Book Section:
Roba, Ayele Kebede (2025) The novelisation of orature in Ethiopian village novels. In: Marzagora, Sara and Orsini, Francesca, (eds.) Oral Literary Worlds. Open Book Publishers, pp. 113-144.

The Novelization of Orature in Ethiopian Village Novels

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Introduction

> We recognise in oral literature a fundamental and indeed 'organic' aspect of the African imagination. For all their undoubted diversity, the manifestations of the imagination in our traditional societies have one common denominator they rely primarily on an oral mode of realisation (Abiola Irele).[1]

Unlike elsewhere in Africa, in Ethiopia the study of the mutual influence between literature and orature has so far not received significant attention. Just as in many other parts of Africa, written literary production has not been as popular as orature in Ethiopia, despite the long history of writing in Geez (since the first century CE).[2] Notwithstanding this fact, Ethiopian literary studies tend to only celebrate the written traditions in Geez and Amharic and to present oral traditions as inferior, especially if they are in Ethiopian languages other than Amharic. The syllabi of Ethiopian university literature courses devote a disproportionate amount of space to the Amharic literary tradition. This creates a bias against literatures in Ethiopian languages without a long history of writing. For example, for advanced degrees orature and literature are studied separately, in different departments, units or programmes. Orature is largely confined to folklore departments, while written literature is studied in literature departments. Many of the theses dealing with orature in Ethiopia have focused on the anthropological and sociological aspects of orature rather than its literary and formal elements.[3] This disciplinary divide

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[1] Abiola Irele, 'The African Imagination', *Research in African Literatures*, 21.1 (1990), 49–67 (p. 54).

[2] See Albert Gerard, *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). Donald Crummey shows that even though writing was practised by the Christian communities, it is has not replaced orality; see 'Literacy in an oral society: the case of Ethiopian land records', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 18.1 (2006), 9–22.

[3] See Tolessa Addisu, 'The historical transformation of a folklore genre: the Geerarsa as a national literature of the Oromo in the context of Amhara colonization in Ethiopia' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University, 1990); Asafa, Tafarra, 'Towards a Political Sociology of Oromo Literature: Jaarsoo Waaqoo's Poetry' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2003); Assefa, Tefera, 'Ethnography of resistance poetics: Power and authority in Salale Oromo folklore and resistance culture, Ethiopia, Northeast Africa' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University, 2015).

perpetuates the notion that 'Amharas and Tigrayans have a *history*, whereas other [Ethiopian] peoples have only an anthropology'.[4]

Against this divide, this chapter deals with two Ethiopian novels that engage directly with orature and in which orature in fact plays a dominant role. Through their novelization of oral texts, the novels show the relationship between orature and literature as part of a continuum. The fact that that these are village novels is not coincidental, for the village novel is a mediatory genre that reflects the interplay or mutual co-existence of oral and written literature. The practice of writing village novels, particularly about villages inhabited by marginalised peoples, is a recent literary phenomenon in both the Amharic and Afan Oromo literary traditions. It dates to the 1990s, after the restructuring of the Ethiopian state along ethno-federalist lines. This political change opened an institutional space for writers to explore Ethiopia's multi-ethnic make-up in their works. Fiqremarqos Desta and Dhaba Wayessa have pioneered the genre in Amharic and Afan Oromo, respectively, writing about characters who speak languages that are not the authors's own. Both Fiqremarqos Desta's Amharic novel *Evangadi* (1998) and Dhaba Wayessa Afan Oromo novel *Gurraacha Abbayaa* (*The Black Man from Abbaya*) (1996) incorporate a variety of oral forms in order to depict the worldviews of Ethiopian peoples who have had no culture of writing until recent times. Arguably, the directly quotation of oral texts in the original Gumuz language in *Gurraacha Abbayaa* is more impactful than the paraphrasing or translating of oral texts into Amharic in *Evangadi*, a strategy that reflects the linguistic and literary homogenization of mainstream Amharic literature. Before I analyse and compare the novelization of orature in the two novels, the next sections explain my key concepts and approach and introduce the novels.

Approaches and Terminology

The preference for writing/literature over orality/orature in Ethiopian history and literary studies is an example of the evolutionist approach of scholars such as Jack Goody and Walter Ong.[5] This evolutionist approach traces a 'linear progression' from orality to writing, with the implication that as a society progresses the latter supersedes the former. Writing is considered a marker of modernity and, by extension, literature is treated as more advanced and sophisticated than orature.

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[4] Christopher Clapham, 'Rewriting Ethiopian History', *Annales d'Éthiopie,* 18.1 (2002), 37–54 (p. 40).

[5] See Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Ora*l (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 2002).

This privileging of literature over orature was rejected by a group of scholars who are commonly identified as 'integrationists', notably Ruth Finnegan and Robert Horton, who argued that literature and orature are inseparable and mutually non-exclusive.[6] For them, 'oral genres continued to be created in literate societies, and […] structures of oral literature survived in written literature'.[7] The integrationists aimed to shift 'the focus from dichotomies to a cognitive continuum where orality and literacy share several qualities'.[8] For Finnegan, though there may be differences owing to factors like the modern technologies used by literate communities, orature equals literature in artistic complexity.[9] For Russell H. Kaschula, 'Oral and written literature are literature in their own right, interacting at some point, remaining autonomous in many ways, backed by the same culture and society, and performing the same function of commenting on that society and the world in general'.[10] There is little difference between them 'in terms of the aims and functions of literature, […] and they are both fuelled and moulded by the culture that underlines them'.[11]

Scholars of African literature have put forward strong arguments for the central role of oral traditions in African literary development. According to Abiola Irele, for example, 'the African imagination is represented by the body of literature produced by, within, and for the traditional societies and indigenous cultures of Africa. This literature forms an essential part of what is generally considered the oral tradition in Africa'.[12] In other words, people who did not develop a writing system, vehicle their imagination, culture, aspirations, frustrations, history and memory through oral expressions. At the same time, we can trace a network of mutual influence and exchanges between written and oral literary genres.

In order to resolve the unproductive binarity between orature and literature, some scholars have tried to redefine and reconceptualise 'literature' itself. Ong spoke about the difficulty in finding a generic term that '[includes] both purely oral art and literature'.[13] Finnegan too wrestled with the problems related to the definition of literature: 'I suggest that we should envisage it not as definable by reference to

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[6] See Richard Horton and Ruth H. Finnegan, eds., *Modes of Thought, Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973).

[7] Daniella Merolla, 'Introduction: Orality and technauriture of African literatures', *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde*, 51.1 (2014), 80–88 (p. 81).

[8] Ibid., p. 82.

[9] See Ruth H. Finnegan, 'The How of Literature', *Oral Tradition*, 20.2 (2005), 164–187.

[10] Russell H. Kaschula, 'Exploring the Oral-Written Interface with Particular Reference to Xhosa Oral Poetry', *Research in African Literatures*, 28.1 (1997), 173–191 (p. 174).

[11] Ibid., p. 186.

[12] Irele, 'The African Imagination', p. 53.

[13] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 13.

Western written genres, but as an umbrella notion that can embrace all those displayed forms and events in which verbal artistry in some way plays a significant part'.[14] Others have gone even further and argued that the concept 'oral literature' is inhibiting and does not effectively capture the true characteristics of oral imaginative thinking. Ugandan linguist Pio Zirimu was the first to introduce the alternative concept of 'orature' in order to stress the literary aspect of orally-produced imaginative expressions, though he used this word interchangeably with 'oral literature'.[15] Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o follows Pitika Ntuli's in defining orature as 'more than the fusion of all art forms. It is the conception and reality of a total view of life. It is the capsule of feeling, thinking, imagination, taste, and hearing. It is the flow of a creative spirit'.[16] For Ngũgĩ, orature is characterised by genre 'fluidity' and 'performance'. In this chapter I use 'orature' to refer to forms of orally performed and enacted imaginative expressions, mostly marked by the actual or imagined presence of an audience (in both novels elements of orature are accompanied by short descriptions of their performance). These forms range from short witty expressions like proverbs to longer genres such as oral narratives (tales), oral poetry and folk song. Conversely, I use 'literature' to refer to written forms of imaginative expression.

The Novel and Orature

The capacity of the novel to accommodate assorted genres of orature and literature makes the novel a ground where oral and written traditions can productively interact. For Mikhail Bakhtin, the novel inherently resists the homogenisation and monologisation of experiences, stories, trajectories, voices, and languages.[17] His dialogic perspective allows the interplay between multiple genres to be envisaged. For Eileen Julien, Fiona Moolla, and Olankunke George, orature in the African novel does not play only an ornamental role but is an analytical category.[18] In her study of

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[14] Finnegan, 'The How of Literature', p. 180.

[15] See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 'Notes towards a Performance Theory of Orature', *Performance Research,* 12.3 (2007), 4–7.

[16] Ibid., p. 5.

[17] See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, translated by Carlyin Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

[18] Eileen Julien, *African Novels and the Question of Orality* (Place: Indiana University Press, 1992); and 'African Literature', in *Africa*, ed. by Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 295–312; Fiona Moolla, 'When orature becomes literature: Somali oral poetry and folktales in Somali novels', *Comparative Literature Stu*dies, 49.3 (2012), 434–462; and George, Olankunke 'The Oral–Literate Interface', in Irele, *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, pp. 15–30.

Nuruddin Farah's novels, for example, Fiona Moolla finds 'a strong oral element in the novel in its reliance on alliteration, imagery, and symbols common to oral verse as well as in its use of folk tales'.[19] Boris W. Andrzejewski shows poetic inserts in one Somali novel 'foregrounding, that is, enhancing the relevance of and attracting attention to particular aspects or themes'.[20] Emanuel Obiechina argues that the folk tales in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart (*1958) serve 'diverse formal, thematic and aesthetic purposes', and offer 'insight to clarify the action, to sharpen characterization, to elaborate themes and enrich the setting and environment of action'.[21]

In Ethiopia, the novel, considered the most 'advanced' literary genre, is highly dependent upon orature. This undermines the idea of a 'linear progression' from orature to literature. The village novels discussed in this chapter, *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, present oral worlds in which orature plays a significant role.[22] Therefore, I argue, this genre provides productive cases for the study of the relationship and interconnection between literature and orature. Orature is present in these novels in the form of work songs, cattle songs, hunting songs, love songs, music, folk tales, and proverbs. Through a close reading of the novels, this chapter shows how the novels incorporate different types of orature and represent their orality and performative aspects. Though they differ in their effects, these elements of orature help elaborate on key conflicts and cultural events, sharpen characters, enrich plots and themes. My approach is one of close and contextual reading, on which I look at specific and concrete examples as well as indirect references to oral texts and analyse their narrative relevance.

The novels typically use description to foreground the performance that accompanies elements of orature, thereby showing the interdependence between orature and literature. The elements of orature we find in these novels are trimmed to be in accord with the narrative purpose and therefore not the same as the 'original' oratures/performance. In order to capture these strategies and the repurposed elements of orature, I use the term 'novelized orature', adapted from Emmanuel Obiechina's notion of 'narrative proverbs' to designate stories embedded in novels that 'perform organic and structural functions of proverbs in oral speech

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[19] Moolla, 'When orature becomes literature', p. 455.

[20] Boris W. Andrzejewski, 'Modern and traditional aspects of Somali drama', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 23.1 (2011), 85–95 (p. 98).

[21] Emmanuel Obiechina, 'Narrative Proverbs in the African Novel', *Oral Tradition* 7.2 (1992), 197–230 (p. 204).

[22] Fiqremarqos Desta, *Evangadi* (Addis Ababa: NA, 1998); Wayessa Dhaba, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* (A Black Man from Abbaya) (Washington DC: Fettan Printers, 1996).

and in creative literature'.[23] For Obiechina, '[n]arrative proverbs are autonomous stories that appear in different genres and narrative registers within different structural linguistic plans and are embedded inside larger, more inclusive narratives. *They function as images, metaphors, and symbols and advance the meanings and formal qualities of the narratives in which they occur'* (emphasis added).[24] Obiechina uses the term 'proverb' functionally, to underline the function that elements of orature play in the novel. I prefer 'novelized orature', which can be both functional and denotative. 'Novelized orature' refers to the poetic inserts such as folk songs and poems, which are a regular presence in African novels, and to designate different forms of orature, tales/ stories, songs, and poetry, that are included in the novels as part of their narrative. Novelized orature is different from orature proper in that it is reworked, appropriated, or dialogized, to use Bakhtin's term, to serve a variety of narrative purposes in the novel.

Novelized orature in the novels can be analysed at two levels, the textual and the extra-textual. For Isidore Okpewho, written texts may represent the oral characteristics of orature in 'the ways in which the words are organized and the resources within the words that ensure the effectiveness of the oral performance'. If the stylistic qualities of orature include 'repetition', 'parallelism', 'piling and association', 'tonality', 'ideophones', 'digression', 'imagery', 'allusion' and 'symbolism', written texts can draw attention to 'the style and techniques of presentation', and to 'all those aspects that make oral literature as an art form somewhat distinct from written literature'. [25] In the novels under discussion, we find strategies of repetition, digression, and symbolism, among others. My analysis considers these elements when focusing/and focus on the embedded texts (songs, poems or stories). But authors can also help readers be aware of 'the conditions or circumstances in which the words of oral literature are delivered and the effect of these circumstances on the text that is produced'.[26] In order to explain this aspect of novelized orature, I consider the extra-textual information provided in the novels in the form of what I call 'commentary'. These are the comments, descriptions and explanations about oral poetry, folk songs and folk tales given by the author, narrator, and characters. It is through this commentary that some of the crucial aspects of novelized orature are represented.

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[23] Obiechina, 'Narrative Proverbs in the African Novel', p. 199.

[24] Ibid., p. 200, emphasis added.

[25] Isidore Okpewho, *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 70.

[26] Ibid.

I understand the village novel as a mediatory genre, for it foregrounds oral genres, performances, and local varieties of language. Novelization creates an interface or interplay between written and oral texts for a unified narrative effect. Orature is novelized by putting it to the service of narrative purposes such as enriching characterization, contextualizing themes, and explaining events.

Orature, I argue, can be used to 'localise' the novel to a specific region and multilingual context. In this regard, my analysis conforms to Franco Moretti's idea of the novel as an imported form that relies significantly on local resources (both local materials and local forms, in my view).[27]

To this end, this chapter first examines the narrative and textual strategies employed by the authors to novelize orature and to foreground 'an ongoing relationship of coevalness and simultaneity' between the novel and orature.[28] Second, the chapter explores how orature shapes the overall narrative structure of the novels, but also how the novels contribute to the preservation and transformation of orature. Lastly, the chapter explores how the authors contest the alleged 'linear progression' from oral to written and unsettle the hierarchical relationship between literature and orature. First, though, let me briefly present the two novels and their authors.

Evangadi and *Gurraacha Abbayaa*

Despite being written in different Ethiopian languages and presenting the experiences of different peoples, Fiqremarqos' Amharic novel *Evangadi* and Dhaba's Afan Oromo novel *Gurraacha Abbayaa* share important features. Both novels present the quotidian life of people who live in remote villages. *Evangadi* is set among the Hamar people living in south-western Ethiopia, and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* among the Gumuz people in western Ethiopia. The Hamar and the Gumuz reside in geographically peripheral areas in Ethiopia, which placed them on the margins of the state in terms of political, educational, and economic benefits.[29] By choosing to write about these communities, Fiqremarqos and Dhaba explicitly counter the marginalisation of peripheral peoples in Ethiopian literary studies. The novels effectively introduce these peoples to mainstream Ethiopian cultural institutions, national media, and academics. Furthermore, Fiqremarqos and Dhaba use Amharic and Afan Oromo, respectively, to give voice to people who do not speak those languages as their mother tongue, thereby deterritorialising these two major

[27] Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on world literature', *New left review*, 2.1 (2000), 54–68.

[28] Olankunle, 'The Oral–Literate Interface', p. 17.

[29] See John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2011).

Ethiopian languages and challenging the nationalist ideology whereby one ethnicity is defined by just one language, and a language belongs to that ethnicity alone. In so doing, these novels resist ethnic labels that promote linguistic nationalism. The two novels are similar in giving so much space to orature *and to oral worlds that are not the authors' own*. This is unusual in the context of Ethiopian Amhara and Oromo nationalisms. The purpose of appropriating oral texts by each novel reflects stark difference, as we shall see. It also differs from the general argument about orature and the novel in Africa, where what is also at stake is a choice between African languages and English/French. For Abiola Irele, novelized orature shows 'the effect of a cultural retention determined by the African background' and 'a fundamental and indeed 'organic' aspect of the African imagination'.[30] Before I discuss how the two novels novelize orature, let me briefly introduce them.

Evangadi

Fiqremarqos Desta, the author of *Evangadi*, was born in Bahir Dar, the capital of the Amhara regional state. A native Amharic speaker, he was a chemistry teacher before he shifted to creative writing.[31] Fiqremarqos has written six novels, and *Evangadi* is the second in his trilogy on the Hamar people. It presents the village life of the Hamar people and their south-western Ethiopian neighbours such as the Kuyegu, the Mursi, and the Erbore peoples. The south-western part of Ethiopia is economically, infrastructurally, and politically marginalized—and Fiqremarqos is among the few individuals to have visited the area out of their own academic or artistic curiosity.[32] He lived among the Hamar for several years, and claims to have become a Hamar man.

By setting his novels among peripheral communities, Fiqremarqos radically departs from the Amharic literary canon, which only describes the experiences of Amharic-speaking people, and presents non-Amharic speaking people pejoratively.[33] To my knowledge, Fiqremarqos is the first Amhara author to write about non-Amhara people without appearing to negatively portray them. His innovation is not only in terms of theme and setting, but also through his engagement with linguistic and oral imaginative expressions. For example, the novel is named after a popular Hamar oral genre, the *evangadi*, a night-time dance accompanied by oral songs.

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[30] Irele, 'The African Literary Imagination', p. 36.

[31] As he explains in an interview for *Maleda TV* (2018).

[32] Clapham, 'Rewriting Ethiopian History'.

[33] See Jeylan Hussein, 'A Critical Review of the Political and Stereotypical Portrayals of the Oromo in the Ethiopian Historiography', *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 15.3 (2006), 256–276.

Evangadi presents Ethiopia as a home of many peoples with a variety of cultures. It challenges the view of Ethiopia 'as an outpost of Semitic civilization', presenting it instead 'as an ethnographic museum'.[34] An ethnographic novel that fictionalises anthropological research (through the figure of the foreign researcher, Karlet), *Evangadi* also thematizes the search for lost facets of one's identity and culture, through the figure of Konchit, as well as other peoples' cultures. It includes few direct examples and quotations of orature, and always in Amharic translation, thereby undermining its own pluralizing efforts by homogenizing linguistic and literary diversity, arguably a reflection of mainstream Amharic literature. Though it is still open to the non-Amharic oral world, the effects of the voices presented through novelized orature are less visible when compared to *Gurraacha Abbayaa*.

The novel includes two main plot lines and two sets of characters, either interested in other cultures or with mixed identities and keen to retrieve layers of their own cultural identity, who intersect in Hamar territory after travelling out of and back to Ethiopia, or across different regions within the country, thereby encountering other speakers and cultures that are not their own. One plot follows Sora Galcha, an Ethiopian man who has relocated to Spain. Sora is from the Erbore in south-western Ethiopia and was educated in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, but he soon grows dissatisfied with his life in the capital and decides to migrate to Spain. There, he meets Konchit Peso Beni, an Ethio-Spanish woman, whose grandfather was also from the Kuyegu community in south-western Ethiopia. The two decide to travel from Spain back to Kuchiru, in the Kuyegu land, in search of the relatives of Konchit's grandfather, Edward Lokaye—this is therefore a search for identity. Lokaye was abducted by slave raiders when he was only a small boy. After a dreary and dangerous journey along the lower part of the Omo River, Konchit and Sora meet Delti, a Hamar man who has moved to Kuchiru. Since Sora knows the Hamar language, Delti can communicate with them and he helps them find Konchit's relatives.

The second plot follows British anthropologist Karlet Alfred, who first appeared in Fiqremarqos' first novel, *Behind the Buska* (1995), as a researcher travelling to the Hamar land for fieldwork. In *Evangadi*, Karlet travels back to a Hamar village, after presenting her research in the UK, to meet her friend Delti, with whom she fell in love during her fieldwork. Her relationship and re-union with Delti and deep connection with the Hamar symbolize a successful interplay or connection between oral and written worlds. Before she arrives in the territory of the Hamar,

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[34] Donald Donald, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 17.

Karlet travels to various places in central and northern Ethiopia, and in her interactions with other people she expresses her appreciation for the cultural diversity in Ethiopia. In these conversations, she challenges other characters who hold negative views of Ethiopia, including a British diplomat who speaks of Ethiopia as a poor and backward country. After visiting old churches and monasteries in northern Ethiopia, Karlet moves to the Hamar region. This movement enables the novel to connect the northern region of Ethiopia—which is usually presented in the mainstream literature and history as the centre for the Ethiopian civilization— and the often-marginalized southern region. Before Karlet reaches, though, Delti has left Hamar without telling anyone about his whereabouts. Karlet joins his friends and family in searching for him. According to a divination ritual performed by the Hamar elders, Delti is near Kuchiru village. When the team arrives at Kuchiru, they find Delti celebrating finding news about Lokaye with Sora and Konchit. Karlet is happy to meet Konchit, whom she had already befriended in Spain, again. At the end, Karlet, Konchit, Sora and several other people from the Hamar leave for Geneva in Switzerland to participate in a festival organized by Karlet to promote Ethiopian multiculturalism. The representatives of different ethnic groups in Ethiopia perform their songs, cultural dances, and dressing styles.

The novel can be considered as a fictional sequel to the anthropological research carried out among the peoples in the southern and south-western Ethiopia.[35] Karlet Alfred is a fictional representation of the foreign anthropologist, but she is also committed to celebrating the rich cultural heritage of Ethiopia. She argues, for example, that Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic and multicultural country, and that it is inappropriate to generalise a problem one observes in a certain locality or community as representative of 'Ethiopian' culture. The novel presents peaceful encounters between people with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including the Hamar, their neighbours, and Europeans. Throughout the novel, the presence of orature is recognizable at the levels of form and content through direct or indirect references made by the characters, narrators, and author.

Gurraacha Abbayaa

Dhaba Wayessa has been described by senior Oromo writers like Isayas Hordofa and Gaddisa Birru as a pioneer of Oromo literature, a role model, and a source of

[35] See, for example, Ivo Strecker, *The Hamar of Southern Ethiopia: III: Conversation in Dambaita.* (Berlin: Klaus Renner, 1970).

inspiration for many young Oromo writers.[36] Dhaba's novels and short stories are canonical texts in Oromo literary studies and are used as textbooks for students of Oromo literature in Ethiopian high schools, colleges, and universities. They have also received higher literary attention and favourable literary criticism.

Dhaba was born in an Afan Oromo speaking family in Wallaga in western Ethiopia, a fact that allowed him to learn the culture of non-Oromo groups in this part of the country. He later moved to the USA, where he currently resides. *Gurraacha Abbayaa* (1996) is his second novel, and it was reprinted three times—a notable success for an Oromo novel. While the back cover testimonials praise Dhaba for his close attention to *Oromo* culture and history,[37] *Gurraacha Abbayaa* shows that Dhaba has as attentive ears for the imaginative expressions and culture of the Gumuz as for the Oromo. In fact, the novel is accompanied by 6 pages of glosses to Afan Oromo and Gumuz words and 2 pages of glosses of literary terms in Afan Oromo and English.

Unlike other Oromo novels, *Gurraacha Abbayyaa* focuses entirely on non-Oromo ethnic groups. It thematises cultural norms (and their transgression) and inter-group conflict and it includes several songs, interestingly attributing to the Gumuz some forms that are popular among the Oromo, like the *geerarsa* and *dhaaduu*. This may imply cultural influence or shared literary practices between neighbouring communities. Just as *Evangadi* subverts and innovates the Amharic literary canon, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* moves thematically and geographically beyond the Oromo-centred narratives of the Oromo literary canon, thereby expanding the spatial imagination and thematic horizon of the Oromo novelistic tradition. The novel resists the monolingual use of the Oromo language by inflecting it with many traces of the Gumuz language.

Gurraacha Abbayaa is set in the village of Mattin in Gumuz land in western Ethiopia. The plot revolves around the conflict between an Amhara man, Gebru Teferra, and a Gumuz man, Bacangire Bakalo, and the consequence of the conflict for both their families, with a particular emphasis on Bacangire's children. The first half of the novel presents the conflict between Bacangire and Gebru and the series of vengeful attacks involving relatives on both sides. The conflict began when Gebru started an adulterous relationship with a married Gumuz woman called Yalunge, an

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[36] Isayas Hordofa and Gaddis Birru shared with their views about Dhaba Wayessa in 2018 when I was interviewing them for my PhD research.

[37] The testimonial by Ethiopian/Amharic poet Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, for example, says: 'Dhaba shows that he is a dedicated student of Oromo mythology with love and respect for the culture. […] He has an ear for the music of Oromo language, he uses his talent to translate the dance, music, costume, and proverbs of the people. He brings the people on the stage, not cultural caricatures'; Dhaba, *Gurraacha Abbayaa,* back cover.

affair which is presented as offensive for the Gumuz community. Arrogant Gebru escalates the conflict by disclosing his affair with Yalunge and killing her husband, who is Bacangire's brother. Bacangire retaliates. The retaliation between the two families escalates until both Gebru and Bacangire are killed, and the feud ends with Gebru's family destroying Bacangire's village and exterminating all the people and animals in that village and leaving only two survivors, Bacangire's teenage children, Teto and Doca. Most events in the first half of the novel are accompanied by songs like *geerarsa* and *dhaaduu,* which characters like Gebru use to mark their achievements.

The second half of the novel is devoted to Teto's violations of Gumuz cultural norms. Unlike the other Gumuz youngsters who are extrovert and playful, Teto is a taciturn boy, who has been in a state of psychological distress since early childhood following the death of his mother, a pain worsened by his father's murder. After the destruction of Mattin, Doca and Teto relocate to another Gumuz village, Luquma, where Teto starts a romantic affair with a Gumuz girl, Yenchen Banzi, during which he violates several cultural norms. For example, he shakes Yenche's hand while she is in menstrual isolation, he has sexual intercourse with her before marriage, and he ends up killing her brother in order to be able to marry her without having to offer his sister Doca to Yenche's brother in exchange. Teto's lack of respect for the norms of Gumuz culture proves not only his own undoing, but also his sister's. When Teto attempts to force her to marry Yenche's brother in an exchange marriage, Doca kills herself. Teto himself is killed by another Gumuz man who is married to Yenche. In this part, the novel incorporates a few oral texts that are parr of cultural events and rituals, like marriage blessing.

The title of the novel, meaning 'The Black Man from Abbaya', invokes the Abbaya, the main river flowing through Gumuz territory, and also refers to the skin colour of the Gumuz people. 'The Black Man' refers specifically to Teto (*gurraacha* is masculine in Afan Oromo). The title is directly taken from the words of a minor character, Ayalnesh, who hosts Teto at her home when he runs away from Luquma after his cultural infractions. It is Ayalnesh who addresses Teto as 'Gurraacha Abbayaa', literally 'the black man from the land around the river Abbaya'. Though specifically used to address Teto in this context, the expression extends to all the Gumuz as 'the black people living on the land around this river'. While the Gumuz racially characterise the Ethiopian highlanders, particularly the Amhara, as *diimaa*, or 'the red people', the Amhara highlanders, on their part, called the Gumuz s*anqalla* or s*hanqilla,* an Amharic term with pejorative connotations meaning 'black people'.

Evangadi and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* follow different approaches in representing the 'multilingual local' oral worlds of the Hamar and the Gumuz, as already mentioned.[38] Francesca Orsini's notion of 'multilingual local' urges us to pay attention to the range of existing language practices in a particular locale, and to the ways in which texts and archives typically privilege some and thereby exclude other languages, voices, and stories. The multilingual local therefore asks to consider the linguistic positionality of texts and authors. Within Ethiopian literary politics, where the monolingual Amhara literary paradigm has tended to suppress the voices of non-national or politically marginalized languages and groups, and of those who rely on orality as a means of literary expression, this question acquires particular significance.

Fiqremarqos filters the Hamar oral world through literate characters who travel through Hamar territory. Unlike Fiqremarqos, Dhaba presents the interactions and encounters between non-literate characters without giving any evidence of writing practice among Gumuz communities. Linguistically, Dhaba gives more space to the Gumuz language than Fiqremarqos does to the Hamar language. We read many Gumuz words, sentences, and even a couple of poems in *Gurraacha Abbayaa*. Fiqremarqos instead includes only a few untranslatable words in the Hamar language such as *evangadi,* a dance that has no equivalent in Amharic. However, in both novels, though to varying degrees, we encounter the voices, worldviews, and experiences of indigenous peoples. One way in which their voices, experiences, and worldviews are represented is through different forms of orature: folk tales, folk songs, and proverbs. The novels differ in this regard, too, as the next section shows. Whereas *Gurraacha Abbayaa* directly quotes fragments of orature in Gurmuz to make its presence more palpable, *Evangadi* mostly mentions, translates and/or paraphrases Hamar orature, weakening the effect. As a result, despite its ethnographic and pluralising intentions, the novel appears less committed to giving space for orature.

Novelized Orature in *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa*

> The continuity with the oral tradition is evident in the novels written in the African languages, in which the derivation of content and mode is direct and immediate. But the oral–literate interface, in its various manifestations, can also be felt as a quality of the fictional

[38] Francesca Orsini, 'The Multilingual Local in World Literature', *Comparative Literature,* 67.4 (2015), 345–374.

> works of many an African writer, reflecting either a conscious design or, as is often the case, the effect of a cultural retention determined by the African background (Abiola Irele).[39]

In his Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, Abiola Irele argues that the oral-written interface reflects the authors' 'cultural retention determined by the African background'. This 'quality of the fictional works' makes oral texts not only resources for local colour in these novels but rather a structural element. At the same time, local colour cannot be ignored as part of the process of localization of the novel. Both *Evangadi* and *Gurraacha Abbayaa* embed oral texts/orature within the main narration. *Evangadi* includes a folk tale and songs from the oral tradition, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* folk songs, proverbs, and oral poetry like blessing. This section presents the strategies used by the novels to novelize orature and the interplay/ interface between orature and literature. It also examines how the novels retain the performative aspect of orature by indicating the presence of the audience and describing the performance when presenting oral texts. As a genre that constitutively mediates between different genres, the novel, I argued, actively blurs the binary between literature and orature.

The two novels employ direct quotation, characterisation and the character system, and narrative commentary to incorporate oral texts into their narratives, though they differ in the effects they create. As already mentioned, the inclusion of orature in each novel is prompted by the description of cultural ceremonies, social events, and conflicts between characters.

In *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, in some instances that the narrator informs us that the Gumuz use folk songs in their daily life. For example, when Gebru comes home after killing Badija, the narrator describes him performing a heroic *geraarsa* song (see below, and also Tadesse Jirata's chapter in this volume) to celebrate his heroism:

> When Gebru chants the *geerarsa*, his voice falls and rises like a tree hit by a whirlwind. It dips and then rises. He boasts as he recites the *geerarsa,* he boasts. The elders and women jump back and forward. When Gebru feels exhausted because of his repeated boastings, they run towards him. They hug him and kiss him. He jumps and dances, and they jump and sing with him.[40]

For the most part, though, orature is incorporated in both novels through direct discourse, with the narrator including a direct quotation from an oral text, whether a tale or song, performed by the characters. In *Evangadi*, one folk tale is cited in order

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[39] Abiola Irele, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 1.

[40] Dhaba, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* p. 17.

to contextualise a cultural practice. When Karlet comes back to Hamar land and finds her Hamar friends preparing to search for Delti and the Hamar elders conducting a divination ritual to gather more information on Delti's whereabouts and safety, she is struck by the absence of women from the ritual and asks an old man, Galtambe, about it. Galtambe relies on his memory to answer the question. He thinks for a while before recalling a Hamar folk tale that explains the exclusion of women from community affairs.

> Once Borjo's[41] legs got stuck in the mud, he saw Hamar women passing near him as he was trying to get out of the mud. Borjo asked the women for help. But the women showed him no pity, they were busy with their tasks and engaged in their own conversation. Thinking that he was joking, they told him that they were too busy to help. Borjo was disappointed and cursed them: 'May you never be up to any serious business. May you be always busy with insignificant tasks. May you be forever petulant'.
>
> After a while, Borjo noticed a group of Hamar men coming along, who were going to collect honey from the nearby forest. The men carried fire to keep the bees away and needed to walk quickly as their fire was about to die. Borjo asked them for help, too. The men responded at once and put all their belongings aside and helped him. He blessed them: 'May you be responsible for the important business of your community. May you be able to solve the problems facing your people. May you be wise and calm'.
>
> Since then, only men have been destined to bear all the responsibilities. The rights of thinking, discussing and deciding on the causes and the concerns of the Hamar community have been granted only to men.[42]

This is an etiological tale that gives a mythical explanation for the gender-based inequality practised in the Hamar community. The author tries to retain the oral characteristics of this story, both through narrative commentary (he tells us that the story has descended orally from the Hamar ancestors) and through the structure of the tale itself. Galtambe must rely on his memory, and this is indicated by the pause he takes before launching into the story, and he uses the expression 'once', typical of oral storytelling, to indicate the undefined past in which the story is set. Lastly, his short and simple sentence structures reflect the style of oral narratives. Though the novel on the whole largely uses short sentences, those in Galtambe's story sound as if they are narrated orally to a listener.

Evangadi also cites folk songs to convey the relationship between humans and nature among the Hamar. These songs are presented, translated into Amharic, in the first chapter of the novel, in the context of the romantic relationship between two Hamar youths, Delti and Dara. Dara loves Delti, though she knows he has a fiancée,

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[41] Borjo is the name of a Hamar deity.

[42] Fiqremarqos, *Evangadi,* pp. 212–213.

and decides to tell him about her feelings. While mulling over how to approach him, she finds out that Delti occasionally spends the night on Buska Mountain, the tallest mountain in Hamar land. One evening, she follows him to the top of the mountain and spends the night with him. During their time together, Delti leaves Dara alone for a while. Dara meditates on the happy moments they have enjoyed together during the night and starts singing a song to express her feelings to the moon and the stars. The narrator tells us that while singing she dances and plays a traditional musical instrument called *turumba*.[43]

…though you are alone, moon,
please witness my wish of being with my hero.
You, stars, you seem disappointed and keep silent,
you hate to share my happiness.

The stars blinked. She saw them telling her, 'Keep it up!'.

If so, if so,
Hey! Sing for us love songs,
Please dance and let us dance together, let us feel happy.
Whenever my hero moves around like a heifer…

When Delti comes back and finds Dara dancing and singing alone, he is impressed by her dance and starts singing along.

Speak out, sky, speak out, oh earth, on what happened,
let the mountain speak out,
let the forest witness where I have stayed the whole day.
Baldambe, Lalombe, Galtambe…[44]
all my friends, please speak out.
Is Bankimoro'slaw repudiated?[45]
Or his words invalidated?!
I have not thrown down my enemy,
I have not killed a lion or a giraffe… with my gun.
Please speak out Zergiya, a gift from my father,[46]
Have you seen me when I feel tired or strong?
Please speak out, birds, on what you have seen yesterday.
Are the principles of my father or his words needed no more...?[47]

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[43] The songs appear in italics in the novel, and the ellipses are in the original.

[44] These are names of Delti's friends.

[45] A Hamar deity.

[46] Zergiya is the name of a cultural gift among the Hamar people.

[47] Ibid., pp. 39-40.

The song is important from the point of narrative content, of what it says, because of the role it plays in the narrative, and because of the formal quality it brings to the novel. It features as part of the Hamar protagonist Delti's childhood recollections and enhances his sweet memory of love. The song signifies the connection between Dara, Delti, and their environment, and how the Hamar people still enjoy a life without deprivation within their natural habitat. The language and structure of this and other novelized songs reflect the characteristics of orature: lexical parallelism, repetition (line 5), the use of figurative language (mainly personification), and the commentary (between lines 4 and 5, and lines 8 and 9) giving information about the performance aspects of the songs are all these elements foregrounding the song's oral qualities.[48] The main literary device used in these songs is personification, and its narrative function is to foreground the relationship between human and nature, blurring the difference between them and establishing an effect of intimacy.

Other than this, the narrator in *Evangadi* tells us that when the Hamar celebrate *evangadi*, they dance, jump and sing. Similarly, in the last section of the novel, when we read about the multicultural festival in Geneva organised by Karlet as part of her research engagement, the narrator tells us that the representatives of various Ethiopian communities perform several dances and sing folk songs—though without describing or quoting any song or any concrete example of orature.

Gurraacha Abbaayaa includes a total of seven folk songs, a proverb and blessing. As with the oral tale in *Evangadi*, the songs are introduced in the context of discussions among the characters on socio-cultural issues such as farming, conflict, cultural festivities, and marriage, in line with the novelization of culture and oral world of the Gumuz people. In fact, the novel discusses cultural issues through oral texts. To represent Gumuz views, the text uses Gumuz characters with their indigenous names, and sometimes has them speak directly in their own language.

The first example of folk song occurs right in Chapter One, which presents the Gumuz culture of communal farming work and situates Teto, the main protagonist, in this context. One day, Teto is walking alone in the bush and hears the voices of a large number of people harvesting and singing work songs. One song is quoted in the Gumuz language and paraphrased in Afan Oromo, the language of the novel. At a first hearing, Teto does not understand what the song is really about. As he approaches the group of people, he hears the following words:

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[48] The personification of the inanimate is popular in orature, Ngũgĩ ('Notes', p. 5.) reminds us: 'Humans are definitely part of nature. In that sense they are not different from animals and plants that all depend on the same environment of earth, air, water, and sun. They are products of the same mother-environment. Orature takes that for granted. Hence in the narratives of orature, humans, birds, animals, and plants interact freely, they often assume each other's' forms, including language. Humans in distress talk to birds and give them messages'.

Maatiyaa dumaatisiyaa qomisaa
Eesaalskee maanjaa lumbaa
Hoo-ho-hoo-ho-hoo-ho-hoo
Hoo-ho-hoo-ho-hoo-ho-hoo.[49]

The narrator tells us the meaning of the song in a short phrase, '*Obbolessi kee jabaataadha- akka ibidaa'* (Your brother is as strong as fire), and confirms that the song is a group work song (*weedduu daboo* in Afan Oromo).[50] The song is not really about work, though, but rather about the conflict between Bacangire and Gebru, and this is how the novel relates orature to its plot. Bacangire is likened to iron, for he is expected to avenge his brother Badija, killed by Gebru. The song, as a result, directly relates to the main plot of the novel (in the first two lines), while lines 3-4 consists of ideophones (the 'hoo-hoo' sound). In this context, the ideophones are used sound to get all the singers to join together and motivate one another during agricultural work (see Desta and Yenaleam in this volume). Ideophones are a distinctive feature of songs in this novel.

Songs, in other words, mark and punctuate important events in the culture of the Gumuz. While Teto is alone in the bush, speculating about the meaning of the song, two Gumuz girls come up to him. One teases him by saying, 'You seem a lone hunter', while the other girl says, 'We wish that you could kill and make us sing and celebrate', once again an allusion to to conflict between Bacangire and Gebru.[51] In fact, interestingly *Gurraacha Abbayaa* includes also two genres of heroic war poems, *dhaaduu* and *geerarsa*, that are famous among the traditional Oromo people and are performed in situation of serious conflict such as wars, battles, raids, or other military endeavours. The novel presents the *dhaaduu* and *geerarsa* as if they are Gumuz genres. In *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, the poems are performed in the context of the feud between Bacangire's and Gebru's families. They are narrative representation of the strong relationship and shared cultural practices between the Oromo and the Gumuz.

When Gebru returns home with the genitals and limbs of Bacangire's brother, Badija, as evidence of the killing, his relatives and friends celebrate his achievement for several weeks. The celebration is marked by different types of boastful song (*dhaaduu*) sung by Gebru himself and his friends, and the description lingers on the loud and multifarious songs in a remarkable representation of performance: 'Those unable to attend the celebration due to old age or other reasons listen to them from

[49] Dhaba, *Gurraacha Abbayaa,* p. 12.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Dhaba, *Gurraacha Abbayaa,* p. 14.

their homes. Women's songs, their ululation, young boys' songs, the killer's bragging… all together they rouse the hearts of the men and women'.[52]

Dhaaduu 'constitutes a man's personal history, upon which his reputation is built, for it is through his prowess that he is remembered during his own life-time and through which he will leave his mark on the future', writes Aneesa Kassam. 'They are recited at a very rapid pace, thus conveying young man's agitation and anger. In them he usually exaggerates his bravery, and there is a subtle play on words'.[53] Gebru's *dhaaduu* and *geerarsa* songs convey some of the same characteristics:

> …Abbaa Gabruu Tafarraa…[54]
> I have gone through the river valley
> and dried the throat
> of the black man from Mattin,
> whose fame was far reaching.
> I went through the village of Mattin
> and ruined his jaw.
> I went through the village of Mattin
> and got rid of my grudge.
> *Abbaa Gabruu Tafarraa*…
> my *facha*[55] is unique
> for the hairs around the genitals are curled up,
> his teeth are sharp they can cut raw meat.
> He can carry *gaya*[56] in his left hand
> and hold *saya*[57] in his right hand.
> I made him jump over a tree log
> and made him to stand on his knees,
> and made him throw away his gun
> and made him eat sand...[58]

The boastings in the song celebrate and exaggerate Gebru's achievements. The narrator describes the audience's reactions as validating Gebru: 'admiration from his sisters-in-law… the songs of the young girls… and the *geerarsa*, along with the songs,

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[52] Ibid., p.1.

[53] Aneesa Kassam, 'The fertile past: the Gabra concept of oral tradition', *Africa*, 56.2 (1986), 193–209 (pp.199-200).

[54] *Abbaa Gabru Tafarraa*: 'Teferra, Father of Gebru', a proud appellative.

[55] *Facha* is a piece of the human body, either limbs or genitals, usually kept by killers as proof that they have killed their enemies.

[56] *Gaya* is a traditional tobacco smoked by the Gumuz.

[57] *Saya* is a cow.

[58] Dhaba, *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, pp.16–17.

seem to have swollen Gabru's heart'.[59] This commentary alerts the reader to the power of the performance—a power that the written text struggles to convey. When it comes to the other *geerarsa* by Gebru, quoted below, Gebru is said to be influenced by the audience and to reflect it back.

> … *Abbaa Gabruu Tafarraa*
>
> I am relieved of the scorn of the Sanqalla's women
> And I am done with my revenge on the Sanqalla of Abbaya...[60]

The fact Gebru sings a *geerarsa* can be read as a strategy to emphasise the strong presence of the Oromo among the Gumuz.

Novelized songs can also be used to voice criticism and express popular reaction. After Gebru ends his celebration, he wants to visit the nearby market village in order to hold another celebration there, Bacangire cuts him short. ('A few days after Gebru murdered Badija, the cattle keepers *also* produced a song about Gebru's defeat' ('*Otuu oolee hin bulin tikeen* illee *weedduu itti mogaaste'*). The word '*illee*' (also) indicates that the cattle keepers are not the first group to produce a song about Gebru and that other social groups in the Gumuz land have already condemned Gebru's action. The cattle keepers sing:

> Gebru, a hero of Axaballa,
> but the Sanqalla is his lord...
> Did he think that the blood of the Sanqalla of Adare[61]
> was a dog's blood or a cat's blood…?
> Whenever Gebru hunts,
> why does he not think twice?
> For it is inevitable that one may be measured
> by the very measure he uses to measure others...[62]

Though this is a cattle herders' song sung while herding the cattle, this song is not a work song but rather responds to the most important event they have observed in their community, the conflict between the main characters. As such the song provides crucial commentary on the novel's plot. As in the previous examples, the song employs symbolism, metaphor ('dog's blood' and 'cat's blood' in lines 3-4 conveying how the Gumuz are looked down upon and equated with animals), and questioning (lines 3-6) to demonstrate Gebru's wrong-headed perception of the Gumuz's weakness. The songs case presents an effective use of figurative language,

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[59] Ibid., p. 17.

[60] Ibid.

[61] *Adare* is a term for village in the Gumuz language.

[62] Ibid., p. 38.

and the fact that the poem is a rejoinder to Gebru's boasting puts the two songs in conversation in the novel, creating a network of oral texts through which communities make sense of events, reflect upon their relationship with other communities, and memorialise the past. Using the songs for proverb, poetic and thematic purpose, the novel creates an orature-novel interface.

So far, I have discussed songs, mostly *geerarsa,* recited after an event. *Gurraacha Abbayaa* presents another *dhaaduu* recited in anticipation of an event. This time the reciter is Teto, the main protagonist, who remembers having heard it from his father. When his sister, Doca, refuses to marry Yenche's brother in exchange for Teto marrying Yenche and kills herself by drowning into the Abbaya River, he decides to kill his would-be brother-in-law so that he can marry Yenche without an exchange in brides between the two families. Before he sets out to commit this murder, Teto remembers some lines of a *dhaaduu* that he used to hear from his father. The poem hints at the murder he is about to undertake.

> A waylayer who hunts overnight!
>
> A waylayer who has no shadow!
> Who walks warily!
> Who never misses when he aims![63]

Before he commits the murder, Teto repeats some of the lines of the poem ('A waylayer who has no shadow/ who never misses his aim!')[64]. The repetition focuses on the action that the singer is going to undertake and highlights his own strength. The fact that Teto remembers this song from his late father reflects the novel's recognition of the generational oral transmission of such oral texts.

Unlike *Evangadi*, in *Gurraacha Abbayaa* most orature is generated by a specific event and is performed or sung in a lively context. The narratives in the novel and the elements of orature are meaningfully weaved together, creating an effective interaction. In most cases *Gurraacha Abbayaa* directly quotes oral texts. This creates a strong interface between the novel and orature and reflects the effect of oral texts on the narrative development of the novel. As mentioned earlier, direct quoting is a more effective way of 'localizing' or locating the novel in a particular socio-cultural and political context than paraphrasing or indirect referencing, as showcased in *Evangadi*.

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[63] Ibid., p. 129.

[64] Ibid., p.133.

The novelization of orature is also represented through characterization and the character system. *Evangadi* features characters from both literate and oral communities, and we also learn about the oral world of the Hamar and the imaginative culture through non-literate characters like Delti and Dara and Galtambe. These characters share their experiences with one another and support each other in understanding their respective communities. The novel presents their oral knowledge as part of the narrative, honouring and valorising it. This trait is present also in *Gurraacha Abbayaa*, with major characters like Gebru (who is not a Gumuz) and Teto (who is) and minor characters like Yenche's father.

Conclusion

> Orature is inducted primarily to eschew scriptocentric representation systems "Anjali Gera Roy)[65]

This chapter has explored the relationship between orature and literature at formal and content levels and conceptualized their relationship through 'novelization'. Novelization involves a set of techniques and choices to represent oral texts and create an interface or effective co-existence of oral and written texts in a novel for narrative and aesthetic purposes. The Ethiopian village novels analysed in this chapter employ devices such as personification, repetition, symbolism and metaphor, direct and indirect quotation of orature, whether in original language or through paraphrase and translation of the language of the novel, and narratorial commentary to novelize orature and foreground 'an ongoing relationship of coevalness and simultaneity' between the novel and orature.[66] These elements not only reflect the presence of orature in the societies depicted, but also inform and shape the development of the story and the narrative structure of the novels, for example by enriching and explaining events, conflicts, cultural themes, or views about cultural practices. In *Evangadi*, novelized orature presents the gendered views of the Hamar community, while in *Gurraacha Abbayaa* it expresses a worldview about socio-cultural life, and particularly about conflict and marriage. Orature, as Obiechina argues, has the flexibility to be incorporated into novelistic narratives because of the openness of the novel as a genre. However, not all novels are equal to this task. Village novels, this chapter has argued, are particularly suited because they engage extensively with oral worlds and cultural practices.

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[65] Anjali Gera Roy, 'The Folktale in Achebe's Fictions', in *Oral Tradition in African Literature*, ed. by Chin Ce and Charles Smith (Nigeria: Handel Books 2015), pp. 30-50 (p. 41).

[66] George, 'The Oral–Literate Interface', p. 17.

At the same time, Obiechina argues, narrative proverbs or novelized orature 'function as images, metaphors, and symbols and advance the meanings and formal qualities of the narratives in which they occur'.[67] The two novels present concrete examples of orature and their oral/performance qualities while modifing them for narrative purposes. For example, in *Evangadi* novelized orature is used to represent the views of the Hamar community on gender-based divisions of labour, while characterization is used to present a western oppositional view to such division, as the dialogue between the white female anthropologist, Karlet, and the Hamar characters Goiti and Galtambe shows. Besides, in the words of Anjali Gera Roy, 'Far from contributing to their novels' anthropological flavour or acting as symbolic devices, folk materials juxtapos[e] an alternative idiom–of African orature–with its own unique manner of structuring reality'.[68] In *Evangadi,* Karlet embodies this encounter with the alternative worldview of the Hamar people, which she comes to promote. Novelized orature not only domesticates the novel to specific multilingual locals, then, but presents an 'alternative idiom' and carries 'organic aspect of African imagination' even when appropriated by the novel. As such, novelized orature is a useful analytical category that, this chapter has showed, plays a similar role whether in African novels in postcolonial languages (as in the case of Obiechina writing on Achebe) or in African languages. This chapter thus participates in the scholarship on orality and the African novel, but with the important twist that the issue is not between the novels' colonial/postcolonial language vs orature in African languages but rather of novelized orature within Afrophone texts. While the novels do not participate in the colonial language debate, they do participate in the debate within Ethiopian literature, which is still colonial-like. Therefore, my chapter adds to the African language debate by highlighting a situation in which the role of the colonial language is occupied by an African national language, Amharic. But while issues of unequal resources and exclusion are germane to the Ethiopian situation, Amharic—unlike English, French, or Portuguese—does not give Ethiopian writers a wider audience or connect them to writers elsewhere in Africa. The novel here does not imply an Afropolitan move or audience, though it still relates to African literary studies, from which Ethiopian literature has largely kept apart.

The novelization of orature can also be read as a form of literary resistance against the oppositional division between orature and literature as well as against the dominant voices in the novel. It is also a modality or means through which the novels make oral texts travel or be more visible beyond their original context by

[67] Obiechina, 'Narrative Proverbs', p. 200.

[68] Roy, 'The Folktale in Achebe's Fictions', p. 31.

transforming oral texts into written texts. For the evolutionists, the transformation from oral to writing is a 'linear progression' with the intention of orature to be replaced by literature, which is considered more advanced and sophisticated. As this chapter shows, this is not true, as orature can be distinctively present in the novels with some of its major inherent qualities (See Ngugi and Okpewho in this chapter). In short, the novelization of orature creates the possibility through which orature is disseminated or presented to reading audiences. In other words, novelization is the narrative technique through which orature and literature interact or support each other in presenting multiple experiences and stories of a certain group of people.

Lastly, what implications does such a reading have for the study of Ethiopian literature, African literature, and world literature? While *Evangadi* uses Amharic to present the experiences of marginalized people and can be said to linguistically belong to mainstream Ethiopian literature, the novel's attempt to normalize or at least smooth the antagonistic relationship between literatures in Amharic and other Ethiopian languages is novel and positive gesture within the Amharic literary tradition. In presenting Amhara immigrants as arrogant and disruptive presences that bring doom to Gumuz villages, *Gurraacha Abbayaa* can be said to implicitly oppose the cultural and linguistic domination of the Amhara. But since this Afan Oromo focuses entirely on Gumuz and Amhara characters and uses Oromo infused with Gumuz and Amharic terms, it distances itself from Amharic and Oromo-centred narratives. We can read the two novels as oppositional within the Amharic-focused mainstream Ethiopian national paradigm of Amhara literary centre and Oromo and other further peripheries. *Gurraacha Abbayaa* mediates between two peripheries, while *Evangadi* mediates a further, oral, periphery.

At the same time, while both novels exemplify Moretti's idea the novel outside Europe as consisting of a hybrid of imported form and local colour, they challenge Casanova's proposition that literatures in marginalized or minor languages struggle for recognition from the centre.[69] Both novels are in fact outside the circuit of world literature and the (Anglophone) novel as a globally circulating form. At the same time, novelized orature in the two novels can help counter the exclusionary definition of literature in world literature studies, which excludes orature from their definition of (world) literature. While novelized orature in these Afrophone novels does not show any influence of the dominant world languages, it highlights the workings of multilingual realities and the oral world both inside and outside the novels, thereby showing how monolingual literary paradigms suppress

[69] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (London: Verso, 2004).

the voices of non-national or politically marginalized languages and groups and of those who rely on orality as a means of literary expression. In short, the novelized orature in these novels proves the continued importance of orality and of oral imaginative or artistic expressions for both individuals and groups and stresses the need to acknowledge orature as a living part of literature, including world literature.

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