

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL RELEVANCE OF ETHIOPIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH: RELEVANCE THEORY IN FOCUS

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper presents some arguments and methods for analyzing and interpreting the sociological relevance of Ethiopian literature in English giving more focus and importance to poetry. The method employed can support the analyses and interpretations of the views/voices within the writers in the faces of the ever changing Ethiopian society. In the Ethiopian tertiary education and scholarship contexts, educators, students and researchers might lack appropriate procedures for the interpretations of literary texts. In such contexts, intuitions are more trusted than scientific scholarship and procedures. This creates problem of miscommunication. This might also lead to rushed generalizations, misunderstandings and improper communications. In tertiary contexts, especially in classroom situations, absence of advanced methods of literary interpretation often places the teacher in an awkward confrontation with challenging postgraduate students. Relevance theoretic approaches can support educators, students and researchers to bridge this gap and help bring Ethiopian literature in English to the level of tertiary scholarship.*

*Selecting three poems (one from each) of Tsegaye G., Eshetu C., and Asafa T., the researcher conducted text interpretations and classroom presentations. Within a period of two years (2010/2011—2011/2012), a total of 31 postgraduate students (MA in English) who registered for a course: “Stylistics for Language Teaching and Learning” were purposefully selected to interpret and present the major messages of these poems which they took as part of the course. In 2011, the class comprised of 19 MA students and all participated in 6 FGDs and in 2012, there were 12 students and all joined 4 FGDs. Each group presented the findings of FGDs to the entire class. All presentations were recorded and noted. The basic stream of the interpretations and presentations followed the theoretical underpinnings of Relevance Theory as proposed and promoted by Wilson and Sperber. The presentations and interpretations of these texts following RT showed that, amidst linguistic barriers, these poets have played not only sociological roles but also pedagogical roles in an ever changing Ethiopian society. It is found out that the three writers presented sociological issues from three different perspectives: African, Ethiopian and Oromo. Tsegaye presents sociological issues often shared by African Negritude writers which glorified pride in blackness and documents assimilations and alienations. Eshetu Chole presents burning sociological issues of all Ethiopians at the time. His political sociology focuses on the establishment of a visionary leadership in Ethiopian inclusive of Oromo People. This leadership should guide all Ethiopians from darkness and poverty to light and prosperity and finally to contested good governance. On the other hand, Asefa Dibaba is concerned with the freedom of Oromo. He believes that the Oromo are being insulted, humiliated, wretched and dehumanized. Then, he has suggested armed struggle to separate Oromo from Ethiopia. In this RT interpretive process, finally it can be concluded that a free statehood can be a true dream for the people of Oromo only through armed struggle.*

**Key words:** *relevance theory, strong and weak communication, implicature, intention, cognitive effects, relevance and Ethiopian literature in English*

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

Ethiopian literature has predominantly existed in Amharic, the national language of over 82 million Ethiopians. In a rejoinder to reaching out to a worldwide audience, a handful of indigenous writers started using English as the language of imaginative writing in 1960s. English is the language which does not dribble into the soul of the ordinary people in Ethiopia. However, the expansion of higher education, the opening of a few printing presses, the growth of Ethiopia's diplomatic relations, the presence of the African Union in the country and globalization have greatly contributed and raised the level of English to the literary and an official language status. Recently, however, writers have taken up Oromiffa, Tigrigna and few other indigenous languages as the languages of literary writing and official communications. The wider question is why do Ethiopian writers take up English as the language of literature? Does this literature have any sociological relevance at all? Does this literature play any role in enhancing the consciousness of the people? Have these writers clearly been understood or misunderstood by the people inside? Have the readers and students properly interpreted these works? Amidst linguistic barriers, does the writer have any significant role in the society? It has often been said that Ethiopian Diasporas use creative writing in English as the safest weapon to reach out to an internationally dominant and powerful reader-cum-leader and secure wider and greater collaborations and recognitions to overthrow a "dictator back home". In order to address these basic questions and assumptions, some example poems by Tsegaye Gebremedhin, Eshetu Chole and Assefa Tefera were purposefully selected and interpreted. Over a period of two years, a total of 31 postgraduate students who took a course: "Stylistics for Language Teaching and learning" were asked to analyze, interpret and present these poems following "Relevance Theory". In these semesters, similar questions appeared in the final exam papers. Their FGDs, presentations and exam papers were captured and included in this study.

Following a Relevance Theory, textual analyses, interpretations and discussions were made. The basic stream of these interpretations and comprehensions followed the theoretical underpinnings of RT as promoted by Wilson and Sperber. In the next sections, the paper presents a review of previous works, relevance theory and major findings. Finally, based on the discussions, conclusions were made.

## **2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In the Ethiopian tertiary education and scholarship contexts, educators, students, researchers and ordinary readers often lack appropriate procedures for the comprehensions and interpretations of the sociological relevance of literary texts. In such contexts, intuitions are more trusted than scientific procedures. Feelings in the interpretations of literary texts are not often supported by inputs/evidences from the texts. This might also lead to rushed generalizations about the work and misunderstanding the author. Due to the absence of acceptable course delivery methods, Ethiopian literature in English as a subject is often excluded from the curriculum. In territory contexts, in classroom situations, absence of methods of acceptable literary interpretation often places the teacher in an awkward confrontation with challenging postgraduate students. Relevance theoretic approaches can support educators, students and researchers to bridge this gap and help bring Ethiopian literature in English to the status of tertiary scholarship.

## **3. OBJECTIVES**

This research has aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- Justify that RT is an appropriate methodological tool for the interpretation of Ethiopian literature in English
- Narrate the sociological concerns of Ethiopian creative writers (poets) in English.
- Identify alternative policy options and recommendations so as to raise the roles and statuses of English.

## **4. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS WORK**

#### 4.1. Is English a strong or weak medium of communication?

In the country where the majority of the people speaks Amharic and Oromiffa, Ethiopian writers must have indisputably compelling sociological reasons to choose and use English as the preferred medium of creative writing. Different researchers and educators in the field have identified several reasons. For instance, Beer argues that “Ethiopian writers were soon to feel the artistic and economic impulse that moved other African authors to use English or French as their medium in order to attempt international recognition; at the same time, English became the accepted second language of the country and the language used in secondary and higher education as well as in much of the business sector” (Beer 1977: 101). On the other hand, Tewodros identifies causes such as the expansion of modern education and the country's earlier relationship with foreign countries as the major reason for Ethiopians to write in English. He further adds, “When we think of the earlier sources of Ethiopian poetry in English, we find two major factors. These are the publication of the newspaper, “The Ethiopian Herald” and the students of the University College of Addis Ababa, especially the students of the university seem to be the basic reason to intensify the literary tradition” (Tewodros 2002:5).

Unlike those who are living in Ethiopia, Ethiopian Diasporas have their own sociological reasons for using English as the preferred language of literature. These Ethiopians, like many other immigrant communities, Lohrentz argues, “Are victims of circumstances and events quite beyond their control that have in many instances caused untold and unimaginable misery, pain and trauma” (2004:3). Examples of these are the red/white terror of the 1970's, the accompanying famine and draught, war and forced military services and risky and dangerous migrations to the neighboring countries. Such traumatic experiences are evidenced by Nega Mezlekia who in a novel “Notes from the Hyena's Belly” (2001) portrays the cruelty of the Derg, famine and drought, the Ethio-Somali war and their effect on the youth.

Similarly, Haftu also presents that whatever reform Ethiopian Diasporas suggested, the voices were not heard by the authorities at home. The reaction that these Ethiopians made is expressing their woes and voices through literary works in English. Other sources indicate that the Diasporic Ethiopian literature in English emerged in the post 1974 revolution as a response to the domestic politics. Because of its historical benchmark, this variant of Ethiopian literature has highly engaged in the political realm of the country from different ideological views (Haftu 2012: 9). If the literature is written in response to the domestic violence and politics, why do Ethiopian Diasporas write in English for the readers/audiences who may not understand the language of the writer? Then, *do these writers use creative writing in English as the safest weapon to reach out to an internationally dominant and powerful reader-cum-leader and secure wider and greater collaborations and recognitions to overthrow a “dictator back home”?*

Likewise, substantiating his arguments from other sources, Endalckachew also argues that Ethiopian Diasporas write literature in English because they wanted to reflect on the social contexts in the migrant's country of origin which prompts them to leave, on the experience of migration itself, on the mixed reception which they may receive in the country of arrival, on experiences of racism and hostility and on the sense of rootlessness and the search for identity which can result from displacement and cultural diversity. Endalckachew asserts that they are all not far away from the post-modern situation. In addition, he presents that “cultural conflicts, discrimination, alienation, identity crisis, generation gap etc., which characterize migrant/diasporic literature, all fit well to the concepts used to describe post-modern literature. The themes of the migrant literature of Africa, by extension – Ethiopia, can therefore be successfully studied with the concepts of migration, Diaspora, displacement and related concepts adopted from post-modernism” (Endalckachew 2008: 8).

If these are the major causes for choosing and using English as the preferred medium of weak or strong medium of communication to reach out to the most dominant reader, what are the major issues that these writers have been raising? How are these major issues analyzed, interpreted, circulated and finally accepted by the readers?

#### **4.2. Major Sociological Issues of Ethiopian Literature in English**

Historically the sociological influences of Ge'ez and Amharic literature on the Ethiopian literature in English have been strong and visible and impacted almost all genres. Since both Ge'ez and Amharic were dominated by the morals and philosophies of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, many of the literatures in these languages were didactic and moralistic initially.

In the 1960s, few Ethiopians started publishing short stories with themes which show the influence of either Ge'ez or Amharic literature. These short story writers did not totally break away from the clutches of the religious teachings of the time and finally ended up presenting lessons which advise readers to be good to others and grow with great sense of traditional Ethiopian morality. In this regard, Beer (1977) argues that short story writers such as Hassan Elmi in his "The Two Lovers (1963)" demonstrated in a rather incredible manner that love can burn as bright and warm as a glowing fire, and suddenly turn to bitter ashes. Kebede Abera also in his "Spent Youth", was not so much an instructive warning as a condemnation of the rigid value virginity had in the traditional Amhara culture. Assege Hagos's "You Too, my Son!" graphically questioned the structure of a society that could propel a young man to madness through poverty and despair, and the hopelessness of the peasant class. Abebe Semegn dealt with the love problems of educated young people in a traditional society, and his "Ambitious", attempted a diagnosis of certain aspects of the relationship between servant and master in Ethiopia. Tesfaye Gessesse's "Ayee my Luck" (1971) gave a trenchant account of an Addis Ababa prostitute and her hypocritical customer and was an attempt at penetrating the psychological makeup. These writers addressed sociological issues such as prostitutions, human relations, cultures and values systems in the period.

It can be argued that it was only after 1970s that these handful of Ethiopian short story writers came out of the tyrannical grip of the traditionalist and religious creative writings. Succeeding 1970s, they started to revolt against the long established Rastafarian ruling system which was greatly backed by the Orthodox Church. Although for the most part, short-story writing ceased for a while in the late sixties with the demise of "Something", in the spring of 1974, when it became clear that the season for political change was approaching, the English-language Ethiopian Herald published a series of stories by various local authors. Most of these stories were thinly disguised sociological commentary on penury, servitude, or the contrast between modern Addis Ababa and an impoverished countryside and are strictly traditional didactic exercises attuned to the times; as literature they are mostly weak (Beer 1977: 112).

The arguments above, however, should not imply that Ethiopian novelists in this particular period reproduced works which don't conform to the traditionalist and moralist philosophies of the time and continued to exist without the influence of Ge'ez or Amharic. In 1970s, like in the short story writers, the novelists also delineated sociologically relevant themes which were didactic, traditional and at times obviously religious. For example, the artistic limitations of didacticism, so clear in much of Ge'ez and Amharic literature, are also visible in Ashenafi Kebede's "Confession" (1962), the first novel by an Ethiopian to be written in English. At the same time, this work breaks away from tradition in some ways, most noticeably in its setting. It is a story of an Ethiopian in the United States and an attempt at revealing the problems of interracial love and student life abroad (Ibid. P.106). Daniachew Worku's "The Thirteenth Sun" (1973) is about a sick nobleman who is taken by his educated son to a holy shrine in the hopes of finding health. The son views with disgust his countrymen's bondage to ignorance and superstition. On the other hand, Sahle Sellassie's "The Afersata" (1968), is about the communal nature of village life and is stressed in this tale of a search for a suspected arsonist. His other novel "Warrior King" (1974) is a historical

novel on the life of Emperor Tewodros and his efforts to bond the regions of Ethiopia as seen through the eyes of a peasant boy. The themes of these four novels show sociologically relevant issues such as interracial love, traditional and moralist philosophy, didacticism and communal life.

Currently, compared to the short story, novel writing in Ethiopia has expanded with a multitude of sociologically relevant themes and social concerns. Take for instance, Fikeremmarkos Desta's "Land of the Yellow Bull" was released in 2003 and is about love story in which love triangle, seduction, sex, romance; longing and pain all are in abundance. Solomon Hailemariam's "The Young Crusader" (2011) mixes love, friendship, sympathy, vice, virtue and justice.

Ethiopian drama in English has not grown to raise the sociological consciousness of the people although those few plays in the 1970s dealt with sociologically important issues. Abbe Gubegna's "The Savage Girl" (1964), the first play in English by an Ethiopian writer, seems to be a moral lesson on the virtues of **isolationism and misoneism**, two attitudes still to be found in some parts of Ethiopia (Ibid. p. 113). Tsegaye Gebremedhin also raised various social issues in his four plays in English: Oda Oak, in which the will of the ancestors constantly pervades, is a drama on violent conflict between superstition and reason. His other play "Tewodros" (1965) dramatizes a portrait of Emperor Tewodros and his turbulent times. In the "Azmar" (1965), he idealizes the views of the peasantry near Addis Ababa. "Collision of your Altars" (1971) is an experimental drama on the fall of Emperor Kaleb's Axumite Ethiopia in the sixth century, as recorded in the Royal Chronicles. What then after Abbe Gubegna and Tsegaye Gebremedhin? Why have other Ethiopians stopped writing plays? The researcher has not seen and read any publication of drama or theater in English currently. Drama in Ethiopia could have grown developing the sociological consciousness of the people.

Contributing immensely to the growth of sociological consciousness, however, currently two genres greatly expanded in Ethiopia and by Diasporas are the novel and poetry. Ethiopian writers have predominantly chosen poetry to vent stifled emotions and flesh out the pains of the current society. Poetry in English flourished along with other Ethiopian writing during the 1960s, and, not surprisingly, ranged from weak, amateurish attempts to the inspired work of Solomon Deressa and Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin. Prouty (1967) points out that the predisposition of the themes of Tsegaye's poetry dwelling upon poverty, modernization and being African or being Ethiopian. Tewodros (2012) quoting Huntberger, in talking about the themes of Solomon Deressa's poems says that the poet speaks for universal humanism. He argues that Solomon's poetry is "least insistent on emphasizing his Ethiopian background" (Tewodros 2012:44). Commenting on the theme of Tsegaye's "Home Coming Son", Tewodros states that it is only with an unwavering communion with his own land and culture that the African feels free and healthy. With this poem, the idea of blackness is also glorified. Despite the pejorative meaning of so many literatures, the poet exemplified the term black to mean light and beauty (Ibid. p. 15).

My other argument here is that in today's Ethiopia, writers have started raising sociological issues boldly and courageously as freedom of speech has slightly improved. In the current society, due to the existence of a relative freedom of expression, the dominant role of the poet or the novelist is to shape the sociological awareness of the people. In this regard, in an interview, Asefa (2006) says:

Today poetry has a dual function: one, to instruct, and, as well, to critique. You, as a poet, you are a social critic. You cannot remain passive to see and submit to the status quo--unless you are a sellout, an opportunist. In Our case, now, Literature has serious purposes more than ever. In my *Theorizing the Present* (2004), a critical approach to study Oromo Literature from a sociological viewpoint, I have clearly stressed the purposive function and didactic role of our literature. In a World driven by exploitation, in a World where humanity is overwhelmed by hunger, disease, want and absolute misery, in a world of inequality and injustice, no criticism can be innocent, no literature can be of purely aesthetic value. "Decorous Decorum" is a direct reference to the



reluctance of the Age We live in. It is a nonviolent rally against the Quietude, Indifference, and Servitude of the present generation. I am saying, if the Life they live is bad, is it because the Generation lived before them was terrible, reluctant, submissive? What if the Generation hereafter will be worse? The meeting point of Time Past and Time Future is the Present, I think. If We have to act, let's act Temporal. Our grief must end somewhere. That point in Time is Here and Now—the Present! (Assefa 2006:1)

My other argument here is that, as clearly expressed by Sahlesilassie, Ethiopian literature raises socially relevant issues to Ethiopians. However, whatever universal or domestic social issue they raise, the work must be properly critiqued and interpreted following proper analytical tools. All in all, unlike the other African literature, the subject of Ethiopian literature cannot be post colonialism, asserts Sahlesilassie:

We have no reason to protest vehemently against cultural assimilation because we have never been victim to it. If we have become westernized, it is because we wanted to. It has not been forced upon us. Likewise we have no reason to search for our roots because we have never lost them. On the contrary, we have become victims of our own tradition, of our own roots. We have lost ourselves in self-praise, in clapping our hands to our stunted tradition which we consider sacred (Sahlesilassie 1974: 6.)

My final argument is that in several contexts of literary analyses and interpretations, there have been gaps between the author's meaning and the reader's understanding of the work/ meaning. Although Ethiopian authors for many years have been raising many sociologically relevant issues which could have supported the transformation of the country, they have not been properly understood. Rapid generalizations are often made and authors are habitually misunderstood. There should be a method or procedure to reduce the gap between the author's meaning and the readers' comprehension of this meaning. This gap can be filled by Relevance Theory (RT) as conceptualized by Wilson and Sperber.

## **5. Relevance Theory as a Methodological Tool : A Conceptual Framework**

As argued in the previous sections, educators and students in the Ethiopian higher education contexts might lack appropriate methodologies for the analyses and interpretations of literary texts. In such contexts, intuitions are more trusted than scientific procedures. Intuitions in the interpretations of literary texts are not often supported by contextual inputs/evidences from the texts. Lack of methodology might also lead to rushed generalizations about the entire work and at times about the author. Literary works might be interpreted, circulated, reproduced and consumed following inappropriate methodologies. In classroom situations, the absence of methods of acceptable literary interpretation often places the teacher in an awkward confrontation with challenging students. To bridge this gap, Relevance Theoretic approach can support educators and teachers.

With the central claims of its proponents: Wilson and Sperber, RT grounds its account on the propositions that "... the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough, and predictable enough, to guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning. The aim is to explain in cognitively realistic terms what these expectations of relevance amount to, and how they might contribute to an empirically plausible account of comprehension" (Wilson and Sperber 2002:250). RT assumes that the most important type of cognitive effect achieved by processing an input in a context is a contextual implication, a conclusion deducible from the input and the context together, but from neither input nor context alone.

It can be openly argued that RT situates itself in opposition to the classical code model whereby information is encoded, conveyed and deciphered by the addressee, with another copy of the code. It is also observable that RT provides more theoretical backgrounds to the inferential approaches to pragmatics and holds that the linguistic meaning of the words decoded by the addressee is just one of many inputs that can shape interpretation. An inferential model of communication makes the claim that communication contains not only the information that you wish to transmit, but also the information of your intention to inform the addressee of your meaning. Consequently, an inferential account - communication is achieved not by

coding and decoding messages, but by providing evidence for an intended hypothesis about the communicator's intentions. Communication is successful when the audience interprets the evidence on the intended lines. Failures in communication result from misinterpretation of the evidence provided (Wilson and Sperber, 1994:89). Inferential communication is not just a matter of intending to affect the thoughts of an audience; it is a matter of getting them to recognize that one has this intention (Wilson and Sperber 2002:250...255).

It has been often argued that RT is a framework for the study of cognition, proposed primarily in order to provide a psychologically realistic account of communication. 'Relevance' here is a technical term. It is defined as a property of inputs to cognitive systems: an input is more relevant, the more cognitive effects it yields, and less relevant the more mental effort it takes to process. For Sperber and Wilson (1986/95a), relevance is a potential property of inputs to cognitive processes. Any input may deliver a variety of different types of cognitive effect; it may, for instance, combine inferentially with existing assumptions to yield new conclusions (known as contextual implications, or cognitive implications), or it may provide evidence that strengthens existing assumptions, or it may contradict and eliminate already held information (Carston and Powell 279-280).

In relevance-theoretic terms:

1. Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.
2. Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time (Sperber and Wilson 252)

Similarly, Allot argues that the core of relevance theory can be divided into two sets of assumptions. Assumptions relating to cognition in general include the definition of relevance as a trade-off between efforts and effects, and the claim that cognition tends to maximize relevance. Assumptions about communication include the claims that understanding an utterance is a matter of inferring the speaker's communicative and informative intentions; and that the communicative principle of relevance and the presumption of optimal relevance mandate the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure, a heuristic that guides the search for the intended interpretation of utterances.

On the other end, Clark (1996) argues that the Principle of Relevance imposes limits on the extent to which linguistic forms can contribute to interpretations. This suggests that certain possible approaches to stylistic analysis, such as counting the frequency of phrases of a certain type, risk putting analysis to unnecessary effort, by making them discover facts about the linguistic expressions which do not contribute in a significant way to overall interpretations. For this reason, a methodology can be proposed which begins not 'from the bottom up' by looking at linguistic forms but 'from the top down' by considering inferences readers might make (Clark 1996:163). For the interpretation of a literary work, Clark also proposes a method which involves three stages:

1. The first stage involves writing down any inferential conclusions which might be reached after reading the text.
2. The second stage involves spelling out the evidence for particular conclusions and spelling out intuitions about them in some detail.
3. The third stage involves using relevance-theoretic assumptions to decide upon the status of the proposed conclusions. This means deciding whether they are explicatures derived from developing logical forms encoded by parts of the text, implicatures which the author mutually manifestly intended to convey, mere implications which the Principle of Relevance excludes from the overall interpretation, or 'conclusions' which do not follow from the text at all. In the case of implicatures, this also involves considering whether they are relatively strong or relatively weak implicatures (Ibid 169-170).

Clark argues that the final stage in this methodology involves deciding for each proposed conclusion whether it was intended by the author or not. The question to be explored about the conclusions is whether they are merely implications which follow from the interaction of the text with certain contextual

assumptions, or whether they are implicatures, that is, intentionally conveyed by the author. The fact that the evidence provided by a literary text is available for detailed scrutiny and uncertainties about what authors might expect to be manifest to readers mean that weak implicatures are characteristic of literary texts (Ibid 175).

Similarly Wilson and Sperber argue that:

It is tempting, in interpreting a literary text from an author one respects, to look further and further for hidden implications. Having found an interpretation consistent with the Principle of Relevance – an interpretation (which may itself be very rich and very vague) which the writer might have thought of as adequate repayment for the reader's effort - why not go on and look for ever richer implications and reverberations? If we are right, and considerations of relevance lie at the heart of verbal communication, such searches go beyond the domain of communication proper. Though the writer might have wished to communicate more than the first interpretation tested and found consistent with the Principle of Relevance, she cannot rationally have intended to (Wilson and Sperber 1992: 76).

In response to the discussion on the sociological relevance of RT, Sperber and Deidre hold that communication is a paradigm case of social interaction, and any theory of communication is a theory of the most ubiquitous social phenomenon. All sociological theories either explicitly or implicitly appeal to some view of communication: any sociological description involves an account of who communicates what, to whom, when, why, and how. What social scientists have had to say on the 'how' question has mainly consisted in distinguishing various media and forms of communication, and showing which are used to communicate what (Sperber and Deidre 1997:145-146). Similarly, Jary also questioned whether the RT is asocial or not:

At the root of RT is the claim that humans pay attention to stimuli likely to be relevant to them. A stimulus is relevant to the extent that for any given improvement in the individual's representation of the world, the effort involved in achieving this is how: the lower the effort, the greater the relevance. In order to make predictions concerning which type of stimuli will be relevant, then, it is necessary first to make some assumptions about the design of the cognitive system in question. For what purposes, we must ask, was the system designed? Or, put another way, what were the evolutionary pressures that drove the selection of that system? (Jary 1998:165)...Nevertheless, the arguments presented in this paper demonstrate that there is nothing intrinsically asocial about RT. Indeed, any attempt to explain behavior by reference to the social environment implies certain information processing abilities. RT seeks to provide an explicit account of these abilities and is therefore of great potential value to an adequate understanding of humans as social beings (Ibid 168).

With the belief that utterances are relevant to the needs or purposes of those engaged in the conversation: to maintain or strengthen social relations, to exercise power, to realize cathartic release and so on, O'Neill also argues that:

This 'propositional' view of relevance ignores, and in consequence has difficulty in accounting for, the kinds of phenomenon [sic] highlighted by more socio-linguistically oriented linguistic theory - for example, the use of language in maintaining and strengthening social relations and in the exercise of power, and the social constraints on language use that come under the misleading label of 'politeness' (1988-89:243). Predictably, people are paying attention to the newly accessible information that seems most relevant to them, and are having thoughts inferentially derived by combining this information with the most relevant contextual information



available. Try to imagine what human social life would be like if humans were not predictable to each other in this reliable way (Ibid p: 150)

RT is very much concerned with speaker meaning, both what it is and how an addressee attempts to recover it. On the relevance of RT for the interpretation of literary works, Wilson outlines the following core issues:

- An author may be simultaneously performing acts of communication on two different levels: a lower-level act of describing a fictional world and a higher-level act of showing this world to the reader as an example of what is possible, or conceivable. The expectations of relevance raised by the lower-level act would be ‘internal’, while the higher-level act would communicate an ‘external’ presumption of relevance... literary works typically achieve external relevance by strengthening and reorganizing existing assumptions and creating a sense of kinship with the author rather than giving rise to totally new implications (Sperber & Wilson 1987: 751).
- In writing their work, authors have not only communicative but also non-communicative goals, personal, social or aesthetic. They may be intending to achieve a variety of perlocutionary effects – boring or amusing readers, insulting, angering or shocking them – which, as Austin (1962) pointed out, are not part of what is communicated, but consequences of the act of communication (Sperber & Wilson, 2011:79).
- The author of a literary work may be performing acts of communication on two different levels, so that a perlocutionary effect achieved at the lower level – say, by making the audience laugh or cry – may form part of the ostensive stimulus for the higher-level act, where it can contribute to the communication of an impression. In this way, some of the affective effects of literary works may be seen as making a genuine contribution to inferential communication (Ibid p. 79).
- The stronger the communication, the greater the author’s responsibility for what is conveyed; the weaker the communication, the more the responsibility falls on the reader’s side (Ibid p.74).

To sum up, the review work presented above has tried to show that RT is not asocial. It presents communication as a sociological issue. In line with RT, analyzing both the author’s informative and communicative intentions can support the interpretation of the sociological concerns of the author. The authors’ informative intention is an intention to modify the readers’ cognitive environment – that is, their possibilities of thinking – rather than directly affecting their thoughts. In recognizing the authors’ informative and communicative intentions, the readers of literary texts must necessarily go beyond the linguistic text. The theory also implies that in the case of weak literary communication much of the responsibility for constructing a satisfactory literary interpretation of a creative text falls on the reader’s side.

## **6. RESEARCH PROCEDURES**

Purposefully selecting three poems (one from each) of Tsegaye G., Eshetu C., and Asafa T., text interpretations, FGDs and classroom presentations were conducted. Within a period of two years (2010/2011—2011/2012), a total of 31 postgraduate students (MA in English) who registered for a course: “Stylistics for Language Teaching and Learning” were purposefully selected to interpret and present the major messages in these poems which they took as a requirement of the course. In 2011, the class comprised of 19 MA students, the researcher as their teacher and all participated in 6 FGDs. In 2012, there were 12 students in MA class and all joined 4 FGDs. Before a poem was given to each group for interpretations, a brief introduction to RT was made and procedures were presented to the entire class

using a power point presentation. Each class formed groups and conducted discussions in a form of FGDs. Each group comprised of a minimum of three students. At the end, each group presented the findings to the entire class. The basic stream of the interpretations and presentations followed the theoretical underpinnings of RT as proposed and promoted by Wilson and Sperber. A summary of the discussions of each group was noted by the group leader and submitted to the teacher/researcher. Each group followed FGD checklists and procedures/instructions as follows:

1. Read the entire poem silently and write down any inferential conclusions first independently and then join the sub group;
2. Substantiate your inferential conclusions with textual evidences from the poem given again independently and then join the same sub group;
3. Following RT conceptual framework, decide upon the status of these inferential conclusions choosing either of the following:
  - a. Explicatures
  - b. Implicatures (strong/weak)
  - c. Implications

In order for triangulating these decisions (through FGDs and presentations), similar questions appeared in the final exams. In all cases, only situations in which similarities were obvious, the teacher/researcher documented these similarities. The notes were used to support the arguments hereunder.

## **7. Interpretation of Ethiopian Poetry in English: Relevance Theory in Focus**

Following the principles of Relevance Theory, it is assumed here that more psychologically pragmatic and empirically credible interpretation of Ethiopian literature can be made. For this purpose, three poems were selected and presented as follows:

### **7.1. Home - Coming Son (By Tsegaye Gebremedhin)**

Look where you walk unholy stranger  
This is the land of the eight harmony  
In the rainbow: Black.  
It is the dark side of the moon  
Brought to light  
This is the canvas of God's master stroke.

Out of your foreign outfit unholy stranger  
Feel part of the great work of art  
Walk in peace, walk alone, walk tall,  
Walk free, walk naked  
Let the feelers of your mother land  
Caress your bare foot  
Let Her breath kiss your naked body.

But watch, watch where you walk forgotten stranger  
This is the very depth of your roots: Black  
Where the tom-tom of your father vibrated  
In fearful silence of the valleys  
Shook, in the colossus bodies of the mountains  
Hummed, in the deep chest of the jungles  
Walk proud

Watch, listen to the calls of the  
ancestral spirits, prodigal son  
To the call of the long awaited soil

They welcome you home, home. In the song of birds  
You hear your suspended family name  
The winds whisper the golden names of  
Your tribal warriors  
The fresh breeze blown on to your nostrils  
Floats their bones turned to dust  
Walk tall. The sprits welcome  
Their lost-son returned.  
Watch, and out of your foreign outfit brother  
Feel part of the work of art  
Walk in laughter, walk in rhythm, walk tall  
Walk free, walk naked.  
Let the roots of your motherland caress your body  
Let the naked skin absorb the home-skin and shine ebony.

On the basis of its cultural content, theme, relevance and length, Tsegaye's "Home-Coming Son" was selected for the explication and implementation of Relevance Theory. Upon the first impression of reading the poem, like most negritude poetry, postgraduate students reflected said that "Home-Coming Son" has an 'exile' and 'return' message. In the poem, an unholy and a prodigal son returns to Africa to the land of harmony, spirits, natural beauty, rhythm, naked beauty, songs of nature and birds. The son is acquainted with the culture and the norms of the land. The land is administered by rituals. To make the prodigal son's home-coming joyous, the spirits of the dead, the gentle blow of winds and birds with rich sonorous songs of nature receive him boisterously. As the voyageur comes home, he is no more a fringe of civilization. To fit into the community, however, his movement should not be gawky. He should be ready to live a frugal life. The son is advised to belong rather than to be a stranger. He should be able to own this culture. His future home will be sturdy, cozy and comfortable if he cooperates in respecting the local culture and wisdom.

The contextual implications in the poem can be interpreted explicating inputs/evidences such as knowledge of role and status, spatial and temporal locations, formality levels, medium (code or style), appropriate subject matter and appropriate province. In "Home-Coming Son", a physical location is presented through the lexical collocation of "nature" which includes 'land', 'rainbow', 'moon', 'mother land', 'valleys', 'mountains', 'jungles', 'soil', 'home', 'fresh breeze' 'dust' and 'motherland'. Since it is a poem of return and exile, the physical location is made clear using this collocation of nature. These words glorify Mother Nature which is ready to give the voyager a motherly comfort and kinship protection. Nature here is described as benevolent and bountiful. A frolic movement towards the land makes the son's resettlement less difficult. While presenting nature, the addressor avoids fulsome lexical items. The lexical item "walk" reiterates several times so that the reader can imagine the contexts of the son's journey to his native country from abroad. The son is walking all the way through the poem. He is told to walk rhythmically not to transgress the harmony of the land. Walking rhythmically, he has to build totemic relations with his ancestral kinships and brothers. The land is also made colorful using lexical collocation of color which includes words such as 'rainbow', 'black', 'dark' and 'ebony.' It is the land of the rainbow and ebony.

The contextual implications can also be interpreted evidencing from the lexical collocation which refer to kinship words such as 'your father', 'prodigal son', 'brother', 'lost-son', 'family', 'spirits', 'stranger', 'unholy stranger', 'forgotten stranger', 'ancestral spirits' and 'tribal warriors.' The prodigal son travels home to his own people. Included are not only the livings but also the dead. References are not only made to the parents, family and ancestors but also to the body parts. The collocation referring to body parts includes: 'heart', 'bare foot', 'naked body', 'naked skin', 'bodies', 'nostrils', 'bones' and 'body'. The collocation of these words glorifies the image of the people in this ritualistic culture.

There are some formality levels that the son has to follow to reintegrate smoothly with the culture. The son has to walk rhythmically and safely in this totemic and ritualistic land. He requires the skill to live in

indigenous culture and nature. At a superficial level, he should be able to merge with the tribal surroundings. This will lead to a conflict as he has to step down from the elevated culture of civilized society and be one with nature. It is only a deep understanding which can allow a person to find comfort in being natural as opposed to being cultural. Knowledge of the culture enables the son to address his people with reverence. Knowledge of province is essential to communicate politely in this tribal community. The son is told to observe these rules of respectful communication in the community. Knowledge of subject matter is an element of context in this poem. The poem works on the various levels which show its complexity. Dominantly, the poem celebrates the beauty of Africa, 'the land of eight harmony', 'the canvas of God's master stroke' where even birds and winds are born with the capability to speak. Like a committed lover, the gentle breeze caresses the naked body. The poem endeavors to build confidence in blackness and a sense of pride in black beauty. To this effect, the addressor advises the prodigal son to 'walk tall', 'walk naked', 'walk proud', 'feel part of the work of art' and 'let the roots of your mother land caress you'. Precaution should be taken not to break the rhythm of the land. Mild instructions are given to the returnee because the 'silence of the valleys' can trigger off great fear in him and the 'chest of the jungles' and the 'colossus bodies of mountains' may place him in conflict with the rhythm of nature.

Accordingly, the unholy son should prepare himself psychologically and physically not to make even a minor gaffe. He should look carefully where he walks to avoid any impending danger, let himself to be caressed by the motherland, let Africa kiss his naked body and should listen to the spirits of the dead/ancestors. If the rhythm is not followed, finding a root becomes fruitless:

But watch, watch where you walk forgotten stranger  
This is the very depth of your roots: Black  
Where the tom-tom of your father vibrated...  
Let the roots of your motherland caress your body  
Let the naked skin absorb the home-skin and shine ebony.

In the poem, Africa is delineated intentionally and manifestly as the land of rituals: 'the land of the eight harmony', 'spirits', 'tom-toms', 'mountains' and 'jungle'. A clear understanding of the culture, the geography and the mystical language of birds and winds is essential for easy settlement in the mystic land. The bare infinitives used to address the stranger create an informal tone and a friendly, positive attitude in the poem besides producing an informal context of conversation between the addressor and the new comer. The voyager, though unheard in the context of the poem, is warmly received and cordially requested to build an unshakable pride in blackness. Pride in blackness, the major concept in Negritude poetry, is the land mark of the poem. Generally, context in the poem is made vivid with the collocation of kinship words, colors, parts of body and nature. The persona also has knowledge of role and status, spatial and temporal locations, formality level and appropriate subject matter. The son gains appropriate knowledge of the local culture at the end.

The relationship between the addressor who is the poet in this poem and the addressee, the son is analyzed following RT. In the opening part of the poem, the addressor and addressee do not have close relationship. In the beginning, the poet addresses the son as 'unholy', 'forgotten' and 'stranger'. Since the rules of the land are many and only after observing these rules, the new comer can move freely.

Disagreement is created because the son doesn't know the law of the land and the local culture in the first part of the poem. He is emphatically instructed to "look where you walk unholy stranger... watch, watch where you walk forgotten stranger/Out of your foreign outfit". These are pieces of strong advice in imperatives given to the son because the land has its own rhythms. The son has to observe all these principles/rhythms of the land to assimilate in the culture. To respect the law, the son is strongly advised: "**This is** the land of the eight harmony/ **This is** the canvas of God's master stroke/ **This is** the very depth of your roots: Black." Initially the addressor is not sympathetic and advises the son that the rules of the

land should be respected to move and live freely in the community. In fact, the son is told twelve times to walk observing the rules.

In the last stanza of the poem, the relationship between the addressor and the son has changed positively. The tone accompanies this positive change. The son in the second half of the poem is addressed respectfully as 'son' and 'brother'. At the end of the discourse, the new comer who has been addressed as 'unholy' and 'forgotten stranger' is addressed as a 'brother':

Watch, and out of your foreign outfit brother  
Feel part of the work of art  
Walk in laughter, walk in rhythm, walk tall  
Walk free, walk naked.  
Let the roots of your motherland caress your body  
Let the naked skin absorb the home-skin and shine ebony.

The addressee is not an unholy, lost and forgotten son. Reintegration succeeds at the end of the poem because the son has properly followed the instructions given by the addressee. Reintegration and acceptance of blackness become possible because the addressor has provided the son with genuine information about what is expected of him in the local culture. Nakedness, rhythm, gracefulness, openness, integrity, laughter and carefulness are expected of the son. In this part of the poem, the addressor has become more informative, relevant and direct. It is the addressor's adherence to the principles of relevance and relations that the assimilation of the son in the culture has become possible at the end of the poem. True assimilation of the son has resulted due to the son's cooperation in accepting the rules of the culture. Like a wise son of Africa, the son has changed himself to enter the culture. He is wise because he does not attempt to change the culture. All in all, compared to the poems below, postgraduate students argued and concluded that this poem has manifestly and intentionally dealt with issues which concern not only Ethiopians but other Africans in general: pride in blackness and assimilations. The other Ethiopian poem presented to the class was Eshetu Chole's "The Traveler."

## **7.2. The Traveler (Eshetu Chole, 1962)**

It was a cool and starry night  
As I lay back upon the dark grass  
That a thought passed through my mind  
  
Amidst the blaze of the heavenly stars  
I felt at loss,  
The loss of a traveler in a strange land  
  
A sudden fear flashed cross my heart,  
A thought of things long-gone and things to come  
And my weary body shook and froze  
  
For I knew the world was no man's land,  
Strange, unexplored, and always young  
  
I thought at once of the distance I had gone  
And the distance yet to come,  
And with the sigh of a tired traveler  
I let these worlds go forth  
"I am traveler in a very strange land"  
A traveler without a guide,  
A land without a path



Compared to Tsegaye's "Home-Coming Son," postgraduate students who participated in this study said that "The Traveler" took them less processing efforts as a result they gained more effects. They added that the major message in the poem is manifestly, mutually and intentionally conveyed. These discussions and presentations focused on six issues in postgraduate class. The summary of these six major issues are presented here under:

- 1) It was a cool and starry night  
As I lay back upon dark grass  
That a thought passed through my mind

In the context where stars shine and the land breathes fresh air, the addressor appears to enjoy the night. What is the addressor thinking all about in these lines? What does "dark grass" symbolize? Some respondents explained that the grass has become dark because many passengers have trodden over it till it becomes dark now. Many respondents found challenging to guess and provide contextual implicatures or evidences on what the addressor thinks all about. Consequently, references were made to the stanza below to provide contextual evidences:

- 2) Amidst the blaze of a heavenly stars  
I felt at loss  
The loss of the traveler in a strange land

In these lines, it can be evidenced that the addressor seriously thinks about his total loss of guidance in a strange country. It is a strange country because there is no shared and mutual understanding among the people. His own motherland has become strange because the country lacks guidance and leadership. He is travelling across the joys of the blaze of heavenly stars and cool breathes to the sudden thinking and feeling of nothingness and utter loss. Almost all groups of respondents asserted that the ambiguity created by the "dark grass" has become slightly clear in the stanza below:

- 3) A sadden fear flashed cross my heart  
A thought of things long –gone and things to come  
And my weary body shook and froze

This third stanza juxtaposes feeling (fear) and reason (thought.) Whereas his mind is torn between the past and the future, his body suffers from the predicaments of the present time as he is in the dark road. Physically, the present time is frosty, weary and shaky. On the basis of the present situations, the addressor has made conclusions as presented in the lines below:

- 4) For I knew the world was no man's land  
Strange, unexplored, and always young

The addressor generalizes that his world is strange and unexplored. In his views, no one owns the world. It is young because the World has not been fully explored. And yet, if the world is not owned by anyone, it belongs to everyone. Everyone is free to discover and explore this young and strange world. But, within this journey; the addressor can't experience the exploration of the world.

- 5) I thought at once of the distance I had gone  
And the distance yet to come.  
And with the sigh of a tired traveler  
I let these words go forth

In these lines, the history of the past and the future are compared. The experiences in the past and what will follow led the addressor to a feeling of tiredness. With a sigh, he made generalizations about these

experiences. Discussants came up with divergent explanations and generalizations of the “sign”. Some of the generalizations given in the class include:

- A. It is a sigh of grief.
- B. It is a sigh of relief.
- C. It is a sigh of physical and psychological tiredness.

With the sigh of despair, grief, loss and physical weakness, the addressor himself finally reached the following conclusions:

- 6) I am a traveler in a very strange land  
A traveler without a guide.  
A land without a path

On the basis of contextual inputs, the discussants identified the following implicatures:

- A. The land is estranged.
- B. The people lack the commitment of political leadership.
- C. The nation lacks visionary leadership.

The traveler is in the land which is unknown and bizarre. The land is unknown because the people are not properly led to discover its potential natural and human resources. The people are in darkness. They cannot break away from the clutches of this darkness to light because they have no guide to show them the light and discover the land. They are travelling but they cannot reach the end. They are fruitless people. Poverty, ignorance, illiteracy and darkness have consumed all their power to discover their own land. They cannot escape from the tyrannical hold of ignorance and starvation because they do not have a visionary leader. The people will remain in this darkness because they don't have vision, too. Because the country lacks vision and political leadership, the people find it strange. All in all, Eshetu raised specifically the concerns of Ethiopians. Ethiopians are in darkness, underdevelopment and severe poverty because they do not have visionary leadership which can lead the people from darkness to light, from poverty to prosperity from ignorance to wisdom. They are in strange land. They are in a total loss. Vision and political leadership are the key issue in the transformation of developing countries like Ethiopia. His bold commentary on the governance of Ethiopia is sociologically relevant to the unification and development of Ethiopian as an African nation. In the contrary, Asafa raises specifically relevant issues to the people of Oromo as presented in his poem “Decorous Decorum.” He proposes the disintegration of the nation.

### **7.3. Decorous Decorum (My People) by Asafa Tefera Dibaba (2006: 12-26)**

Following the same RT methods, selected stanzas from Asafa Dibaba's “Decorous Decorum” were presented to the various focused group discussants who were also postgraduate students. All the discussions followed RT principles and interpretative procedures. Hereunder are the summary of the reflections that many groups raised during their arguments on each stanza presented:

- 1) My People,  
I sing in praise of you,  
of your *political quietism*,  
of your *dignified patience*-  
of your *decorous decorum*  
of the *location of your politesse*

In these lines, the poet manifestly and intentionally asked the people about their political quietism, dignified patience, decorous decorum and the location of their politesse. Why is he asking them such kind of politically motivated questions? Who are these people? Many respondents argued and finally agreed that the “People” in the lines above imply the Oromo in Ethiopia. The addressor is dissatisfied with their silence

and conformity to the existing political system. Why does the poet praise the people for being subservient to the existing subversive political system? They could have been praised more if they were dissidents and traitors. References were made to the next lines:

2) praise is not praise  
when sung by a thwarted fiddler;  
a fiddler let down by his friends and foes  
alike, being insulted, humiliated  
wretched and dehumanized  
my people's eulogy is no more than a dirge,

In these lines, the addressor manifestly and intentionally expresses that he feels frustrated and saddened, insulted, humiliated and dehumanized because he has been let down by his own people. Therefore, the eulogies he has been singing for the conformist people are now changed to dirges because he believes that the people are already dead. The people are assumed to be dead because they fail to become dissenters and separatists. As expressed in the lines below, his people like the dolphin in the ocean could have vented out the depth of their tortures in this ocean of human sufferings in the land of strange people, Ethiopia:

3) who can tell the depth of an ocean  
if not the dolphin hunted in it,  
My People?  
your hope is mistaken for fear  
your patience for naivety  
your repressed greed (for freedom)  
is taken for narrow-ism  
separatism, terrorism !  
your vented national (liberation) movement  
is belittled to hooliganism, My People,  
and your benign *presence*  
your terrible ordeal today  
is taken for an effervescent orgy

These lines above openly express the greed for freedom and national liberation. All the efforts of the people of Oromo to liberate have been taken as acts of narrowism, terrorism and hooliganism. For the poet, however, any forms of separatism or terrorism by these people are justified because the people have acceptable causes for their struggle in the liberation movement. And yet, **peaceful solutions to the freedom of these people are not implicated in any way. It is violence through an armed struggle which can free the people and sustain their freedom.** Since the state terms this armed liberation movement as an act of hooliganism, their terrible ordeal today is taken for an effervescent orgy.

4) when the road taken is wrong,  
the road not taken can be right,  
My People.  
now that you are  
at the cul-de-sac, at an impasse  
there is a cliff before you.  
roll the stones before you  
let them go down back to their basics!  
than you live rolling them up  
and down like Sisyphus

Obviously, the road to freedom chosen by the people is hazardous because the cliffs hinder the travel and the stones roll to block the ways of the people. Now that the people are at a deadlock and the road taken has been hazardous, they have to take a new road to freedom. One solution explicated here is to 'let them [the people] go down back to their basics! /than you live rolling them up/ and down like Sisyphus.' Can this solution lead the people to a better road? What is that new road explicated? Can dreaming well and sleeping well be the right struggle strategies in the new road to freedom as expressed in the lines below?

5) have dreams  
and let your dreams come true.  
if you have dreams, My People,  
why are your dreams so blurred?  
you don't sleep well  
or you don't dream well  
or you don't know the *difference*,  
*yes, difference*,

In these lines, the addressor has raised having a clear 'dream' to the level of designing a 'military strategy.' He advises the people to have a clear dream equivalent to a clear military strategy and fight for the effective implementation of the strategy till "the dreams come true." What is the difference between good/clear dreams and blurred dreams? What does "dreams" come true here mean? What is the dream all about? Do the people know the relevance of having good dreams or sleeping well? It is strongly implicated that the dream is all about the success of the people in building the nation of their own through armed struggle as manifestly and intentionally indicated in the lines hereunder:

6) better later than ever, My People, I said!  
I said: come out of your comfort zone and  
make a bow and arrow out of my skin  
make string and sling out of my skin  
make storm out of my anger  
and tempest out of my tear and sorrow  
make mud out of my flesh and blood  
make a World out of my marrow  
make glue out of my sweat  
and protect this Land, bond this Nation  
before you die. If We are not dying,  
My People, then why not We live?

The tone of the addressor above has been very pessimistic. As part of the success of the armed struggle implicated in the previous stanza, he has offered his blood, skin, bones, flesh and sweats so that his people can be well armed with traditional armaments such as bows and arrows to gain momentous power to freedom. He wants to die and give away his body parts so that his people can live a better tomorrow. This is the military strategy he implicated in the previous lines. While discussing the implicatures, discussants agreed that the Nation and the Land implicated here is a country called Oromyia. Obviously, before the present generation dies out, the people have to unit themselves and build a country called Oromyia. However, in the lines below, the poet manifestly and intentionally referred to the fearfulness of the people in this journey to freedom:

7) you are now old and grey  
bent on your walking stick,  
My People? So old a Nation  
to defend itself, to build a Free State?  
ihi, My People?

'Walking sticks, old and grey' all refer to the age old history of the people and the nation. It is courageously and clearly stated here that the objective of the entire struggle and the military strategy suggested is to "build a Free State." And yet, the nation could not get its freedom because the people, as the poet argues, can easily be scared by a falling leaf. A roaring mortar can faint them.

8) you are defeated without war  
you are famished without famine  
you are wretched without transgression  
you are torn without conflict  
you are a Slave without Master.  
My Countrymen, if youth knew, if Age could!

Elders can tell the Past  
They cannot act  
the Youth can tell the Present  
they cannot act;  
*who* can tell the Future ,  
and *who* can act

The addressor has made it very clear that these people cannot easily get their freedom because he thinks that they have been defeated without war, famished without famine, wretched without transgression, torn without conflict and were slaved without a master. These elders can narrate the history of the land but cannot change the present situation of the people. His people are enslaved, transgressed, famished and defeated. The young Oromo can boast of the present but can change neither the present nor the future of the people. He found it very difficult to boldly recommend who can lead the people to their freedom. The future is uncertain and difficult to act and talk about. It is in the control of neither the young nor the elderly. Now, instead, he can sing neither for the young nor for the elderly but for himself. Now comes the point where he can change all his beliefs and assumptions because he lost all the hopes in his people.

9) to End

I sing thus, in praise of my Self:  
I have *a* House  
I have no Home  
I have *a* Land  
I have no Country  
I have a People  
I have no Nation  
nor Nationality  
or Citizenship—  
I am a Subject  
I am on Exile  
on my Fatherland  
*I* am distracted

At this point of departure, and a turning point in the poem, the addressor is not happy with what he owns at the present: a house, a land and a people. He wants to have a home, a country and a nation. Therefore, now, he is in exile. He is a subject on his father's land. The ironical state of having a house and no home, having a land and no country, having a people and having no nation nor nationality and having no citizenship will prevail producing more subjects, exiles, and distractedness in the Fatherland of the Oromo people. What does "I am distracted" here mean? He is distracted because he does not know where he is.

10) My People

where is my Home  
what is my Country  
*who* is *ME*  
why am I what I am?  
or, what is the difference?

His uninterrupted and unanswered questions at the end of the entire poem show his total loss of identity, lack of purpose and feeling of totally being lost/ placeless. These self addressed questions can help the reader to make generalizations. To support the generalization process, the questions were rephrased as: Where is his home? What is his country? Who is he? Why is he there? What difference does it make to all these questions? Readers may not provide readymade and satisfactory answers but all can conclude that the addressor feels frustrated with the existing context of the Oromo people in Ethiopia. All in all, compared to Eshetu Chole, Asafa Dibaba manifestly and intentionally expresses the desire for a new nation through armed struggle.



## 8. Conclusions

It can be concluded that the three writers presented sociological issues from three different perspectives: African, Ethiopian and Oromo. Tsegaye presents sociological issues often shared by African Negritude writers which glorified pride in blackness and documents assimilations and alienation. Assimilation as the major means for unification of Ethiopia is strongly implicated in this poem. Eshetu Chole presents burning sociological issues of all Ethiopians at the time. His political sociology focuses on the establishment of a visionary leadership for all Ethiopians inclusive of Oromo. This leadership should guide all Ethiopians from darkness and poverty to light and prosperity. On the other hand, Asafa Dibaba is concerned with the freedom of Oromo. He believes that the Oromos are being insulted, humiliated, wretched and dehumanized. Then, he has suggested armed struggle to separate Oromo from Ethiopia. Free statehood can be a true dream only through armed struggle.

While Tsegaye and Eshetu recommend assimilation and visionary leadership for all Ethiopians respectively, Asafa manifestly and intentionally argues for a Free Oromo Nation through armed struggle because he believes that there is subjugation and humiliation of the people of Oromo. In the poem, he openly questioned the people about their political quietism, patience, decorous decorum and the location of their politesse. He feels frustrated, saddened, insulted, humiliated and dehumanized because he has been let down by his own people. Therefore, the eulogies he has been singing for the people are now changed to dirges. The people are assumed to be conformists because they fail to become dissenters and separatists. His people like the dolphin in the ocean could have vented out the depth of their tortures in this ocean of human sufferings.

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