using internationally banned gas. Escaping from the holocaust narrowly, Embaye forms guerilla fighters whose base is at Adi Aw-ala which is near Badime and fight until the collapse of the fascist. Finally, he and his men return to Eritrea embalming the Ethiopian flag.

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original works and has not been presented for a degree in any other university, and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been dully acknowledged.

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Place Addis Ababa University

Date of Submission June 25th, 2010

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as a university advisor
