

## SALALE OROMO WOMEN SONGS OF RESISTANCE

*Feminist Critical 'Listening' of a Folkloric Oicotype (OROMOIA, ETHIOPIA)*

*[by Asafa Tefera Dibaba, USA]*

### *Abstract*

Women are the principal informants in the present songs of *Bar-kumee* (post-millennium songs). This fact conditions the point of view, ideologies, and perceptions expressed in these songs of resistance. The songs reveal the need for social and economic empowerment for women as one determinant factor in development. There can be such gender-bound feminine voices in Oromo folklore, but the nature and characteristics of the voices have not been studied in any detail. The present paper attempts to reveal the ideas and beliefs that women express in their rendition of one such gender-bound 'genre' and show how their renditions differ.

### **KEYWORDS:**

*resistance research. resistance folklore. eroticism/sexuality. local politics. gender politics. humor*

### *I. Introduction*

This is another Millennium Monologue from the Salale and Jirru field of folklore, North Showa/Oromia in Ethiopia during my folkloric field research from September 2009 to July 2010. The data was collected through interview with folkperformers and group discussions with women folksingers in the area. Children also copied and recited the songs used as humor among adults to critique about the Ethiopian Millennium.

It is a song of gratitude by women to an indolent husband lost his days and nights inattentive to his wife. Struck by hunger and languished to death, Men are now inactive, docile and impotent that Women mockingly thank their weak Men who lie all night long like a fallen log with no or less want of sex. It is also a song of the barren period of time, *Bar-kumee*, i.e., Millennium, despite all the state propaganda elevated it as an imagined utopian age of joy, peace, and justice. It is a satire concocted to be a song of joy for such a time especially created through revolution, revolution for the oppressors not for the oppressed. The monologue is also about troubled love and marriage during a harsh time. Through this Monologue from Jirru centering on *Bar-kumee*, Oromo women in the locale express their erotic views during adverse socio-economic and political conditions and voice their gloomy situation under domination imposed by the repressive state and patriarchal structures.

Methodologically speaking, women and children were sources of the data since adult men and elders seemingly avoid muddling in such serious matters as taboo and politics. The discussion of the function, organization, performance and thematic concerns of the songs in question will establish their distinct status as a separate genre with such complementarities among them. The history of the evolution of such a subject-specific genre set in a specific historical context is attempted only as the analysis of the

characteristic literary genre is worked out. The foregrounding of women in connection with the performance casts some light on the collective viewpoint, on the erotic and the politic sentiments of women in a specific historical context, which initiates a folkloristic resistance research.

The following categories could thus be made of these songs of *Bar-kumee*: songs associated with *eroticism and sexuality*, and of *politics*. Under these rubrics, we can capture at least four general lyrical forms woven into these songs, the women being composers and performers with children, with no specific audience: lyrics of starvation and its causes, socio-economic crises, migration, and environment.

Drawing on folkloristic and critical approaches, this paper aims at analyzing issues of structured (and domestic) violence and agency addressed through Jirru and Salale Oromo women resistance folksongs from different transversal critical perspectives. Following are queries this paper aims at closely investigating from a feminist and a critical point of view and signifying the state of Oromo protest song rooted within the resistance culture of the society in the specific locale:

- the reconstitution of intersecting relations of power such as gender, class, sexuality
- the project of resistance against what can be called a neoliberalist political and economic agenda at local and national/global levels masquerade
- the visible forms of oppression (domestic, state) and how they are communicated in the community as through creative resistance, e.g., protest recitals
- and the interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary reformulation of theoretical concepts and methodological approaches in academic disciplines involved in resistance studies: Critical/Conflict Theory and Feminist Theory as *anti-oppressive* methods.

## *II. Resistance Research and Folkloristics*

Be that 'we are multiple from the start,' as our 'true names' reflect this fact, but different resistance cultures are used and dissimilar indigenous forces are employed to shape social changes and enhance transformations related to economy, education, religion, and political leadership. In so doing, the political, social and economic well-being of the society is boosted and values of emancipatory resistance are promoted. When it comes to promoting human progress, some subcultures are clearly more effective than others. Which values, beliefs, and attitudes work in favour of resistance culture at a time in history and how those values foster to mitigate domination and maintain human rights is of a paramount importance mainly to identify the role of folklore scholarship in promoting social justice. The social basis and political scope of the Oromo protest songs need to be pinpointed as thoughts and verbal expressions and as a mode of communication where the technology of [literacy](#), especially writing and print, are unfamiliar to most of the population. It is equally imperative to identify to date what historical contexts and factors motivate such a creative resistance and constitute oral literatures of rebellion against every act of socio-political, economic and cultural domination.

Resistance literature as a postcolonial literary project broke new ground in western literary studies by calling for a wider, more serious consideration of previously ignored Third World texts. It also demanded critics to abandon their New Critical neutrality and objectivity in favor of a methodology that takes the social, political, and historical circumstances of the creative works into account (Hawley 1996; Harlow 1983). This tendency is also strictly adhered to in the field of *Resistance Research* or *Research as Resistance*, which employs anti-oppressive methods and critical tenets in folklore and gender and cultural studies against every kind of domination (Brown & Strega 2005).

The assertion of Resistance Literature is clear-cut: literature (oral or written) represents an essential “arena of struggle” for people who seek liberation from every kind of oppression, which can take any form of domestic, local or global domination. Creative resistance is at the same time a struggle over the historical and cultural record, which involves deconstructing the old imperial chronicle and reconstructing the history that represents the oppressed, as one North African French anthropologist put “contemporary history will of necessity unfold as the history of decolonization” (in Harlow 1983:4). Resistance literature is a public voice against destructive policies and repressive attitudes and a battle for historical and cultural control. Therefore, it is considered to be no less crucial than the armed struggle, as a ‘peace by peaceful means’ for the oppressed to force governmental and civil change, not to rely heavily on violent political and guerilla elements. Hence, via such non-violent cultural elements as through art performance and poetry recitations and oratory, the people will be able to voice their grievances and eventually work towards liberating themselves from cultural hegemony.

The oppressed can achieve this by engaging with instances of cultural and institutional tools such as folkloric genres of sexuality and eroticism, praise, prayer and Gnostic and local knowledge, which provide a means by which the powerless allusively communicate with the powerful. Most importantly, protest poetry provides a force for mobilizing a collective response to domination and allows the people to reclaim their “historical personality,” which is a necessary part of any successful national liberation.

Socially engaged folkloric scholarship and insightful close study of text, texture and context help to uncover the cultural work of folklore and make conscious the ethnic, gendered and sexualized power relations. Comparative in its method of analysis, thoroughly and accurately reported data is equally important in folklore scholarship, since folklore “means something.” That is, folklore is a pervasive, integral and significant aspect of social existence. Its documentation and study can provide important insights into the essence and dynamics of culture and human behavior. By analyzing folklore, one can discover general patterns of culture, and, folklore, as a form of “ethnographic autobiography” provides a mirror for the rest of the culture and functions as a kind of popular pulse. Among identified several functions of folklore, one is its “serving as a vehicle for social protest,” and allowing counter-hegemonic thoughts and actions and unconscious anxieties to be expressed through symbolism (Dundes 1965:277).

Hegemonic or dominant discourses and subjugated or illegitimate discourses are produced, it is argued, by process such as the sanctioning, including, excluding, valuing, and devaluing of certain concepts, ideas, languages, and words. As Heckman (1990:189) suggests the gaps, silences and ambiguities of discourses provide the possibility for resistance, for questioning of the dominant discourse, its revision

and mutation. They also provide the terrain on which alternative, oppositional, and counter discourses might merge.

By the theory of *struggle* invoked in Hannah Arendt's (1970) remarkable analysis of politics, that acting in concert involves the attempt to change relations between people. Following Arendt's theory, *struggle* has three defining factors. First, it occurs in the relations between people. Second, it involves 'giving birth' to and affirming new ways of being together. Finally, it is a collective endeavour.

Having thus defined struggle, the concept further develops. There are three important points of difference: first, instead of power/resistance unfolding within the subject's inner world, struggle occurs between people making it a profoundly objective and material process. Second, rather than assuming successful power relationships create identification, and resistance dis-identification, it is argued that struggle may involve dimensions of 'over-identification' (with power and alternative narratives). Struggle is not only an action—reaction (cause—effect) relation, but an affirmation which involves bringing into being new ways of being. Finally, instead of assuming that power and resistance function at the level of the subject, it is to be argued that struggle/resistance is ultimately a collective enterprise. Resistance/Struggle only has meaning between people involved.

Ethically and morally speaking, because of some negative states of affairs like widespread suffering, unhappiness, poverty etc. can only be a ground for resistance if someone is responsible for it. In the case of severe deprivation, there is a right to *resistance* (against the state) only if the poverty is caused by the state, or if it is caused by persistent and grave institutional failures, e.g. if the law is blind to the relevant deprivations, and to the extent that the global order is responsible. It seems that the concept of resistance/struggle reinvigorates the study by highlighting how political resistance does not only involve oppression, but also involve the attempt to affirm more just relations between people, the historical relationship

Violence and agency in globalization processes include economic, political, social, legal, epistemological and cultural dimensions and call for historical as well as normative perspectives. The intersection of multiple differences and the structure of inequality, e.g. gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality is one aspect of such nuances contributing to "history in the making" and "politics from below."

Resistance study about unequal resource distribution and unjust power relation under male domination and repressive state structure is as such characterized by *interdisciplinarity*. Gender is a central organizing category of human societies. Sex differences were principally regarded as natural givens that determined the lives of men and women, usually through institutionalized gendered hierarchies. Feminist theory has challenged these assumptions and inspired political movements that aim to dismantle male supremacy in its diverse manifestations, among them gendered violence. Gender is conceptualized as one of several vectors of power that *intersect* in multiple ways. Race and ethnicity, class and ability, sexual orientation and cultural embeddedness have come to be regarded as essential components of gender norms.

Foucault essentially explains such conditions for the possibility of resistance by building it into power relations from the start that *power* implies more than one option open, whereas, *domination* occurs

when people work in constraints that entrap them in asymmetrical relations blinding them to their real range of possibilities (Hoy 2004: 82). In this respect, “all domination is power, but not all power is domination, since power in a broad sense “can be positive and productive” (ibid). Hoy cites Foucault (1984 in Spurr 1993) as saying in an interview “that one cannot speak of power unless one could also speak of freedom...where power is found there resistance will be found as well” (Hoy, ibid). Hence, for a power relation to come into play there must be at least some degree of freedom on both sides that in power relations, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance. This is because, “if there is no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, fight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all” (Foucault, 1997: 292, in Hoy, ibid p82).

Resistance is found not secondarily only in response to power but is found in the social ontology from the start and does not always subvert domination, but can be exploited to increase domination. That is, emancipatory or critical resistance can be distinguished from a resistance of co-optation or compliance. In the case of co-optation, domination defuses resistance by appearing to allow it, not by suppressing it (Hoy, ibid p83). Ethically and morally speaking, some negative states of affairs like widespread suffering, unhappiness, poverty etc. can only be a ground for resistance if someone is responsible for it. In the case of severe deprivation, there is a right to *resistance* (against the state) only if the poverty is caused by the state, or if it is caused by persistent and grave institutional failures, e.g. if the law is blind to the relevant deprivations, and to the extent that the global order is responsible.

In an undemocratic and authoritarian system, no authority or critic dare to mention the name of the statesman in public and comment for observable practical failures without an immediate severe upshot, which now the folkloric performers audaciously do. Such is another folkloric deviation from the set political standard as the moral standard we observed violated in those recitals above, which is deviation from the norm for the sake of refusing to succumb to unjust practices, a challenge in activist scholarship.

Globalization processes have significantly transformed economic and social relations and new scales of politics. These processes have released new dynamics of violence, but also of agency and resistance to violence. The logic of globalization is inherently gendered and, in several respects, works to the detriment of women. The dynamics of global restructuring are driven by the removal, displacement and replacements of borders between the national and international level, but also between the social spheres of economy and state, market and family, and those between public and private. All these (displaced) borders are central to the gendered nature of modern institutions, of gender roles and gender regimes and their global and local restructuring.

Violence and its devastating effects on agency have been a crucial factor that stabilized local and global gender hierarchies. It is one of the core assumptions of the IK that new forms of gendered violence, accompanied by new strategies of resistance and empowerment, emerge in the context of global restructuring. However, these new forms of gender-based violence have to be contextualized in patriarchal structures and traditions of violence against women. Thus, violence is a multi-faceted concept that needs careful examination. It has to be differentiated from terms such as power, hegemony, coercion, and its implications for agency have to be analyzed with attentiveness to context and detail.

In sum, in the view of critical/conflict model, the society is not like an organism that gradually and peacefully becomes more complex in order to increase its survival chances, as this is the case in Functional Theory. Rather, society is filled with human beings who exercise power to oppress and coerce others and those who succumb to and those who reverse the oppression through every possible means. Hence, periods of apparent peace in any coercive regime are simply times when the powerful are able to dominate the populace in an efficient manner, since, according to this model, the suppressed will become enabled and will eventually overthrow and change the system. Conflict being the mechanism for social change in such a system, the conflict between antagonistic groups creates different forms of society engaged in resistance. Critical/Conflict theory is characterized by uneven resource distribution and, therefore, benefits and deprivations resulting into a patterned competition and conflict, until the ideal social system aimed at is promising to happen.

### *III. Erotic-Politic and Folkloric Oicotype*

Folkloric “oicotype” is identified as a version exhibiting variation specific to a singular cultural context, as a key tool in the comparative study of folklore, and can help study how folklore is modified to fit local ideological or worldview tendencies (Dandus 1965:73).

“Is there No Penis on this Land?” is such an Oromo nuptial song another time. There is another Vaginal Monologue also from another African Land where women are strikingly critic of gender-cultured marriage relationships (Ajibade 2005) or such a poem fearlessly titled “My Vagina is Coming,” all the way from Namibia (Afuba 2007). The latter is a monologue by women about their inattentive husbands to see their women conquered by Disease, Hunger, and Poverty under a patriarchal and repressive state domination, the fate of African women and children. In those folkloric and literary ventures, African women voice their awful situation in such a fore-grounded but bawdy languages to claim equal dignity that all people posses, property right and the right to be treated with respect regardless of gender, ethnic origin or class.

The issue of ‘equality’ transcends the acknowledgement of ‘difference’ but ‘equality’ synonymous with ‘same.’ That is, underneath social difference (gender, class) that we are all ‘same’ in our ‘humanity!’ Such are indicators of the socio-economic, cultural and political differences within communities and between communities, and issues of having to choose between one’s social identity (e.g., gender) than membership to the wider mainstream society (e.g., class) are straightforward in such an Oromo nuptial song from Bale (Wattile 2007):

**na shokoyssa,**

**Waabeen tiiraa,**

**tiira maaf bulbulanii?**

**ani dhiiraa,**

**dhiira maaf gurguranii,**

**dhiira lolaan dhaqatanii,**

**ana tolaan qabatanii!**

**but it trembles me,**

**Wabe (river), it is such a hero,  
why they stain it?**

**I am a 'man'**

**why they sale out a 'man?'**

**a man fights and restores dignity**

**but me, they sale me out as cheap as anything!**

The discourse that surrounds polarities such as them/us, primitive/cultured, victim/perpetrator has been painfully underscored in our folklore scholarship so far and such an oversimplification necessitates such a close study reconsidering the state of our resistance literature. As Shoyinka is once heard as saying "...[When] I hear that outrageously simplistic cry of 'Culture is a gun,' I feel like reaching for my culture" (cf. in Hawley 1996:5), such narratives of defiance by the Jirru Oromo are also a loaded gun against the repressive situation of the time and may be in our age will find a voice and also an audience.

#### *Eroticism/Sexuality*

The moral components of protest folksongs related to the nature of resistance (ethical, political) also makes the major foci of critically studying into what resistance (sub-) cultures impede or enhance development and help to maintain human rights, equity, justice and democratic trends. To explore sociopolitical, economic and cultural discontents, i.e., "everyday resistance" masked in eroticism, lullaby and dirges against domination and investigate the responses, attitudes and views of the people to the local officials and to the state, songs are vital sources. In this song [25]

**yaa Bar-kumee!**

**Bar-kumee mataa sariitii,**

**dhirsaa fi niitiin,**

**osoo wal hingahin**

**lafti bariitii.**

**Oh bar-kumee!**

**bar-kumee with a cobwebbed hair,**

**it dawns,**

**before husband and wife**

**turn around to play or strife.**

the singer comments, when there are adverse life conditions such as this during the time of Millennium, no husband or wife can be happy to think of fun overwhelmed by their wretched condition, and the night passes as idle as the day. Dreadfully enough, "*Bar-kumee with a cobwebbed hair,*" has come to represent the life situation of the people that resembles a cobweb, flimsy and insubstantial, acting as a trap or snare wherein husband and wife lie all night long unmoving, no "*turning around to play or strife,*" till it dawns but idly.

The metaphor of the female body constructed as an erotic and (re)productive sign in the discourse of sexuality also relates to the world under domination represented by the feminine body/sign. This echoes Foucault's "*the hysterization of woman's body*" in his *The History of Sexuality* which relocates the woman as in the womb (i.e., *hysterra*). The euphemistic expression "sleeping dictionary" used by the European colonial officials for their African mistresses leaves the women as a text to be opened and closed at will, since the women could provide to their masters a relatively painless form of native language instruction, and whose contents allow the officials to enter into mysteries of the continent. Hence, sexual knowledge of the African women body is knowledge of Africa itself to the officials. Spurr, in his *The Rhetoric of Empire* (1993:170ff) puts this analogy further that the African women considered as a "sleeping dictionary" evokes Africa as a dormant or sleeping text, which can only be awakened and brought to life by an intervention, such as that no "*turning around to play or strife,*" till it dawns for the Jirru men and women.

The degree to which one cultural group is emotionally expressive, overt and evident differs from culture to culture. Some cultures are highly influenced by religion as one important source of norms and values in a given society and religion is historically and socially associated with cultural dimensions. One study describes four such cultural dimensions distinguishing one cultural group from another: uncertainty avoidance, high power distance, masculinity-femininity, and individualism-collectivism.

Regarding uncertainty avoidance, that is, the degree to which the society is threatened by unknown situations, a strong uncertainty avoidance culture shows a strong need for predictability (p72), and tends to be more anxious and expressive. It is generally accepted to raise one's voice and emotions are externalized, expressed. In a culture where uncertainty avoidance is low, the study shows, people do not care much about avoiding ambiguities, aggressions, and emotions are internalized, not expressed, and less wellbeing and unpleasant emotional experiences are normal.

Moreover, in a high power distance culture, subjects value conformity, i.e., women's and children's obedience and dependence is expected. In such a culture, self-control rules against extreme exhibitions of emotions (p71). Consequently, erotic activism and sexual contact tends to lower as subjects express and feel less emotion. Conversely, according to the study, in a low power distance culture, women voice their emotion, exercise their roles, and if this is true among the Oromo in general and the Jirru in particular remains to be clear. Moreover, in a masculine culture, feminine obedience is normative,



particularly related to sexual activity and procreation (Hofstede 1991; 1998 cited in Ubillos, 71), but men must show “excellence” in sexual performance.

In such a collectivistic culture as African, Asian and Latin American cultures, interdependence and group objectivity is valued and fulfilling one’s social duty is more important than one’s own well-being. Unlike the western individualistic feminist culture, where individuality is emphasized, less gender difference is practiced and emotional well-being is said to be higher, in our collectivistic culture, sexual inhibition is high, feminine virginity is valued, and individual emotional wellbeing is plaid down in a less egalitarian society.

Whatever the case, in these poems, the Oromo women in the specific locale are daringly voicing their situation despite the freedom of expression is stiff, the general masculine culture among the Oromo is inhibitive and the agenda of eroticism and sexuality is made public in a discussion only under some apologetic procedures. In this view, one can assess in what follows the broad-spectrum of Oromo sub-cultures ranging from erotic (infidelity) and food culture to religion and sexuality [28]

**boqqolloo baranaa**

**ya daabboo koo.**

**dhirsa baranaa**

**ya aabboo koo:**

**ganda dhaqee, nama hin aarsuu,**

**as galagal jedhee, nama hin xaarsuu**

**ittuu galagalan, nama hin warraaqsuu!**

**oh corn, to date,  
you are my daily bread.**

**oh, husband, to date,**

**you are a Father, a holy:**

**no adultery, to burn me in a rage of envy**

**no want of sex, to turn me around at night,**

**he shows effort, but dull, albeit!**

In the time of abundance and excess, ‘corn’ is not accepted to be a conventional food among the Oromo of Jirru, according to the bearer of this data, but barley, wheat and teff. The rest cereal crops are considered only secondary, and now that agriculture has failed, hence, a final resort to turn to

despicable cereal crops such as 'corn.' Literally speaking, when it comes to choosing between crops, the Oromo go for wheat or barley and only secondly for 'teff,' which is said to be introduced from the north Orthodox Christian Amharas. In this regard, where there are two worse choices, to go for the least worse seems to be a coping mechanism during adversities. Now that their crops failed they depend on 'corn' supplied by humanitarian aids, which is also purchased in the market and also locally called 'Saxana,' i.e., '90', though no one knows to mean what, but most likely to mean "famine food."

It is not clear why 'corn or 'maize' and wheat purchased in the market is said to be "Saxana," literally "famine food" or "poverty food" among the Jirru. Perhaps such staple foodstuffs are relatively inexpensive or readily-available to be used in such times of extreme poverty or [starvation](#). Poverty food is quite often strongly associated with the hardship under which it was eaten, and is therefore socially downplayed or rejected as a food source in times of relative plenty. In any society, the characterization of a foodstuff as "famine" or "poverty" food is social, and some foods are considered poverty food in some societies and luxury food in others. As there are taboo foods and drinks, so there are cereals and foodstuffs rejected or detested to be used for food for some reason un/justifiable.

Theoretically, such a praise of an indolent husband by his wife tormented by physiological and emotional needs, who honours him so much for his fidelity: "*no adultery to burn me in a rage of envy*," and for his meek behavior, "*no want of sex to turn me around at night*," is forced by the meek life situation of the family. This seems another survival strategy among the oppressed, another means of maintaining harmony and peace, despite the lacks and scanty resources. To sing thus is to protest and reverse the situation, the induced poverty through shifting the role of some genres or modeling on the existing ones or creating new ones such as the present *songs of Bar-kumee*. There could be such songs of famine in history, such as that of the 1985, but not as such exacerbated by poor policies and for which, according to these songs, categorically the system seems to blame.

By way of a comparison, here I illustrate the deliberate (or accidental?) generic functional shift from a lullaby to a protest song of gender inequality in a Tanzanian patriarchal dominant system. In the article entitled "Understanding Gender through Genre" (Sonkoro 1996:3), the researcher echoes the woes of a young woman seemingly singing to lull her child but reverberates her sad condition caused by an unequal marriage. In the narration below, she hushes and lulls her child not to cry lest it reminds her of the bitterness and loneliness caused by her father and mother who married her

**..... off to an old man**

**A docile, inactive and useless man**

**All it knows about is gluttony**

**And when it goes to bed**

**All it does is snore like a cow!**

**And when near the bed,**

**It knocks the utensils over.**

In this song of lullaby now changed into a protest song about an unequal social identity, i.e., gender, the singer is protesting against forced or arranged marriage, most strikingly, to an old and useless man whom she reduced to "IT," an object rather than a man. The song shows the lullaby now shifted into a "veiled speech of a veiled woman" (ibid), as she portrays herself to be a chained, imprisoned bird in the recital,

**How can I, poor bird, pass through**

**So, when you go there give him a wink**

**Tell him to come in the evening**

to show that she is unable to go out to meet her young loved one (ibid). Lullabies are normally aimed at rocking the baby to sleep and to express verbally the joy of nursing and mothering carrying and caring on the back or lap. This can also involve a work song and a lullaby sung carrying the babe on the back and lulling while also grinding,

**grind, grind, grind,....**

**Let me grind for (it) my husband, grind**

**So that it eats to its full, grind,**

**As if it is the one that worked for this, grind**

which is sung to defy against the workload worsened by the laziness and greed of her husband and by his sexual impotence. Similarly, this Oromo woman wretched by loneliness recites while singing,

**irbaatan daakaa  
dhagaan cabaadhaa  
misiin shookkisaa,  
jibbaata Waaqaa  
jabaan jabaadhaa,  
dhirsa irraa hidhee**

**niitii boochisa?  
usi yaa dhagaa  
daakuma daaki  
obsi yaa garaa!  
yaaduma yaadi**

**grind, grind, grind for dinner  
my millstone wrecked  
to grind to fill for lunch,  
oh God,**

what a might on earth (got my husband)?  
put him in jail  
left his poor wife woing lonely?  
hush, hush quiet, oh my millstone  
grind, grind, grind and grind  
hush, hush, quiet, my gut is churning!  
ah me! (What got him?!)

The singer is lamenting of her husband unlawfully imprisoned using the old work song of women grinding and singing with adaptation and recreation of the song to suit to a passive protest against the contemporary political situations which victimized her poor husband leaving her helpless: *put him in jail / left his poor wife woing lonely?* The domination for the Oromo women, like many other women in Africa, is two-fold: one is the economic and social domination rendered by their male counterparts and the other is the political and psychological repression imposed by a repressive state structure. Sonkoro's songs by the Tanzanian woman above is about the unjust social evils befall most African women, e.g. forced / arranged marriage, under the malevolent patriarchal system while that of the Oromo woman above is coupled by the evil acts of undemocratic officials, '*jabaan jabaadhaa*,' literally meaning, '*what a might on earth*,' while such a direct violence against civilians may be also a case in other parts of Africa.

Songs are important components of the Oromo protest genres and singing songs of eroticism among the women and girls is not limited to the Oromo culture. Though songs of different genres can be performed on a different occasion and context, as can be seen from the examples, but this is in consonance with the view that the Oromo women are not voiceless, albeit we may fail to heed to their voices.

This song [6]

**yaa Bar-kumee!**

**Bar-kumee mataa kanniisaa!**

**dhirsi baranaa obboleessaa,**

**cal jedheema na cinaa ciisaa.**

**as galagali jedhan,**

**dhiitichoonuu nama dhiisaa?!**

**jette dubartiin Riqichaa, jedhan.**

**oh Bar-kumee!**

**Bar-kumee with a head of a swarm of bee!**

**to date, a husband is a brother in vow**

**who lies all night long frozen.**

**who dares to awaken him,**

**if he kicks and kills?!**

**said, the women in Riqicha**

is a recital by a women who discreetly points at the failure and attributes the song to be performed by the women in the nearby village, Riqicha, avoiding, first, possible risks of violating social taboos and, second, averting the risks of political repercussions inflicted by local officials for her mocking at the Ethiopian new Millennium. There, with Sonkoro, a husband is reproached with his inability being old and to satisfy his spouse though well fed to his fill: *grind, grind...so that it eats to its full, grind*. Here a famished husband is exempted from copulation during such a hard time even if the need urges the women to lament the loss and woe the ill-timed erotic fervor: *who dares to awaken him / if he kicks and kills?!*

Is this no resistance? It is! It is resistance against indefinite postponement of yield, fertility and abundance. It is a frivolous resistance against unjust gendered culture and chauvinism by the fellow men. It is a non-violent resistance practiced by the very meek social class, namely, children and women, to subvert a structured violence directed against humanity by officials.

The sarcasm behind the line, *'Bar-kumee with a head of a swarm of bee'* is to refer to the emblematic representation of the EPRDF for the 2005 national election ended by a great deal of civilian casualties and thousands of unlawful imprisonments. In our tradition, a (swarm of) bee is an archetypal symbol of a good fortune, wealth and fecundity, an emblem of such a cooperative than competitive communal spirit committed to work and change. Ironically enough, the reality on the ground came to be derisive, irreverent.

#### *Socio-political critiques*

The dawning of the new millennium is about the first one thousand years of Ethiopia as a rising superpower, albeit the real life situation on the ground witnesses a different story of its shocking nosedive. Purportedly, it is the time when the downward slide has been arrested and that in the new millennium Ethiopia's lost glory will be restored. However, the society thus grieved the hoped for Millennium as saying [1]

**yaa Bar-kumee**

**Bar-kumee mataa daaraa**

**nurraa gali**

**nuuf gahee garbuun gaaraa.**

**oh Bar-kumee**

**Bar-kumee with dusty hair**

**our barley is now ready over the hills**

**away from our land with your heir.**

In this song, against the lofty and empty statements of vision held by leaders and local officials alluded to as *'Bar-kumee with dusty hair,'* the local people came to see what it is all about by Millennium and placed their hope, literally, on the harvest yet to come: *'our barley is now ready over the hills.'* Now that the very bleak time of hunger, slothfulness and anguish is over as the meager barley harvest is to come, the singer feels self-empowerment and rebuffs the Millennium for all its inundating false promises. The metaphor of the *'barley over the hills'* is the long awaited hope, i.e., change and social transformation that will set them free from total dependence, from long grieved economic and political subjugation held them trapped. One does not need to unnecessarily risk his/her life to directly reject government policies and directives set by local officials but thus indirectly alludes to it and forwards the deep-seated resentments and disillusionments as in these recitals by women and children in Jirru. 'Barley,' as a mark of identity for the Oromo, is also a symbol of abundance, excess and self-indulgence.

There must have been lofty, albeit empty, statements of vision and false promises made by the government and local officials that left the people disenchanted. Such was the case with previous Ethiopian rulers, even more so as they approach their demise. For example, Haile Selassie, who is said to have once declared himself, "Misguided people sometimes create misguided ideas. Some of my ancestors were Oromo. How can I colonize myself?" in response to accusations by dissidents, also billed himself as the great modernizer, when the famine, mostly in Wollo, estimated to have killed 40,000 to 80,000 Ethiopians between 1972-74. The famine and its image in media undermined popular support for the government, and Haile Selassie's once unassailable personal popularity fell only to be toppled by the 1974 revolution. Mengistu Haile Mariam, whose ancestral root is also traced to date to Oromo origin—as a reference for the historic enigma the country is put in—also craved to be the great revolutionary hero by building "the only proud socialist country in Africa" and left human and material resources a waste in the service of such a utopia.

At the beginning, Mengistu and his leadership, the Dergue, aroused the sympathy of the peasantry, mainly due to the land proclamation. By its later actions, however, by its brutality coupled with the misguided policies of forced conscription, collectivization, villagization, and endless campaigns against many real and imagined enemies, the Dergue ended up enslaving the very peasants the land proclamation helped to liberate and eventually sealed its own doom. Today the EPRDF, led by the TPLF, seems to be more discredited politically than the Dergue was in its decaying stage. The recital [37]

**yaa Bar-kumee**

**Bar-kumee mataa fixeensaa,**

**maal nu *raddaata* yaa Mallas,**

**atuu hiyyeessaa?**

**oh Bar-kumee**

**Bar-kumee with dewed hair,**

**what you got to help us,**

**for you too are no much better, oh Melles?**

must have been sung to rebuke the Prime Minister who the people came to associate with the promises made of the new Ethiopian Millennium that now the rock bottom has been reached under his rule, many thought the remaining time could not be any worse, if not much better. However, to declare a vision is one thing, to see to it that it gets fulfilled is quite another.

One can imagine how the art of the mockery is playful to hear the scorned Bar-kumee readily answering [16]

**‘Bar-kumee’ jedhanii**

**maqaa na balleessanii,**

**namuma *chiggaariin* ajjeefte agartanii?**

**jette Bar-kumeen jedhani.**

**‘Bar-kumee,’ they said, ‘Bar-kumee’**

**and slurred me,**

**but whoever has detected one killed starved?**

**moaned, Bar-kumee.**

This narrative is an indirect reference to the officials’ propaganda as part of the journalistic state ‘rhetorical approach’ (Spurr 1993) through mass media and meetings to delude the public by surveillance of protestors, aestheticization of the wretched situation and debasement—as if people complain just of dishonesty, lack of self-discipline and good manner, and cynic attitude.

Such a folkloric oicotype from Jirru serves in tracing the changes a genre or a sub-genre undergoes and studying how such transformations can reflect local, specific worldview and value system. The Jiruu Oromo women and children *Bar-kumee* monologue in this study constitute such a folkloric oicotype adapted to that specific cultural milieu and tolerated by the public to critique the common socio-economic and political problem of the time and reflexively express resistance against the status quo.

Similarly, if we argue there are two aesthetics to date in our contemporary resistance literature, hence this is true: one aesthetic is that of oppression and acquiescence (collaboration) while the second is the aesthetic of human struggle for total liberation (Ngugi wa Thiongo in Harlow 1987). That is, the meaning that people make of their situations is important to the resistance researcher as in this recital [2]

**yaa Bar-kumee**

**Bar-kumee mataa daaraa**

**garaa-duwwaan**

**zangii qabee xaaraa**

**oh Bar-kumee**

**Bar-kumee with dusty hair**

**I stroll nowhere, empty-bellied**

**by my walking stick propped**

that the reality of life seems to be reduced to individual, familial or ethnic, but the poor socio-economic conditions of the nation at a point in time animated in the phrases above "*dusty hair*," "*empty bellied*," "*stroll nowhere*" can be thus clearly historicized and urge the researcher to portray the situation as it is on the ground. The purpose of such an emancipatory social science research is primarily to investigate social conditions, expose hypocrisy, seek to discover observable structures or 'unseen forces,' ask questions, and encourage social transformations at grassroots level. With this aspect of class conflict, what is important to the researcher is the extent to which it requires a shared worldview and the knowledge about those shared standards of what is deviant, unworthy, impolite among the society. Equally important is knowledge of the values and the facts to which those values might apply: who is rich, who is poor, how rich, how poor, etc (Scott 1985: xvii). In so doing, one challenges the claim that research can and should be value neutral. Such is a problem one encounters in conducting an 'activist scholarship' and crafting (creative) resistance literature to shed light on unbearable social injustices. In the recital above [2], the words 'dusty hair' / 'stroll' / 'nowhere' / 'empty' / 'propped' represent the wretched life condition of the people restricted to pessimistic disdain felt towards Millennium and the most hoped for change. The protest poem [8]

**Bar-kumee ya Bar-kumee,**

**midhaan lafarraa dhume:**

**kan 1000 hrrumattii**

**kan 100 dugdumattii**

**kan 50 harkumatti!**



**keessummaan baranaas nagaattii,  
atuu beektaa, dhibama garaattii.**

**oh Bar-kumee, Bar-kumee,  
no grain on earth to date to bite:  
for a 1000, a donkey can bear it,  
for a 100, one can on a back,  
for 50, just in a fist!  
oh guest, no welcome, for you know what,  
you know what, by your gut!**

shows the degree of humiliation one feels for inability to welcome a guest, feed the needy and satisfy the starved wayfarer, as tradition has it. This depicts such an irresistible socio-cultural crisis rendered not by over-spending and consumerism (may be a case to some degree?) but by the crop failure worsened by global financial crisis, false promises and political instabilities that people blame on the Prime Minister above as saying *“you too are no much better, oh Melles”* [37].

The focus of the present study is not just on the folkloristic accounts of the monologue, the chants and the recitals, but on the oral mass of the critique, the protest and the aura of resistance portrayed in James Scott’s (1985) “hidden transcripts” of the Indonesian peasants. That is, the issue of structural violence in Ethiopia through the repressive and ideological state apparatuses is critiqued at local and global levels. Locally, here the Jirru Woman satirically comments the poor economic and social condition she is put in as saying [4]:

**yaa Bar-kumee  
Bar-kumee mataa sariitii!  
hin yaadda’in yaa dhirsaa-niitii,  
Birraan amma nuu bariitii.**

**oh Millennium  
Millennium of tufted hair!**

**oh husband and wife (so frantic)**

**Birraa is approaching, you don't panic.**

In traditional Oromo community, scarcity and paucity is met with sad and distressing mood for it supposedly pertains to reluctance and slothfulness to be poor. In the song above, Millennium was hoped to be the period of abundance, joy and hope. However, it cynically turned out to be irresistible misfortune to the people and left husband and wife with remorse that they may only recover when the thick darkness clears, the wintry season passes and Birraa, the brightest time comes and the harvest season approaches. During Birraa, there is an Irreecha, the Oromo thanksgiving celebration early on in October in Oromia and among the Oromo in the Diaspora. Birraa is the time for such premier Oromo cultural celebration that marks the end of the rainy season in Oromia to be followed by the harvest season of abundance.

As can be inferred from this wider public grievance only partially voiced by the marginalized group, i.e., women and children in the specific locale, the following could be only hypothetically summed up. The lack of clear agricultural support policy and strategies can cause such a human predicament and is implicitly a felt problem. Lack of support for sustainable smaller-scale farmers is another possible cause contributing into the social and economic crisis, which can lead in turn into a large-scale famine already knocking on our door. Small-scale farmers are susceptible to displacement from their land by cheap EU and US imports and investors from across the rich world, which is nowadays increasing at an alarming rate mainly in Oromia. Lack of grain reserves, as these are sold off to recompense service debts, is another possible factor contributing into such a severe social crisis. Finally, lack of systematic ways of increasing the income of the poor exacerbated the situation coupled by today's price increases that hurt the poor so much as protection from price shocks has been flayed away by organisations such as the IMF, the WTO and the World Bank.

This is about activism, that is, research as resistance is about exposing such social injustices and inequalities. It brings into discussion such an acute need for exploring the knowledge accumulated by cultural practitioners in various practical domains—including struggles for social justice. Practitioners often have knowledge and perspectives that challenge the way academic researchers think about issues, which can be an important spur to intellectual innovation (Hale 2008:xiii), discusses. Such unspeakable dreadful life conditions that could be managed under some circumstances are also sensitive and render risk to research into for reasons.

Generally, there are at least three reasons why such an 'activist scholarship' has been an unusual commitment to date. First, an idea of modern science/epistemology that knowledge is one based on detached objective observation; second, the wider range of scholarship more contained with 'academic' agendas and career structures; and third, activism usually understood to be of expressive of subjective individual interests, emotions, or ethical commitments rather than of broader, reflective and more intellectually informed perspective on social issues. Consequently, several research projects have had little to do with broader social activism and to seek to solve practical social problems.

The challenge and experience in struggling to ensue a just world, i.e., resistance against substantive injustices, involves human beings in a struggle—‘acting in concert.’ The recital [10]

**atarri shugguxii hidhatee,**

**baaqelli qawwee bitatee,**

**garbuun goofaree filatee,**

**gali yaa “Saxanaa,”**

**hiyyeessi birrii fixate!**

**our peas are armed with a handgun,**

**and our beans with a gun,**

**our barley has finely combed its tuft hair.**

**away “Famine Food,”**

**that the poor have now grown poorer!**

literally, is about the indigenous cereal crops (peas, beans, wheat) ready for food and that the food misnamed to be ‘Saxanaa’ or “Famine Food” supplied by the government and humanitarian aids is no more the foodstuff they opt for. As the *“poor have now grown poorer,”* and no one can afford to purchase food but look up to their crops nearly to blossom, ripe, and fruit, the people are seemingly self-determined not to wait for aids. The two recitals below [12] and [17] validate this reality:

**gurgurree fixne**

**jabbiilee keenna, kichaa kichaa**

**binne, qamadii jedhanii!**

**isa huuba *bichaa*...**

**jette nadheen Riqichaa**

**we are done with**

**our young bullocks and heifers**

**to pay for the ‘wheat’—so they said!**

**but filthy, full of muck...**

said women in Riqicha (village).

and

woofcoon in didichaa,

*irdaataa* kennine jedhanii

huuba *bichaa*

jabbiilee keenna,

gurgurree fixnee, kichaa kichaa

the mill waffles hastily,  
that they said they offered us a charity  
the 'charity' full of filth and dirt—

we are done with our bullocks and heifers

forced to pay our debt!

that added to the irresistible poverty, overloaded by tax and other service debts, the people could not afford to pay for "Famine Food" having their properties totally sold and vanished. The quality of the aid is referred to as "*filthy, full of muck*," and that they are overburdened by debts which left them without cattle, which has another further environmental impact. The people used to depend on their livestock for manure which they dried and used for fuel called '*koboota*,' a dried dung. In this poem [9]

koboonna hinjiruu,

*qulquwaalii* bobeeffannaa!

waan Bar-kumeen nu goote

masqala baanee himannaa.

no more manure,

and now, only cactus is our fuel!

what Bar-kumee did to us,

after Masqal, but we tell.

one can observe the implication of the poverty they live in and that has a direct bearing not only on the lives of the people but also on the environment. As there is no more cattle in the kraal, and “*no more manure,*” *koboota*, for fuel in the homestead, so they turned to cutting ‘*qulquwal*,’ a cactus tree, a spiky and spiny leafless plant called “*adaamii*” in Oromo language, growing in dry regions. “Masqal” is a national festival beginning in the third week of September coming before “Irreecha”

Worse enough, if the situation will not improve, it seems one may engage in a struggle, usually undermined as banditry, as alluded at in the poem above [10]: “*our peas are armed with a handgun / and our beans with a gun.*” The line that “*our wheat has finely combed its tuft hair*” refers to the hairstyle dressed by ethnic heroes and guerilla fighters. For the same reason, resistance culture involving an armed struggle is evidently part of the lived-experience of the people in the area.

#### *IV. Folkloric Characteristics*

There is no better source of norms for resistance than the norms of that society, and resistance is more likely to be effective when the norms are made manifest in every possible means. By choosing *Bar-kumee* as a narrative figure, the Oromo of Jirru return to a consciousness of interconnectedness within the world besieged by hunger, want and repression and overcome alienation imposed by domination. Hence, with all its specificity, the monologue shows unique characteristics in resounding the change and struggle and relocating the process of power relationship in inclusiveness of cultural resistance.

#### *Untranslatability*

In deconstructing the discourse of the dominant culture which is part of dismantling the dominant structure, the creation of such an entirely new discourse begins. In order for the oppressed to establish fully such a mode off discourse untranslatability is one typical limitation. Untranslatability is exemplified by the generic ‘*mata*,’ literally, meaning ‘*head*’ in 17 recitals out of 40 in this monologue which hampers the critical solidarity sought in studying such a resistance literature. Only in poem [37] *Bar-kume* is personified to represent the Prime Minister as a self-avowed God Father who is, in this respect, guilty of failing to keep his promise. Most modifiers in the recitals negate the “pluralistic” “open-ended” world as subject to every possible human misery. The negation represented by such repetitive words as ‘*mataa dooluu*’ / ‘*head cutoff*’ [23] in

**ya Bar-kumee!**

**Bar-kumee mataa dooluu,**

**kan hiyyeessaa dhiisii,**

**kan dureessaatuu, buddeen**

***leemaatii* gubbaa hin ooluu!**

**oh Bar-kumee!**

**Bar-kumee, head-cutoff,**

**let alone the poor,**

**you find on the rich's platter**

**no leftover!**

and '*mataa lafee*' / '*bone-headed*' [33],

**ya Bar-kumee!**

**Bar-kumee mataa lafee**

**dargageessa dhiisiii**

**jaarsuu gammoojjiitti hafee!**

**Oh Bar-kumee!**

**Bar-kumee you bone-headed,**

**let alone the youth**

**elders too are lost in the dry land!**

and '*mataa daaraa*' / '*ashy head*' [1] and [2], '*mataa sariitii*' / '*cob-webbed hair*' [4], [25] and [31] are negations of negations, counterdiscourses as a daily life praxis in the fragmented and constantly decentered hostile environment. The metaphoric urge of '*mataa*,' i.e., 'head,' represents 'leader,' 'head of state' or, in this case, 'head of the household,' which symbolizes both the coercive superordinate state structure and equally the chauvinist patriarchal social structure. Such a critical analysis inundated by 'intertextuality' and detached from the historical and socio-cultural context of the text, is similarly constrained by untranslatability of the concept ('*mataa*'), which can also mean a 'tuft of hair,' signifying a heroic fervor.

Untranslatability is a barrier between one culture and another so much as it is between a language and its other. In this monologue, where the cultural group interacts with its other, namely, the Showan Amharas or the Amharic speaking Orthodox Christian neighbours also called among the Oromo generally as "*Sidaamaa*", there are linguistic borrowings and mix-ups as '*chiggaarii*' / '*wretchedness*' [16], '*qulquwalii*' / '*cactus*' [9], '*Maskaramii*' / '*September*' [26] which occurs by mere linguistic blending than lack of an equivalence in Oromo language. As a limitation of writing itself, which has served the dominant system to establish its cultural hegemony, untranslatability is also a mirage of the

consciousness of *difference* between the oppressed and the oppressor, the ‘backward’ and the ‘civilized,’ and the ‘oral’ and the ‘literate.’

### *Difference*

*Difference*, in the search of critical solidarity, is understood as temporal, sexual, social, linguistic, national or cultural. It is as such an attempt to bring the unthought-of and the unsaid into the realm of the sayable by means of generic and gender border-crossings from one cultural location to another, which is deviating from the norm (textual/contextual). *Temporally* speaking, it is as if something newfangled has come that famine is not a guest but a gate-crusher that also incarcerated the husband who knows nothing to talk but the skyrocketing price of food, as this recital reveals [34]:

**dhirsi baranaa**

**karra keessa ciisaa.**

**achii ka’u,**

**waayee teessoo natt’ odeessaa,**

**eenyumat’ narraa fageessaa?**

**a husband these days,**

**there he sleeps, on the gate.**

**if awake,**

**he knows nothing to talk but ‘teessoo,’**

**how but can I get rid of him?**

In the recital, the *difference* is not only to be measured by ‘teessoo,’ i.e., a used tin can for measuring cereal crops, which is understood as a symbol of scant food on the ground but also by the wretched period of time ‘barana’ that came to dissociate alive a husband and wife. The same is succinctly put in the poem [22]

**ya bar-kumee!**

**Bar-kumee mataa sariitii,**

**addaan hiikte ka dhirsaa-niitii!**

**oh Bar-kumee!**

**Bar-kumee with a cobwebbed hair,**

**look! you separated husband and wife!**

Thus, the *end* of one epoch is not signified by its own *closure* so much as it is tragically enough overshadowed by a 'new' *opening* through which alternative paths continue to lead us towards the unpredicted socio-economic and political impasse one can label it as the '*New Millennium crisis*.' Sexuality is another extreme polarization in the monologue which shakes here the conventional subjective rendering of self to the societal norms and to one's people's identities while echoing the general harsh reality of the nation. In so doing, the border between the oppressed and the oppressor, male and female, 'We' and 'Other' fades and narrowed but only temporarily in the face of irresistible emotional and physiological acute want of humanity, deviation being a novelty, an irresistible rule of the day.

*Deviation*

In the move towards the reaching of one's culture, critical solidarity becomes the fundamental principle against hegemonic culture and administrative system. As already argued, to achieve these humanistic goals of coherence, progress, and rationality certain forms of cultural and political monoliths are shaken. In the song [38]

**'90' ya Abbaa Gaarree**

**jabbiloo fixxee,**

**qotiiyyootti dabartee maarree?!**

**oh '90' (Famine Food)!**

**vanished are our calves and heifer,**

**and now, you turn to our oxen anymore?!**

the reciter addresses the departure from the convention where traditionally it is an abomination to sell calves, heifers and oxen just for buying food, but now to buy 'famine food,' people have nearly emptied their kraal.

Set in the context of masculine culture and repressive state structure, to bring the awful situation of children and women into public costs running the risk of violating moral values and renders less *significance* compared to the social and economic wellbeing. Children of the have-nots are depicted as waiting on the gate of the haves, relatively speaking, but no one shows a slight concern, but which tradition urges to narrow the moral distance and be generous to the client, i.e., the needy (child). Moreover, it is culturally inhibited for children to hunger after food crumbs as in this poem [3]



**yaa Bar-kumee!**

**Bar-kumee mataa faajjii,**

***qursii* hinqabduu,**

**Karra qabii ijaajjiii**

**oh Bar-kumee!**

**Bar-kumee with a bunch of hair,**

**for no leftover you wait,**

**stand still on the gate!**

which children use in the village to strictly caution their peers not to go about in the village, even if starved, for such is disgraceful and considered a bad manner before parents. Morally speaking, children should also practice a self-restraint even in such a harsh situation.

While the voices in the monologue share the feminist and the activist, the semiotic and the political impulses intricately enmeshed, they also express themselves through a masqueraded voices supposedly evading risks but to summon their fellow women only far beyond the river, in this case, *Riqicha*. In so doing, the political and the aesthetic, the textual and contextual battles have sought ascendancy through such simplistic deviation and polarization.

### *Coding*

There are strategies by which women covertly express ideas and attitudes that are erotic or politic in purpose under the dominant culture. Such strategies as *appropriation*, *distraction*, *incompetence*, and *trivialization* constitute the theory of *coding* used in women's voice through folklore and literature (Radner and Lanser 1987). Hence, coding is adoption of a system of signals, forms, signifiers used to protect the creator for the risk of directly stating particular message (ibid, p414).

*Appropriation* is a coding made by adopting material or form normally associated with male culture to feminist purpose as in songs [13] and [14] Bar-kumee is said to boast of her malicious acts of sickening the haves and the have-nots equally (see Appendix). Appropriation through demeaning her voice to a womanish act is evident in the conclusive remarks "jette Bar-kumeen jedhan," i.e., "...Bar-kume, she said."

*Distraction* is another coding strategy of evading risk as characteristic of protest songs. Ambiguity in the song [18] is to effect opacity and obscurity to keep the message from being heard and to draw attention from the subversive power of the feminist message as in the poem

karaa Waayyuu kana  
natti agarsiisaa  
dhaqeen sakarsiisaa

lead me on  
to the Waayyuu  
and let me rid them on

to purposely keep the meaning from being explicated at a single stance.

*Indirection* is a coding that involves techniques of *impersonation*, *metaphor* and *hedging*. Through impersonation, another personae is substituted for the “I” to avoid possible consequences of saying the same thing directly, which is observable throughout these *Songs of Bar-kumee*. The conclusive remarks “said women of Riqicha,” i.e., women beyond the river, and “Bar-kumee said,” are allusions used to voice their situation by attributing to the women beyond, or to Bar-kumee through impersonation. *Hedging* is weakening a message using ellipses, passive constructions, euphemisms (linguistic taboos) and qualifiers which one can see vividly in this Bar-kumee monologue [16]

‘Bar-kumee’ jedhanii

maqaa na balleessanii,

namuma *chiggaariin* ajjeefte agartanii?

jette Bar-kumeen jedhani.

‘Bar-kumee,’ they said, ‘Bar-kumee’

and slurred me,

but whoever has detected one killed starved?

moaned, Bar-kumee.

that the reciter hedges by indirecting the situation as normal despite the reality on the ground. Passive construction as a coding technique to avert risk is identified as characteristics of “women’s language” or “language of the powerless” such as in the song [39] and the driving force is unmentioned.

*Trivialization* is belittling of the topic at hand even if serious but to divert attention which involves the employment of a form, a mode, a genre considered by the dominant culture as unimportant, innocuous, and irrelevant (ibid, 421). Expressions like “oh, we are just gossiping,” “That was/is only women’s/children’s talk,” etc avoid attention though the issue is forwarded cautiously through the song. The song [35]

**yaa Bar-kumee**

**Bar-kumee mataa *maskootii***

**na gattee badde**

**waa *beetasaba* kootii**

**oh Bar-kumee**

**you with a window-like hair tuft**

**I am abandoned (because of you)**

**by my parents! [said children]**

is a clear indication of forced parental movement and of the consequent effects such as children abandonment and displacement coupled by unproductivity of the young generation. This one can see in the song [20]

**yaa Bar-kumee tiyyaa**

**Bar-kumumaa!**

**shraa bitadhu**

**surreet' na jalaa dhumaa**

**danda'e ka hundumaa!**

**oh Bar-kumee**

**it is Millennium!**

**but, if I buy shoes,**

**I have no trousers**

**Ah me! bear it up! bear it up!**

which the child singer pretends to care much more about clothes and in so doing to disparage the felt need for food as trivial.

*Incompetence* is another characteristic feature of these songs by which women in the area may impact their male counterparts through expressing their resistance to patriarchal expectations. That is, *incompetence* as coding in women's voice in folklore and literature is about evading to cook, sew, knit, etc and refusing to perform a key female function. However, in this *Post-Millennium Songs* from Jirru Oromo women (and children), men are condemned for their failure to meet the demands of their

women counterpart, namely, to fully accomplish their sex role as a key male function as voiced in the songs of sexuality and eroticism [6], [25], [31], [34].

## V. CONCLUSION

As seen in this study folklore serves as a voice for those who have no other voice. Eroticism in these songs is a template of resistance. It is about how women in their songs struggle to engage their partners sexually in the face of adverse conditions. It is not just about pleasure for its own sake, however. It is a mockery at the political infidelity of the *status quo*. Eroticism in these recitals has more to do with where the head of her partner is than what he is doing with his genital. It is about the emotional 'absence' of the partner due to the frustrating harsh reality before him than his physical presence, which contributed so much to weakening their sexual potential. That men are sleeping is a symbolic reference to the general impotence around, the unproductive and barren period of time.

Drawing on folkloristic and critical approaches, the Jirru Oromo protest folksongs are examined here using a critical feminist tenet as a principal method. Methodologically, based on observations and casual discussions accompanied by informal interviews, the data collected have been carefully transcribed and translated for further interpretations through such folkloristic analytical rubrics as categorization, generification and functional border-crossings of genres. It has been found that issues of morality and ethical mores are subsided in the face of adversities while economic and political disruptions are given prominence. Hence, the reconstitution of intersecting relations of power and gender, class, sexuality comes to the forefront, and creative resistance against what can be called a neoliberalist political and economic agenda at local, national/global levels is at work among the Jirru Oromo at present.

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## APPENDIX

### SONGS OF BAR-KUMEE

#### [1]

**yaa Bar-kumee**

**Bar-kumee mataa daaraa**

**nurraa gali**

**nuuf gahee garbuun gaaraa.**

**oh Bar-kumee**

**Bar-kumee with dusty hair**

**our barley is now ready over the hills**

**away from our land with your heir.**

#### [2]

**yaa Bar-kumee**

Bar-kumee mataa daaraa

garaa-duwwaan

zangii qabee xaaraa

oh Bar-kumee

Bar-kumee with dusty hair

I stroll nowhere, empty-bellied

by my walking stick propped

[3]

yaa Bar-kumee!

Bar-kumee mataa faajjii,

*qursii* hinqabduu,

Karra qabii ijaajjiii

oh Bar-kumee!

Bar-kumee with a bunch of hair,

for no leftover you wait,

stand still on the gate!

[4]

yaa Bar-kumee

Bar-kumee mataa sariitii!

hin yaadda'in yaa dhirsaa-niitii,

Birraan amma nuu bariitii.

oh Millennium

Millennium of tufted hair!

oh husband and wife (so frantic)

Birraa is approaching, you don't panic.

[5]

ya Bar-kumee

Bar-kumee mataa faajjii

garbuun gaaraa ga'ee

nurraa ijaajjii

oh Bar-kumee

Bar-kumee with a bunch of hair

our barley is now ready

that you stop hurting us.

[6]

yaa Bar-kumee!

Bar-kumee mataa kanniisaa!

dhirsi baranaa obboleessaa,

cal jedheema na cinaa ciisaa.

as galagali jedhan,

dhiitichoonuu nama dhiisaa?!

jette dubartiin Riqichaa, jedhan.

oh Bar-kumee!

Bar-kumee with a head of a swarm of bee!

to date, a husband is a brother in vow

who lies all night long frozen.

who dares to awaken him,

if he kicks and kills?!

said, the women in Riqicha



[7]

*ashuuqii* nyaattanii  
buddeen irraan deebi'uu,  
kana na dhiisaa  
hin deemnee ammas  
dalluma jalan ciisaa

you eat boiled beans  
and repeat food,  
you stop!  
I am not gone  
I sit on your gate [Bar-kumee said!]

[8]

Bar-kumee ya Bar-kumee,  
midhaan lafarraa dhumee:  
kan 1000 hrrumattii  
kan 100 dugdumattii  
kan 50 harkumatti!

keessummaan baranaas nagaattii,  
atuu beektaa, dhibama garaattii.

oh Bar-kumee, Bar-kumee,  
no grain on earth to date to bite:  
for a 1000, a donkey can bear it,  
for a 100, one can on a back,  
for 50, just in a fist!  
oh guest, no welcome, for you know what,  
you know what, by your gut!

[9]

koboonna hinjiruu,  
*qulquwaalii* bobeeffannaa!  
waan Bar-kumeen nu goote  
masqala baanee himannaa.

no more manure,  
and now, only cactus is our fuel!  
what Bar-kumee did to us,  
after Masqal, but we tell.

[10]

atarri shugguxii hidhatee,  
baaqelli qawwee bitatee,  
garbuun goofaree filatee,  
gali yaa “Saxanaa,”  
hiyyeessi birrii fixate!

our peas are armed with a handgun,  
and our beans with a gun,  
our barley has finely combed its tuft hair.  
away “Famine Food,”  
that the poor have now grown poorer!

[11]

naxalaa sukkaaree natty afarsaa

Oromoodhaa garbuun gahee

Sidaamatti ol na dabarsaa

....jette Bar-kumeen jedhani

clad me in a clean cotton sash

barley is ready for the Oromo

now journey to the Sidamas

Bar-kumee said.

[12]

gurgurree fixne

jabbiilee keenna, kichaa kichaa

binne, qamadii jedhanii!

isa huuba *bichaa*...

jette nadheen Riqichaa

we are done with

our young bullocks and heifers

to pay for the ‘wheat’—so they said!

but filthy, full of muck...

said women in Riqicha (village).

[13]

niitii dureessaa

gadi naa dubbisaa

amman mataa irraa luqqisaa

call the wives of the haves

out. let me shave her  
bald, and make her hairless!

[14]

dureessa luka qaqallisee  
hiyyeessa mataa irraa luqqisee  
*waxxaatii* gammoojjiitti gad deebisee

I have turned lame all the haves  
I have made hairless the have-nots  
and the youth, to migrate!

[15]

karaa Oromootti  
gad na dabarsaa  
jaartii achiittan  
boqoo irraa yaasaa

lead me on  
to the Oromos  
and let me make  
their old women toothless!

[16]

‘Bar-kumee’ jedhanii  
maqaa na balleessanii,  
namuma *chiggaariin* ajjeefte agartanii?  
jette Bar-kumeen jedhani.

'Bar-kumee,' they said, 'Bar-kumee'  
and slurred me,  
but whoever has detected one killed starved?  
moaned, Bar-kumee.

[17]

woofcoon in didichaa,  
*irdaataa* kennine jedhanii  
huuba *bichaa*  
jabbiilee keenna,  
gurgurree fixnee, kichaa kichaa

the mill waffles hastily,  
that they said they offered us a charity  
the 'charity' full of filth and dirt—  
we are done with our bullocks and heifers  
forced to pay our debt!

[18]

karaa Waayyuu kana  
natti agarsiisaa  
dhakeen sakarsiisaa

lead me on  
to the Waayyuu  
and let me rid them on

[19]

karaa Jiddaa kana  
gadi na buusaa

**gurguddaa kanan  
gaagee irraa buusaa**

**lead me on  
to the Jiddaa  
and I pull those swell in pride  
down from their horse.**

**[20]  
yaa Bar-kumee tiyyaa  
Bar-kumumaa!  
shraa bitadhu  
surreet' na jalaa dhumaa  
danda'e ka hundumaa!**

**oh Bar-kumee  
it is Millennium!  
but, if I buy shoes,  
I have no trousers  
Ah me! bear it up! bear it up!**

**[21]  
yaa Bar-kumee  
Bar-kumumaa  
dandeenye ka hundumaa**

**oh Bar-kumee  
it is Millennium!  
Ah! We bear it up! We bear it up!**

**[22]  
ya bar-kumee!  
  
Bar-kumee mataa sariitii,  
  
addaan hiikte ka dhirsaa-niitii!**

**oh Bar-kumee!  
  
Bar-kumee with a cobwebbed hair,**

look! you separated husband and wife!

[23]

ya Bar-kumee!

Bar-kumee mataa dooluu,

kan hiyyeessaa dhiisii,

kan dureessaatuu, buddeen

*leemaatii* gubbaa hin ooluu!

oh Bar-kumee!

Bar-kumee, head-cutoff,

let alone the poor,

you find on the rich's platter

no leftover!

[24]

daandii qallayyoo kana

ol na baasaa

nadheen Waayyuu tana

morma keessaa baasaa

lead me on

to Waayyuu

let me squeeze them

those Waayyuu women to tiny.

[25]

yaa Bar-kumee!

Bar-kumee mataa sariitii,

dhirsaa fi niitiin,

osoo wal hingahin

lafti bariitii.

Oh bar-kumee!

bar-kumee with a cobwebbed hair,

it dawns,

before husband and wife

turn around to play or strife.

[26]

*Hamileef' Nahasee*

Nagumaan si baasee

*Maskaramiin* geenyaan

shakarsiisee

caamatti gad si baasee

July and August

I let you pass at peace

now September has come

to ride you out

into another dry day.



[27]

suutuma jedhaa

makiinaa irraa

gad na buusaa

amman dhaqee

beerran ilkaan irraa buusaa

unload me

but slowly

I hurry to

let old women

toothless, [said corn, the ‘famine food].

[28]

boqqolloo baranaa

ya daabboo koo.

dhirsa baranaa

ya aabboo koo:

ganda dhaqee, nama hin aarsuu,

as galagal jedhee, nama hin xaarsuu

ittuu galagalan, nama hin warraaqsuu!

oh corn, to date,  
you are my daily bread.

oh, husband, to date,

you are a Father, a holy:

no adultery, to burn me in a rage of envy  
no want of sex, to turn me around at night,  
he shows effort, but dull, albeit!

[29]

yaa Bar-kumee too nagaattii  
birriin dhumtee '90'tti  
an nan galaa *katamaatti*

oh Bar-kumee good bye.  
I am left with no money, nothing.  
no choice but to move to town.

[30]

yaa keessummaa bara Bar-kumee  
achumaan nagaattii  
atu beektaa dhibamahold.  
nah in *taazzabin* garaattii

oh guest of these bleak day  
good bye  
hold no grudge, for no welcome as usual.  
but you know why! You know why!

[31]

yaa Bar-kumee mataa sariitii  
siifan gad dhiisa niitii

oh Bar-kumee of a cob-webbed hair,  
you take away my wife if you will!

[32]

yaa Bar-kumee  
Bar-kumee mataa camcammoo  
dur Oromoon jiraa  
barana Waayyuu bahe immoo

oh Bar-kumee  
bar-kumee of a sugar beet head  
I had a long time with the Oromo

and now journey to those in Waayyuu

[33]

ya Bar-kumee!

Bar-kumee mataa lafee

dargageessa dhiisiii

jaarsuu gammoojjiitti hafee!

Oh Bar-kumee!

Bar-kumee you bone-headed,

let alone the youth

elders too are lost in the dry land!

[34]

dhirsi baranaa

karra keessa ciisaa.

achii ka'u,

waayee teessoo natt' odeessaa,

eenyumat' narraa fageessaa?

a husband these days,

there he sleeps, on the gate.

if awake,

he knows nothing to talk but '*teessoo*,'

how but can I get rid of him?

[35]

yaa Bar-kumee

Bar-kumee mataa *maskootii*

na gattee badde

waa *beetasaba* kootii

oh Bar-kumee

you with a window-like hair tuft

I am abandoned (because of you)

by my parents! [said children]

[36]

yaa Bar-kumee

Bar-kumee mataa kanniisaa

ya jabbiiloo tiyya dhumtee

qotiyoo maaltu walitti gad dhiisaa?!

oh Bar-kumee

you with hair like a swarm of bee

am done with my calves my heifers

but my oxen, you sell on my dead body!

[37]

yaa Bar-kumee

Bar-kumee mataa fixeensaa,

maal nu *raddaata* yaa Mallas,

atuu hiyyeessaa?

oh Bar-kumee

Bar-kumee with dewed hair,

what you got to help us,

for you too are no much better, oh Melles?

[38]

‘90’ ya Abbaa Gaarree

jabbiloo fixxee,

qotiyyootti dabartee maarree?!

oh ‘90’ (Famine Food)!

vanished are our calves and heifer,

and now, you turn to our oxen anymore?!

[39]

yaa Bar-kumee

Bar-kumee mataa daalattii

waa namaa dhume

dallaa jalattii.

oh Bar-kumee

Bar-kumee with ashy hair

we are lost famished

left anguished, fallen on our gate!

[40]

yaa Bar-kumee

Bar-kumee mataa daalattii

lakkii daa'ima hin miidhin garaattii

Bar-kumee with ashy hair,

oh Bar-kumee

fetuses in the womb, don't kill.

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