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Thematic Overview: Gadaa as a Point of Departure in Oromo Studies

Ezekiel Gebissa

Over the last decade, *gadaa* has emerged as a unifying symbol of the Oromo community every where. The sycamore tree, which symbolizes the *gadaa* assembly, has become the ubiquitous trademark of Oromo political groups inside Ethiopia and abroad. The Oromia *chaffee* (the name given to the Oromia Regional State Parliament) maintains the trappings, if not the functions, of the traditional *gadaa* assembly. Even the Oromia regional parliament's office complex in Adama is built to symbolize the five *gadaa* grades of the generational cycle with each building of the assembly center representing each *gadaa* age grade and the Oromo regional moieties. Oromo political parties that operate outside Ethiopia are modeled after and use terminology drawn from *gadaa* organization. There is a growing desire among Oromos to acknowledge the *gadaa* heritage, to relate to each other *akka gadaatii*,[1] and to seek ways to practice in modern times the enduring legacies of the *gadaa*.

Even historically, despite ebbs and flows, there has never been a dispute as to the significance of *gadaa* as a symbol of the Oromo nation. Perhaps the mischaracterization extant in Ethiopianist writings that "the Oromo do not have a cohesive and corporate history"[2] is the result of a gross misunderstanding of the significance of the *gadaa* culture in Oromo history and identity construction. *Gadaa* is a unique Oromo invention, not only in the sense that it is the most complex social institution ever devised, but also as a mature system of government that grew out of "five centuries of evolution and deliberate, rational, legislative transformation."[3] As such, it sets the Oromo apart from other peoples in Ethiopia and Africa. More important to note in this connection is that the *gadaa* system is not a traditional political system suited only to a pastoral society; it is also a democratic system that can serve as a model of governance in modern times.[4] Legesse's apt description of *gadaa* as "one of those remarkable creations of the human mind" underscores its versatility as a complex system that regulates political, social, economic, and religious life and an indigenous mechanism of socialization, education, peacemaking, conflict resolution, judicial administration, religious expression, economic organization, and social harmony.[5]

Within the framework of social harmony, *gadaa* functions as a system of cooperation, social integration, and enforcement of moral conduct. Scholars who were intrigued by the speed with which the Oromo were able to control large areas during their expansion in the sixteenth century have suggested that the explanation for the Oromo expansionary juggernaut is found in their indigenous system of integration. Once new areas were controlled, *gadaa* institutions were deployed to maintain law and order and to incorporate non-Oromos into Oromo social, cultural, military and political lives. Even enemies were adopted and granted legal and moral protections, enjoying the same rights as any indigenous Oromo. Social relations and propriety rights in those relations were regulated

by *saffuu*, the human and divine laws that inform the knowledge of right and wrong. As such, the integrative aspect of *gadaa* extends beyond the moral dimensions of human relations to the mechanisms of harmony and solidarity with *uumama* (nature) and the *uumaa* (creator).[6]

Thus, it is impossible to study the Oromo without a thorough understanding of the *gadaa* culture. When scholars speak of Oromo unity, they do not refer to a fictitious Oromo state that, as some say, never existed in the past. Whether a modern Oromo state existed in the past is not germane to the *gadaa* unity that cuts across confessional and regional affiliations and constitutes the Oromo nation. The unity of Oromos that is crystallized in the *gadaa* culture is not a nostalgic memory of a glorious past or an illusory vision of a future paradise. *Gadaa* is a reality embedded in the Oromo psyche that constitutes what it is to be Oromo as an individual and as a nation. *Gadaa* underpins the cohesive or corporate Oromo history that scholars who have not studied the Oromo fail to recognize.

The case is different with scholars who have studied the Oromo. In 1995, Mario Aguilar observed that "gada still remains the basic point of departure for any study of Oromo, [even though] ways of introducing knowledge on the Oromo and about Oromo have certainly been diversified."[7] Indeed *gadaa* is the point of departure for Oromo studies. The articles in this issue of the *Journal of Oromo Studies* firmly establish this fact and contribute to the effort aimed at producing diversified knowledge about the Oromo.

The Articles

In the first article, "Pan-Oromo Confederations in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century," Tsega Etefa deals with the adaptation of the *gadaa* system to the various social dynamics within Oromo society and to the external challenges that the Oromo faced as they expanded to new areas in the sixteenth century. As the pastoral Oromo settled in the northwestern

and western parts of today's Ethiopia, they moved further away from the seat of the national *gadaa* assembly, making regular contact with the national government difficult and necessitating the creation of regional self-governing republics in various areas. The expansion into Gojjam, Begemider and Tigray, stretched thin the Oromo population over large areas and increased their vulnerability to external enemies. Aware of their precarious situation, various Oromo clans formed pan-Oromo confederations to present a united front against their enemies or to protect those clans that were exposed to surprise attacks.

Overall, the article puts to rest three persistent misconceptions about the Oromo. First, it exposes that the legendary brutality of Oromo invaders of the sixteenth century has no factual basis even in the heartland of historic Abyssinia where frontier mentality could have overtaken *gadaa* military discipline. The article reinforces the established idea that *gadaa* military organization and discipline were critical to the Oromo expansion. *Gadaa* leaders organized the *gadaa* warriors into an effective fighting force, collected intelligence and spread disinformation, and used hit-and-run tactics to overcome their enemies. Once the conflict was over, the Oromo adopted their enemies, including Emperor Susenyos, and made them equal members of the Oromo community.

The article also shows the assertion that the Oromo have no corporate history is without foundation. To be sure, the notion of corporate history hinges on the belief that written public record is necessary to reconstruct a cohesive history. In other words, we can only talk of an Oromo cohesive history "when the Oromo impinge on the public record."[8] The fact that Oromos always reached out to each other and kept practicing *gadaa* ways even in such areas as northwestern Ethiopia is testament to the enduring unity of the Oromo nation based on *gadaa* culture. The Oromo may not have left in their wake what some scholars call public record without which a cohesive history is impossible. Etefa's article demonstrates that

gadaa is a living document and it serves as a basis of the corporate history of the Oromo.

Third, the article challenges the complicated issue of the supposed disappearance of pan-Oromo consciousness after the sixteenth century expansion. There is an underlying assumption in dominant scholarship that the Oromo expansion of the sixteenth century led to the fracturing of Oromo identity along clan lines at first and regional lines later, leading to the disappearance of pan-Oromo consciousness. Consequently, the Oromo came to emphasize clan identity, for instance, as the Maccaa or Tuulama rather than as Oromo. In the twentieth century, regional identities such as Wallaga, Harer, or Arsii became more important at the expense of the pan-Oromo identity. In this line of thought, the general argument goes that pan-Oromo consciousness was reconstructed only recently as Oromo elite became aware of their marginalized position in Ethiopia. Even Paul Baxter seems to subscribe to this notion when he writes:

> As more and more Oromo became civil servants, Army officers and NCO's [non-commissioned officers] and more Oromo school boys became undergraduates, and as more Oromo MPs managed to get elected, each group found that, in addition to sharing humiliating experiences, each shared a common language and similar values. The new pan-Oromo consciousness was generated in the army, the University and the Parliament itself.[9]

It then follows that what developed in the 1960s was a "new pan-Oromo consciousness" which resulted from a common Oromo elite experience. Tsega Etefa shows a remarkable continuity that was never broken, presenting the emergence of the Maccaa Tuuluma Self-Help Association in 1963 as a conscious revival of the Boorana League of the Maccaa and Tuulama of the seventeenth century.

Even when the subject is the encounter between the Abyssinians and specific Oromo groups in the late nineteenth century, a period commonly viewed as marking the tragic end of the *gadaa* culture, the narrative is filled with resonances of *gadaa*. Tesema Ta'a's article, "Defending Regional Autonomy and Cultural Identity: The Case of Leeqaa Naqamtee and Leeqaa Qellem," demonstrates that the *gadaa* government as an institution declined among the Maccaa Oromo beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, leading to the formation of independent Oromo kingdoms. The new governments, often headed by a *mottii*, were hereditary and hierarchical as opposed to the egalitarian generational social organization of the *gadaa* system. Still, the *mottii* administration maintained remarkable similarity with the *gadaa* system it had supplanted. In Leeqaa Naqamtee, for instance, decision was almost invariably made after lengthy deliberations in a Leeqaa council of elders composed of, depending on the period being discussed, elected officers known as *abbaa-biyyaa*, *abbaa-qoroo*, and *abbaa-lafaa*. The offices of the new government, including the *mottii*, are quite reminiscent of the *abbaa gadaa*, *abbaa bokkuu*, and *abbaa sa'a* offices of the *gadaa* government. The judiciary was an independent body of elders known as *salgee* (nine), s*hanee* (five) and *sadee* (three), depending on the number of justices seated in the courts at any one time. Even with tangential reference to this development, the article provides useful insight that reveals the enduring power of the *gadaa* system.

The thrust of Ta'a's article is the contention that the paradigm of conquest and resistance alone does not account for the myriad ways in which Oromo society responded to the Shawan southward expansion. When Shawa's forces decisively defeated the Gojjam army at the Battle of Himbaabboo and thus won the competition for Oromo territories south of the Abbay River, the rulers of Leeqaa Naqamtee and Leeqaa Qellem were presented with a choice of resisting and losing it

all or submitting peacefully in order to negotiate a better deal for themselves and their society. The Shawan proposition to the Leeqaa rulers was to accept Menelik's suzerainty and annual payment of tribute in exchange for local self-rule and cultural autonomy. This arrangement promised the central governments' non-interference in local administration, no northern settlers, and economic autonomy with respect to levying taxes on trade and land rights. The Leeqaa rulers could not have turned down this offer after witnessing the fate of the powerful army of Gojjam, which was equipped with modern firearms, yet suffered an ignominious defeat in the hands of the Shawans. Resistance in their eyes was not a feasible option. They chose what appeared to them to be the only pragmatic option and accepted Shawa's terms of peaceful submission. They maintained their internal autonomy for a while, but the Shawans progressively tightened their grips on the economy at first and the administration of the Leeqaa territory later. Nevertheless, Leeqaa Naqamtee and Leeqaa Qellem were able to avoid the direct ravages of conquest, the depredations of *naftenyaa* administration, and the onerous demands of settler colonists.

In Tesema Ta'a's article, colonial encounter emerges as an interactive process, the outcome of negotiations between unequal partners, with a powerful invading force poised to inflict great destruction on the one hand and local leaders keen on preserving their positions vis-à-vis the local rivals for power and their autonomy from the invading force on the other. In the context of Africa, the argument that Ta'a presents differs from the Kenyan conquest state model,[10] where local leaders accepted a forcibly imposed colonial order but were quickly co-opted by the colonial state. It is also different from Belgian Congo's 'Bula Matari' model,[11] where colonial order was established with unprecedented brutality and maintained by terror without any regard for local social or political realities and interests. What we see in Leeqaa resembles but not quite analo-

gous to the accommodation model[12] of St. Louis and the Senegal River valley, where the local Muslim leaders made their own assessments of the French posture and drew their conclusions concerning possibilities of accommodation for the French objectives and their own benefits. It appears the Leeqaa case exhibits features of the Kenyan and Senegalese models. The article has the potential to contribute to theories of colonial conquest and state if it is fully developed based on substantive scholarly debates supported with more cases of the Oromo colonial encounter.

The themes of Etefa's and Ta'a's articles are brought into even sharper focus in Marco Bassi and Gemetchu Megerssa's piece on the Oromo experience in the Ethiopian state titled, "Failed Modernization of the Ethiopian State: Oromo perspectives on the Ethiopian political culture." The authors investigate Oromo perceptions of Ethiopian political culture of which they became a part in the nineteenth century. The historical memory of elders from three towns west of Finfinne shows with remarkable consistency that the pre-conquest Oromo society was a highly ordered, complex social organization with a democratic political system, which the elders consciously contrast with the hierarchical, sometimes chaotic, Ethiopian political system. It becomes obvious that Oromo perception is shaped by the *gadaa* culture as the Oromo elders' judgment of the Ethiopian political system and culture is based on their own *gadaa* system. Surprisingly, the elders' view of Goobanaa Daacee contrasts with conventional wisdom about him. The Oromo elders have an ambivalent view toward Goobanaa. He was an *abba gadaa* who put too much premium on self-interest, was deceived, and fell for Menelik's bait. The authors find a coded meaning in this attitude. For the Oromo elders, Goobanaa is not a traitor, a treasonous sellout that broke Oromo unity, but an embodiment of the ultimate betrayal of the Oromo nation by the Amhara. According to the authors' interpretation of the elders' symbolic narrative, Oromos al-

ways lose a confrontation only when their opponents succeed in dividing them using Oromo collaborators. The elders are suggesting that only the Oromo can defeat the Oromo.

Using the narratives of the Oromo elders, Bassi and Megerssa show that the Ethiopian state has consistently failed to include the Oromo in the political space. The barrier of exclusion was put in place immediately after the conquest, maintained during the imperial and the military regimes, and now readily adopted by the 'federal' system. Underlying it all is a powerful meaning that explains why nearly all Ethiopian regimes have failed to deal with abject poverty, perpetual sluggish growth, and an unrelenting threat of political breakdown. That failure constitutes the breakdown of the political project of the Ethiopian state in the second half of the twentieth century, a phenomenon the authors call 'failed modernization.' When Oromo elders speak of betrayal in the past, it is a metaphorical commentary on the present conundrum of Oromo nationalists. The task of decoding the metaphor is thus designed to offer insights into the future by looking deep into the past as it is crystallized in the memory of the Oromo. Bassi and Megerssa hope that our focus on the symbolic foundations of the Oromo perception of the Ethiopian political culture may give meaningful historical insights relevant to the current dilemma of Oromo nationalists between electoral competition and protracted insurgency.

Whereas Bassi and Megerssa provide interpretation of the Oromo experience captured in the memory of elders, Merera Gudina, in his article titled, "The Ethiopian State and the Future of the Oromos: The Struggle for 'Self-Rule' and 'Shared-Rule'," looks at textbook history and personal observation to frame his views about the dilemma of Oromo nationalists. Where Oromo elders see duplicity in the political behavior of Ethiopian rulers, Gudina sees duality in the experience of the Oromo in Ethiopia. He posits that the nineteenth century Shawan southward expansion was preceded by Oromo

northward expansion three centuries ago. Over time, the Oromo elite secured an influential place in the imperial court in Gondar and played a decisive role in the selection of candidates for the imperial throne. This in some ways complements Etefa's observation that ordinary Oromos were kingmakers in Ethiopia in the sense that Susenyos was an adopted Oromo who used his Oromo supporters to claim the throne.

The idea of dual history that Gudina enunciates does not portend an argument that the Oromo elite consistently held a dominant position in Ethiopia. In fact, he emphasizes that the majority of Oromo were incorporated into Ethiopia on unequal terms and lived in the empire as subjects in a colonial-type relationship with their rulers, denied basic political, economic, and cultural rights as citizens. Their demand for equality was often met with brutal repression throughout the imperial and post-imperial periods. Gudina contends the way politics is unraveling in Ethiopia today marks the beginning of the 'unmaking' of the empire in which Oromos were treated as subjects rather than as citizens. Even though the Amhara are responsible for the 'making' of Ethiopia on unequal terms, Gudina argues that the Oromo today have a historic opportunity for the "remaking" of Ethiopia as a democratic, multinational state where the human rights of all citizens are respected.

The place of Oromia in Ethiopia, according to Gudina, is not just a matter of geographic centrality; it is also a historic responsibility to correct the egregious mistakes of the past and take the lead in making a democratic Ethiopia. After all, democracy is an Oromo heritage and peacemaking an enduring Oromo value. To reject this responsibility, Gudina concludes, is not only forfeiting the call of history but also prolonging the miserable conditions in which Oromos live in pursuit of an unachievable, even undesirable, objective given the prevailing realities in Ethiopia and in the world. The author argues that Oromos have invested too much in life and trea-

sure in the making of Ethiopia to demand separation from it at this historic moment in time.

The issues of democracy and peacemaking, both rooted in the *gadaa* heritage, resonate in Tenna Dewo's article, "The Concept of Peace in the Oromo *Gadaa* System." The Oromo concept and practice of peace, based on traditional values and beliefs anchored in the *gadaa*, pervades all aspects of Oromo life, their worldview, their religion, their rituals, legal system, and lore. As a rule, the Oromo try to prevent war and violence through conflict avoidance, dispute settlement, and conflict management mechanisms. When wars do take place, according to the Oromo, they are waged to ensure an enduring peace. Underlying the preventive strategy is the *gadaa* culture as a socio-political organization designed in a way that minimizes competition and conflict, and as an ideological/spiritual system, which cultivates attitudes of peacemaking in the youth. The implications of Dewo's argument are that the Oromo traditional concept of peace and practices of peacemaking are needed today when all contemporary endeavors for peace seem to have failed to produce sustainable peace.

The Oromo quest to revive their *gadaa* heritage is frequently derided by many as a futile attempt to resurrect unworkable traditions of the past. Fortunately, this is not a view enunciated by informed citizens or erudite scholars. The eminent sociologist Donald Levine, for instance, has stated that, if Oromos succeed in successfully reviving the important values of the Oromo *gadaa* system, they "can contribute not only constructively to the organization of discourse in Northeast Africa, but in an unparalleled way to contemporary efforts to organize dialogue in the global community."[13] Asmarom Legesse, after a lifelong study of Oromo democracy, has laid out in exquisite detail the features of Oromo political culture that can serve as a cornerstone of a modern political system.[14] In his study of conflicts and state formation in the Horn of Africa, Leenco Lata has proposed the adoption and adapta-

tion of the Oromo *gadaa* system and values as a worthwhile approach to ensure genuine self-determination and democratic participation in the region.[15]

In a similar vein, Tenna Dewo has presented a case for the adoption of the salient principles of the Oromo traditional concepts of peace and adaptation of conflict resolution mechanisms to the realities of modern life. An important corollary of his argument is the notion that the Oromo concept of peace and practice of peacemaking can contribute not just to the well-being of Oromo society but also to the quest for harmony among the various ethnic groups, nations, and nationalities in Ethiopia. If ordinary people at the grassroots, not just political leaders, take on the responsibility of maintaining peace and resolving conflicts at the local level, using indigenous mechanisms, the political benefit that accrues from the resultant peace and stability would be significant for Ethiopia in general and the Oromia Regional State in particular. In a way, allowing people to resolve problems at the local level is the ultimate exercise of self-governance and is compatible with the process of decentralization and democratization.

In this issue of the journal, the topic of peace becomes an academic concern in Mario Aguilar's article, "*Nagaa* Boorana: Contemporary Discussions on Ritual and Political Diversity," In Aguilar's hands, the subject becomes central to an on-going debate about the relevance of *gadaa* culture to political solutions for the Oromo. Aguilar's article has both thematic and comparative appeal to social scientists as well as to activists in general. On one level, the issue he addresses has relevance to the debate between two anthropologists, the Harvard-trained Asmarom Legesse and the Oxford-trained Paul Baxter, regarding the nature of the *gadaa* system. On another plane, the debate is germane to a higher level intellectual discourse concerning views represented by American and British approaches to the study of culture or society.

The debate over the *gadaa* system recently became a public exchange of ideas after Legesse offered a deep critique of Baxter's works on the Oromo. Based on an ethnography collected among the Boran of Kenya in the early 1950s, Baxter had suggested that *gadaa* was essentially a ritual system that had minimal political or military functions. Baxter argued that his ethnography suggests that Boorana Oromo was an acephalous or stateless society with no government, military organization, and law enforcement mechanisms and, therefore, was often beset by lawlessness and anarchy. Legesse responded with stringent criticisms of this position, arguing that Baxter's conclusions were ethnographically unsound, methodologically deficient, and ideologically patronizing, highlighting in Baxter's approach inadequacies he claimed were inherent in British social anthropology of the 1950s. Legesse argued that his ethnography, which was collected from the only living *gadaa* society, demonstrates that Oromo society has produced an elaborate polycephalous political system with four distinct institutions, each charged with administrative, military, legislative, and judicial responsibilities. In this sense, the *gadaa* system has significant political relevance and might even provide a model for African democracy today.

With *Nagaa* Boorana, Aguilar joins the debate with a view to resolving the apparent contradiction between two highly trained researchers and lifelong students of the Oromo culture. To accomplish this task, Aguilar starts from a premise that the arguments both Legesse and Baxter enunciated are valid because *gadaa* is a political system underpinned by religious/moral systems. Within the framework of a concept he refers to as 'contrarieties,' which allows the analyst to hold apparently contradictory views simultaneously, Aguilar offers ethnographic and historical evidence from the Waso Boorana that provides an insight into Oromo views of the cosmos. In what appears to be a reflection of his thinking on how African systems tend to unify political and religious categories, Aguilar

asserts that the paradigm of separating religious and political belief systems is not based on African systems of thought but a result of the imposition of a Western neo-colonial paradigm that introduces a separation. In Oromo society, the idea of peace provides for a unified cosmos in which religion and politics are essentially united. Whether the debate between Legesse and Baxter is resolved depends on future discussions, but Aguilar has certainly elevated the debate onto a different plane and contributed to advancing this Journal's mission as a genuinely scholarly enterprise.

Crosscutting Themes

The articles in this issue have presented various outlooks concerning the centrality of *gadaa* to Oromo identity, history, conquest, colonization, nationalism, and quest for self-rule. They have established that it is impossible to undertake meaningful research on any aspect of Oromo life without paying careful attention to *gadaa* culture, thus reinforcing the essential factors that bind together the Oromo as a nation regardless of the varied historical experiences of different Oromo groups. Nearly all the articles, specifically Tenna Dewo's article on the *gadaa* concept of peace, have explored ways in which traditional Oromo institutions could be deployed in contemporary circumstances to improve the deplorable conditions in which the majority of the Oromo in Ethiopia live today. At the same time, the articles have identified several areas that require in-depth investigation, lacuna to be filled, and connections to be made.

In strictly academic terms, it is imperative that Oromo studies concentrate on diversifying studies of Oromo institutions and history. In scholarly and semi-scholarly studies, the pervasive view is that the *gadaa* system ended when Emperor Menelik banned it after the conquest and colonization of Oromo areas.[16] Several articles in this issue have raised questions about blanket characterizations that the Abyssinians in

one fell swoop obliterated the *gadaa* system and culture. From the articles in this issue and other studies, we learn that Oromo chiefs emerged among the Maccaa Oromo and in the Gibe region before the advent of Menelik in Oromoland. We also learn from these articles that *gadaa* institutions continued to function well into the twentieth century among the Tuulama, not to mention among the Boorana, the Arssi, and the Oromo clans in Harerge that were dealt with in other studies. Approaches that do not pay attention to these kinds of data and detail flatten the texture of the Oromo experience and roll everything into one undifferentiated whole. The tendency to simplify complex processes often runs against a settled issue in the study of culture that social institutions are dynamic systems that change in response to internal transformation and external interaction. Research that focuses on the dynamic aspects of Oromo life can reveal fascinating processes of adaptation and resilience of Oromo institutions.

The nature of the nineteenth century colonial encounter also calls for diversification of approaches. Thus far, researchers have largely focused on the before-and-after of conquest, ignoring the variety of ways in which Oromos responded to Menelik's conquests. Two decades ago, researchers working on the various experience of the southern peoples, including the Oromo, argued that the way societies responded to the conquest determined the subsequent colonial order and proposed a typology of independent enclaves, *gebbar* areas, and fringe peripheries.[17] However, research focusing strictly on the Oromo experiences has not followed suit. Several of the articles in this issue allow us to delve into fundamental questions about colonialism and how the colonists exercised power. Did the colonists achieve some measure of 'legitimacy' for avoiding conquest and opting for 'indirect rule," and if so, how? What was the role of diplomacy, economic resources, and religion? The scholarly advantage of this framework is that it cuts across the more familiar subdivisions in terms of

actors (collaborators and resisters) and time (pre-colonial, colonial) and reveals that there are more variations than the exiting dichotomies can allow us to understand. Reading the Leeqaa leaders' approach and the insights expressed in Bassi and Megerssa's interviews, one understands the historical processes being explored are best understood within a framework that avoids dichotomies.

Finally, we need to learn more about the experience of Oromos in the Ethiopian Empire. One of the constant refrains in the articles is the theme of betrayal. In the seventeenth century, Susenyos used his Oromo supporters and adopted kin group to win the contested wars of succession and claim the imperial throne. Once on the throne, he turned against the Oromo who helped him become emperor. In the nineteenth century, the Leeqaa rulers accepted a deal that granted them autonomy to rule their kingdoms in exchange for tribute. Once the Ethiopians realized that direct control was more rewarding economically, they began gradually to undermine and eventually end the tribute-for-autonomy arrangement. The reminiscences of the elders that Bassi and Megerssa interviewed are full of instances of betrayal, symbolized by the tragedy of Goobanaa, but more concretely in the exclusion of the Oromo from the country they participated in building in the hope that it would be a common house for all citizens. The saga continues into the 1990s, as Gudina's article shows, when Oromo parties joined the Transitional Government trusting that the past practices of exclusion would end. On paper, the Oromo saw a promise of a new start when the main political actors agreed that the only peaceable way forward was the path of democratization of politics and decentralization of power. Soon Oromo nationalists realized that the promise was hollow as their representatives were expelled from the political arena, exiled or herded into prison.

The lessons of this history of betrayal depend on how the situations are interpreted. In any case, the articles in this

issue have demonstrated the promise of the Journal. Scholars could engage in serious discussions, general readers could find detailed knowledge about the Oromo, and activist could learn important lessons from past Oromo experiences.

Notes

1. Broadly translated, the term means "in the *gadaa* tradition or in the *gadaa* spirit." One of the first academic papers to suggest the refashioning of indigenous mechanisms for governing and peacemaking in the modern nation-building process is Bonnie K Holcomb, "*'Akka Gadaattii'*: the Unfolding of Oromo Nationalism. Keynote Remarks at the Conference on Oromia, University of Toronto, Canada, 3-4 August 1991, 1-10.
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3. Asmarom Legesse*, Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System* (Lawrencevill, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2006), 195.
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Pan-Oromo Confederations in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

Tsega Etefa

Before the Oromo began to move in large numbers into the central and northwestern highlands dur ing the first half of the sixteenth century, they had lived in the plains and southeastern highlands of today's Ethiopia region for centuries. In these regions, a single institution of government known as the *gadaa* regulated all aspects of Oromo life from its seat in the area now widely believed to be the cradleland of the Oromo.[1] The *gadaa* system was a politico-military and ritual system based on an egalitarian ethos and well-organized institutions. Within this system, the Oromo were ruled by a generational class that assumed office at the age of forty with the honorific title of *luba*. Each class ruled for a period of eight years after which the next group of the same age assumed the mantle of corporate leadership.[2]

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During the early years of Oromo expansion into various areas of East Africa inhabited by Christian, Muslim and the other groups, these *lubas* led and directed the movements of the people. The population movement was initiated, among other factors, by demographic and ecological factors. According to traditions collected by Yelma Deressa, the Oromo cradleland in southern Ethiopia prior to the mid sixteenth century was endowed with salubrious pastureland and fertile soil. The situation was favorable for a rapid increase of the human and livestock population.[3] The resultant increase in population led to the emergence of different groups, including the two major Oromo moieties known as the Boorana and the Barentuu/Bartumma. Over time, these groups multiplied in number and began looking for living space that was more commodious for the ever-increasing human and animal population.

At the initial stage, the Oromo expansion of the sixteenth century does not seem to have involved all the various groups moving *en masse*. Recent research has shown that only the pastoralist Oromo who were looking for pastureland moved while the settled agriculturalist stayed in the general area of their cradeland, the territories then ruled by the Muslim sultanates of Dawaro, Ifat, Waj, and Bale, and within the land of the Christian kingdom in today's Shawa region of Ethiopia.[4] Such patterns of movement helped the emigrant population to form a long chain of settlements along their major routes of expansion. The Bartumma branch moved in eastern and northern directions eventually settling in today's Arsii, Baale, Harar, Gojjam and Wallo regions in Ethiopia. The Boorana, on the other hand, trekked to the northwest, west, and southwest regions along meandering routes to what are today Shawa, Wallaga, Illuabbabor and Gojjam. Other Boorana groups also moved into Kenya as far south as the Tana River.[5] At present, the Oromo have become one of the largest and most widely spread ethnic groups in Africa.[6]

In spite of the emergence of several groups during and after the population movement, the Oromo kept their unity and identity. Addressing the enduring unity of the Oromo, Mekuria Bulcha has suggested that, "After separation, the different branches of the Oromo nation lived in federations and confederations in several autonomous but contiguous territories. Segmentation into different branches did not diminish the shared belief of common descent from one founding father."[7] This paper explores Bulcha's observation further and provides an explanation as to why and how the Oromo kept their unity and identity long after they began to live in places far-flung from their cradleland where they lived under a single institution of governance.

Formation of Oromo Confederations

The various Oromo groups began to form autonomous *gadaa* governments in the territories they had come to occupy. In some cases, these autonomous local governments were answerable to the overall *gadaa* of the main branches such as Tuulama. Though Odaa Nabee, the seat of the *caffee* or the governance council of the Macca and Tuulama located somewhere between today's Dukam and Bishoftu, served as a unifying regional center, Tuulama power gradually decentralized into local republics as was the case with other Oromo groups. Each of the major Tuulama groups formed its own *gadaa* government and elected officials. "For instance, the Bacho had chafe [*caffee*] Ballo while the Soddo had Birbirsa Tiya, Jiddaa had Foqa Awas, and the Galaan had their chafe [*caffee*] Galaan just south of Addis Ababa."[8] The *gadaa* system allowed a decentralized self-administration since the Oromo abhorred concentration of power in the hands of a single individual or a few persons. The *caffee* among the Tuulama branch thus functioned at both local and higher levels. For instance, the Foqa Awash took responsibility for maintaining order and peace, and rendering justice locally among the Jiddaa group of the

Tuulama. At a higher level, the regional or the inter-group *caffee* of the whole Tuulama was constituted from the representatives of the local *caffees* of the various clans. In theory, the whole Tuulama assembly at Odaa Nabee had supreme powers and could reverse the decisions passed at the local level, but in practice, the local *caffee* seem to be virtually independent.[9]

The decline of *gadaa* government as an institution for the whole of the Oromo might have eventually contributed to the formation of independent Oromo states. The *gadaa* leaders found it difficult to exercise their power over each Oromo group and the war leaders gradually established themselves over their own territories. The establishment of local governments did not create a groundswell of Oromos identifying with their clan government rather than the larger Oromo identity. Despite the transformation of the way they were governed, Oromos continued to emphasize group rather than individual interests and uphold pan-Oromo unity rather than specific clan affiliation. The various branches of the people, though moved into different territories, kept their common identity and shared beliefs. This might have facilitated the formation of confederations particularly in defense of their respective autonomous territories.

From the accounts transmitted by Bahrey, it seems that various Oromo groups formed confederations to defend their respective territories. The earliest of these confederations were the *Afre* and the *Sadacha.* During the days of the Robale *luba* (1570-78), two Macca Oromo groups, the Calliya and Hooko, forged an alliance with the Liiban and Guduru and assumed the collective name of *Afre*, literally the confederacy of four. The *Sadacha* confederation was formed by three (hence *Sadacha*) groups consisting of Warra Karrayyu, Warra Ilu and Warra Noolee of the Barentuu branch[10] in the Wallo region. There was also a *Sadacha* confederation formed between 1578-1586 by the Boorana groups of Hakaakoo, Abbo and Suuba. It seems that these confederations were formed to help each other in

defense of their territories. Emperor Sarsa-Dengel of Abyssinia (1563-97) led a series of expeditions against the Macca, Tuulama, Jawwi and other Oromo groups. The *Sadacha* (Boorana) moved further to the southwest and joined the earlier confederation of the *Afre* in Damot. This alliance of the confederation of the *Afre* and the *Sadacha* was able to defend Oromo territories in the west and southwest as well as consolidate their respective *gadaa* government in all the lands between Abbay and Gojeb Rivers. These include Wallagga, Jimma, Illuabbabor and surrounding areas. The formation of these confederations produced significant results by keeping Emperor Sarsa-Dengel's army at bay. On one occasion, exhausted by his prolonged struggle with the Oromo, the emperor is said to have blurted in despair: "It is better ... to fight those who shed the blood of Christ [Falasha] than the pagan [Oromo]."[11]

The successes of the *Afre* and *Sadacha* (Boorana) confederations in defending their territories in places as far west as Wallaga and Illuabbabor made difficult constant communication with the common government of the Macca and Tuulama at Odaa Nabee. Owing to the long distance and increased problems of security, travel to Odaa Nabee for the regular *gadaa* ceremonies became difficult. The Macca, therefore, decided to set up their own *caffee* at Odaa Bisil, located between Geedoo and Ijaajjii towns.[12] Even though the Macca founded a new *gadaa* government center, they maintained good relations with the Tuulama who kept their center at Odaa Nabee. The Macca-Tuulama together with Barentuu groups formed a pan-Oromo confederation and conducted simultaneous expansions north of the Abbay River. In 1585, for instance, the Boorana crossed the Abbay into Gojjam while groups of the Bartumma conducted expansions into the Abyssinian province of Bagemeder.[13]

Oromo pressures from two directions forced Sarsa-Dengel to devise several new policy measures to defend his imperial domain. Unable to keep control of Damot to the south of the

Abbay, he decided to keep the Oromo out of Gojjam because losing it would have dealt a serious blow to his power. Gojjam was his principal province for its riches in gold and horses. An Italian traveler, S. G. Baratti, described the gold riches of Gojjam as follows: "The other kingdoms are less remarkable, only that of Damut and Goiame are full of Mines of Gold. The Emperor keeps them with above 6000 men in Arms continually."[14] In fact, the forces that were stationed in Gojjam were not only numerically significant, but also comprised one of the emperor's famous regiments. The emperor exempted the people of Gojjam from tribute obligations of supplying him horses as a way of encouraging them to block Oromo expansions into Gojjam.[15] When these measures proved ineffective, Sarsa-Dengel devised a policy of striking an alliance with friendly Oromo groups and settling them in Gojjam and Dambya so that they could stiffen the line of defense against other Oromo groups. He allotted the uncultivated and fallow lands of Gojjam and Dambya to the Oromo and began mingling them with the Abyssinian society.[16] Nevertheless, these measures could not keep the two provinces from the Oromo expansion, which was actually further intensified.

In 1586, Oromo forces attacked the royal camp at Mangesto in eastern Gojjam and dispersed the royal family. During the operation, the Oromo mobilized their forces simultaneously and attacked from three directions. The Macca moved against the royal camp from the direction of Gindebarat, the Tuulama from the direction of Amonat and Walaqa, and the Marawwa and Wallo, of the Barentuu branch, from the direction of Bashilo and Mille Rivers.[17] This was a coordinated assault by a pan-Oromo confederation of both the Boorana and Barentuu moieties under the leadership of *gadaa* officials of the Mulata *luba*.

By 1586, the Macca had already formed their own *gadaa* assembly at Odaa Bisil but they continued to work with the Tuulama and Barentuu groups. The same year, the Oromo also

held governance council (*caffee*) in Gojjam and issued decrees for furthers actions and matters of common interest. Despite the creation of various *caffee* by the subsequent groups, the *gadaa* council of all Oromo was at work during this period. In the early seventeenth century, however, the overall leadership of the *lubas* had diminished, and the Oromo had resorted to forming alliances under new respective confederation leaders. In the process of the expansion of the Oromo in the seventeenth century, the leaders of the *Afre, Sadacha* (of both Barentuu and Boorana branches) and other confederations seem to have eclipsed the role of the *lubas* of the pan-Oromo *gadaa* government.

Pan-Oromo Confederations in the Seventeenth Century

Following the death of Emperor Sarsa Dengel in 1597, a power struggle in the Abyssinian imperial court ensued. The political infighting facilitated the process of Oromo settlement north of the Abbay in a rather complicated manner. The empress Maryam Sena, Kefle Wahed, the governor of Tigray, and *Ras* Atnatewos, the governor of Amhara, became the three most powerful personalities in the empire. The two governors, both sons-in-law of the emperor, formed a powerful ruling triumvirate together with the empress. Later on, however, the empress added to her party, *Ras* Za-Sellase, whom James Bruce identifies as a Gurage renowned for his bravery in the army.[18] Just before his death, Sarsa-Dengel had nominated his cousin, Za-Dengel as his successor. The party of the empress, however, enthroned the minor Yaqob, an illegitimate but natural son of Sarsa-Dengel. They deported Za-Dengel to Deq Island in Lake Tana from which he later escaped to live in a remote mountain hideout in Gojjam. *Abetohun* Susenyos, who had the right to claim the throne as a great grandson of Lebne-Dengel (1508-40), escaped to his Oromo allies in western Shawa to avoid imprisonment. From there, he started to raid and plun-

der the territories south and east of the Abbay. Thousands of the Oromo followed him (note that he had been captured by the Oromo and lived with them for a while until he was rescued and returned back to Gojjam); and Oromo attacks on Amhara, Bagemeder, Enarya, Gojjam and Walaqa between 1597 to 1607 were essentially associated with Susenyos. Together with his Oromo and some Berababo Gafat followers, Susenyos attacked eastern Gojjam in 1597. Then he campaigned in the region of Waj in the south and sought to force the former subjects of the kingdom there to pay him tributes. He is even said to have become a member of the Oromo *luba* class and led the Oromo in campaigns against the Kingdom of Enarya south of the Abbay. With the *Sadacha*, Susenyos penetrated Enarya's defenses and killed its governor Gumcho. The people of Enarya, however, reorganized themselves and defeated Susenyos.

Concerned by Susenyos's rebellion against them, the empress and her allies at the royal court deposed Yaqob and brought Za-Dengel back to power. The main reason for this was apparently that Yaqob reached the age of fourteen and wished to exercise full authority, while the triumvirate wanted to keep power in their own hands. When Za-Dengel assumed power, many of the dignitaries of Yaqob, who was exiled in Enarya, escaped from the court and joined Susenyos in Walaqa. His army augmented in number and momentum on his side, Susenyos's stepped up his revolt. He crossed to Gojjam and laid it waste from 1603-1604. Oromo pressure on Gojjam also increased. Susenyos then returned and camped in Darra east of the Abbay. Za-Dengel was forced to lead an expedition to Darra against Susenyos and his Oromo allies. For this purpose, he decreed a general mobilization except for the disabled. The emperor moved against Darra and confronted Susenyos and his numerous Oromo, mainly Warantisha, one of the historical Bartumma branch of the Oromo, followers. Susenyos's army laid ambush and killed many soldiers of the

emperor. In a heavy rainfall and hail, the emperor's troops were unable to track down the rebel prince. The only thing Za-Dengel could do was to plunder Oromo cattle and return to Gojjam.

Because of the increasing *Afre* pressure on Gojjam, Za-Dengel ordered *Ras* Atnatewos of Gojjam not to combat the Oromo until he had arrived; but Atnatewos could neither postpone nor avoid confrontation. In the decisive battle that followed, Atnatewos's forces were routed. It seems that these strong Oromo pressures on his empire eventually led Za-Dengel to seek European military assistance. In 1604, he wrote a letter to the Pope disclosing his desperate struggle with the Oromo as follows: "... we have in our country certain heathen enemies [the Oromo]. If we march against these we cannot find them, for they fly, and when we return, they come in where we are not like robbers; and therefore to destroy them we desire him to send us forces and all sorts of officers to direct the assault on the enemy's mountain strongholds."[19]

In the meantime, Za-Dengel grew increasingly unpopular among his own people, according to some, because of the depredations of the general mobilizations he had decreed and, more serious still, due to his reported conversion to Catholicism. In 1604, his people rebelled against him and he was killed at the Battle of Barcha in Dambya. Important personalities of the court led by *Ras* Za-Sellase of Dambya subsequently decided to recall Yaqob from Enarya and raise him to the throne again. Za-Sellase and *Ras* Atnatewos, for their respective reasons, agreed on this arrangement. Enraged by their action, Susenyos traveled to Amhara from where he sent letters to *Ras* Atnatewos of Gojjam asking him to recognize him as the lawful successor of Za-Dengel. Without waiting for the response of the *Ras*, Susenyos crossed to Gojjam with a large Oromo following. Atnatewos turned around and recognized him, while Za-Sellase hesitated. Ignoring this, Susenyos crowned himself and declared the *fait accompli.*

When Za-Sellase still refused to accept his ascension, Susenyos ordered his Oromo troops to attack Bagemeder. The conflict continued with Yaqob being crowned again by Za-Sellase and his allies who went on hunting for Susenyos. Finally, the forces of Yaqob and Susenyos met at Gol, near Yabart in eastern Gojjam, where Yaqob lost his life and Susenyos finally assumed full powers.

It should be noted that Susenyos owed his success greatly to his alliance with Oromo groups. In gratitude for this, he allotted them tracts of land in Gojjam, Dambya and Agawmeder. The most important Oromo groups who followed him were the Macca, the Baso, the Warantisha, the Jawwi and many others. Thus, both the Boorana and Barentuu groups were represented and they were all settled in Gojjam and Bagemeder. They were so numerous that Susenyos had to confiscate church land to satisfy his Oromo allies, which highly angered the clergy. Pieces of land belonging to churches at Makana Semayat, built by emperor Galawdewos (1540-1559) in Bagemeder and Mayfade Maryam built by *Itege* Silus Hayla between the Chemuga and Shigez Rivers in Gojjam, were partly confiscated and redistributed to the Oromo.[20]

Once on the throne, Emperor Susenyos (1607-32) turned against the Oromo. The Oromo realized that Susenyos had betrayed them and they decided to dethrone him. As I have argued elsewhere, "Those of the Oromo who favored Susenyos remained with him but the rest decided to oppose him. All the Oromo decided to overthrow him once and for all."[21] Oromo expansions into Gojjam and Bagemeder became increasingly organized and Susenyos had to march against them to protect the throne in various fronts. In 1610, a pan-Oromo confederation was formed when a mainly Arsii group of the Barentuu/Bartumma branch decided to engage Susenyos' army in Gojjam. At the same time, the Liiban group of the Boorana moved in from a different direction. While the emperor was busy fighting the Barentuu/Bartumma groups, the Liiban marched on

western Gojjam as far as Agawmeder.[22] The emperor's chronicle makes it clear that the Oromo conducted joint operations to overthrow the emperor and to control the fertile lands of Gojjam and Dambya. The emperor's forces defeated the Barentuu/Bartumma groups and wanted to pursue them beyond the Abbay but he could not follow through with his plans because of the reluctance of his troops.[23]

When the fog of battle cleared up, it became apparent that only one regiment of the Oromo was defeated in southern Gojjam. Other Oromo groups continued to move and settle in the Bir River Valley where Susenyos marched against them. This region would actually continue to be a constant scene of contention between the Oromo and the emperor for a long period. Emperor Susenyos achieved a temporary victory against the Oromo who simply re-crossed the Abbay southwards, only to come back with reinforced forces to launch a counterattack at a more propitious time. This strategy eventually helped them to settle in areas north of the Abbay. As the emperor was occupied elsewhere, the Oromo were able to defeat regiments of the army and settle in the region, which further enriched the Oromo groups north of the Abbay.

It is apparent that, just like Emperor Za-Dengel (1603-04) before him, these Oromo pressures weighed heavily on Susenyos while he started requesting Europe for military assistance. In 1610, he wrote to the Pope and the King of Portugal, complaining, like Za-Dengel before him, about the disorderly state of his empire and requesting Portuguese to provide troop assistance once again to save the country from the Muslims as they had done during Ahmad Grañ's invasion. The Pope replied promising him some military aid.[24] However, Portuguese troops did not arrive to assist militarily, although Jesuits like Pero Paez sometimes accompanied the emperor during his campaigns helping with theological discussions. Regardless, Susenyos continued to have a strong attachment to and admiration for the Jesuits in his empire.

Unchecked, the Oromo continued to pressure the emperor's domain in various directions. A rebellion broke out in Tigray, for instance, against *Ras* Se'ela-Krestos, Susenyos's brother and governor of that province, at the beginning of his reign. While Susenyos was marching to Tigray to crush the rebellion, the Marawwa Oromo confronted him in Bagemeder. The emperor was defeated and most of his officers perished in the conflict. Unable to proceed to Tigray, he returned to Qoga, his capital. Following their victory, the Marawwa and other Oromo groups formed a confederation to undertake expansions into all the lands between the Takaze River and Lake Tana. They pursued Susenyos as he retreated, obliterated Enfraz, and burnt down the royal settlement at Qoga.[25]

The second decade of the seventeenth century witnessed repeated Oromo expansions to areas north of the Abbay as far as Tigray. In 1617 groups of both the Boorana and Barentuu/Bartumma Oromo, such as the Ittu had formed a pan-Oromo confederation known as the Boorana League[26] to move northwards in a coordinated manner. Accordingly, some Boorana groups and the Ittu lined up against Gojjam, the Marawwa against Bagemeder, and the Karrayyuu against Tigray. Although there were earlier Oromo settlements in all these regions, they had not yet consolidated their positions because of repeated attacks by the emperor's forces.

Caught off guard by the simultaneous threat from three directions, Susenyos and his officers temporized for a while before deciding to march against the Karrayyuu in Tigray. When he reached Bagemeder, his officers told him the hopelessness of the case as follows:

> We cannot save Tigray. If we go down by Wag Meder and Abargalle we shall not find enough water and grass for our camp. It will not even suffice for the merchants, let alone for us. If we descend via Lemalmo it will be too far, and the [Oromo] will have returned, having done

> what they set out to do. Let us save Gojjam which is nearer to us, lest both countries be lost.[27]

Susenyos and his officers returned to save Gojjam which gave the Karrayyuu a free hand in Tigray. When Susenyos reached Gojjam, he found that *Ras* Se'ela-Krestos had already defeated one flank of the confederation's fighters. The rest of the Oromo continued to reinforce the Oromo who had settled in various parts of the province.

By forging a well-organized confederation and launching coordinated attacks in different places, the Oromo were intent on dividing and attacking emperor Susenyos' army. They put all their resources together and decided to dethrone the emperor as well as settle in the fertile parts north of the Abbay. So far, the Boorana League seems to be a major pan-Oromo confederation known by that name at the time. Here the name *Boorana* does not seem to refer to one branch of the Oromo. It was applied probably because of the *Angafa* (elder) status of the Boorana branch. Although Beckingham and Huntingford[28] state that the league collapsed in the same year, that there were more continuing operations indicate that it might have lingered on for some more years.

In 1620, three years after the Boorana league's maneuvers, there was another pan-Oromo operation. As the Macca and Tuulama continued to settle in Gojjam and Dambya, the Bartumma groups continued their expansion into Bagemeder. When some members of the *Afre* crossed the Guman River in southern Gojjam and settled in areas extending all the way to Metekkel, other members of the confederation moved into eastern Gojjam. Disturbed by all this, Se'ele- Krestos, the governor of the province (transferred to Gojjam from Tigray in 1612), appealed to Emperor Susenyos for help. A fierce fighting between the Oromo and the combined forces of Susenyos and Se'ela Krestos followed in the Bir Valley with the Oromo retreating south across the Abbay after the battle. At about

the same time, the Tuulama crossed to Gojjam via Baranta in eastern Gojjam. The inhabitants of the region failed to inform Susenyos about the Tuulama advance because they feared further plunder by the emperor's army. It is also possible that the local population in eastern Gojjam, which included the Oromo, were in support of their incoming kin group. Therefore, the Tuulama seem to have settled in those parts while the emperor's forces were still in Gojjam, although some of them crossed back to the east of the Abbay.[29]

One of the fallouts of the Macca-Tuulama campaigns against Gojjam in 1620 was the weakening of the alliance between Enarya and the emperor against the Boorana. In the same year, King Benaro of Enarya sent his son Yemane-Krestos to *Ras* Se'ela-Krestos to forge a stronger alliance. In any event, nothing effective could have come out of it because Gojjam itself was seriously weakened by repeated Oromo onslaughts.[30] Therefore, Benaro's efforts to take a concerted action against the Boorana failed to materialize.

When the emperor set out for Gojjam to fight off the Boorana groups, he left *Dajjach* Walda-Hawariat, his son-in-law, at Danqaz, the temporary capital, to guard his throne. It was during this time that the Barentuu/Bartumma groups of the Wallo, Jiillee and Karrayyuu descended upon parts of Bagemeder. While the emperor and his other officers were busy fighting the Macca-Tuulama in Gojjam, *Dajjach* Walda-Hawariat was forced to march against the Barentuu/Bartumma who defeated his troops and killed him and other officers.[31]

Successes of the Confederations

Between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Oromo managed to expand and settle in various parts of Gojjam and Dambya, despite the Abyssinian rulers' best efforts to put up an effective resistance. As indicated earlier, Emperor Sarsa Dengel exempted the people of Gojjam from tributes to encourage resistance against Oromo settlement,

allowed friendly Oromo groups to settle in Gojjam and Dambya and stationed strong regiments and governors in Gojjam. It is possible that Susenyos transferred his energetic brother *Ras* Se'ela-Krestos from Tigray in 1612 to deal with the growing Oromo power in the province. The Oromo nevertheless became an influential force in Abyssinian politics.

The Oromo rose to such prominence in Abyssinian affairs because of the swiftness with which they overpowered their enemies in military confrontations. They used their famed intelligence gathering strategy in the frontier districts, launched surprise attacks when possible, and effected organized retreat ahead of stronger enemy formations. Their overall strategy was to avoid conventional wars as much as possible. In Gojjam and Dambya, they were able to defend their positions against the enemy's strong resistance and the difficult terrain of the Abbay Valley. They mastered the challenge of geography through courage and endurance. Contemporary accounts report that the Oromo, "cross it [the Abbay] at all times without difficulties by swimming or on rafts or inflated skins or by clinging to their horses' tails."[32] According to a seventeenth century Yemeni Ambassador to Gondar "they [the Oromo] are of strong physique of endurance in long journeys and in bearing hardships."[33]

In fact, the explanation lies with the way the Oromo mobilized their society and military campaigns than the robust physical condition. Women participated in the campaigns by digging trenches, raising ramparts, fortifying camps, and providing supplies to soldiers using pack animals.[34] The unity, coordination, military strategy and discipline of the Oromo sustained their fighters and the populations through difficult confrontations and physical challenges. They had an effective intelligence network that fed commanders not only with information relevant to military operations but also concerning locations of fertile lands for occupation and settlement. In 1627, for example, when a serious Oromo expansion was suspected,

the emperor Susenyos appointed *Dajjazmach* Buko, apparently an Oromo, as governor of the province of New Damot (north of Abbay River) replacing Se'ela-Krestos who was nevertheless ordered to assist Buko whenever called upon. The emperor himself was ready with another regiment of the army to combat the advancing Macca from south of the Abbay by stationing his troops at various locations in the Bir Valley. When the Oromo observed that Gojjam was thus fortified, they retreated after a few skirmishes, leaving disinformation that they had diverted their attention to Enarya. Buko and Susenyos demobilized their forces in great relief. When their spies reported this, the Oromo swiftly moved into the defenseless province and boosted Oromo settlements in that province. Susenyos returned to Gojjam only to be defeated handily. He was later able to reverse the situation. However, Buko was killed in action further west where Se'ela-Krestos was again sent to stem the Oromo advance. The Oromo re-crossed to the south of the Abbay and avoided confrontation with the *Ras*. In 1629, the Oromo recrossed the Abbay to Gojjam when their spies reported that the area was not defended. Its governor had left for Lasta to crush another (probably religious) rebellion. Fequre-Egzi, a general left behind by *Ras* Se'ela-Krestos, tried to resist but he too was killed in action.[35] Oromo expansions into Enarya, Bagemeder and other provinces thus continued unabated.

Upon assuming power, Emperor Fasiladas (1632-67) inherited the protracted struggle of resisting the Oromo expansion. When the Yemeni ambassador visited Gondar in 1648, he was greatly impressed by the Oromo as a powerful people. He reported to his king in Yemen that they were "exerting pressure on the Christians of al-Habasha from all sides and borders of their territory, none of these regions being devoid of them."[36] His report is an indication that, by the second half of the seventeenth century, the Oromo have consolidated themselves and there were little pan-Oromo operations against

emperor Fasiladas. Around 1662 the Boorana attacked Gojjam while the Barentuu/Bartumma descended upon Bagemeder. While the emperor was fighting the Boorana in Gojjam, the Wallo groups moved into Bagemeder where they met a major resistance.

The Abyssinian emperors were involved in power struggles and civil wars during the Zamana Mesafent (1769-1855) which greatly reduced expeditions against the Oromo. Until the rise and consolidation of Shawa, there was little military threat against the Oromo from north of the Abbay. This might have reduced the need for pan-Oromo confederations. This lack of pan-Oromo operations against attacks led to internecine fighting among the various Oromo groups. The Shawan rulers took advantage of the fighting and disunity within the Oromo. Firearms imported by Shawan kings also worked against the Oromo. Thus, gradually some Oromo groups, particularly the Tuulama, lost their independence and were unable to forge a concerted action against the Shawan expeditions to annex the rest of the Oromoland.[37]

Legacies of the pan-Oromo Confederations

The Oromo confederations and alliances, in addition to helping the Oromo defend themselves and consolidate their positions, allowed them to develop a unique military organization and techniques, particularly in cavalry that inspired fear in their enemies. In the first half of the seventeenth century, Manoel de Almeida noted, "What makes the [Oromo] much feared is that they go to war and into battle determined and firmly resolved to conquer or die. The Emperor Seltan Cegued [Susenyos] recognized this quality in them and in most of the Abyssinians the exact opposite."[38] This reputation was widespread even as late as the nineteenth century. Even outside forces considered the Oromo quite formidable and feared an unfortunate encounter with them. When the British led a punitive expedition against Emperor Tewodros in 1867-68, the

force they were concerned about most was not the army of the emperor nor any other force but the Oromo. Referring to the Oromo, the British noted in their military communications:

> As some of these pay tribute to Turkey, and others are bitter enemies of King Theodore, there does not appear much reason for anticipating that our troops will meet with any serious obstacles except such as arise from the climate and the nature of the country to be traversed, unless the [Oromos] should decide on fighting in defence of the king.[39]

Aware of the skill and the bravery of Oromo as an effective fighting force, particularly the cavalry, the British decided to approach them diplomatically during their expedition.

> The number of the warriors of the people just mentioned [Oromo] is estimated at twenty-thousand; most of them gallant horsemen, well-skilled in the use of their weapons, fighting on the system of the Parthians, that is to say, fighting when they choose, flying when they please, and availing themselves of every opportunity of harrassing their antagonists. Fortunately, these men are like Dugald Dalgetty of old, and are generally willing to sell their services to the highest bidder; we may therefore hope that our Government will be able to buy them, otherwise the danger to which the expedition will be exposed from their attacks during its passage through their territories are too evident to need specifying; especially as they actually delight in war, and are constantly engaged in it.[40]

What contemporary observers were unable to notice was the cooperation and alliances Oromos were quick to forge in face of formidable enemies. As the pan-Oromo confederations demonstrate, it was a standardized practice for the Oromo to come together and help one another in times of external attacks. During the reign of Iyyasu I (1682-1704), the Oromo

of Guduru repulsed his planned expedition to the Gibe region. The Guduru inflicted a major victory over his army and he was forced to turn around, though he was able to reach the Gibe region during his second expedition in 1704. In addition, during the reign of Emperor Tekle Giyorgis I (ruled intermittently, 1779-1800), the Oromo of Wallo and other groups of the Barentuu branch blocked his planned expedition against Shawa.[41] The emperor seems to have prepared to attack the Oromo of Shawa as the age-old expeditions against the Oromo continued.[42]

Even though the pan-Oromo confederations were unmistakable examples of Oromo cooperation, it should be noted that there were Oromo deserters who fought on the side of the Abyssinian army. Some of these deserters guided the emperors against their fellow Oromos. For instance, during Emperor Iyyasu II's expedition to Guduru in c.1700, some Oromo groups provided guidance to his army but the Guduru eliminated them in the process. This was indeed a major defeat for Iyyasu's army, and when a famine broke out in Gojjam a year later, it was named 'Guduru' as a painful remainder of their shameful defeat in Guduru.[43]

Today the idea of cooperation and alliances pioneered by the early pan-Oromo confederations symbolizes the enduring unity of the Oromo despite their dispersion over a wide area and contacts with other cultures. Even today, Oromos refer to Oromos a *Ijoollee biyya abbaakoo* (children of my fatherland). During the time of the confederations, the epithet referred to the whole of Oromoland (Oromia) rather than territories under the respective federations such as *Afre* and *Sadacha*. The fact that Oromos use the description *Oromo keenya* (we the Oromo) rather than *Arsii keenya* (we the Arsi) or *Tuulama keenya* (we the Tuulama), when referring to themselves shows that clan or regional affiliation was never used as an identity marker before Oromoland was annexed by Menelik II (r. 1889-1913). In spite of external influences and internal segmenta-

tion, the Oromo kept their ancient traditions, values, and history and continued to claim descent from a common ancestral father and consider the various Oromo groups as brethren. When the Macca-Tuulama Association was founded in 1963, the name that the founders chose for the organization was not a new coinage, but a conscious effort to revive the spirit of cooperation and alliance that characterized the earlier confederation of the two branches. We have seen above that these branches of the Oromo had been in a confederation, though they had separate *gadaa* governments. In many ways, the Macca-Tuulama association is an important legacy of the pre-colonial pan-Oromo confederations.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Oromo had a strong commitment to the pan-Oromo cause, the ability to mobilize human and material resources for that cause, and execute a well-planned strategy to advance their collective purpose. We have seen above that they were able to mobilize the Oromo from Wallaga to Wallo and from Hararge to Gojjam for the same cause. These accomplishments are unique achievements rooted in Oromo nation.

Notes

1. H.S. Lewis, "Origin of the Galla and the Somali," *Journal of African History,* 6:1(1966): 39; J. D. Clark, *The Prehistoric Cultures of the Horn of Africa* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 12.
2. C. F. Beckingham & G.W.B. Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1954), 115.
3. Yelma Dheressa, *Ye Ityopiya Tarik basrasedesteñaw kefle Zemen* (Addis Ababa: Berhanen Selam Printing Press, 1959 E.C.), 216; Tesema Ta'a, "The Oromo of Wollega: A Historical Survey to 1910" (M.A. Thesis, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 1980), 9-10.
4. Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), xii-xiii.
5. Tesema, "Oromo of Wollega," 10.
6. Kumsa Asfaw, "Ethiopia, Revolution and the National Question: The case of the Oromos," *Journal of African Studies,* 15: 1&2 (1988): 16; Jan Hultin, *The Long Journey: Essays on History, Descent and Land among the Macha Oromo* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1987), 14.

7. Mekuria Bulcha, "The Survival and Reconstruction of Oromo National Identity" in *Being and Becoming Oromo. Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*, eds. P. T. W. Baxter, Jan Hultin, Alessandro Triulzi (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), 50.
8. Lemmu Baissa, "The Oromo Gada system of Government," in *State Crisis Globalization and national Movements in North-East Africa*, ed., Asafa Jalata (New York: Routledge, 2004), 110.
9. *Ibid.* 110-111.
10. Beckingham & Huntingford, *Some Records,* 112-114.
11. David Matthew, *Ethiopia: A Study of Polity 1540 - 1935* (London: Eyre & Spottis Woode, 1947), 38.
12. For details see, Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia*, 42.
13. Beckingham & Huntingford, *Some Records*, 120; Rene Basset, "Etudes sur L'Histoire d'Ethiopie," *Journal Asiatique* ser. 7: 17 (Paris, 1882):118.
14. S.G. Baratti, *The Late Travels of S. Giacomo Baratti: An Italian Gentleman Into the remote Countries of the Abyssins or of Ethiopia Interior* (London, 1670), 120.
15. Balthazar Tellez, *Travels of the Portuguese in Ethiopia* (London: J. Knopton, 1710), 62.
16. Bairu Tafla (ed.), *Asma Giyorgis and His Work: History of the Gâllâ and the Kingdom of Sawâ* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden Gmbh, 1987), 163.
17. Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis and His Work*, 185; Beckingham & Huntingford, *Some Records*, 122-123. Amonat is a river located in northeastern Shawa and southeastern Wallo; while Walaqa was one of the administrative districts within the Christian Empire before the 17th century. It was located north of upper Shawa as far as Gishen River, and perhaps included Goha Tsiyon, Darra and Boorana in Wallo. Today Walaqa is only survived as a name of a river in Boorana in Wallo. See Bairu Tafla, pp. 880 & 982.
18. James Bruce, *Travel to Discover the Source of the* Nile vol. 2. (London G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1790), 238-39; Wallis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia and Abyssinia* (London: Methuen & Co, 1928), 374.
19. Philip Caraman, *The Lost Empire: The Story of the Jesuits in Ethiopia 1555-1634* (London: Sdgwick & Jackson, 1985), 53.
20. For details see, Tsega Endalew, "The Oromo of Wanbara: A Historical Survey" (MA thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1997), chapter I.
21. Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis and His Work,* 311.
22. *Idid.*, 307.
23. Esteves Pereira (ed.), *Chronica de Susenyos roi d'Ethiopia* (Lisboa: Impresa Nacional, 1892 – 1900), 104– 105. There were several Oromo soldiers

who remained with the Emperor and perhaps they were in favor of their kin.

24. Bruce, *Travels*, 268. For the details see Caraman, *The Lost Empire,* 80–81.
25. Pereira, *Chronica de Susenyos,* 116-119, 120; Bruce, *Travels,* 277–78. Note that Emperor Minas (1559-63) had transferred his power base to this region in 1559 for security reasons. Now, it was no longer secure and even the Royal Court could not protect itself.
26. Beckingham and Huntingford, *Some Records,* xc.
27. Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis and His Work*, 333-335; cf. Pereira, *Chronica de Susenyos,* 156-157.
28. Beckingham and Huntingford, *Some Records,* xc.
29. Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis and His Work*, 361 – 363; Pereira *Chronica de Susenyos*, 222 – 224.
30. For details, see Hassen, *Oromo of Ethiopia*, 74.
31. Tafla 375.
32. Bruce, *Travel,* vol. 3, 646 -647; See also Budge, *A History of Ethiopia,* 614.
33. Johannes Van Donzel, *A Yemenite Embassy to Ethiopia 1647 – 1649* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1986), 113.
34. Caraman, *The Lost Empire*, 76; Budge, *A History of Ethiopia,* 614.
35. Bruce, *Travels*, vol. 2, 374 – 377 & 383.
36. J. Van Donzel, *A Yemenite Embassy*, 113.
37. Beckingham and Huntingford, *Some Records*, xcii.
38. *Ibid*, 137.
39. Colburn's United Service Magazine, *Naval and Military Journal*, Part III (London: Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, 1867), 245.
40. Colburn's United Service Magazine, *Naval and Military*, 245. Here the Oromo were compared to the ancient Parthians who invented heavy cavalry. They were the archenemy of the Roman Empire in the east; and they limited Rome's expansion beyond eastern Anatolia. Their power was based on a combination of the guerilla warfare, with organisational skills sufficient to build and administer a vast empire (247BC-224AD). For details, see http://ebooks.abc-clio.com/?1-57607-994-5, 17-18.
41. Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis and His Work*, 435.
42. Beckingham and Huntingford, *Some Records* xci; see also Tafla (ed.), *Asma Giyorgis and His Work*, 447.
43. Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis and His Work*, 413-415. This expedition is also described in, Basset, "Etudes sur L'Histoire d'Ethiopie," 161-166.

Defending Regional Autonomy and Cultural Identity: The Case of Leeqaa Naqamtee and Leeqaa Qellem (1882-1937)

Tesema Ta'a

The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the conquest and colonization of the independent states and peoples in the southern, southeastern, western and southwestern Ethiopia. Leeqaa Naqamtee and Leeqaa Qellem were among the western states that were targeted for conquest, subjugation and annexation by Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913) of the Kingdom of Shawa as he endeavored to build the Ethiopian empire. While many of the conquered states in the region put up strong resistance against Menelik's forces and lost their sovereignty, these two entities opted for negotiation to obviate the depredations of war and to defend their regional autonomy and identity against the expanding Shawan and Gojjame forces.

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For the contemporary leaders of the Leeqaa Oromo, the Shawan aggression came at an inopportune time. Two Abyssinian regional lords, King Menelik of Shawa and King Teklehaymanot of Gojjam, appeared in their region armed with modern firearms while Morodaa Bakaree (r.1868-1889) of Naqamtee and Jootee Tulluu (1855-1918) of Qellem were preoccupied with consolidating their control over their local rivals. As vassals of Emperor Yohannes IV, both Menelik and Teklehaymanot were rivals for the imperial throne. In 1881, Yohannes gave Teklehaymanot the title of "*negus* (king) of Gojjam and Kafa," perhaps to keep the power of the two vassals in check by playing off one against the other. This unleashed a grand territorial competition for the rich western Oromo lands south of the Abbay.

The two Leeqaa rulers were confronted with a dilemma to either accept the inevitable by submitting peacefully or roll the dice and resist Abyssinian expansion at any cost. Morodaa and Jootee opted for what they thought at the time was a pragmatic choice that would enable them to continue to rule their respective regions, manage their internal affairs, and make their own decisions. They made a choice that they believed provided for a recourse that would allow them to maintain the cultural identity of their peoples not merely as a source of pride but also of strength and confidence in an era of widespread cultural destruction. This paper highlights the political rationale of the Leeqaa leaders as they saw it then in deciding to opt for peaceful submission. The resultant negotiated internal autonomy obviously did not give them freehand to rule their domains, but it clearly spared the Leeqaa people the ravages of war during the conquest, avoided the unbridled *nafxenyaa* exploitation and the superimposition of an alien administration and the loss of cultural identity.

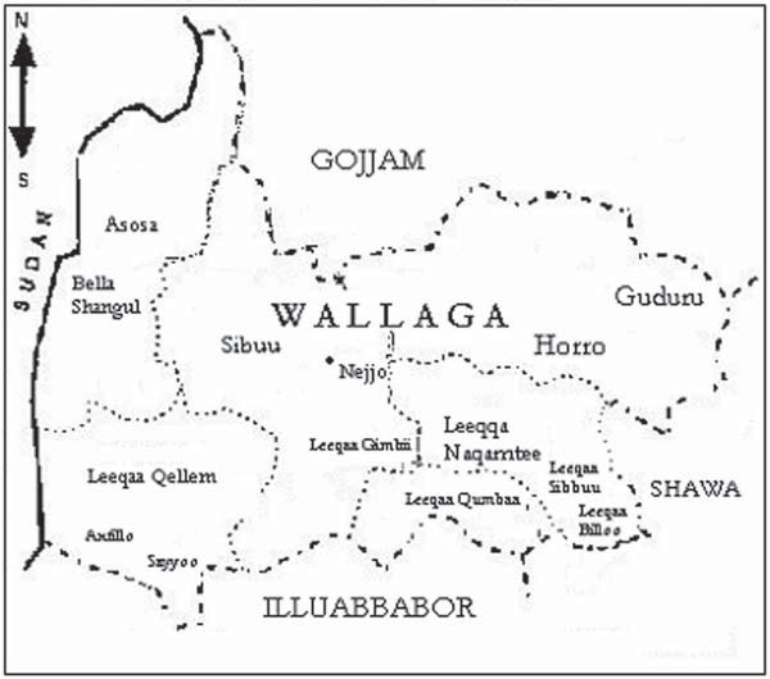
Negotiating Regional Autonomy

Following the capture of Abishee Garbaa, the strongest of Horro's Oromo rulers, by *Ras* Adal Tesema (later King Teklehaymanot), northern Wallaga became the sphere of influence of Gojjam. According to Leeqaa traditions, Gojjam's involvement in the internal affairs of northern Wallaga started a few years before the Battle of Himbaaboo on 6 June 1882. The traditions also relate that, by 1881, *Ras* Adal had brought under his influence most of the Tuulama and Macca groups with the approval of Emperor Yohannes IV. Based on Leeqaa traditions, therefore, we can determine that Gojjam's involvement predates Shawan encroachment on any part of Wallaga.[1]

As soon as news of Gojjam's advance of 1881 reached him, Menelik promptly sent his general, *Ras* Goobanaa Daacee, to march to Wallaga, pursue the Gojjame forces, and check their further advances. The report of Goobanaa's journey to Wallaga reached Morodaa, the *mootii* or king of Leeqaa Naqamtee, while he was accompanying *Ras* Deresu of Gojjam who, after consolidating Gojjam's gains in Wallaga, was on his way to the Gibee kingdoms further south. Morodaa quietly took leave of the Gojjame general at the Gabbaa River and immediately returned to Leeqaa Naqamtee.[2]

Leeqaa informants relate very clearly the tactics followed by Morodaa when he was faced with an impending conflict over Wallaga between Gojjam and Shawa. They maintain that Goobanaa's advance into the heartlands of Wallaga was not free from resistance. He encountered determined resistance from the Leeqaa Nonnoo, which was broken without much difficulty and the Shawan forces proceeded westwards.[3] Morodaa soon learned the detailed news of Goobanaa's victory over the Leeqaa Nonnoo, the submission of many of the Shawan Oromo chiefs and the military strength of the Shawans. Promptly, he sent his brother Dibaabaa Bakaree, with one hundred *waqeetiis* (750 gms) of gold as tribute to Goobanaa together with some oxen and food supplies. The purpose was to

assure Goobanaa that his country was peaceful and that he had no plans to resist his advance[4]



Map 1. Leeqaa Naqamtee and Leeqaa Qellem

Meanwhile, Morodaa convened a conference of his notables and advisors. He told the assembled dignitaries that they had allowed the Gojjame free passage by offering tribute and that the Shawans, who seemed to be stronger force than the Gojjame, had now presented a greater threat to their political existence. He reminded them that their weapons of war were inferior and victory was not certain. If they chose to fight, their rivals Tuchoo Dannoo, son and successor of Dannoo Beeraa of Leeqaa Qumbaa, Geendaa Buushan of Leeqaa Sibuu[5] and the other rival chiefs in the newly incorporated areas beyond the Dhidheessa River would rebel or ally themselves with the Shawans against Leeqaa Naqamtee. He presented his people with two alternatives: to fight or to submit.

On his part, he expressed his preference for submitting peacefully, lest they lose both the war and their land.[6] Morodaa was inclined to take this decision for political reasons. An alliance with the Shawan ruling class would strengthen his position against his rivals in Wallaga, quash rebels against his rule in his domain, and eventually enable him to create a strong relationship with King Menelik.

When Dibaabaa Bakaree returned from his mission to Goobanaa, he reported that the *Ras* and his followers were very pleased with the gifts. He also told Morodaa that Goobanaa wanted to see him. Morodaa at once sent Dibaabaa back to guide Goobanaa from Billoo, which was about 50 kms to the east of Naqamtee, to Hindhee, located 40 kms to the west. Leading a hostile army through the territories of Leeqaa Qumbaa, a stronghold of Morodaa's rivals, Goobanaa camped at Hindhee where the *mootii* met him. Informants say that Tuchoo Dannoo of Leeqaa Qumbaa was determined to fight against Goobanaa and his followers. Morodaa warned Goobanaa of Tuchoo's intentions and Goobanaa tactfully invited Tuchoo to come and visit him at Hindhee. A messenger told Tuchoo that Goobanaa did not come to take over his country but to create friendly relations with him and help him strengthen his position against his rivals. Tuchoo trusted these words and traveled to Hindhee with his followers to meet Goobanaa. Leeqaa Qumbaa leader and his cavalrymen were respectfully welcomed at first and served food and drink. In the meantime, at the instigation of Morodaa, Goobanaa ordered his soldiers to cut off the girth of the saddles of Tuchoo's horses and those of his followers. Goobanaa then asked Tuchoo to submit to Shawan rule. Tuchoo refused and angrily walked out of the camp with his cavalrymen to take immediate action against Goobanaa and his followers. But Tuchoo and his horsemen found the girth of their saddles cut off. They now had no alternative but to submit. Tuchoo was given the title of *qeññazmach* and Goobanaa appointed *Balambaras* Lulseged, one

of his followers, as a governor of Arjoo (Tuchoo's former domain), and left some of his soldiers with him to maintain peace and order.[7] This was the first time the Shawan court appointed an administrator to rule any part of Wallaga. As such, it constitutes a landmark in the history of Shawan-Wallaga relations. From this time onwards a series of similar appointments were made over many other areas where the Shawans encountered resistance, thus paving the way for the incorporation of the whole region into the Shawan feudal state system.[8]

Local traditions relate that there was a lot of discussion and negotiation between Morodaa and Goobanaa at the Shawan encampment at Hindhee. Goobanaa argued that it would be in the interest of Morodaa and his people to side with Shawa against Gojjam rather than the other way round. He added that all Tuulama and Macca chiefs between Shawa and the Leeqaa region had already submitted to Menelik and joined forces with the Shawan army.[9] On his part, Morodaa told Goobanaa that Gojjame forces had preceded the Shawans in the region, given him the title of *dejazmach*, founded the first Orthodox Church in Naqamtee, and even converted him and some of his people to Christianity. Thus, a strong bond had been established between him and the Gojjame and he needed very strong and convincing reasons to brake off these relations.

Morodaa argued that he did not want either money or land from the Shawans or the Gojjame since he already had these in plenty himself. What he needed was to be left alone and remain autonomous with his people in peace and tranquility. If he were to side with the Shawans, he wanted to be assured of a strong and lasting bond of genuine friendship between himself and Menelik. The ties he would have with Menelik should be direct and personal, and not through the intermediary of any other administrative officials.[10] Goobanaa promised Morodaa that no Shawan administrator would be appointed on his territories and that he will continue to be

directly responsible to Menelik himself under whose overlordship he will remain an autonomous ruler of the land of his forefathers. Subsequently, Morodaa's new alliance with Shawa was sealed with a formal *kakaa* (oath) between him and *Ras* Goobanaa on behalf of Menelik.

In return for these solemn assurances, Morodaa promised to dissuade all other Oromo chiefs in the area, and particularly in Horro-Guduru, from actively siding with *Ras* Deresu.[11] This was of a considerable advantage to the Shawans since Teklehaymanot's forces were almost entirely dependent on the Horro-Guduru cavalry. The active support of the latter to Goobanaa or at least their neutrality in the Shawan-Gojjame showdown would help Shawa tremendously. True to the word he gave Goobanaa, Morodaa advised the Oromo in the region to be neutral in the standoff between the Gojjame and the Shawans. Privately, he urged his fellow Leeqaa leaders to collaborate with the likely winner, rather than gamble on their future by supporting any one side without calculating risks.[12] All this decisively tipped the balance of power south of the Abbay in favor of Menelik.

Having thus won the Leeqaa to his side, Goobanaa continued his march to the southwest following the same route that Deresu had taken to the Gibee region. Both Leeqaa and local Gibee traditions relate that the two forces of Shawa and Gojjam met in the small Kingdom of Gumaa and that there were no clashes between them. Rather Deresu is said to have offered to withdraw without a fight, leaving behind all the tributes and war booties he had collected on behalf of his suzerain, King Teklehaymanot.[13] Deresu agreed and withdrew, abandoning all the advantages that Gojjam had accumulated in Wallaga south of the Abbay, since *Ras* Adal first led his forces into Horro-Guduru in the late 1870s. An infuriated King Teklehaymanot immediately sent Deresu back into Wallaga with additional troops led by his son *Ras* Bezabeh.[14] Later, the king himself showed up in Wallaga to fight Menelik who also

had arrived to lead the Shawan forces in person. Gojjam and Shawa soon entered into a direct military confrontation, which culminated in Shawan victory at the Battle of Himbaaboo, on 6 June 1882, when Teklehaymanot himself was wounded and taken prisoner by Goobanaa's forces. The outcome of the conflict was determined by Shawa's superior military and firearms as previous studies have correctly, if exaggeratedly, emphasized.[15] The narrative we presented here, based on oral traditions, suggest that the amicable relations that Goobanaa worked out with important sectors of the local Oromo leadership was equally significant. Morodaa was aware of this and congratulated himself on the victory of the Shawans at Himbaaboo. It became even more apparent that he had indeed made the better choice when Menelik conferred on him the title of *dejazmach* and confirmed him as the hereditary ruler of Leeqaa Naqamtee. Although he had clearly avoided making the Gojjame angry with him, his role in the Shawan success proved quite invaluable, particularly his persuasion of the local leaders to keep neutral was quite decisive.[16]

Peaceful submission in exchange for autonomy was only part of the deal for Morodaa. He had agreed to persuade prominent Oromo chiefs in the southwest to follow his example. Counting on Morodaa, Goobanaa proceed to his next mission in Leeqaa Qellem to subdue Jootee Tulluu Abba Igguu, who at this time was the dominant Oromo chief of much of southwestern Wallaga. Traditions hold that when Jootee learned of Goobanaa's expedition towards his realm, he turned to his rivals, *abetu*[17]Abba Gimbii of Anfilloo and *abetu* Abba Dannoo of Sadii, to persuade them to form an alliance against the Amhara forces coming against all of them.[18] The three *abetus* agreed to present a united front against Goobanaa's forces and sealed their agreement with a solemn oath. When Goobanaa arrived in the territory of Abba Dannoo at Sadii, however, there was no sign of confrontation between Jootee and Goobanaa. Jootee and Abba Dannoo met Goobanaa at

Komboo, located about fifty kilometers from the Dambii Dollo, and did precisely what Morodaa had done at Hindhee when he met Goobanaa for the first time. Jootee reportedly offered gifts to Goobanaa as a symbol of his desire to submit peacefully to Menelik's suzerainty. In return, Goobanaa gave Jootee the title of *dejazmach* and declared him governor of the region west of Morodaa's territory, with the exception of Bela Shangul to the north. For his part, Jootee agreed to pay annual tribute to Menelik, convert to Christianity, and allow the evangelization of his people.[19]

Some observers attribute the failure of Qellem's united front and Jootee's surprising peaceful submission to Morodaa's intervention. Though there is no evidence of direct contact, the fact that Morodaa was Jootee's father-in-law and a close friend makes the explanation plausible.[20] It might have also been that Jootee's allies might have broken their promise, fearing that Goobanaa's presence in the area was to help Jootee gain his long-sought supremacy over them. In any event, it seems Morodaa, either through the power of example of his own success in receiving autonomy or through an active involvement in dissuading his fellow Oromo chiefs, had succeeded in paving the way for Goobanaa to subdue the southwestern region without resistance.

These two rulers were now left to administer their respective territories under Menelik's suzerainty. Their autonomy was more or less similar to the British "Indirect Rule" in Africa, but it is significant to underscore that there was no *nafxenyaa* rule, no Abyssinian settlers, and no vigorous program of cultural assimilation in the Leeqaa territories. In all other Oromo areas in the region, particularly in Arjoo and Horro-Guduru, new *nafxenyaa* administrators were appointed. Clear mutual advantages and benefits accrued from this arrangement for Jootee and Morodaa on the one hand, and for Menelik on the other.

Even though Morodaa and Jootee submitted peacefully, it is inaccurate to generalize that the entire Leeqaa accepted Shawan hegemony without resistance. Ethiopian chronicles and European travelers have glossed over a number of vital developments in the area. According to tradition, Garbii Jilloo of Leeqaa Billoo, Tuchoo Dannoo of Leeqaa Qumbaa and Geendaa Buushan of Leeqaa Sibuu allied to resist the Shawans. Ligdii Bakaree asked his brother, Morodaa, to side with the Oromo leaders against the Shawans, but Morodaa refused. Ligdii quarreled with his brother and therefore, prepared a small army of his own to join the coalition forces of Tuchoo, Garbii and Geendaa to fight against the invaders. Hence, Ligdii is remembered as a brave warrior and is praised in songs.[21] Goobanaa had to make two expeditions against the Leeqaa coalition before he could subdue them. These devastated the country without forcing the inhabitants to acknowledge Shawan supremacy. Primarily owing to his modern firearms, Goobanaa achieved decisive victories over the majority of the Leeqaa Oromo before his return to Shawa.[22]

Sometime after Goobanaa returned to Shawa, the newly conquered Oromo again organized themselves to fight against the Shawans. Turii Gagan, the chief of Nonnoo Roggee, Mardaasaa Konchee, the chief of Nonnoo Migraa, leaders of the three Leeqaa groups of Leeqaa Billoo, Leeqaa Sibuu, and Leeqaa Qumbaa, along with Limmuu and Gudayyaa, formed a league against their Amhara rulers. Ligdii Bakaree again joined the allies who scored a short-lived military success against Shawan armies, forcing them to retreat as far as the Gudar River, 160 kms. east of Naqamtee.[23] Morodaa remained neutral at best to preserve his dominant position against his rivals, Geendaa Buushan of Leeqaa Sibuu and Tuchoo Dannoo of Leeqaa Qumbaa.[24] Informants blame Morodaa for not joining the league because they reason that, if Morodaa had not collaborated with the Shawans, the Oromo of Wallaga would

have defeated the Shawans.[25] No one can state with certainty that Morodaa's involvement could have altered the outcome.

After 1885, Goobanaa is said to have made two expeditions to western Wallaga. One of these expeditions took place in 1886 when he led a campaign against Mahdist bands that had made incursions into Jootee's territory. As long as the Mahdists were interested in trade, Jootee did not seem to be concerned about their presence in his territory. In fact, it seems Jootee had converted nominally to Islam to please them and even enlisted Mahdist soldiers (Ansar) to assist him in his bid to assert his supremacy over his traditional rivals, the Sayyoo and the Anfilloo. When the Mahdists tried to tax his people and impose Quranic code of conduct, Jootee decided his only recourse was to challenge them.[26] According to traditions, Jootee escaped from Qellem and went to Naqamtee to ask Morodaa to accompany him to Shawa and support his request for help. Morodaa informed him that he had already sent messengers to Menelik and was waiting for a reply. Jootee continued his journey to Shawa. On his way, he met Goobanaa and his army at Geedoo, about 140 kms east of Naqamtee. Consequently, Jootee joined the Shawan army and returned to Qellem to fight against the Mahdist troops.[27] In Qellem, Goobanaa reportedly managed to persuade the Mahdists not to interfere in the affairs of the regions that were effectively ruled by Menelik or were occupied by his troops.[28] After forcing the Mahdists to withdraw, Goobanaa stayed on for a while, most likely to help Jootee Tulluu reassert his dominant position vis-à-vis, the Sayyoo and the Anfilloo. He returned to Shawa in October 1886.[29]

The second expedition occurred two years later in 1888, when Goobanaa returned to Wallaga in response to a call for help by Morodaa Bakaree against another Mahdist incursion into the territory of the Sibuu in northwestern Wallaga. Morodaa was concerned that he might be weakened and rendered vul-

nerable vis-à-vis his enemies if they engaged the Mahdist alone.[30]

He had good reasons to be worried. West of the Dhidheessa River, strong leaders of the Leeqaa Sibuu, such as Waaccoo Dabaloo of Jaarsoo, Waaqbulchoo Kuusaa of Mandii, and Gondee Tufaa of Ayira, were reportedly dissatisfied with the administration of Morodaa's appointees, including Ciibsaa Bakaree, and were allegedly waiting for an opportune moment to evict them from the Sibuu country. All of Morodaa's opponents thought the moment had arrived when Sudanese Mahdist forces ventured into the western interior of Wallaga with the help of the chiefs in Asossa such as Baambaasii Abbaa Mootii. The Ansar and their allies made their centre around Najjoo, well in the interior the Sibuu country. They forced the people to drop their traditional beliefs and accept Islam. They prevented them from drinking local alcoholic beverages such as *daadhii* (local mead) and *farsoo* (local ale). Above all the Ansar raped the wives and daughters of the people and brought about considerable destruction to the economy and culture of the society. The oppressive and exploitative activities of the Ansar provoked much hatred, discontent and hostility among the public in western Wallaga and a continuous struggle against their rule.[31]

On 14 October 1888, the Ansar and combined army of Goobanaa and Morodaa Bakaree met at a place called Guutee Dilii, fought and defeated the Mahdists and their allies who consolidated their forces there. Many of the Ansar were killed and others were chased back to the Sudan. One of the local allies of the Ansar, Waaqbulchoo Kuusaa, was killed and his head was tossed into the Daabus River with that of Suleman, one of the commanders of the Ansar. But Waaccoo Dabaloo, escaped with a few Ansar who were forced to withdraw from Najjoo and the Daabus River Valley.[32] The victories over the Mahdists favored both Morodaa Bakaree and Jootee Tulluu in helping them centralize local power by breaking local resis-

tance and insubordination. This in turn gave them a chance to make internal administrative arrangements by eliminating Mahdist incursions, which used to create favorable conditions for the internal rebels.[33] On the other hand, the expulsion of the Mahdists marked the peak of their power.

After the victory at the Battle of Guutee Dilii, Goobanaa appointed his son, *Dejazmach* Wodajo, in Leeqaa to collect tribute and customs dues from the *kellas* (toll stations), functions earlier handled by Morodaa Bakaree. This disappointed Morodaa because Goobanaa was in effect going back on his solemn promise that the Leeqaa ruler would always be directly accountable to Menelik. The situation was further aggravated when Wodajo detained twelve slaves whom Morodaa had sent to him with *dirgo* (food supplies). Morodaa traveled to Shawa to appeal to Menelik. Goobanaa welcomed him, listened to his complaints, and arranged for an audience with the emperor to restore the direct overlordship. Morodaa returned to Naqamtee with a letter from Goobanaa by which Wodajo was removed from his post.[34] By the end of the1880s, a direct relationship had been created between the two Leeqaa rulers and Menelik's government. According to an agreement between Menelik and Morodaa, no armies or commanders (*nafxenyaa*) were to be settled in his domain in exchange for an annual tribute in gold of five hundred *waqeetiis* and hundred *farasulla* (1,700 gms) of ivory and military support to Menelik when necessary. In 1888, Menelik became the godfather of Kumsaa upon his baptism and Morodaa thereupon entrusted the guardianship of his son to the emperor.[35]

Menelik thus created a strong vassalage in Leeqaa. However, Menelik's rule was only indirect and the internal affairs of Leeqaa Naqamtee were entirely in the hands of Morodaa and his officials. Taxes and tributes were collected by the *balabats* of each district and were paid directly to Morodaa who paid a fixed annual tribute to Menelik. The local land holding system was untouched at first. It is said the annual

tribute may not have been a burden in the eyes of the local rulers for gold and ivory were available in abundance in those days.[36] The growth of Morodaa's power and influence in Leeqaa Naqamtee and that of Jootee in Leeqaa Qellem helped Menelik in his systematic annexation of almost all parts of Wallaga. At the same time, it also initially spared the people of Leeqaa Naqamtee and Leeqaa Qellem the direct settlement of outsiders and the feudal exploitation of the Shawan *nafxenyaa*. In contrast, the people of Horro-Guduru, Leeqaa Qumbaa, Leeqaa Sibuu, Leeqaa Billoo and other groups who resisted Shawa's conquests were exposed to Shawa's most oppressive and exploitative rule right from the beginning.[37]

Maintaining Regional Autonomy: Collaboration and Diplomatic Maneuvers

After Morodaa's death in 1889, his son Kumsaa became the ruler of Leeqaa Naqamtee continuing the line founded by his grand father, Bakaree Godaanaa.[38] During his childhood, Kumsaa had received church education, which taught him obedience, loyalty and piety—the cardinal principles of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. As a rule, all officials under Menelik were obliged to be loyal and obedient to the emperor, and to implement his polices to the best of their ability. Very early Kumsaa knew that and, for the security of his autonomy and position, he had to maintain a delicate balance between his own interests and those of Addis Ababa. He demonstrated his loyalty by building a number of Orthodox churches in many districts to spread Christianity and to win the hearts and minds of the people. He also created a new administrative system and reformed many of the customary laws his father and grandfather had been content to leave in place.[39]

Kumsaa had initiated many new projects, including not only changes in the politico-administrative aspects, but also in the area of religion. He was not a champion of the Orthodox faith, but he was keenly aware of the fact that his autonomy

required avoiding conflict not only with the imperial court but also with the Orthodox Church, which was the agent for the assimilation of the conquered cultures into Amhara hegemonic culture. In order to please the *abun* (head of the church) and the local clergy, Kumsaa built churches and church schools all over Leeqaa Naqamtee, thus denying his detractors a reason for complaint about his autonomous status. As an educated person, albeit in church schools, he in fact understood the value of education and believed that his government could run more effectively if his people were taught basic reading and writing skills. To make sure that the youth of his domain were not indoctrinated by the Orthodox *debteras* (unordained clergy), he opened a school in Naqamtee near his residence where instruction was given in Amharic, French, and English.[40] Graduates of the church schools were given the chance to continue their education at the appropriately named Governor's School.[41]

Despite construction of buildings throughout the Leeqaa country, Orthodox Christianity did not win the hearts and minds of the local community. Using Ge'ez, the ancient Semitic language of the northerners that the Oromo of Wallaga had never heard of, instead of the Oromo language, the clergy were unable to make any impact. The Orthodox Church relied on Kumsaa's authority, but it took its assignment from Addis Ababa which was the basis of vital support for its local power. In short, one can see that Orthodox Christianity in Wallaga had not achieved strong grassroots followers during Kumsaa's rule.

The autonomous status of Naqamtee made it impossible for the Orthodox Church to achieve its intended political objective. In comparison to Leeqaa Qumbaa, which was ruled by an Amhara warlord and had a significant number of *nafxenyaa* settlers, Naqamtee seems to have escaped the direct impact of the Orthodox Church's assimilationist impulses. Gustav Arén, a scholar of great insight, observed this fact as follows.

> To achieve this [isolating indigenous Protestants] this [Orthodox] clergy joined hands with the Amara in Arjo, who has a large settlement in that region. It was evident that government officials in alliance with the clergy formed a powerful pressure group, which tried to enforce Orthodoxy as a means of securing Amara culture and combating Oromo consciousness, which seems to have found an outlet in the evangelical movement.[42]

Kumsaa was himself an Orthodox Christian, but he was much interested in the secular education given by the Protestant missionaries, whom he used as leverage against the Orthodox Church. Swedish evangelical missionaries were very active in his country. They opened schools at Boojjii, Najjoo and Naqamtee after an initial expedition to Wallaga in 1898 from Eritrea. Kumsaa was interested in their teaching and helped them to establish themselves. He is said to have welcomed Onesimos Nesib, the translator of the Bible into Oromo language. Kumsaa's willingness to allow the establishment of the missionaries helped and paved the way for the spread of modern education. In addition to schools, the missionaries also opened the first hospitals in Wallaga, including Naqamtee Hospital.[43] Their work in the region has had a significant contribution and Kumsaa's effort to improve administration and to the socio-economic development of his domain.

During the early years of his governorship, Kumsaa governed with considerable independence from the central government. He was responsible for all the internal affairs of Leeqaa Naqamtee with the exception of imposing the death sentence, which was reserved for Menelik. Kumsaa's governorship marks a watershed in the politico-administrative history of Leeqaa Naqamtee. After several reform measures, the Leeqaa administrative structure came to resemble the *gibbi* (imperial court) in almost every respect. Local appointments and dismissals remained Kumsaa's prerogatives.[44] Many of those who received the title of *fitawrari* were Kumsaa's close friends

or those who distinguished themselves by capturing *shiftas* (bandits) or by their effective administration.[45]

Beginning around the turn of the century, the imperial court began to assert more control in the economic sector. Kumsaa had been responsible for collecting customs duties until 1899 when a *negadras* was sent from Addis Ababa. His major obligation to the central government was the payment of an annual tribute as his father had done before him. At first, the amount was the same as what his farther had paid, five hundred *waqeetiis* of gold and one hundred *farasulla* of ivory.[46] Later on, the amount of gold was doubled. Menelik's collector of customs at Mandii, *Negadras* Sartsa Wold, informed the central government that the country under Kumsaa was so vast and so rich in gold that the tribute he paid could be increased easily. Therefore, Menelik ordered Kumsaa to pay one thousand *waqeetiis* of gold a year.[47]

Although Menelik's interference in the autonomy of Leeqaa Naqamtee increased after the Battle of Adwa, Kumsaa remained cooperative and loyal, fully aware that a complaint would provide his Amhara opponents an excuse for demanding an end to his autonomy.[48] Kumsaa's *modus operandi* seems to be that he would maintain his autonomy, a precarious one at that, as long as he was able to maintain Menelik's direct overrule. When constructing a road from Addis Ababa to Addis Alem in 1902, Menelik wrote to Kumsaa to bring 4,200 workers to Addis Alem. The workers were to include soldiers and other able-bodied men from the countryside.[49] Kumsaa delivered the workers himself and returned to Naqamtee. In 1908, Menelik wrote Kumsaa explaining his wish to complete the construction of a railway from Djibouti to Addis Ababa. He ordered Kumsaa to impose on the taxpayers in his domain a special tax to be paid in cash. Menelik recommended to Kumsaa to collect a land use tax from landholders and a poll tax from the landless who nevertheless owned cattle. Initially, Kumsaa responded stating that it was difficult to levy taxes

because land was neither privately held nor divided into *qalads* (measured land).[50] In the end, Kumsaa accepted Menelik's recommendation, collected taxes in cash and sent the money to the central government.[51]

Kumsaa adroitly used his relations to expand his domain in Wallaga and to have the Amhara governors from the Leeqaa and Sibuu country. In this regard, his record is mixed. As required of him as Menelik's vassal, in 1897-98 he participated in an expedition led by *Ras* Mekonnen against Bella-Shangul whose leaders were suspected of an alliance with the British against the Ethiopians.[52] A large Ethiopian army made up of the Ethiopian army commanded by *Ras* Mekonnen, a Leeqaa Naqamtee contingent headed by Kumsaa, and troops from Qellem under Jootee arrived in Mandii ready to fight the Bella-Shangul leaders.[53] Sheik Khojele of Asossa reportedly sided with *Ras* Mekonnen against his fellow leaders of Bella Shangul and Komosha who had decided to fight. After nine months of campaigning in Bella-Shangul, it seemed the region was sufficiently pacified for Mekonnen's troops to withdraw and return to Harar. After a brief imprisonment in Addis Ababa, Sheik Khojele was allowed to remain in charge of his territory.

Subsequently, Khojele was allegedly found to be intriguing with the British against the Ethiopian government. *Ras* Demissew, the governor of Arjoo, and Kumsaa were ordered to return to Bella Shangul for another campaign. They captured Sheik Khojele, sent him to Menelik, who imprisoned him. *Ras* Demissew appointed his lieutenant, *Fitawrari* Gulilat, as governor of Bella-Shangul and returned to his fiefdom. In 1899,while Bella-Shangul was under *Ras* Demissew's overrule, Menelik reached a border agreement with Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. The border was only represented by a blue line drawn on the map without formal demarcation on the ground. The blue line nevertheless made it clear that Bella Shangul had passed to Ethiopia until a formal settlement could be reached with the British.[54] A boundary agreement was made and a Brit-

ish explorer, Major Gwynn, who had accompanied Colonel John Lane Harrington, the chief British negotiator, to Addis Ababa to obtain Menelik's acquiescence of the boundary delimitation, sent a letter to Menelik outlining the proposed boundary. Menelik read the letter with a map of the country in front of him. He found the description and the map to be accurate and accepted the settlement of the boundary set at Kurmuk. Menelik ordered Kumsaa to protect the agreement by stationing soldiers at the line of delimitation. Menelik immediately wrote ordering Kumsaa to send soldiers from Leeqaa Naqamtee to ensure that neither the Sudanese nor the Ethiopians crossed the new line and settle.[55] Soldiers were sent in accordance with the orders of the king.[56]

Within Bella Shangul, Gulilat's rapacious soldiers grew very unpopular and Demissew's rule became chaotic within five years. Menelik then placed Bella Shangul under Kumsaa's administration.[57] Kumsaa kept Leeqaa garrisons in the country under his lieutenant, *Fitawrari* Jiraataa Jetoo. This commander's heroic deeds in the country of the 'Arabs' was much praised in songs.[58] Kumsaa introduced the first modern customs duties on trade in Bella-Shangul. In 1904, a rebellion in Bella-Shangul was reported to Menelik. Kumsaa again went to Bella-Shangul and replaced Jiraataa with *Fitawrari* Kabaa who was also from Leeqaa.[59] In all, Kumsaa ruled Bella Shangul from 1903 to 1908. Before the end of his rule in Bella Shangul, Kumsaa's representatives participated in the final boundary demarcation with Major Gwynn, who was appointed as a British commissioner to carry out a permanent demarcation. Menelik agreed on condition that the commissioner showed the frontier to the Ethiopian chiefs who represented his government before actual demarcation.[60]

Erosion of Regional Autonomy and Cultural Identity

In Naqamtee and Qellem, the Shawan presence was being felt more and more as the years went by. This growing Shawan intervention resulted in strained relations and a constant tug of war, particularly between Leeqaa-Qellem and Addis Ababa. The local autonomy of Leeqaa Qellem became more an appearance than a reality as early as November 1908, when the region was directly entrusted to *Fitawrari* Sahale Giorgis, brother of *Ras* Tesema Nadew, then governor of the neighboring province of Illuabbabor. In 1909, Jootee was imprisoned in Addis Ababa on the pretext of secret dealings with the British colonial government in the Sudan and misgovernment or maladministration of the region. Under the leadership of Mardaasaa, Jootee's son, many people reacted furiously and expressed their discontent by taking up arms against the new governor and his supporters. Although the rebellion was temporarily suppressed, it was not completely quelled until Jootee was released and reinstated as a governor in 1912.[61] The general process of Shawan court direct involvement in the internal affairs of Leeqaa Naqamtee and Leeqaa Qellem, the reaction of the local leadership, and the subsequent developments are the themes to be treated with more details in this section.

Menelik's interference in the autonomous provinces of Leeqaa Naqamtee and Leeqaa Qellem was intensified when he had consolidated his authority after Adwa. Menelik sent a number of *negadras* to Naqamtee to collect revenues at custom gates and markets. *Negadras* Tenna and *Negadras* Sartsa Wold, with a few escorts each, were assigned to Naqamtee and Mandii respectively.[62] The *negadras* were directed to report to Addis Ababa about important economic and political matters. Accordingly, *negadras* Sartsa Wold, as already indicated, informed Menelik that Kumsaa's government was rich enough to double its tribute and Menelik immediately ordered Kumsaa to pay 1000 *waqeetiis* of gold yearly.[63] As the involvement of

the central government in Leeqaa affairs increased, they were instructed to impose dues on all traders who did not possess a stamped permit from another *negadras*.[64]

Other than the *negadras*, Menelik sent resident agents from time to time to conduct surveillance and report to him any sign of disloyalty. On 6 June 1909, for instance, he sent *Ato* Mulatu and *Ato* Haylegnaw, ostensibly to inspect Kumsaa's administration of justice. The central government did not pay them for their services and Kumsaa was ordered to provide for all their expenses.[65] They were neither judges nor advisors, but probably members of Menelik's spy network.

Emblematic of Addis Ababa's interference in the internal affairs of the "autonomous" region of Leeqaa Naqamtee was a letter, which Menelik sent to Kumsaa on 8 July 1899, authorizing *Negadras* Yigezu to be in charge of customs in Leeqaa Naqamtee, in violation of his earlier promise to Morodaa of non-interference. In the letter, Menelik ordered Kumsaa to assist Yigezu to do his job of collecting market taxes and customs duties at every gate in Naqamtee efficiently. The *dejazmach* was also instructed to provide food and lodging for the *negadras* and his servants.[66] Moreover, it is interesting to note that Menelik, in another letter to Kumsaa dated 8 March 1904, clearly warned the governor not to negotiate any treaty or agreement with the British in the Sudan but to refer any thing of political nature to Addis Ababa. Explaining that friendship and amity existed between Ethiopia and Britain, Menelik told Kumsaa that he is authorized to correspond with them concerning minor matters, such as trade, to strengthen the relationship.[67] From the point of view of Addis Ababa, sending resident agents, customs collectors and strict orders to Kumsaa was to tighten the control of the central government by gradually eroding local autonomy. It is also important to note that the resident agents were supposed to compile a complete evaluation report on the governor's administration, which could be

utilized by the central government for either approval or disapproval of the indigenous leadership.

Apparently, Kumsaa seems to have understood Addis Ababa's message when he expressed his dissatisfaction about the presence of the resident agents and customs collectors in his region. He not only saw them as a threat to his economic benefit but also feared that he could be removed if they created serious misunderstandings between him and the crown thorough their involvement in the internal matters of his country. Relations between Kumsaa and the capital became less cordial after Menelik's first letter appointing his own collectors of customs. Informants state that the customs collectors and Kumsaa were never on good terms and that they, therefore, criticized him in their reports.[68] In one of his letters, he complained to Menelik that customs duties of both internal trade and transit trade from other parts of Ethiopia to the Sudan had grown very high. He explained that merchants had appealed to him several times because, in the short distance from Billoo to Naqamtee, there were three different posts levying duties. They were run by *Negadras* Yigezu, *Negadras* Tenna, and *Negadras* Haile Giorgis, each of whom took a commission of five percent in cash from foreign and local traders. Kumsaa and the merchants were very bitter and thought the proliferation of taxation was heavy and unfair.[69]

Although agents were sent from Addis Ababa as *negadras* and residents in Leeqaa Naqamtee, the agreement of 1888 between Menelik and Morodaa not to settle soldiers in the country of Morodaa was preserved into the early years of the twentieth century. But even this aspect of Leeqaa's autonomy seems to have come under serious threat on 30 December 1906, when one thousand three hundred *gondare*, veterans of Menelik's wars, under a certain *Balambaras* Bekele were sent to live in Naqamtee. These settlers along with their families were sent to be fed and housed by Kumsaa.[70] Informants say that the Gondare did not work to earn a living since they were sup-

plied by the governor. They were living in Naqamtee town near Kumsaa's palace. Moreover, they were not subject to Kumsaa's authority, but were placed under the jurisdiction of *Dejazmach* Demissew of Arjoo in a sort of "extra-territorial" arrangement in favor of the *nafxenyaa*. Whenever a court case arose between them and the local Leeqaa people the matter was referred to Arjoo. The people of Leeqaa complained because of the expenses and the distance of travel to Arjoo from Naqamtee, which was especially a big problem for the Leeqaa farmers.[71]

Informants say that after living in Leeqaa for some years, supported by Kumsaa and the Leeqaa people, the *gondare* began to rob the local people on market days, taking away their sheep, goats, grain, and other commodities. Sometimes serious clashes occurred. Outraged, Kumsaa appealed to Addis Ababa where *Lij* Iyyasu had come to power after Menelik was incapacitated by a stroke he suffered in 1909. He complained that providing the *gondare* had cost him MT $10,000 (Maria Theresa *thallers*) per year. He also wrote to Iyyasu that *Ras* Tesema, after becoming a regent, had increased his tribute to MT $13,000 per annum, in some years rising to MT$ 23,000.[72] Even though Kumsaa recognized this was the price of his internal autonomy, he was particularly perturbed by the behavior of *Balambaras* Bekele who he believed had ventured to create a misunderstanding between him and the central government. As the commander, Bekele acted the spokesperson of the *gondare* and their liaison responsible for presenting their demands to Kumsaa. Kumsaa offered to continue to supply them wherever they might be settled, but implored Iyyasu to move them out of his territory.[73] Iyyasu ordered *Ras* Demissew to move the Gondare to Arjoo and he did so.[74]

Even though the *gondare* were transferred to Arjoo on Iyyasu's orders, Menelik's stalwarts were not happy that Kumsaa succeeded in keeping Leeqaa Naqamtee free of settlers. In 1909, *Ras* Tesema Nadew, guardian to the throne and tutor to

the young Prince Iyyasu, demanded that Kumsaa continue to provide MT$ 10,000 for the maintenance of the *gondare* in Arjoo. Kumsaa was outraged enough that he began preparation for a rebellion against Tesema. He made Najjoo his second capital and ordered his men to dig a trench, today remembered as *Qota Najjoo* (the trench of Najjoo), about four meters deep and six meters wide around the town. It had four gates with guards at each gate. Kumsaa collected arms and food supplies and stored them on the top of Mount Chochii, west of Najjoo. According to Leeqaa tradition, war did not break out for *Ras* Tesema suddenly died in 1911, while Kumsaa was still at Najjoo making his preparations. Iyyasu's transfer of the troops from Kumsaa's territory to Arjoo was made permanent. The *gondare* were given land by *Ras* Demissew and made their new home there.[75]

The situation in Qellem was different. No *gondare* soldiers were settled in Jootee's realm and interfered in his administration. The main source of conflict between him and the central government were the geographic proximity of his domain to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, the Amhara governors of the adjacent provinces, and his traditional local rivals within and around his autonomous domain. On several occasions, Jootee was accused of secretly working to have his territory annexed by the British in the Sudan in the same way the leaders of Asossa, Bella Shangul, and Komosha were. The case might not be a fabrication given Jootee's unpredictable personality. On the other hand, it may be a baseless accusation of either the Amhara governors in the region or his traditional rivals who were always anxious to see Jootee removed from Qellem. Either way, it was a source of constant friction with Menelik.

Because Menelik was unsure of Jootee's loyalty, he appointed *Ras* Tesema Nadew as governor of Illuabbabor to act as an overseer of Jootee's activities. Apparently, the appointment of an Amhara overlord to check on his actions made

Jootee's position precarious vis-à-vis his traditional rivals. Faced with a double threat, Jootee took on the enemies he could deal with in a very violent way. Subsequently, his rivals such as Buraayyuu Abbaa-Gosaa of Sayyo, appealed to *Ras* Tesema Nadew for intervention aware of the *Ras*'s animus toward Jootee.[76] As expected, *Ras* Tesema used this as a pretext to intervene in the administration of Qellem. Jootee was summoned to Addis Ababa and was condemned to life imprisonment at Ankober during which time his followers fled in large numbers to Begii in Bella Shangul, seeking relief from Tesema's oppression.[77]

Jootee's imprisonment was not so much because of his opposition to the new settlers and vengeance of his rivals as it was due to his earlier refusal to obey Menelik's order to grant the land beyond Hora-gubaa, a hot spring, to the British during the boundary demarcation negotiations.[78] Securing his release required the good will of Menelik. Jootee's son, Mardaasaa, proceeded to London through the Sudan to request the king of England to mediate between his father and Menelik. After three years in London, he obtained a letter from King George to the Emperor of Ethiopia. On his arrival in Addis Ababa, however, Mardaasaa refused to hand the letter to Tesema who by this time has become an *enderassie* (regent) because Menelik was too ill to run the government. Mardaasaa too was thrown in prison for insubordination. In the interim, Tesema died suddenly and Menelik learned about the letter and summoned Mardaasaa to his court. The ailing monarch, though unhappy that Mardaasaa had a letter of support from London, nevertheless ordered his father released.[79]

Upon his release in 1912, Jootee was reinstated to his territories and authority by *Lij* Iyyasu, the uncrowned prince but Menelik's designated successor. Iyyasu established a working relationship with Jootee, even visiting him in his realm and marrying his daughter. Nevertheless, Iyyasu was deposed in a palace coup d'etat in 1916. Jootee happened to find himself a

collaborator with the deposed prince. In 1918, his realm was given to *Dejazmach* (later *Ras*) Birru Wolde Gebriel. Jootee died shortly afterwards and the territory fell under the tight control of Shawan generals.[80] Unable to gain the confidence of their Amhara overlords, none of Jootee's sons succeed in regaining their father's autonomy. Leeqaa Qellem not only lost its autonomy, but also became an occupied land ruled in the same way as the principalities that rejected peaceful submission.[81]

In the case of Leeqaa Naqamtee, its precarious autonomy outlived Kumsaa. Upon his death in 1923, Kumsaa was succeeded by his son, Hambisa, christened Habtemariam, with the title of *dejazmach*.[82] Hambisa continued to pay tribute in gold and ivory to Addis Ababa to ensure that the administrative, judicial and military affairs of his domain remained in his hands. He continued the tradition of loyalty and friendly relations with the central government and used the reciprocal autonomy to improve living conditions in his realm. By the early 1930s, according to Adrian Zervos, Naqamtee had become an important center connected by roads to Addis Ababa, Goree, Gambella, Bella Shangul and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. The town also had telephone lines to communicate with Addis Ababa and other towns. Moreover, the establishment of post offices and the maintenance of porters who arrived at the regional market held once a week ensured sound postal services.[83] The type of relationship that allowed Hambisa to make Naqamtee a focal point in the trade between the imperial capital and the western peripheries was sustained into the early 1930s.

In 1930, Iyyasu's successor, Empress Zewditu, died and *Negus* Taffari, the regent and heir apparent since 1916, ascended the Ethiopian throne as Emperor Haile Sellassie. The new emperor's vision of the empire was radically different from his predecessors' and the continued autonomy of the provinces was not consistent with the polity he had envisioned. It was a matter of time before he would abrogate Menelik's concor-

dats with the ruler of Leeqaa Naqamtee. The inevitability of Haile Sellassie's intention was impressed upon Hambisa in 1932, when Jimma's autonomy was abolished and *Ras* Desta, the emperor's son-in-law, replaced Abba Jifar, the hereditary ruler, as governor of the annexed province.[84] Before Haile Sellassie could move against Leeqaa Naqamtee, however, the Italians invaded Ethiopia.

The period of Italian occupation, 1935-1941, demonstrated the failure of integration of the Leeqaa regions to the Ethiopian empire state. As long as the coercive machinery of the Abyssinian administration existed, resistance to the system had proven to be a futile adventure. Consequently, when the general mobilization call of the Ethiopian government came in 1935, the Oromo of Wallaga accepted it. Refusing to participate would have resulted in the confiscation of their rifles to compensate for shortage of firearms.[81] From Hambisa's perspective, the time was not yet ripe for severing relations with Ethiopia. Pretending to obey his sovereign's order, Hambisa "assembled a force that was made up of men who were too young or physically unfit to constitute an effective fighting force.…[The able-bodied men he recruited] did not take part in the battle for the northern front and, in the areas where they joined combat, desertions and foot-dragging were commonplace."[85] None of the major hereditary rulers of the Western Oromo participated in the war because, as the British consul in Goree put it, "they were busy working for the downfall of the Amharic Taffari Government, and, although mobilized, they avoided contact with the Italian forces."[86]

The negative attitude of the Leeqaa people came to surface when the coercive machinery that had suppressed them for so long was undermined. Peasants who were unable to pay war levies in cash were obliged to enlist as porters and servicemen for their *gondare* masters.[87] As the campaign continued, the government demanded more cash for the expenses of the war. The *gondare*, unable to forgo their feeling of superior-

ity even in times of crisis, ridiculed the peasants for their exclusion from military engagements because of their lack of skill in how to use firearms.[88] Even among the Leeqaa, the rulers and the ruled came together to act in concert to throw off the Amhara overrule, not to mention the areas of Wallaga where direct rule had on many occasions led to open rebellion. With the disintegration of the Ethiopian army, Amhara rule in Wallaga and western Abyssinia in general appeared to be collapsing. Hambisa and his counselors saw this as an opportunity to end his relations with what he called the Shawa government.

During the early months of Italian invasion, Goree became a new capital of the exiled Ethiopian government.[89] Economically, the south-west was already a British protectorate and from the Oromo elites' point of view, a British mandate would have been preferable to the Shawan or Italian rule.[90] Once the news of the Italian entry into Addis Ababa and the flight of the emperor came, the Oromo in the Leeqaa country made immediate moves. Just before Imiru's arrival in the southwest, the Oromo leaders of much of western Abyssinia decided to form an independent state then known as the 'Western Galla [Oromo] Confederation.' To that effect, they had sent their appeal to Sir Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary of Great Britain at the time, for recognition and protection.[91] A series of meetings were held among various hereditary chieftains of Wallaga, ultimately leading to the signing a document, which appointed Hambisa as the leader of the chiefs and requested a British mandate which will "remain until we achieve self government."[92] The Goree government obviously was pessimistic about the formation of the confederation because Hambisa was making a dual communication with them and with the British at the same time.[93] The British refused to accept their demands and the Italians occupied Wallaga in 1938 as part of the occupation of south- western Ethiopia.[94]

Conclusion

In the initial years of their relations with the central authorities of the Ethiopian empire, both Leeqaa Naqamtee and Leeqaa Qellem successfully defended their regional autonomy through diplomatic/political arrangements as well as through astute management of the invaluable resources of their territories, including gold and ivory. As historical evidences show the success of the autonomy of Leeqaa Naqamtee lasted longer than that of Leeqaa Qellem for the latter had only survived up to 1918, whereas the former continued up to the Italian occupation of Wallaga. The survival of regional autonomy and ethnic identity of the two Leeqaa states had far-reaching consequences in the socio-cultural, economic, and political history of Wallaga.

The local autonomy of Leeqaa Qellem was increasingly threatened particularly during the post Adwa period. By all accounts, the survival and longevity the autonomy arrangement was dependent on personality of Kumsaa and Jootee, the strong traditions of the indigenous leadership, and, in the case of Naqamtee, the friendly ties Kumsaa's father had established with Menelik. Kumsaa's administrative reforms and activities and his efforts to maintain a smooth relationship with Addis Ababa greatly enhanced the process of centralization. Kumsaa respected the imperial order and satisfied the financial and labor demands while constantly complaining about its impact on the local population.[95] On balance, he was able to preserve some of his authority, avoid the rapacious exploitation of direct *nafxenyaa* settlement, and stave off the cultural impact of both the settlement and direct rule.

Apparently, the retention of an autonomous status by the Leeqaa rulers through peaceful means had spared the incalculable damage conquest and direct colonial administrators could have wrought on the land and people of Leeqaa. In many ways, the Leeqaa rulers were self-interested individuals in the Hobbesian sense of the term. Nevertheless, the au-

tonomy they negotiated with the Abyssinians had created a relatively protected space for the Leeqaa Oromo to cultivate a sense of unity as Oromos, in spite of the political rivalry among their rulers and the relentless assault of the Amhara rulers in the adjacent provinces. This was manifested in the formation of "Western [Oromo] Confederation,"[96] which, irrespective of their earlier and existing differences, brought all the western Oromo together around the common cause of regaining their lost independence.

Notes

1. Informants**:** Dhugumaa Onchoo, Diggaa in 1973. Abishee Garbaa was the son of the last *Abbaa-Biyyaa (*literally father of a country), Garbaa Hurruubaa, who was elected by *gadaa* assembly. When his father died Abishee's mother is said to have requested the assembly to transfer power of the *Abba-Biyya* to her son before election would be held according to the traditional principles. When the assembly turned down her request, Abishee fought all clans of *kudha-arfan* Horroo (fourteen clans of Horro) putting all of them under his control one after another and become a *mootii* (king).
2. Informants: Oljirraa Abaa, *Girazmach* Tamru Guutaa, Diggaa, in 1973; R.A. Caulk, "Territorial Competition and the Battle of Embabo," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 13:1 (1975): 78.
3. Enrico Cerulli, "The Folk Literature of the Galla of Southern Abyssinia," *Harvard African Studies*, 3, (1922): 74.
4. Tesema Ta'a, *The Political Economy of an African Society in Transformation: The Case of Macca Oromo (Ethiopia)* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag:,2006, 81.
5. Leeqaa Qumba was to the south of Naqamtee while the Leeqaa Sibuu was located further west.
6. Ta'a, *The Political Economy*, 81.
7. Informants: Basazenew Alemu, Qubulee Muddaa, Woldegiorgis Beke, Arjoo, in 1979.
8. For details, see Ta'a, *The Political Economy,* chapter 4.
9. Informants: *Girazmach*, Waltajjii Dagaagoo, Boojjii Aug. 1979.
10. Informants: *Girazmach* Tamru Guutaa, *Kenna*, Abdiisaa Mosaa, Naqamtee, in 1973.
11. Terefe Woldetsadik, "The Unification of Ethiopia (1800-1935, Wallaga," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 1 (1968): 76; H. Le Roux, *Menelik et nous* (Paris, 1902), 308.

12. Informants: *Kenna*, Abdiisaa Mosaa, *Ato* Qana'aa Taa'aa , June 1973.
13. Informants: *Kenna*, Abdiisaa Mosaa, *Ato* Qana'aa Taa'aa, Naqamtee, in 1973. Informants from Jimmaa also report that there were no clashes between the Gojjame and the Shawan army at Gumaa. Interview conducted by the History Department , Addis Ababa University, 1974. *Girazmach* Abbaa Bulguu Tigiree, Gumaa, April, 1974; Abbaa Diggaa Abba Joobir, Gumaa, April 1974; Bairu Tafla, " Three Portraits: Ato Atsma Giorgis, Ras Gobana Daci and Tsahafe Tizaz Gabra Sellasse," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 5:2 (1967): 37-38.
14. Geber Sellassie, *Tarik Zemene Ze Dagmawi Minilik Niguse Negest Ze Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, Berhanena Salam Printing Press,1959 E.C.), 102-103.
15. Himbaaboo is a plain in Guduru which was occupied by Himbaaboo Didee, one of the pioneers in Horro-Guduru as the *qabiyyee* of his group. The traditions relate that the plain was named after him. Earlier researchers have used the name "Embabo" instead of Himbaaboo in connection with the battle of Embabo which was fought between the Gojjame and the Shawans in 1882. It seems reasonable to use the name Himbaaboo rather than "Embabo" which is meaningless. Therefore, Himbaaboo seems the correct name of the place and any thing connected with it. See R.A Caulk, "Territorial Competition… pp, 12-13. *Idem* "Firearms and Princely Power in Ethiopia in the 19th Century," *Journal of African History* 13: 4 (1972), 620.
16. Informants*:* Oljirraa Abaa, August 1973; Nagarii Jamoo, Gimbii, *Qees* Dafaa Jamoo, Ayira in 1979.
17. The decline of the *gadaa* system gave to a new political system headed by "strong men" headed by *mottii* among the Leeqaa of eastern Wallaga, and *abetu* among the Sayyoo of western Wallaga. Nagaso Gidada, "History of the Sayyo Oromo of Southwestern Wallaga, Ethiopia, from about 1730 to 1886" (Ph.D, diss., Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 1984), 329-334.
18. According to oral tradition collected by Nagaso Gidada, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Sayyoo were ruled by "strong men" fighting each other for supremacy. These contenders were Tuffa Hedde (Abba Offaa) of Hawaa, succeeded by Burrayuu Barri (Abba Gossa); Bakakkoo Tuffaa (Abba Dhasa) of Galan; Gumma Osho (Abba Dentaa) of Qotta'o Sadii, succeeded by his son Hirppa (Abba Danno). There was another powerful *abetu* Qajela Abba Gimbi of the Bussasie of Anfilloo. Gidada, "The Sayyoo Oromo," 245-329. North of the Sayyoo was Qellem, ruled by *abetu* Tulluu Guda, who stepped down in favor of his son, Jootee Tulluu.
19. *Ibid*., 18, 46.

20. Bahru Zewde, "Dajazmach Jote Tulu Abba Iggu (1885-1918)," (B.A. thesis, Haile Sellasie I University, 1970), 18.
21. Ligdii is praised in songs as follows. Informant: Qana'aa Taa'aa, Naqamtee August 1973.

Oromo and English

Gabareen hinqottii Gindiin Hinbaqaqsaa
The farmer farms and the plough tills
Isheen Kaan hinsobdii Ligidiitti dabarsaa
Leave it to Ligdii others are liars (cowards).
Abbaa ittibaqsaa
the great challenger and brave.

22. Cerulli, "The Folk Literature of the Galla," 74-75.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Ta'a*, The Political Economy*, 86.
25. Informants: Qana'aa Taa'aa, Kenna, *Kenna*. Abdiisaa Mosaa, *Girazmach* Tamru Guutaa, in 1973; see also Cerulli, *The Folk Literature of the Galla*, 80-83.
26. Alessandro Triulzi, "Trade, Islam, and the Mahdia in Northwestern Wallaga, Ethiopia," *Journal of African History* 16: 1 (1975): 66.
27. Informants: Nagarii Jamoo, Gimbii, Bulii Ankee, Qees Maatiwoos Ciibsaa, Mandii, in 1979.
28. Atsme Wolde Sellasse, "Ya Galla Tarik," (Mss in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies), 94. Triulzi, Trade, Islam, and Mahdia," 67.
29. Alessandro Triulzi, "The Guduru Oromo and their Neighbours in the two generations before the battle of Embabo," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 13:1 (1975): .
30. Triulizi, "Trade, Islam, and the Mahdia" 66-67.
31. Informants: *Qees* Dafaa Jamoo, Ayira, *Girazmach*. Waltajjii Dagaagoo, Boojjii, *Qees* Jaal'ataa Wasee, Boojjii, in 1979. The Mahadist forces entered Wallaga in two directions. One detachment came through Asossa crossed the Sherqolle river into Jootee's lands, while the other group passed through Mandii crossed the Daabbus river and invaded Morodaa's territories.
32. Ta'a, *The Political Economy*, 87.
33. Triulzi, "Trade, Islam, and the Mahdia," 68.
34. *Ibid*
35. On this occasion, Kumsaa took the baptismal name of Gebre-egziabher. Informants: *Fitawrari* Ballaa Molla, *Girazmach* Dhugumaa Onchoo, in 1973; C.F.J.G. Vanderheym, *Une Expedition avec le Negous Menelik* (Paris, 1896), 110.
36. Informants: *Kenna*. Abdiisaa Mosaa, *Girazmach*, Tamru Guutaa, In 1973.

37. Informants: *Kenna*. Abdiisaa Mosaa, *Girazmach*, Tamru Guutaa, In 1973.
38. Abebe Ambachew *et al*., "Field Trip to Nakamte," *Bulletin of the Ethnological Society* [University College of Addis Abeba] 6 (1957): 13, citing *Fitawrari* Jiraataa Jetoo, oral informant.
39. Bairu Tafla, "Four Ethiopian Biographies: Dajjazmach Garmame, Dajjazmach Gabra-Egziavbher Morodaa, Dajjazmach Balcha and Kantiba Gebru Desta," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 7:2 (1969): 147.
40. Emmanuel Abraham, *Reminiscences of My Life* (Oslo: Lunde Forlag, 1995), 16.
41. Informant: *Girazmach* Dhugumaa Onchoo, Diggaa, 1973.
42. Gustav Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm: EFS-Forlag, 1978), 427-428.
43. Terfasa Digga, 'A Short Biography of Onesimos Nesib,c.1850-1931,' (B.A Thesis in History, HSIU, 1973), 24, citing w/o Walata Hiywat Gabrastatewos 'Ya Qes Gabrastatewos Waldawalaga Malak' unpublished personal document.
44. In the mid nineteenth century, Bakaree Godaanaa (r.1841-1868) emerged as a powerful force within the *gadaa* system of government. He undermined the political role of the *gadaa* system and set up a new administrative and judicial structure with offices of *mootii, abbaa-biyyaa* (father of a country), *abbaa-qoroo* (district governor) and *abbaa-lafaa* (owner/father of land). In time, the *mottii* system became a hereditarily monarchy with complex state structure, which Bakaree's scions expanded and consolidated as they continued to rule as monarchs. As a *mootii,* Bakaree was a supreme head of a well-organized administrative and judicial hierarchy. He created three judicial bodies that strictly looked after legal matters at every level of the *mootii's* realm. The judges were elected by local people and approved by a council consisting of the *abbaa-lafaa*, *abbaa-qoroo* or the *abbaa-biyyaa*. Although the new offices were hierarchical, as opposed to the egalitarian *gadaa* system, the old *gadaa* rules, regulations and procedures had influence on the organization of the new legal bodies. Keeping peace and security in their areas and collecting tribute due to the *mootii* were some of the responsibilities of the *abbaa-lafaa*. The *abbaa-qoroo* who ruled over a much larger areas than the *abbaa-lafaa*, were responsible for maintaining law and order in their region and collecting taxes from the peasant communities as well as merchant caravans. The *abbaa-qoroo* had to be courageous and capable to lead their people militarily in time of war. An *abbaa-biyyaa* had a number of *abbaa-qoroo* under him and his responsibilities were directly to the *mootii*. Often the *abbaa-biyyaa* was his highest councilor. These lofty posts were held either by the many sons of the *mootii* himself or by his

close relatives. This pre-conquest administrative style of Leeqaa-Naqamtee was maintained to the times of Bakaree's scions and successors, Morodaa and Kumsaa, until the latter made the politico-administrative reforms on Menelik's model.

45. Tesema Ta'a "Administration of Leqa Neqemte between 1850-1923" (B.A thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1976), 26-27.
46. *Ibid*., 26-27.
47. Alessandro Triulzi and Tesema Ta'a, *Ya Wallaga Ya Tarik Sanadoch ka 1880wochu iska 1920wochu* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2004). A letter sent from Kumsaa to Iyasu: Naqamtee, Megabit 2, 1905 E.C (March 9, 1913).
48. Informant: Abdiisaa Mosaa, June 1973.
49. Triulzi and Ta'a, *Ya Wallaga Ya Tarik Sanadoch*, A letter sent from Menelik to Kumsaa, Addis Ababa, Tiqimt 17, 1895 E.C (Oct. 27, 1902).
50. Triulzi and Ta'a, *Ya Wallaga Ya Tarik Sanadoch*, A letter sent from Menelik to Kumsaa, Addis Ababa, Yekatit 28, 1900 E.C (March 6, 1908).
51. Informant: Olgira Aba, August 1973.
52. Atieb Ahmed Dafalla, "Shiek Khojele Al-Hassan and Bela-shangul 1825-1938" (B.A thesis, Addis Ababa University 1973), 50, citing Bakura siyon Tilahun, "Ya Assosa- Banishangul Tarik, "MS, (Institute of Ethiopian Studies), 22.
53. Informant: Ballaa Molla, July 1973.
54. Dafalla, "Shiek Khojele Al-Hassan," 42.
55. Triulzi and Ta'a, *Ya Wallaga Ya Tarik Sanadoch*. A letter sent from Menelik to Kumsaa, Addis Alem, Meskerem 30, 1895 E.C (Oct10, 1902); C.F C.W. Gwynn "The Frontiers of Abyssinia, a retrospect," *Journal of the Royal African Society* (1937), 150-155.
56. Triulzi and Ta'a, *Ya Wallaga Ya Tarik Sanadoch* …, A letter sent from Menelik to Kumsaa; Addis Ababa, Ginbot 4,1895 E.C. (May 11, 1903): Harold G. Marcus, "Ethio-British Negotiations concerning the western border with Sudan 1896-1902," *Journal of African History* 4.2 (1963): 96.
57. Dafalla, "Shiek Khojele Al-Hassan," 42.
58. *Ibid*, 44, citing Waldayes Mulat, Mangistu Almaw, Oral informants and Sudan intelligence report. no 190/1910/ *passim.*
59. Informant: Dhugumaa Onchoo, in 1973.
60. Gwynn, "The Frontiers of Abyssinia,"150-155.
61. Triulzi and Tesema, *Ya Wallaga Ya Tarik Sanadoch*, A letter sent from Kumsaa to Menelik, Naqamtee, Tahsas 21, 1899 E.C (December 30,1906).
62. Informant: Oljirraa Abaa, July 1973.

63. *Ibid*. A letter sent from Qegnazmach Ibsaa to *Dajjazmach* Gabra Egzabiher, Sene 19,1898E.C.
64. Triulzi and Ta'a, *Ya Wallaga Ya Tarik Sanadoch*. A letter sent from Kumsaa to Iyasu; Naqamtee, Tir 6,1905 E.C (January 13,1913).
65. *Ibid*. A letter sent from Qegnazmach Ibsaa to *Dajjazmach* Gabra Egzabiher, Sene 19,1898E.C.
66. Triulzi and Ta'a, *Ya Wallaga yatarik sanadoch*. A letter sent from Kumsaa to Menelik, Megabit 15, 1896 E.C (March 23, 1904).
67. *Ibid*, A letter sent form Kumsaa to Menelik, Naqamtee, Megabit 15, 1896 E.C (March 23, 1904).
68. Informant: *Kannaa*, Abdiisaa Mossa, Naqamtee June 1973.
69. *Ibid*, A letter sent from Kumsaa to Menelik, Tahsas 2, 1898 E.C (December 11,1905).
70. A.Triulzi and Tesema, *Ya Wallaga Ya Tarik Sanadoch* …, A letter sent from Kumsaa to Menelik, Naqamtee, Tahsas 21, 1899. E.C (December 30, 1906).
71. Informant: Oljirraa Abaa, July 1973.
72. Alessandro Triulzi, "Nekemte and Addis Ababa: Dilemmas of Provincial Rule" in *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia. Essays in history and social anthropology*. Donald Donham and Wendy James, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 60.
73. Triulzi and Tesema, *Ya Wallaga Ya Tarik Sanadoch*, A letter sent from Kumsaa to Iyasu, Naqamtee, Tir 6, 1905 E.C (January 13, 1913).
74. Informant: Moggaa Ingida, July 1973.
75. Triulzi and Ta'a, *Ya Wallaga Ya Tarik Sanadoch*. A letter sent from Kumsaa to Iyasu, Naqamtee, Megabit 2,1905 E.C (March 9,1913).
76. Woldetsadik, "The Unification of Ethiopia," 84.
77. Alessandro Triulzi, *Salt, Gold and Legitimacy, Prelude to the History of Noman's land, Belashangul, Wallaga, Ethiopia,(ca.1800-1889)*, (Napoli, 1981, 166; Nagasso Gidada, 'The Impact of Christianity in Qellem Awrajja, 1886-1941' (B.A Thesis in History, HSIU,1970), 5-6; Alberto Sbachi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini: Fascism and Colonial Experience* (London: Zed Books,1985), 160.
78. Alemu Shuie "Wallaga during Italian Occupation, 1936-41" (M.A thesis in history, Addis Ababa University, 2002),19. Hora Gorbaa found between Gidaamii and the Sudan border, then claimed by the British.
79. Woldetsadik, 'The Unification of Ethiopia,'84-85.
80. *Ibid;* Shuie, 'Wallaga During Italian,"19.
81. For details, see Bahru, "Dejjzmach Jote Tulu," 47-51; Nagaso Gidada, "Oromo Historical Poems and Songs: Conquest and Exploitation in Western Wallaga, 1886-1927," *Horn of Africa* 5:3 (1982), 32-40.

82. "Ya Dajjazmach Habta Mariam Achir Ya Hiywat Tarik," (from *emahoy* Agitu's personal document in Naqamtee's old palace), 15.
83. Adrian Zervous, *L'emprire d'Ethiopie* (Alexandria, 1936), 401; Richard Pankhurst, "Trade of the southern and western Ethiopia and the Indian Ocean Ports in the 19th and early 20th centuries," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 3:2 (1965): 520.
84. Guluma Gemeda, "The Rise of Coffee and the Demise of Colonial Autonomy : The Oromo Kingdom of Jimma and Political Centralization in Ethiopia," *Northeast African Studies* 9:3 (2007): 65.
85. Ezekiel Gebissa, "The Italian Invasion, the Ethiopian Empire, and Oromo Nationalism: The significance of the Western Oromo Confederation of 1936," *Northeast African Studies* 9: 3 (2007): 78-79.
86. Eriskine to Eden, 21 August 1936, PRO, FO 371/20206.
87. Zervous, *Lemprire D' Ethiopie*… , 401.
88. Olgira Tujuba, "Oromo-Amahara Relations in Horro-Guduru *Awraja* (Northeastern Wallgga) ca. 1840s-1941" (M.A Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1994), 128.
89. John Markakis, *Anatomy of Traditional Polity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 104-108; Margery Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 293-97; Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844-1913* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 190-93; C.W McClellan, "Reaction to Ethiopian expansionism: the case of Darasa, 1895-1935" (PhD. diss., Michigan State University, 1978),3-5; Sbachi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini*, 35.
90. Anthony Mockler, *Haile Sellassie's War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 163-164; Patrick Gilkes, *The dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 221-213.
91. Tadesse Mecha, *Tiqur Anbassa Ba Meirab Itiyophia* (Asmara, 1952, E.C), 74-75; Tesema Ta'a, "The Bonayya Incident and the Italian Occupation of Nekemte, 1936-1941," in *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: The Papers of 13th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* Vol. 1,eds. Kaitsuyoshi fokui, Eisei Kurimoto, Masayoshi Shigeta (Tokyo, 1997), 264; Sbachi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini,* 81.
92. Gilkes, *The* Dying *Lion*, 211; Erskine to Eden 24 June 1936 PRO, FO. 371/20206, quoted in Shuie "Wallaga During Italian Occupation," 29.
93. Shuie, "Wallaga During Italian Occupation," 28, 30. Markakis, *Anatomy of Traditional Polity,* 105-106; Gilkes, *The Dying Lion,* 210-212. The dual communication involves talking political directives from Goree and waiting for the peace negotiations and at the same time in touch with the British government.
94. Ta'a, "The Bonayya Incident,"269-70.

95. This is evident in the many letters Kumsaa wrote to Menelik. The letters appear *inter alia* in Triulzi and Tesema, *Ya Wallaga Ya Tarik Sanadoch*. For analysis of the letters, see Truilzi, "Nekemte and Addis Abeba," 59-67.
96. For a detailed analysis of "Western [Oromo] Confederation" see Gebissa, "The Italian Invasion," 75-96.

Failed Modernization of the Ethiopian State: Oromo Perspectives on Ethiopian Political Culture

Marco Bassi and Gemetchu Megerssa

The dominant feature of modern politics is the emergence of the nation-state. This is the outcome of a number of interrelated social, economic, political and cultural processes, stretching several centuries back into European history. Innovative ideologies such as the enlightenment and crucial political events such as the French and the American Revolutions led to the emergence of electoral democracy based on a strong individualistic ethos and on the idea of popular sovereignty that rulers should be accountable to the ruled. In Europe linguistic homogeneity was a major fea-

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ture for the emergence of the nation-state (Anderson 1983), but successful modern multi-ethnic democracies such as Switzerland and Canada show that modern multicultural states can perform equally well by adopting a federal structure. Federalism, in fact, facilitates the integration of linguistically diverse citizens into the state's processes and fosters the feeling of loyalty of all citizens to state symbols.

In Africa political modernization is the result of a sudden process of colonization (Apter 1965). This has produced a problem of incongruity between African and modern European political, legal and economic models. Even though postcolonial African states were formally founded on such a poorly articulated platform, the prevailing attitude towards modern states mirrors the colonial dogma of relegating the traditional (African) component to a negative and backward domain. In recent years, this misconception has been seriously challenged. For instance, during a conference on globalization held in Addis Ababa in 1999, Archie Mafeje pointed to the passive or indiscriminate adoption of alien models as one of the root causes of many of Africa's problems. In order to get out of the crisis, Mafeje suggested that Africans look to their roots, traditions, and histories and reinterpret them in new ways.[1] If, as we suggest, the strength of modernity in the political field lies in citizen identification with the state and its symbols and participation in the state processes, then African modernity should include provisions to bridge the gap between traditional political practices of the diverse ethnic groups within the state and the standard governance requirements. Indeed several African countries have taken some institutional steps in this direction.[2]

Ethiopia holds a special place within the African context. Because European colonialism lasted only five years, most mainstream studies consider that Ethiopia was scarcely affected by colonialism. However, recent approaches have adopted the perspective of 'domestic' colonialism to account for the di-

rect connection between the parallel constructions of the Ethiopian Empire and the colonial European empires in Africa (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990, Asafa Jalata 1993). According to this view, the domestic colonial construction led to the formation of rigid ethnic hierarchies. While in other African colonies a dichotomist opposition of whites and blacks was associated with modernizing political, social and economic processes, in Ethiopia internal stratification was built on a feudal system[3] that remained unchallenged until the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974.

In mainstream Ethiopian studies ethnic stratification remained largely understated, while the feudal organization of society, was primarily represented as a spatial extension of the organization of the Abyssinian kingdoms.[4] This feudal organization was openly addressed and came to be referred to as 'traditional society,' as contrasted with the forces of progress and modernization that ultimately led to the 1974 revolution. Everything that concerned the cultures, models and values of the rural people—in other African contexts all these would be regarded as 'tradition'—simply disappeared from the dominant economic, historical, political, and legal discourse, relegated to the marginal domain of anthropology. Despite the production of a number of outstanding theses on various aspects of Oromo social, economic, juridical and political organization, few were published and even less were disseminated in Ethiopia. Only recently have publications on Oromo been made possible abroad, with important fora provided by the *Journal of Oromo Studies* and *Oromo Commentary*.[5]

Due to this peculiar situation, 'tradition' and 'modernity' may be understood ambiguously in Ethiopian academic and political discourse. The discontinuity between traditions and current practices is probably better expressed in terms of harmonizing local (rural or ethnic) and national (urban or Ethiopian) models, rather than in terms of tradition (Africa)/modernity (Europe). In any case, the problem of the pluralism of

(political) cultures in Ethiopia has mostly been discussed in relation to the Eritrean question. In the past it was especially expressed in terms of nations and nationalities rather than tradition/modernity or in ethnic discourse. Fentahun Tiruneh (1990: 85 – 97) dedicates a full chapter of his book *The Ethiopian Students: Their Struggle to Articulate the Ethiopian Revolution*, to the nation/nationalities question. He traces the internal ideological struggle on the issue within the Ethiopian student movement, concluding that it culminated in the 1971 resolution of the Ethiopian Students Union in North America (ESUNA), which proclaimed "the right of all nationalities of Ethiopia to self-determination and…the complete equality of all nationalities regardless of their size" (1990: 87). One can immediately recognize that some of the leading principles of the 1991 Transitional Charter of Ethiopia, later incorporated into the 1994 Federal Constitution of Ethiopia, were reverberations of the 1971 ESUNA declaration. Indeed, federalism was another of the critical themes of the ideological debate in the Ethiopian student movement (Fentahun Tiruneh 1990: 90, 96).

The students might have been the driving force behind the Ethiopian Revolution, but the revolution took its own course. The *derg*, the military government (1974-1991), established an even more centralist and authoritarian political system, still ethnically stratified, but built upon a system based on state ownership of land rather than the feudal property ownership system it had replaced.

The political objectives discussed by the students in the early 1970s came to the foreground after the fall of the *derg* in 1991. This is perhaps the first time in Ethiopia that an attempt was made to introduce a modern constitutional and administrative arrangement based on the principle of electoral democracy. A democratic federal constitution was approved in 1994, and the Ethiopian state was formally decentralized along ethnic federal states. The new federal constitution was

intended to reduce the distance between the state and the various peoples of Ethiopia, adopting Western political philosophy, standards, and models.

Despite the fact that drastic changes have been introduced over the years in the economic field (from feudalism to socialism to liberalism) and in the political arena (from an absolutist monarchy to socialist centralism and to democratic federalism), we argue that Ethiopia's political culture is still characterized by an unbroken continuity of political exclusion. Various observers have pointed out that the democratic constitutional provisions were poorly implemented, while important political parties, including the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), are still excluded from the formal political arena (Assefa Fiseha 2006; Human Rights Watch 2005; Lister 2004; Pausewang, Tronvoll and Aalen 2002; Tronvoll and Aadland 1995; Leenco Lata 1999). In his article on party dynamics in a society severely divided along ethnic lines, Donald Horowitz reports serious political exclusion was practiced in Ethiopia in 1993, despite the good 1991 premises (1993: 22-3). Besides party politics, political exclusion severely inhibits participation in state processes and the feeling of loyalty to state symbols by a large portion of the population, who accordingly cannot be considered full citizens.

In this paper, we argue that the failure of modernization of the Ethiopian state has a manifestation at the symbolic level, with individuals and entire groups still feeling that they cannot be part of the Ethiopian national or federal community. We further argue that failure in the political field, the 'regulatory' component of a state system that is all-encompassing, is the root cause of the Ethiopian poverty and delayed development, hence producing 'failed modernization' in a more concrete sense. The post-1991 events show that macroeconomic initiatives and national and international policies cannot by themselves solve the poor conditions of life of most Ethiopians. From 1992 to 1998 and in the wake of the Ethio-

Eritrean War, Ethiopia has received significant financial support from the international community. The policy of economic liberalization that was implemented after the fall of the *derg* has made credit for new investments available through a reformed banking system. Despite impressive national and international efforts, the country is still caught in a cycle of food deficiency. According to UN official estimates, 10 million people were at risk of famine in July 2000. This figure appears to outnumber all previous crises.[6]

Between 1998 and 2000, we studied these problems during a research financed by the Ethio-Italian University Cooperation Programme, based in the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology of Addis Ababa University. We investigated the factors that affect ethnic solidarity and integration in towns west of Addis Ababa. We conducted semi-structured and group interviews[7], and door-to-door surveys in Holota, Walliso and Ambo. Interviews were also conducted in Dambi Dollo, 700 km. west of Addis Ababa, chosen for comparison of people's experiences in a region distant from our primary research area. Because Addis Ababa University and the Italian Cooperation did not extend the research funds into the conclusive data analysis and write up phase,[8] the data on which our interpretation is based is limited to the transcribed interviews of urban Oromo elders reputed as people with special knowledge of the history of their town. The informants were selected by crosschecking the names randomly provided by the people of the town during a preliminary survey with a list obtained from the town administration.

Even though the article deals with historical events connected to the construction of the Ethiopian imperial state, our purpose is not to reveal hitherto unknown historical truth. The article is essentially a work of interpretation of the meanings of our informants' accounts, with a view to understand the political values of these urban Oromo, their perceptions of the Ethiopian state, and the way they relate to it. We have

found out that since the time of their incorporation, the Oromo have confronted the need to take a position in relation to the Ethiopian state, either to be in or out, collaborate or fight against it. We hope that our focus on the symbolic foundation of the Oromo and Ethiopian political culture may give meaningful historical insights relevant to the current dilemma of Oromo nationalists between electoral competition and protracted insurgency.

Competing Forces for Regional Supremacy

During the first half of the nineteenth century, political power in what is today the Ethiopia region was highly fragmented, with the emergence of several political-military centers and of several warlords competing for regional supremacy and control of trade routes. In the Oromo-inhabited areas, internal change within Oromo society and the development of long-distance trade led to the emergence of several Oromo kingdoms in the Gibe region, including Jimma Abbaa Jifar (Mohammed Hassen 1994; Gulma Gemeda 1984, 1989; Lewis 1965). During the same period, some Oromo leaders also gained control over various Oromo communities (Tesema Ta'a 1986).

From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, some of the Abyssinian political-military centers were able to obtain access to significant quantities of firearms by controlling the international trade of slaves,[9] gold, and ivory and by establishing international connections (Tsegaye Tegenu 1996: 186). The new technology of warfare dramatically affected the power balance in the region, enabling some of the centers to expand, and facilitating the construction of the so-called 'modern' Ethiopian empire.

The interviews conducted in Holoota and Walliso clearly show how competition among different centers of power affected local perceptions of the relations of power in a changing environment. The major actors in our informants' narra-

tives were Menelik from Entoto-Finfinne (Addis Ababa), Goobanaa Daacee from the Tuulama region of Oromoland, the armed soldiers from Gojjam, and Hassen Injamo, the Muslim leader of Qabana (located near Jimma), who rebelled against the advancing forces of Menelik and was suspected to have taken refuge in the domain of Abbaa Jifar. (Guluma Gemeda 2002: 53-5).

The elders interviewed in Walliso on 27 November 1998 emphasized a crucial confrontation between Hassen Injamo and Goobanaa.[10] Here are some excerpts of the interview:

> [The Amhara] first waged war to put the new people under their control. The people were displaced by the war. There was a popular man who used to fight against Oromo. He was called Hassen Injamo.
>
> Hassen Injamo was Hadiyya. … Some Gurage accompanied him. He wanted to become a king himself. He campaigned against the Oromo to dominate them. In the beginning Hassen fought against the Oromo.
>
> Then he made agreement with prominent Oromo elders. On the other hand, he converted some Oromo to Islam through the sheikhs who accompanied him. Hassen Injamo converted Oromo into Islam. He even forced Amhara to become Muslims. He fought many people up to the areas of Awash and made them pay tribute.
>
> Hassen Injamo has ambushed and attacked the churches and burnt the *tabot,* ark of covenant. He planned to wipe out Menelik's forces. When this was reported to Menelik, he sent Goobanaa.
>
> There was a connection between Abbaa Jifar and Hassen Injamo because both of them were Muslim (*Interview* 3 – Walliso, 27 November 1998).

Then the elders provided a detailed description of events leading up to the battle, and of the battle itself. They also explained Abbaa Jifar's behavior:

> The Jimma people got the news of Goobanaa's victory over Hassen Injamo's forces. The news they got about war was full of horrors. Then they decided not to fight against Goobanaa's army.
>
> Abbaa Jifar retreated. He sent a message that he was not planning to fight against the king. He appealed to the king not to come to fight him.
>
> In Jimma, people surrendered their territory without challenging Goobanaa's forces; Jimma people went back home peacefully without firing any bullet.
>
> They then surrendered their territory to Goobanaa and became *gebar*. After this victory, Goobanaa became famous. He was given appointment with a title of *ras*.
>
> After this event nobody has challenged Amhara forces. Then Menelik officially put the territory under his control (Interview 3 – Walliso, 27 November 1998).

The local Oromo can only watch these events and bear witness to the devastating effects produced by firearms. It is something they could not challenge. In this way, political supremacy in the Tuulama region was implicitly established.

Perceptions of the Oromo Society before the Imperial Time

Despite the nineteenth century changes that had affected Oromo society, the interviews conducted in all the towns that were studied (Holoota, Walliso, Ambo and Dambi Dollo) indicate that the *gadaa* system was fully in operation during the second half of the century, though with local variations.

Most of our informants were town dwellers, often belonging to families that have been co-opted into the emerging

imperial structure. Still, they were capable of providing detailed and valuable description of the *gadaa* system as it existed before Ethiopia's southward imperial expansion. Most of them stressed the rituals, but some could also describe the genesis of the local system, its structural (generation class) and spatial arrangements, and they were conceptually able to keep its ritual, administrative and economic functions sharply separated. Here are some excerpts referring to the *gadaa* in Walliso area:

> They [the *gadaa* officials] used to defend their territories. In their administrative system, they used to elect intelligent men. They used to elect one leader. If any problem arose, the leader will try to resolve it with the traditional elders.

> In the ceremony of power transition, the group that have been ruling retires [*guula taa'u*]. The *raba,* who are the successors, assume the *gadaa* authority. The handing over of power from generation to generation is held every eight years. The new *gadaa* leaders sing a traditional song. The retiring ones on the other hand will become *guula* and stay at home. The retired ones say "oh, God, I will really belong to you" ["*Ayyee, Waaqa, ani keeti* "]. The new leader will sing a song saying: "*Riffensini kangubbattuu korma.*" This is equivalent to say that the matured one will assume the leadership position. The retired ones hold whips and stay at home in *guula*. The new leaders will be responsible in law making. This was how they used to slaughter *buttaa* and pass power to the next generation.

> The other leader was called *abbaa murtii.* This person is responsible for passing resolutions and judgment. There was also *abbaa horata*. This can be equated with the minister of agriculture. A strong person who is knowledgeable is elected into this position. There is also a leader who oversees the branches of the administrative system.

> This system was highly democratic. These branches undergo power transmission every eight years.
>
> All the things that people used to buy, sell or bargain about were operated under the auspices of the *gadaa* system. The people used to report their problems and conflicts between them to the *gadaa*. There were *abbaa alanga* from each branch of Gulu, Malu, [*gosa*, or localized clans] etc. … *Guuma* is paid to parents of the person who has been killed by a given individual. The two conflicting parties that were involved in this type of conflict are made to reconcile and to forgive each other's fault. The retired *gadaa* leaders are responsible to organize issues like this. They used to make decision over dispute concerning properties. The *abbaa alanga* were responsible to resolve conflicts between individuals (Interview 3 – Walliso, 27 November 1998).

We were surprised by such vivid descriptions provided in an area where the *gadaa* system is supposed to have disappeared more than a century ago. Even the Boorana elders do not usually provide such a portrait of a system they are currently living in. Of course, some of our informants were educated town dwellers; hence we have to consider the possibility that they might have been influenced by current literature on *gadaa*. However, they describe some functional and terminological variants that, to our knowledge, are not provided in any written source, showing that we are dealing with a local oral tradition free from secondary feedback.

The relevant fact in terms of symbolic interpretation is that, before incorporation into the Ethiopian state, Oromo society was a highly ordered, complex society, characterized by a democratic political system. This set of ideas is evoked by the *gadaa* system according to the logic, notions, traditions, and political experience of the Oromo only. This constellation of positive meanings can therefore be referred to as the core values of the 'Oromo political culture,' to differentiate it

from the 'official' political culture of the emerging Ethiopian state, henceforth called 'Ethiopian political culture'—fabricated by the state or its personnel or attributed to them.

The Oromo Role in Building the Empire

The narratives provided by the interviewed elders challenge the mainstream idea of the empire built through direct conquest by Menelik and the Amhara. The elders rather stress the Oromo role in this process. This idea is expressed mainly through Goobanaa, an Oromo military leader depicted in the narratives as someone who played a major military role in establishing Menelik's rule over Oromoland west of Addis Ababa. In the early phases, according to the elders, the Amhara tried to gain control over the area without intermediaries. The process went as follows, according to an informant from Walliso.

> Amhara came from Amhara land. They first planned to take over Oromo territory. Then they made a military campaign. They sent their soldiers. They evicted the Oromo people living near their territory. These Oromo were called Ume Ergano. The Ume Ergano were defeated. They were renamed Amhara Ume. Then, Amhara who were led by *Dejazmatch* Bezu were sent to fight other Oromo. The Oromo defeated them for the second time (Interview 3 – Walliso, 27 November 1998).

The strategy of subjugating the Oromo by force apparently did not work. Eventually, as the interview below elucidates, the Amhara defeated the Oromo only by allying with Goobanaa Daacee and using firearms.

> After they failed to take over Oromo territory, they made a military alliance with Goobanaa Daacee.
>
> The Amhara found out that Goobanaa was a very strong man. Goobanaa was popular in Abichu area for his skilful fighting on horse back. Menelik got information concerning Goobanaa's fame. They decided to make agree-

> ment with him. They sent a priest to Goobanaa. He told Goobanaa that they [the Amhara] would give him an appointment if he would help them in putting Oromo territory under their control. The priest told Goobanaa that the Amhara were willing to give him half the territory they would occupy. He [the priest] also told Goobanaa that he would be crowned a king. He gave him presents like clothes and other attractive things. Then Goobanaa made a campaign against Oromo (Interview 3 – Walliso, 27 November 1998).

The elders from Holoota maintain the same view as elders from Walliso concerning the reasons why the Amhara defeated the Oromo.

> Menelik put the area under his control by allying with Goobanaa … . He promised him leadership over the entire land. Then Goobanaa waged war. They recruited military men with guns from Gondar. They used firearms that Oromo did not see before. Then they put Shawa land under their control. When they invaded Shawa land, the Oromo community living around Walliso strongly confronted them. The Walliso people could go up to an extent of killing the war leader *(Tor Mari)* of Goobanaa's army (Interview 1 – Holoota, 24 November 1998).

The implicit meaning of the text is that only the Oromo could defeat the Oromo. Although in the historiography Goobanaa is considered a mere general of Menelik, the interviewed Oromo elders stress his autonomous action of conquests with inputs from Menelik, namely firearms and means to recruit military men with guns from Gondar. He does it based on an equal share and equal level agreement with Menelik.

All informants from Holoota and Walliso explicitly refer to the strategy of dividing the Oromo in order to rule them.

> The Amhara used tactics to defeat the Oromo. They initiated one group of Oromo to fight against other

> Oromos. When they wanted to occupy Oromo territory, they first initiated the neighboring Oromo to go and fight against other Oromo groups. They used to spread mistrust among Oromo and create conflict between them.
>
> Goobanaa was allied with Menelik. Goobanaa spread propaganda over the entire country. He made agreement with Oromo living here. He invaded one group of Oromo by creating alliance with another. This was how he broke Oromo unity. This was how Amhara succeeded in occupying Oromo territory. Amhara did not defeat Oromo alone. They made Oromos to fight against each other (Interview 3 – Walliso, 27 November 1998).

Goobanaa is a powerful but highly controversial symbol among the Oromo. The dominant meaning is certainly a negative one. For instance, he is mostly recalled to convey the idea of collaborating with the dominant Ethiopian elite against Oromo interests for personal benefit. Indeed, as recounted above, Goobanaa is held responsible for breaking Oromo unity, an image recalling the idea of betrayal. Nevertheless, as is well known, symbols may convey multiple meanings and the attitude towards Goobanaa that is emerging from the interviews seems rather ambivalent. Indeed some of the informants have described Goobanaa as an *abbaa gadaa* in Jidda area, belonging to the Abichu, a senior Oromo clan. After termination of his service, he is said to have started to seek personal benefit. The reference to the status of *abbaa gadaa* may have a twofold implication. On the one hand, a holder of the office of the *abbaa gadaa* is a symbol of true Oromo-ness, with a positive component in it. On the other, Goobanaa personifies the idea of betrayal, because he gave up proper social principles and behaviors (see below).

In the interviews this positive element is never openly referred to; however on several occasions the informants implicitly expressed a sense of pride in Goobanaa, the fierce

fighter, the one who greatly contributed to the founding of the Ethiopian empire and the one who shared great power within the early imperial structure. In the opinion of an informant from Walliso: "In Ethiopian history the only two individuals appointed with the title of *ras* were *Ras* Darge and *Ras* Goobanaa. Goobanaa fought fiercely against different people" (Interview 3 – Walliso, 27 November 1998). If our interpretation is sound, the stress on Goobanaa's role and autonomy in building the empire gives a dimension of Oromo-ness to the process of the founding of the Ethiopian Empire.

This component seems further stressed in the part of the interviews dealing with Goobanaa's establishment of imperial administrative set up in Walliso area, through the *looko* institution.[11]

> In the beginning Goobanaa put three individuals under his control. He left the area to *Dejazmatch* Garedew, *Dejazmatch* Manaye and *Negadiras* Shosho [these are Amhara]. He did the same thing in Bacho. The people he appointed were not sitting idle. The three individuals he appointed started Christianizing famous individuals from the community. They did this at different spots. Then gradually strong Oromo men came under their control. Land came under the ownership of different individuals attached to the administrative system.
>
> When the Amhara came, they appointed strong Oromo leaders to serve their purpose. They appointed Dara Gadaa from Lemman, Bellamo Roge from Abadho, Quntura Garja from Kono, Bulto Galan Kefo, Guluma Lube and Sabaqa Cali from Maru. These were individuals appointed by Goobanaa.
>
> Goobanaa appointed the *looko*. There were three *looko* in the area. One *looko* could have 7 to 10 *balabat* under its administration. Each *balabat* was accountable to his own

> *looko*. The order that comes from the centre reaches the *looko* first and then goes to the *balabat*.
>
> The *looko* were Oromo.
>
> Gulumma Lube, Manne Bulli in Ammaya, Bellamo Roge in Walliso; Dhugo Bulto in Bullele, Ture Galate in Sodo; these were the *looko* in the area. They owned the whole territory (*Interview* 3 – Walliso, 27 November 1998).

What is evident in this narrative is that the Oromo were deeply involved in the administrative structure set by Goobanaa in Walliso. Some of the Oromo administrators were strong local Oromo leaders, such as Bellamo Roge who had previously been selected to one of the *gadaa* offices. The divisions entrusted to the *looko*, and the subdivisions under them reflected the clan and lineage structure previously administered under the *gadaa* system. In this area west of Addis Ababa, we have therefore evidence of indirect rule.

We have to consider that at that time Oromo society was already in transformation because of the trade. The *gadaa* collective governance was giving way to the emergence of authoritarian leaders in several places and with it the appearance of processes of stratification. In this dynamic context a new macro-factor appeared: firearms and colonization. The elders do not have a macro-vision of the colonial process, but they could clearly perceive the advent of a new era under the pressure of a new technological factor, firearms. Goobanaa made the choice to participate in the process and become a primary actor and embodiment of this change. The ambivalence of the elders for this choice and for the success of the fierce Oromo leader should not be a surprise.

The Empire as an Anti-society

In analyzing Oromo perception of the Ethiopian political culture, our central issue is to understand what type of Ethiopianess was established in the wake of Menelik's conquests. De-

spite the involvement of some Oromos in the Amhara administration of the Oromo society, the Oromo perception of the empire is extremely negative. There cannot be any doubt that for the Oromo the ultimate source of imperial authority was violence. This, again, can be traced through the life-history of Goobanaa. One informant notes, "At the time Goobanaa made the alliance with Menelik, he was in the bush. He used to rob and kill Oromo. He was a leader of bandits." (Interview 3 – Walliso, 27 November 1998).

The implication is clear. Although in practice Goobanaa was probably one of the emerging Oromo warlords in a dynamic economic and political environment, he is portrayed as an enemy of the Oromo participating in anti-social behavior even before his engagement with Menelik, basically a *shifta* (bandit) in the mold of other Amhara war leaders of the time. But Goobanaa was different because he fought against his own people and later adopted the methods of the Ethiopian empire against his own people:

> Goobanaa tortured many of his opponents. He used to mutilate the genitals of males. My grand uncle was one such victim… . He was called Indhe Asho. He was the brother of my grand father. Many people were mutilated. They treated them badly to make them become loyal.
>
> You have asked us what has happened after Goobanaa got victory in the area of Walliso. There was a song. The lyrics of that song manifest frustration. It is as follows.
>
> Ha cufanii balbala
> Let doors be closed
> Maal cufamni akkanaa?
> What kind of closing is this?
> Gannii namaa hinbarritu
> The rainy season feels prolonged
> Dubbii Goobanaa Dhacee

The matter of Goobanaa Dhachee
Malii Dubbin akkanaa?
How awkward a matter it is?
Namni nama himbirmatu
When nobody comes to your rescue
(*Interview* 3 – Walliso, 27 November 1998)

Other elders who were present during the same interview provided the following explanation of the song:

> Have you really understood the implications of the poem? Many people were killed, tortured and their genitals mutilated. They were completely defeated. There was no family whose member was not affected in one way or another. People were confused about what they should do. They were confused whether to live or to die. The poem sung by one of the captives indicates the desperate condition they faced. (*Interview* 3 – Walliso, 27 November 1998)

When dealing with the horrific consequences of Goobanaa's choices, the elders abandoned the model of independent behavior and put the blame on his Amhara allies. In the words of one informant, "Goobanaa was told to reward those who would submit to his authority and punish those who would reject it (Interview 3 – Walliso, 27 November 1998).[12] This tendency is better exemplified by the narration of Goobanaa's death. Goobanaa, the putative betrayer of proper Oromo society finds himself betrayed by his allies.

> *Ras* Goobanaa was a prominent person during the rule of Menelik. He fought against people in Gojjam, Gonder, Wollo, etc. He helped Menelik control the country by force. Menelik arranged marriages between one of his relative and *Ras* Goobanaa to make him loyal to his authority. Then Menelik and his associates feared that *Ras* Goobanaa could claim authority to rule the whole country. In order to get rid of this uncertainty, they poisoned

> *Ras* Goobanaa and ended his life. They killed him after they made him their brother-in-law (Interview 2 – Holoota, 24 November 1998).

This part strengthens our interpretation of the ambivalent attitude towards Goobanaa. The equal share agreement with Menelik could have justified Goobanaa's attempt to build a new political system. The empire was anti-society, but still a victorious one, one to which the Oromo could have taken part, an idea symbolically evoked by Goobanaa's marriage. But the final betrayal of the powerful Oromo fighter, someone who had a significant share in founding the empire, put an end to this political project and to the Oromo-ness that could have been forged at the outset of the imperial identity construction. In the elders' narratives, Goobanaa is never directly addressed as a betrayer. Rather, the Amhara betrayal of him looms large. As a result, the Oromo are condemned to a role of rural servants (*gabar*) and have to carry the yoke (see below).

Regarding the Oromo *balabat* and *looko*, they are essentially reduced to opportunists who collaborate with the victors for personal benefit. The feeling towards the *balabat* is expressed well in the following narration referred to in a case of land dispute:

> Oromo peasants then reacted to an Oromo *balabat* in this way: "we have exploited this land together long ago. We have been fighting against our enemies together. How did it really happen that you order us today?" Then the Oromo expressed their objection to the Oromo *balabat* who were allied with Amhara by refusing to hand over land to them. They rather handed it over to the Amhara *balabat* (Interview 1 – Holoota, 24 November 1998).

The Economic Exploitation of the Rural Community

In his historical study on the food supply for Addis Ababa, Tekalign Wolde-Maryam (1995) has appropriately argued that

the political and military processes of the late-nineteenth century lie at the origin of urban control over land and labor in the hinterlands. In the most fertile parts of the empire, including the area west of Addis Ababa, the land in the territories occupied by the colonists was demarcated and property was systematically registered with the introduction of the *gabar* (a word derived from Shawan land tenure) land title assigned to individuals. As noted by Tekalign Wolde-Maryam (1995: 11), land registration was interpreted by several Ethiopian and expatriate historians as a process of privatization, commoditization or westernization. All of these ideas related to modernity and several scholars have explicitly mentioned this land reform as a prelude of Haile-Selassie's more systematic attempt to modernize the country in the post-Italian period. Our interviews, while describing in detail the exploitation imposed on the Oromo rural community, confirm Tekalign's rejection of the idea of modernizing land relations, since access to land became 'increasingly politicized, rather than to be separate from state or group politics as the concept of freehold suggests" (1995:17).

Land demarcation and registration were used to impose several types of tribute and *corvée* labor in favor of the state, the *balabats* and other nobility, and the settled-armed soldiers.[13] Although the *gabar* land title could be transferred, the peasant never initiated such a process owing to a rational individualistic decision in the absence of any recourse to non-agricultural occupation. Transfer of the *gabar*'s land rights mostly occurred as a result of land confiscation, a systematic means to impose the will of the conquerors. Indeed the interviews conducted in Holoota and Walliso clearly show that physical punishment and, above all, eviction from land were the main coercive means of backing the political system, something running opposite to the concept of 'private holding of land.' If the political and economic practice is considered together with the theoretical mainstream representation of the land tenure system intro-

duced by the Shawans, then land registration simply appears as a way to transfer land rights from the local Oromo communities to the Ethiopian state and its personnel, either Amhara or Oromo collaborators, and as a powerful coercive political instrument. This is etched in our informant's memory as follows.

> Those people had about 700 or 1000 soldiers. These soldiers came and occupied Oromo land … . These soldiers made individuals pay taxes by giving them tickets. After giving tickets those farmers were required to hand over part of their produce. When the farmers hesitated, giving away part of their produce, these soldiers would automatically expel them from their lands.
>
> The Oromo were the ones who would grind grain for Menelik's soldiers, who were predominantly Amhara. The Oromo used to fetch drinking water, firewood, hay and also transport the yoke for Menelik. Those Oromo who refuse to obey the orders of Menelik had their land confiscated.
>
> Yes, the Oromo owned horses and did go to war, too. Those Oromo, who became loyal by cutting grass, fetching firewood, grinding grain and also going to war … could maintain their land. To the contrary, the Oromo who refused to obey and accept the orders did lose their land. Even those living somewhere away from the town went to war in order to maintain their land. The ownership of land was based on one's loyalty to the king. If one refused to go to war, his land would be given to those who went to fight under the order of the king.
>
> They obey orders because of their fear of arrest and fear of being tied up by *sansalat, igirbirat* ….
>
> If anyone fails to fulfill one's obligation, one would be put in prison and lose one's land (Interview 1 – Holoota, 24 November 1998).

> If one fails to pay tax, he would immediately be imprisoned. They were kept in chains (Interview 2 – Holoota, 24 November 1998).

The exploitation of the rural communities continued through the subsequent political dispensations of twentieth-century Ethiopia. In terms of economic relations, taxation and extraction of all the available rural surplus, remained extremely high despite several tax reforms introduced during the imperial time (Schwab 1972). Later, the *derg* introduced new modes of state exploitation (Baker 1990: 220-3).

Rural producers carried the brunt of the cost of modernization, without any benefit accruing to them in return (1993: 49-66). Illustrating this, Fassil G. Kiros writes:

> The burden of modernization fell on the rural producers in more ways than one. They were made to provide most of the commodity for export. They provided tax revenues required for the maintenance and expansion of new state apparatus. And only they could provide the food and other raw materials required for the support of an increasing number of dwellers of the new towns. And all this, as already stressed, with little or no change in the structure and technology of the traditional production system (1993: 57-58).

Fassil further goes on to say, "Urbanisation in Ethiopia has not been characterised by mutually reinforcing processes of change involving the rural and urban areas … . The new Ethiopian urban centres … were principally centres of consumption rather than production" (1993: 62). Various services, including education, were largely provided in towns, with the rural population having a very limited access. The urban–rural interaction was established as a one way relation of exploitation and remained in effect through all phases of Ethiopian history.

Urban–Rural Interrelation and Ethno-Cultural Dichotomy

Our research confirms what is already evident in other studies that most of the earlier towns originated as military posts and grew as centers of political control and tax extractions (Baker 1990: 212).[14] They became the focus of the imperial structure, with the presence of mostly Amhara administrators and a large number of soldiers. Over time towns acquired more and more functions and attracted larger numbers of migrants, mostly coming from distant areas. Surveys conducted during our field research show that non-Oromo immigrants formed the majority of the town population.

The local communities, by definition "rural" since a town settlement was non-existent before the building of the empire, had little involvement in urban life, where the Amharic language was used. The local cultural models, values, languages and modes of governance survived the conquest and subsequent occupation, but they were relegated to the rural context deemed incongruent with modernity. Accordingly, towns came to be associated with the new imperial polity and its associated functions, while the rural environment remained the 'domain of the (local) people.' Still at the time of Bassi's research among the Boorana Oromo of southern Ethiopia, the rural actors used to differentiate sharply between *aadaa Booranaa* (the culture of the Boorana-Oromo) and *aadaa katamaa* (the culture of the town) or *aadaa mangiiftii* (the culture of the government). The two sets of norms and values, the Oromo on one side and the town/government (Ethiopian) on the other, are thus dichotomized and associated with rural and urban spaces, respectively.

The conflicting relation between the urban and the rural domains acquires an ethnic dimension, since the urban setting is often identified with the Amhara and the rural invariably with the Oromo. This perspective is partly misleading. Although the symbols of urban, or Ethiopian, culture are predominantly

Amhara (mainly the Amharic language and Coptic religion), the preliminary analysis of our surveys in towns west of Addis Ababa shows that members of all ethnic groups participate in the urban/Ethiopian culture, though with differentiated levels of involvement and as mere individuals accepting the dominant symbols. Inter-ethnic marriage in urban areas was common before 1991 (although asymmetric across the different groups) and most urban solidarity groups had an inter-ethnic composition. There were no distinct patterns of spatial distribution based on ethnicity as one can find, for instance, in Isiolo (Hjort af Ornäs 1990: 145-8) or Marsabit in Kenya (Marco Bassi's personal observation in 1986). Our data suggest that ethnic integration in urban settings is relatively high and that the Oromo participate in it, if they were willing to give up their Oromo culture, values, and symbols. However, we have also found out that the main cleavage is one that differentiates this urban context from the rural one, fitting into Lipton's (1977) model concerning the conflict between rural and urban classes. Urban-rural intermarriage was non-existent and the door-to-door survey showed that most successful Oromo town dwellers come from distant Oromo areas. Successful Oromo town dwellers participate in the national economy as any other Ethiopian, but they are not the focus of dynamic relations with the surrounding countryside. The rural population is generally excluded from trade and other town-based economic activities. Towns in Oromia have thus failed to provide a ground for diversifying the rural economy and for integrating the rural population into the wider national and international economy, as occurs in other east African small towns, such as Isiolo and Thika in Kenya, in southern Sudan or in southern Somalia (Hjort af Ornäs 1990, Andreasen 1990). In short, small towns in Oromia failed to serve as a catalyst for rural improvements.

Failed Modernization

In this article, we have analyzed the formation of the Ethiopian Empire based on the memories of Oromo elders in towns west of Addis Ababa. In our view, this process is the symbolic foundation of the Ethiopian state and it lies at the core of Ethiopian political culture. The so-called 'modern' Ethiopia is an empire, whose legitimacy was based on a dynastic principle similar to several nineteenth century European states. However, while for the Europeans dynastic legitimacy was a traditional and accepted principle (of course challenged by revolutionary ideas), in Ethiopia, a significant portion of the people in the south considered it an Abyssinian tradition that was imposed on them by those who became their rulers through a process of internal colonialism supported by Europeans firearms. The people in the empire, whose tradition was based on different political institutions and principles, as in the case of the *gadaa* of the Oromo, simply were not able to recognize political legitimacy based on dynastic claims. The descriptions of the *gadaa* system provided by elders show that different (ethnic or local) political models are still vivid in the memory of the people. Not only do Oromo urban dwellers remember, transmit and recall them, they also clearly state, in all the towns that have been studied, that the *gadaa* system, though weakened, has always remained operational and that people continue to behave respecting the *aadaa-seera* (culture of rule of law) (interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). *Gadaa* is currently presented by urban elders in towns close to Addis Ababa as a democratic and egalitarian mode of political organization, which sharply contrasts with the hierarchical political culture of the Ethiopian empire.

In other words, the dynastic principle and the connected symbols of political legitimacy could not be shared nor accepted by most Oromo. Indeed, the discourse produced by the elders tells us that the victorious system was imposed by means of military conquest and maintained through violence and other

coercive means. In Oromo narratives represented in interviews 1 to 6, sheer brute force emerges as the sole source of Ethiopian state power, and this holds true throughout the *derg* period as well. The elders of Ambo stressed that the performance of the *gadaa* ritual in their area disappeared only when the *derg* openly banned the institution and forbade people from participating in even the simpler ritual obligations (Interview 4 – Ambo, 21 August 1999).

Despite this contrast, we have identified that the Oromo have an ambivalent attitude towards the founding of the Ethiopia state. In a period of profound social, political, and technological transformation, their cognitive scheme is dominated by the possibility of being a part of Ethiopia, but this was rendered impossible by the behaviour of the Abyssinians, the real betrayers of the common project of building a shared Ethiopian home. The lack of political legitimacy actually prevented the majority of the Oromo from participating in the Ethiopian political process. As the system developed in the century that followed its founding, the Ethiopian empire-state grew increasingly exclusive rather than becoming inclusive of the left out citizens. Being outside Ethiopia's political system and political culture is not perceived to be a conscious choice made by the Oromo, but rather a condition imposed on them by the state. In general, what we discovered in the interviews we conducted are both startling and revealing. They are startling in the sense that the Amhara conquerors chose the dangerous path of exclusion and revealing in the sense that it shows why nationalist Oromos feel they have no attachment and loyalty to the Ethiopian state.

Our central question is nonetheless whether this entrenched political culture has been changed by the recent political transformation of Ethiopia. The fact that the elders of the largest nation in East Africa continue in 1998-2000 to speak the language of political exclusion from the state and its political processes, nearly a decade after the formal launching

of a program of democratization and decentralization, is a strong indication that something has gone terribly awry. The images of Goobanaa the betrayer and betrayed, the imperial system viewed as an anti-society, the vivid descriptions of the *gadaa* system by Oromo urban elite, the fact that *gadaa* is not only still operational but also in full revival are dominant symbols in the elders' narratives, all expressing a strong grass-roots demand for political innovation.

The introduction of democratic federalism was a significant step in the effort to link the state decision-making processes to local or ethnic perspectives in context of modern party politics. This is a phase of political change comparable to the colonial transformation in Africa, with a radical change of political models, rhetoric, symbols and rituals. Once again, the Oromo participated in the founding conference and the Transitional Government of Ethiopia in the early 1990s as was the OLF, the historic Oromo political organization. The Oromo once again found themselves out of the new political construction at a very early stage after the OLF proved its competitive electoral potential in the 1992 snap elections. Thus, Oromo leaders who collaborated in the new political project and the Oromo population had to face the harsh reality of political repression and exclusion (Leencoo Lata 1999).

Symbolically speaking, the exclusion and repression of the OLF leadership and its followers since 1992 is a reenactment of Menelik's betrayal of Goobanaa. Whether the instrument is marriage between families of war leaders or the new device of democratic federalism, the result is the same: the Oromo would not be allowed to be equal members of the common Ethiopian home. Oromo elders seem all too cognizant of the parallelism of history and contemporary politics. By speaking about Goobanaa in ambivalent terms, the elders were actually speaking metaphorically about the present. Since 1992, the Oromo in Ethiopia have been forced into the unenviable dilemma of choosing between participation in the con-

ditional electoral process or in underground political activity. As the elders put it: "people are confused about what they should do. They are confused whether to live or to die." Once again, 'being left out' is not perceived as the conscious choice of the Oromo, but a condition imposed on them by the exclusivist Ethiopian political culture, which the governing group vowed to change, but continued to practice.

Clearly, the mere formal introduction of a new constitutional model is not sufficient to enter into an effective democratic political system. In order to enhance the principles contained in the federal constitution, promote a broader identification with the new state's symbol, and augment political participation, it is necessary effectively to move away from the authoritarian conception of keeping a permanent line of demarcation between 'the state' and 'its citizens.' In an era when global wars are fought in the name of democratization and human rights, the participation of popular parties in national elections is the minimum acceptable standard for a successful democratization of a state. An effective change of political culture needs to take place in Ethiopia with the convergent efforts of all actors, national and international.

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Interviews

List of unpublished interviews conducted by Gemetchu Megerssa during the Research on "Ethnic Relations in Major Towns Around Addis Ababa: A comparative study of the dynamics of social solidarity," Department of Sociology and Social Administration, Addis Ababa University, Ethio-Italian University Co-operation Program).

1. Holoota, 24 November 1998: Interview with Megerssa Dadhi (translation Doyo Hargesa).
2. Holoota, 24 November 1998: Interview with Damissie Dhuki, Alemu Beyene, Megersa Dadhi (translation Doyo Hargesa).
3. Walliso, 27 November 1998: interview with Tujo Erge, Baqala Banti, Tafara Edha (translation Doyo Hargesa).
4. Ambo, 21 August 1999: interview with Walde-Samayat Waaqtole (translation Doyo Hargesa).
5. Ambo, 22 August 1999: interview with *dejazmatch* Jabessa Dahe (translation Doyo Hargesa).
6. Dambi Dollo, 9 September 1999: interview with Atomsa Weyesa (translation Sora Jarso).

Notes

1. Personal communication at the conference in Addis Ababa in 1999.
2. For instance, Botswana, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Somaliland, Zambia and Nigeria have established House of Chiefs or House of Elders.
3. We use 'feudal' here to refer to the land-based relations but we do not imply any further analogy with European feudalism. For instance in Ethiopia slavery was a dominant feature.
4. See, for instance, Tsegaye Tegenu's image of the fiscal military state (Menelik's empire) represented as an extension of the *Gäbar Madäriya*

fiscal system established in Shawa during the beginning of the nineteenth century (1996: 86-100).

5. Baissa Lemmu (1971) and Dinsa Leepissa (1975) are two relevant early cases. The ideas contained in their studies announce later discourse on bridging customary and modern governance, including Asmarom Legesse's *Oromo Democracy,* which only appeared in 2000. As mentioned by the author: "this book on Oromo democracy developed in the context of intense discussions at the conferences of the Oromo Studies Association beginning in Toronto, Canada in 1991, rather than in the Ethiopian Studies Association meetings" (2000: xii).
6. For comparison, see earlier estimation by Mesfin Wolde-Mariam (1985) and Dassalegn Rahmato (1990).
7. Elders were left to freely speak about broadly defined topics or to answer general questions, with little interference by the interviewer.
8. An earlier version of this paper was presented by Marco Bassi at the XIV International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (ICES), Addis Ababa, 2000, and submitted for publication to the XIV ICES Committee. It was ultimately excluded from the *Proceedings* without formal notification.
9. Ethiopia radically differs from other regions of Africa where slave trade has been a dominant economic and political factor in the previous centuries. Several historians have defined the nineteenth century as the time of the great transformation of Africa, with an increase by about 10 times of international exchange of goods different from human beings at the continental level. In Eastern Africa, the slave trade remained the dominant commercial activity until the 1870s (Gentili 1995: 48-9) and slavery was still flourishing at the beginning of the 20th century (Pankhurst 1968). Based on his study of the conditions in Ethiopia just before the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, Major Polson Newman finds that, despite the Edicts against slave trading "the whole social and economic structure of the country is dependent on slavery, which is supported and practiced by the Church as well as by High Court and Government officials" (1936: 83). He reports the practice of three aspects of the matter, domestic slavery, slave-raiding and slave trading (1936: 84).
10. According to Bahru Zewde, this battle occurred in 1888 (1991: 61).
11. We have found reference to the *looko* institution only in Walliso area. As shown in the narration below, in this area Goobanaa nominated Oromo *looko* to serve as intermediaries at the highest administrative level, with several Oromo *balabat* under each of them.
12. This is the well-known "politics of stick and carrot," typical of authoritarian political system. This metaphor is often recalled with reference to

current Ethiopian politics, showing a substantial continuity of the Ethiopian political culture here described.

13. The interviews conducted in Holoota and Walliso perhaps give a better understanding of the incredible burden put on the rural community.
14. Other towns, as Walliso, Ambo and Dambi Dollo, originated for various different reasons, but soon acquired the administrative and military functions.

The Ethiopian State and the Future of the Oromo: The Struggle for 'Self-Rule' and 'Shared-Rule'

Merera Gudina

The history of modern Ethiopia is dominated by themes of the 'making' and 'unmaking' of the country. While imperial conquests, state formation, and economic exploitation shaped the 'making' of modern Ethiopia in the second half of the nineteenth century, class and national struggles aimed at 'unmaking' the historical process that created the multi-ethnic Ethiopian polity dominated the second half of the twentieth century. The class and national struggles of 1960s and 1970s that precipitated the revolutionary upheaval of 1974, the various struggles that led to the change of regime in 1991, and the ongoing struggles for self-rule and democracy are all part of the 'unmaking' endeavor.

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This paper argues that even though in recent years centrifugal tendencies have gained publicity, if not traction, the 'remaking' of Ethiopia on equal terms has been an achievable objective of the class and national struggles.

A closer look at the nature of the perennial struggles for the 'remaking' of Ethiopia clearly shows the centrality of competing ethnic nationalist claims for an equitable share of power and resources under the command of the state (Merera 2002). Successive regimes before the 1970s attempted to address the national question through assimilation of the conquered subjects and the establishment of a unitary state controlled by the members of the hegemonic official culture. The military regime (1974-1991) recognized the problem of nationalities and attempted to resolve it through the regional autonomy formula. The proposed solution failed to address the competing claims because it was informed by and presented as a socialist project rather than as a genuine national response to a vexing problem.

The present regime's approach is an ethnicity-based federal setup designed to lead the country along a liberal democratic trajectory. What was implemented as democratization and shared rule by the new regime to address the demands and claims of the country's diverse communities appears to be faltering. The contradictory actions of the regime of declaring democratization and decentralization as a policy and practicing centralization in fact has failed to effect a major departure from the country's autocratic/authoritarian past. Hence, democratization in a manner that ensures both 'self-rule' and 'shared rule' has failed. The Oromia region, which is the focus of this study, is a case in point of the degree of failure of the regime's policies and the continued struggle for genuine autonomy and democracy on the part of the local population.

This article begins by assessing the historical processes that made the 'making' of modern Ethiopia possible in order to trace the genesis of the country's perennial political chal-

lenges. It then proceeds to discuss the development of the modern Oromo nationalism and Ethiopian government responses to the question of nationalities in order to show how the national question was radicalized and morphed into a demand for secession. In the next section, I will argue that the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front's (EPRDF) top-down approach, centralization drive, and hegemonic aspiration, have seriously impeded the process of democratization and the demand for self-rule. I will show this by weighing the demand of the Oromo people against the promises made by the government. Overall, my analysis will show that the demand for the 'unmaking' of the multinational Ethiopian polity has proven undesirable, unachievable, and unworkable. The primary goal of the various national struggles has always been the 'remaking' of Ethiopia based on the equality of the various groups and the appropriate response to the political demands is one that favors the formula of self-rule for the nations and nationalities and shared-rule at the federal level. While the article discusses the role of the Oromo people in the democratization of the Ethiopian state, its propositions have practical implication for the larger Ethiopian society.

The Incorporation of the Oromo on Unequal Terms

The southward expansion of imperial Ethiopia was preceded by centuries of Oromo penetration into 'historic Ethiopia.' By the turn of the eighteenth century, the Oromo elite were playing a dominant role in the ruling houses of Gondar, Wallo, Gojjam and Shawa. The dominance of the Oromo elite of 'historic Ethiopia' during the period of Ethiopian history known as 'Era of the Princes' (1769-1855) was so great that Tewodros II (r.1855-1868) made ending the supremacy of the Oromo the central mission of his political career (Bahru 1991:31). The Yejju princes who dominated court politics at Gondar later produced political stalwarts such as Taitu Bitul, *Negus* Michael (Mohammed Ali) who fathered Iyyasu (r. 1913-

1916), and King Taklehaymanot of Gojjam. Products of the Oromo penetration of 'historic Ethiopia,' these figures briefly controlled Menelik's empire in the early part of the twentieth century. During the reverse Abyssinian expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Oromo elite stood on both sides of the fence, as conquerors and the conquered, which makes the Oromo history in Ethiopia a dual history.

By the time Tewodros started the process that led to the creation of a modern multi-ethnic empire-state around the 1850s,[1] historic Ethiopia had experienced feudal anarchy for over eighty years and central authority existed in name only (Getahun, 1974; Bahru, 1991; Teshale, 1995). Tewodros' dream was to unite historic Ethiopia by ending both feudal anarchy and the supremacy of the Oromo elite during the period. In fact, although the then dominant factors of political mobilization were religion and region, Tewodros was the first modern Ethiopian ruler who explicitly recognized the ethnic factor in his project of empire-building and consciously challenged the supremacy of the Oromo princes over the Abyssinian kingdom. Ethnicity became an additional key factor in Ethiopian politics, although it remained an undercurrent until the 1960s.[2]

After a brief period of Yohannes's reign (1872–1879), a new power centre emerged in Shawa under the leadership of Menelik. The Kingdom of Shawa started southward with the incorporation of the Oromo of Shawa, whence it rapidly extended to the rest of the south (Bahru, 1991). One kingdom after another and one independent principality after another succumbed to the Shawan army. Outnumbered and outgunned, and mostly divided, some Oromo communities submitted peacefully while others put up heroic resistance (Getahun, 1974; Bahru, 1991; Addis Hiwot, 1975). Menelik's campaign successfully tripled the size of the empire and incorporated dozens of ethnic groups of diverse languages and cultures. Though the emerging power was peripheral to

Ethiopia's historic political center, by the turn of the twentieth century, the new power elite was able to effect an enduring transformation in the history, geography and demography of the Ethiopian state (Donham & James, 1986; Bahru, 1991; Teshale, 1995).

The core of the Shawan power elite were the Amhara, who successfully incorporated and assimilated the Oromo elite of Shawa with its three-pronged ideology of Orthodox Christianity, Amhara cultural ethos, and commitment to Ethiopian unity with Shawa as its centre. Once the task of incorporating the Oromo elite of Shawa into the emerging politico-military structure was accomplished, the conquest of the other regions became far easier. The whole expansion took less than a quarter of a century as access of the Shawan army to European firearms dramatically changed the balance of force. The role played by firearms proved decisive, especially from the Oromo nationalists' perspective (Asafa, 1993; Holcomb & Sisai, 1990).

Outside Shawa, Menelik and his generals extended the war of conquest to the west, east and south. Menelik won a decisive victory in 1882 at the Battle of Himbaaboo, in today's Western Oromia. This opened western Oromo lands whose rulers submitted one after another with little or no resistance. Four years later, Arsii fell to the Shawans, despite tenacious resistance by its population. The fall of Arsii allowed Menelik's army to march southeast to capture the eastern city-state of Harar at the battle of Chelenquo in 1887. The conquest of these regions gave Menelik access to real wealth-coffee and gold among other things–which significantly enhanced his political position and military might in the then emerging modern empire state of Ethiopia (Getahun, 1974; Addis Hiwot, 1975; Bahru, 1991). In the subsequent century, the Shawan Amhara elite, the embodiment of Orthodox Christianity, Amharic language and the Abyssinian cultural values, dominated multi-ethnic Ethiopia in a manner unprecedented in the country's long recorded history.

After the creation of the empire-state was completed, the creation of "one Ethiopian nation" continued under what was then termed *makinat* (pacification and/or colonization). *Makinat* involved evangelization of the local population, institutionalization of a new system of political control, and imposition of a new political class, culture and language on the indigenous populations such as the Oromo. As the result, new centres of political and military control, generally known as *ketemas* or garrison towns mushroomed across the south.[3] Cultural subjugation was carried out through Amharization, which accorded Amhara culture a dominant position as national culture and the Amharic language as the *lingua franca* of the Ethiopian state (Addis Hiwot, 1975; Teshale, 1995). The imposition of the Amharic language became increasingly critical over the years as it became the sole language of the judiciary and administration and non-Amharic speakers such as the Oromo had to depend on interpreters. It also became the medium of instruction in primary school students, which negatively affected the employment opportunities for non-Amharic speakers. The cumulative effect of all these measures was the entrenchment of ethnic domination that left a permanent grievance in the subjected peoples of the south where the bulk of the Oromo population lived (Getahun, 1974; Teshale, 1995).

One of the more enduring, repressive and damaging parts of the "nation-building" measures was the imposition of a new type of political control on the newly conquered regions of the south (Getahun, 1974). The conquest had been bloody and the fate of millions was left to the mercy of the Shawan *conquistadors*. The subjected peoples paid very dearly in land, produce, and the *corvée* labour to meet the demands of the colonists. The land of the indigenous peoples was confiscated and given to the military and quasi-military administrators and the soldiers under their command (Addis Hiwot, 1975; Gebru T., 1996).

Furthermore, to grab the new opportunities created in Oromo areas and much of the south, the elite and the surplus population from the north flocked to these areas as administrators, court officials, soldiers, interpreters and priests. An alien system of rule known as a *nafxenyaa* (settlers) system of political, military and economic control through the power of the gun was imposed on the southern peoples. (Markakis, 1974; Teshale, 1995). Notably, this was a vastly different system from one that applied to the north, introducing a north-south dichotomy to the country's political economy which remained in place until the popular upsurge of 1974.

Viewed from a comparative perspective, the Shawan expansion and the resultant politico-economic consequences were far more brutal and devastating in the south than in the north. In the north, the political project involved re-unifying regions, which had been part of the Abyssinian polity for centuries, and peoples who shared the Christian tradition and Abyssinian cultural ethos for millennia (Getahun, 1974; Markakis, 1974; Addis Hiwot, 1975; Teshale, 1995). In the south, it meant bringing into the emerging empire-state new lands and new peoples on unequal terms. For the south, the outcome was a dual oppression: national as well as class. The result was one polity that contained two markedly different systems.[4] The oppression in the south was very severe and different from the situation in the north, Addis Hiwot (1975: 30ff) deemed it appropriate to describe it an "internal colonialism," a term preferred by Oromo and Somali nationalists with the agenda of separation and adopted by several Oromo and non-Oromo academics (Donham & James 1986; Holcomb & Sisai, 1990).

By the end of Menelik's reign, the north-south dichotomized system was firmly in place and the south, though formally part of the empire, was in fact a colony. Haile Sellasie, who emerged as the dominant political figure from the post-Menelik succession struggle, despite his Oromo ancestry, continued the "nation-building" process on a much more naked

and narrow ethnocratic basis. During his rule, inequality among the various ethno-national groups widened and deepened, thereby creating a propitious ground on which the ethnic-based liberation movements could emerge in the period after the Italo-Ethiopian war (Teshale, 1995; Gebru, 1996).

Modern Oromo Nationalism and Responses of Ethiopian Regimes

In the post-1960 period, new challenges against the regime increasingly began to take the form of either class or national struggles. As Bahru (1991: 209) put it, "Opposition to the regime … had many facets. Peasants rebelled against increasing demands on their produce. Nationalities rose in arms for self-determination. Intellectuals struggled for their vision of a just and equitable order." The Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) began championing the common class struggles against the imperial regime while the Eritrean and Oromo movements became the bearers of national and/or regional struggles (Kiflu, 1993). Political mobilization along class and national lines, which were to become the dominant forms of struggle in the post-1960 period, were largely the logical outcome of national and class oppression-the bedrock of most injustices under the imperial regime (Addis Hiwot, 1975; Markakis, 1987).

In the case of the Oromo, the ethno-national struggle was expressed in the first Oromo-wide movement, the Macca and Tuuluma Self-Help Association (MTSHA). This organization, considered by many Oromos to be the pioneer of modern Oromo nationalism, indeed contributed immensely to the creation of self-awareness among the Oromo youth. The idea of Oromo nationalism began among the Oromo elite as they became increasingly aware of their secondary status in the imperial regime's military and civilian bureaucracy in the 1950s. After the establishment of the MTSHA, it was embraced by Oromo students and the younger-generation intelligentsia, who totally radicalized the Oromo question and elevated it to the

level of the demand for the "right to self-determination" (Olana, 1993; Merera 2002). Between 1970 and 1974, the ideology of the "colonial thesis"[5] took shape [see Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) Programme, 1976] and thereafter became the rallying force of political mobilization for most of the Oromo elite (Merera, 2002). After the MTSHA, the Bale Oromo resistance against land alienation and unbearable taxation served as an additional catalyst for the growth of modern Oromo nationalism (Gebru, 1977 & 1996). In fact, the Bale uprising was a more sustained struggle and had a reverberating effect among the radical Ethiopian students in general and the Oromo intelligentsia in particular (Kiflu, 1993). Together the two movements constituted the genesis of modern Oromo nationalism.

The success of the MTSHA in attracting the Oromo elite of the day signalled to the imperial regime the coming danger represented by Oromo nationalism. The Bale Oromo uprising had further raised the spectre of an Oromo-wide armed movement that could be supported by Somalia against the imperial establishment. The response of the imperial regime to the emerging Oromo nationalism was both quick and brutal. The leaders of the MTSHA were herded to prison, where some died and others served long prison terms, while the guerrilla fighters of Bale were forced to disband and their leaders negotiated for minor government posts. However, the suppression of both movements did not succeed in obviating the impending political problem since the seeds of modern Oromo nationalism had already been sown. In fact, a more radical demand for the right to self-determination soon galvanized the Oromo intelligentsia and youth in the 1970s, which partly contributed to the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 that ended aristocratic rule.

The military junta that took power in 1974 seemed intent on transforming the country in all other respects except in its approach to the national question, which had been the major

source of crisis of the Ethiopian state. In a way, its answer to the nationalities' problem did not constitute a major break from the imperial regime's policies. The military elite possessed no well-thought-out program of political reform, except the vague motto of "Ethiopia First." Nevertheless, it moved quickly to embrace the left's political agenda of a socialist revolution. Socialism was declared the official ideology of the state on 20 December 1974, in order to capture the imagination of the revolutionary youth, who were subsequently sent to the countryside to organize the peasantry, and claim the mantle for revolutionary leadership from the civilian left.

Of the measures taken by the military junta to improve its socialist credentials, the Land Reform Proclamation of 1975 was the one that directly addressed the main historical grievance of the various ethnic groups in much of the south, including the Oromo. The decree on religious equality and the separation of church and state in Ethiopia was also part of the new regime's response to the religious/ethnic inequality perpetuated under the imperial regime (Kiflu, 1993). However, a more programmatic and direct response to the rising demands of ethnic nationalisms came with the declaration of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) in April 1976. The regional autonomy formula was included in the NDR program as part of building socialism in Ethiopia, which reads in part:

> The right to self-determination of all nationalities will be recognized and fully respected. No nationality will dominate another one since the history, culture, language and religion of each nationality will have equal recognition in accordance with the spirit of socialism.
>
> The unity of Ethiopia's nationalities will be based on their common struggle against feudalism, imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism and reactionary forces. This united struggle is based on the desire to construct new life and a new

> society based on equality, brotherhood and mutual respect. ...Given Ethiopia's existing situation, the problem of nationalities can be resolved if each nationality is accorded full right to self-government. This means that each nationality will have regional autonomy to decide on matters concerning its internal affairs. Within its environs, it has the right to determine the contents of its political, economic and social life, use its own language and elect its own leaders and administration to head its own organs.
>
> This right of self-government of nationalities will be implemented in accordance with all democratic procedures and principles Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC,1976).

The promise of the NDR Program was short-lived. After the departure of the All Ethiopian Revolutionary Movement, (MEISON), which attracted a good part of the Oromo radical intelligentsia and was believed to be the main author of the NDR Program, the regime began to portray ethnic nationalism as the most serious threat to the revolution. Ethnic and regional movements were labelled counter-revolutionary forces and a war of annihilation was unleashed against them. The Eritrean, Tigrayan, Oromo, and Western Somalia liberation fronts had to face the military regime's much enhanced war machine, lavishly supplied by the Soviet Union (Dawit, 1989).

Once the ethnonationlist threat to the military junta's power was eliminated, the regional autonomy program was resurrected in the National Constitution of 1987, which provided a regional autonomy status, albeit on paper, to some regions. Based on the new Constitution, the country's administrative structure was subdivided into 29 regions. Only a few of these, particularly Eritrea, Tigray, Asab and Dire Dawa, were accorded autonomous status, which was in practice severely restricted (Asmalash, 1997). The country continued to

be a unitary state and the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) became the only legally recognized political party in the country. In fact, political malversation was so pervasive that the promise of representation was dashed from the very start. Only party members were "appointed" to the national *Shengo* (Parliament) and in regions such as Eritrea, military officers filled the quota of the region (Merera, 1992). The regional autonomy formula never saw the light of day, even though as a concept it fell considerably short of what the various forces demanded (Merera, 2002).

The fall of the military regime in 1991 and the reordering of the Ethiopian state that followed initially appeared to accommodate the Oromo people's demand for self-rule. Hopes were raised and dashed, following the OLF's forced withdrawal from the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). As the result of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) leaders' hegemonic aspirations to dominate Ethiopian politics indefinitely, spurred by arrogance emanating from their much enhanced military machine, the hope of building an inclusive political structure quickly gave way to open confrontation and a new round of conflict (Leenco, 1998a).

The Post-1991 Experiment and the Oromo Question

The EPRDF assumed power in May 1991 making triple promises: to create a nation-state of equals by ending ethnic domination; democratize the Ethiopian state and society by ending centuries of autocratic/authoritarian rule; and create peace and stability (Merera, 2002). Taken together the promise to bring about quick economic development and prosperity for all citizens of the country was a welcome development for a country emerging from a century of autocratic rule.

In an effort to implement the promises made on paper, a conference was convened in July 1991 to establish a transitional government, to which some two dozen political movements, including four Oromo-based groups, were invited.[6] In

hindsight, the interest of the TPLF-led EPRDF in inviting the Oromo movements seemed to be less out of a genuine desire to share power and more with the aim of getting a much-needed international legitimacy to rule a country where Oromos make up the single largest ethnic group. Oromos were also needed both for neutralizing the multi-ethnic political organizations as well as the Amhara elite who were expected to pose a serious threat to the new regime. Whatever the real motive of the TPLF leaders, a charter for the transitional period, which openly guaranteed the 'right to self determination, including and up to secession' to the country's diverse communities, was approved and an 87-seat Council of Representatives (COR) was formed to oversee the transitional process. The executive was elected out of the COR, which was empowered to act as a law-making body for the transitional period. Although the number of seats allotted to independent Oromo parties was limited to seventeen, significantly smaller than the proportional size of the Oromo population, an additional ten seats were given to the TPLF-affiliated Oromo organization, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO). Some cabinet posts were given to the OLF, which was considered a junior partner in the TPLF/EPRDF dominated TGE (Leenco, 1998).

As an official response to the nationalists' demands for self-rule, a language and ethnicity-based administrative system, with fourteen administrative units (twelve regional states and two special regions), was formed in early 1992. In the new set-up, the Oromo region looked considerably larger than other regions, at least geographically, canvassing the breadth and length of the Ethiopian landmass. Here it is important to note that the OLF, the largest Oromo organization at the time, wittingly or unwittingly, gave its blessings to the new political engineering of the TPLF leaders, including implementation of the controversial Charter, the composition of the TGE, and the regionalization policy that followed. In retrospect, this

appears to have been a grave miscalculation on the part of the OLF leaders (Merera, 2002).

The alliance between the TPLF and the OLF was neither a partnership of equals nor one that had the potential for durability. What created a serious tension between the TPLF and the OLF, among others, were contradictory goals represented by the hegemonic aspiration of the former to recreate Ethiopia around the centrality of the Tigrayan elite and the objective of the latter to share power proportional to the size of the Oromo people. The TPLF leaders' euphoria, emanating from the impressive military victory they achieved on the battlefield, left no room for political sobriety, while the rising tide of Oromo nationalism forced the OLF not to moderate its demands. TPLF leaders were confident that they could militarily destroy the OLF and reign in Oromo nationalism under the leadership of the OPDO. The OLF leadership appeared to have calculated that it could easily mobilize the giant Oromo population against the TPLF-led minority party. The expectations of both did not materialize, even to this day. The TPLF leaders have weakened the OLF as an organization, but they have not won the trust of the Oromo people. The objective to redirect and control Oromo nationalism through the OPDO, whose leaders have not been able to shrug off the image of being politically dependent at best and ex-prisoners of war in TPLF hands at worst, did not materialize.[7] Since it was forced out of the TGE by late 1992, the OLF has been waging a low scale guerrilla war with little success. In some ways, the continued armed struggle has provided the TPLF the pretext to justify persecution of Oromo political activists (Human Rights Watch 2005).

In April 1996, another Oromo organization, the Oromo National Congress (ONC), was created to advocate a third-line as a way forward, with the objective of seeking to resolve the Oromo question through the achievement of both self-rule and shared-rule within the Ethiopian framework. Despite

articulating the right to self-determination to be defined as genuine self-rule and real autonomy by advancing the democratic principle of 'one man, one vote,' the ONC faced stubborn resistance both from the organized Oromo movements and from the Oromo intelligentsia. Misunderstanding among friends and serious obstruction from the increasingly dictatorial regime of the EPRDF virtually paralyzed its activities until the May 2005 elections. The ONC participated in the elections and emerged as one of the major political forces in the country – now holding by far the largest Oromo opposition seats in the country's Parliament (NEBE 2005).

To sum up, the forcing out of the OLF from the legal political process in 1992 and the continued foundering of the process of democratization, have led the Oromo to a new type of political and economic marginalization. The OPDO could not move beyond the structural limits and opportunities that can be tolerated by the TPLF, and hence has become an instrument of indirect rule, the tried and true method of controlling the fate and resources of other peoples. The OPDO lacks both the legitimacy to represent the Oromo people and the technical skill to run a transparent and accountable administration in the Oromia region. Problems of ineptitude and incompetence have plagued the party and affected its ability to bring development and prosperity to the Oromo region. Human rights violations are rife, the conduct of elections seriously flawed, and economic growth flagging, despite Oromia's potential for development and contribution to the national economy (see for instance, Human Rights Watch 2005).

Quo Vadis the Oromo Movement

The central problem in the Oromo question has always been the lack of broader consensus among Oromo leaders and parties on a workable strategy that can lead to the realization of the Oromo aspiration for self-rule. Controversy concerning how to move the cause forward has continued to haunt orga-

nized Oromo movements. The problem goes back to the very origin of modern Oromo nationalism, which coincided with and was influenced by two competing currents: the Ethiopian nationalist current aimed at revamping and remaking the Ethiopian state and the Oromo ethnonationalist current, which adheres to the 'right to self-determination' with the ultimate goal of creating a separate state. The younger generation of the Oromo intelligentsia, which assumed the leadership of the Oromo national movement in the 1970s, inevitably came to function within the confines of the confusing influences of these opposing currents. Before the debate over the course of the nationalist movement had matured, the task of creating political organizations got underway. First came the All Ethiopia Socialist Movement, better known by its Amharic acronym MEISON, which was able to attract leading Oromo intellectuals of the 1960s generation. MEISON was an all- Ethiopia movement with the project of a socialist revolution, which was supposed to resolve the nationalities' question through class struggle (Ottaway, 1978). After MEISON came the Ethiopian National Liberation Front (ENLF), an Oromo movement with the objective of liberating all the peoples of Ethiopia from all kinds of injustices through self-determination. An organization that had elders and younger educated elite among its leaders, the ENLF was committed to building an Ethiopia in which all people, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or class, were equal (Mekuria, 1996).

The Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 not only caught many by surprise, but also further complicated the resolution of political problems. Firstly, it led to the general awakening among Oromos, especially among Oromo intellectuals as well as the youth, by promising the possibility of change. Secondly, it led to the proliferation of Oromo political groups: the Organization for Oromo People's Liberation Struggle (OOPLS), the Revolutionary Struggle of Ethiopia's Oppressed or ECHA'AT, the EPRP-affiliated Oromo People's Liberation Organization,

the MEISON-affiliated Oromo National Democratic Movement and others, most of which later merged with the OLF (Gadaa, 1999; Africa Confidential, 1977a, 1977b, 1978). Though all professed commitment to the advancement of the same general cause, the multiplicity of Oromo political organizations quickly became locked in a struggle for organizational supremacy. Over the course of time, the jockeying for supremacy gave way to fragmentation and coalescence along regional and confessional cleavages.

This in turn made a genuine debate over the critical issues on "the way forward" nearly impossible. Far worse, emotions carried the day as the battle line was drawn between the so-called "Red Goobanaas," referring to the Marxist-oriented Oromo leaders who sought resolution of the Oromo question within the Ethiopian context, and the "narrow nationalists," the radical nationalists who advocated self-determination leading to an independent Oromo republic as the only ultimate remedy to "Ethiopian colonial domination." (Leenco, 1998b) These camps, represented respectively by members of MEISON and ECHA'AT, spent more energy and resources on undermining each other than on fighting the common enemy, until both found their members behind bars. Although détente was generally observed in prison, a low-level 'cold war' among members of MEISON and ECHA'AT continued in prison cells. The struggle they waged between themselves frustrated all attempts to forge unity around a common cause. Partly because of the intense struggle among the Oromo and partly because of the equally turbulent wider political environment in the country, one generation of possible leadership was decimated, thousands herded to prisons and tortured, while others fled into exile. Sadly, the opportunity created by the popular democratic movement of 1974 to remake the Ethiopian empire in a manner that ensured the fundamental rights of the Oromo people was lost (Mohammed, 1999).

It now appears new cleavages are extant in the Oromo national movement, along the lines of survivors of Ethiopian prisons, veterans of the guerilla struggle, and transnationlists in exile.[8] In reality, even the OLF, which emerged as a major political force in Oromo politics out of the bloody interlude of military rule in the 1970s and 1980s has neither overcome the legacy of years of division nor convinced its followers regarding the future course of the struggle. When it joined the TPLF-led TGE in 1991, the OLF leadership–as it undoubtedly came out of that political venture as a much larger potent political force–did not seem to have learned a crucial lesson from the similar venture of the MEISON's leadership a decade and half earlier (Leenco, 1998a).

Worse still, the independent Oromo political movements, while sharing the OLF's commitment to the right to self-determination, do not go beyond criticizing the OLF leadership for its mistakes and for its failure to articulate an alternative course for the Oromo national movement. The ONC, caught between the capitulationist line represented by the OPDO and the radical line espoused by many Oromo political groups, is engaged in a struggle for political survival. Despite its emergence as the Oromo party holding with the largest seat in the country's parliament, it has not been able to deliver on its promises.

Nevertheless, the political line the ONC has advocated, that of self rule for the regions and shared rule at the federal level, is getting the attention of Oromos. The newest Oromo party, the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM), ran and won 11 seats in parliament on a political program that broadly subscribes to the self-rule-shared rule principle. Even the OLF has made pronouncements on more than one occasion that its program no longer advocates secession as the only political solution to the nationalities question in Ethiopia. While these independent Oromo movements have continued the struggle for genuine autonomy and democracy, the OPDO,

which was assigned the task of advancing TPLF interests in Oromo politics, has continued to create road-blocks against the aspiration of the Oromo people for self-rule. Far worse, sensing ultimate failure evidenced by its poor showing in the 2005 elections, it has turned the Oromo region into 'a big prison house', where citizens live in fear and frustration (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

As the popular struggle for genuine autonomy and self-rule has continued, so has the division and confusion among the Oromo movements regarding which direction of struggle can deliver concrete results. The political infighting among Oromos, which is taking a new turn within the OLF at a critical moment in Oromo history, occured at a time when the crisis of the Ethiopian state appears to have created a real opportunity for achieving self-rule and shared-rule for Oromos as well as the rest of Ethiopian peoples. The interminable inter-Oromo struggle and the resultant failure to devise a realistic common agenda for the Oromo nation and for Ethiopia has held back Oromo leaders from assuming a leadership role in the struggle to end centuries of authoritarian rule and remaking of the Ethiopian state into a common democratic home of equals (Pausewang 2007).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the incorporation of the bulk of the Oromo people into the expanding empire state of Ethiopia in the second half of the nineteenth century on unequal terms and the Oromos' own complex dual history in Ethiopia has complicated the Oromo people's quest for the right to self-determination and democratic participation. The paper has further argued that the debate about which way forward has gone on for a generation without a resolution. It is incumbent on the current generation to settle it. In the author's view, given the dual history of the Oromo nation as well as the new architecture of international politics, the struggle of the people

should focus on how to achieve a dual solution in the form of 'self-rule' and 'shared-rule.' In practical terms, the effort to formulate and articulate an achievable agenda and a path to success requires two historic compromises. These are the coming of the independent Oromo movements to the political middle road and the courage to link the Oromo people's struggle for 'self-rule' with the Ethiopian peoples aspiration for 'shared–rule' based on a universally accepted democratic principle of 'one man, one vote'. Such historic compromises can only be made through a readiness to build a democratic common home. Today, the most serious challenge for Oromo movements is the courage to rise above the historical injustice done to the Oromo without necessarily forgetting it, and devise a political strategy that ensures majority-rule in the future.

If history had given the Amhara the opportunity to lead the 'making' of modern Ethiopia on unequal terms in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Oromo people have a historic opportunity in the twenty-first century to play a leading role in the 'remaking' of Ethiopia on equal terms. The choice before the Oromo nation is not between statehood and nothing else at all. The real choice is between recognizing the Oromo people's important place in Ethiopia and participating in the common struggle for democracy, or rejecting democracy and prolonging the political and economic marginalization of the Oromo people and others in Ethiopia. History, geography and demography have entrusted to Oromo movements the responsibility of leading the struggle for democracy in Ethiopia. Their failure to assume such an historic role is what has undoubtedly prolonged the birth pangs of democratic Ethiopia and the misery of the Oromo people.

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Notes

1. Ethiopia with its existing boundaries took its present shape in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the process of the expansion of the Ethiopian state.
2. Most of the current political problems of Ethiopia took root in the process of the creation of the modern empire-state in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. For instance, highland Eritrea was detached from Tigray and became an Italian colony from 1890 to 1896 when Menelik abandoned it to the Italians. The Tigrayan elite began to feel dominated when they were reduced to second-class status following the death of Yohannes in 1889, while a larger part of the Oromo and the rest of the southern peoples were brought under the Ethiopian state during this period on unequal terms. Hence, the current political crisis in the country is linked to these events of the 19th century one way or another.
3. Most of the old southern Ethiopian towns were products of the garrison settlements created for political as well as military control of the various parts of the South. They soon developed both as administrative and commercial centres of the respective areas.
4. Many observers of Ethiopian politics make a distinction between north and south Ethiopia in several major respects: the political institutions, the land-ownership system and other instruments of oppression. See for instance, Markakis (1974) and Addis Hiwot (1975), the extent to which the people of the South suffered dual oppression-markedly different from the North.
5. Refers to the framing of the Oromo question as a colonial question and hence the transformation of the Oromo quest from the demand for national equality to one of decolonization and establishment of an independent Oromo republic.
6. This conference was the first time that Oromo organizations negotiated and participated in formation of Ethiopian government in the name of Oromos. For the OLF version of the story, see Leenco Lata (1998; 1999).

7. According to many observers of Ethiopian politics, the OPDO was created out of the ex-prisoners of war in the hands of both TPLF and EPLF. (See Young, 1997: 166; Pausewang, S. *et al* 2002: 14; Leenco, 1999).
8. In July 2007, the long simmering conflict within the OLF came to surface when the OLF brought a lawsuit in a Minnesota court against a splinter group it referred to as the Transitional Authority of the Oromo Liberation Front (TA-OLF). There are also several new Oromo organizations in the diaspora, including, among others, the Front for the Liberation of Oromia (FLO) and the Oromo Liberation Council (OLC), an umbrella group made up of the Oromo People's Liberation Organization (OPLO), the Oromo People's Liberation Front, (OPLF), and Union of Oromos in North America (UONA). http://oromoaffairs.blogspot.com/2007_07_01_archive.html.

The Concept of Peace in the Oromo Gadaa System: Its Mechanisms and Moral Dimension

Tenna Dewo

Although peace has been a leading and universal theme in religion, morality, and social life, it is one of the most abused concepts in politics. War and violence continue to be unleashed under the pretext of "peace." The bulk of humanity claims to prefer peace to war, tranquility to violence, friendship to enmity, and consensus to compulsion. Yet human beings wantonly threaten peace and use it to cover up evil in both human thoughts and works. The topic of "peace" is the urgent issue of our time. The consensus among moral philosophers regarding the staying power of peace is that human beings have not discharged their moral responsibility in solving the problems that threaten peace.

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In aptly asserting that the "talk of peace and prosperity is not pious cliché but the statement of urgent necessity,"[1] the philosopher A. C. Grayling has launched a discussion that opens the door to introducing the Oromo concept of peace to an audience already interested in the relevance of traditional beliefs for twenty-first century philosophical debate. In his recent book *The Heart of Things*, he invites readers to reflect on ideas pertinent to personal questions about happiness and the quality of life to wider public concerns, such as war and democracy. In this essay, we present Oromo concepts to an audience for whom they are new, while at the same time introducing Oromo readers to the philosophical debate over how to regard and assess traditional belief systems.

The Oromo of Ethiopia maintain that "peace," translated as *nagaa*, is the essential key to all cosmic and human order, possessing the highest and most central value for humanity to pursue. This view is expressed in the songs they sing, in the prayers and blessings they offer, in the ritual and ceremonial activities they undertake, in the speeches and narrations they deliver, in the administrative and legal actions they perform and in the proverbs, folktales and stories they cite or tell. The Oromo concept and practice of peace is based on traditional values and beliefs anchored in the *gadaa*, the politico-military and ritual system of the Oromo. This paper then explores both the Oromo concept of 'peace' and the mechanisms used to sustain it within the context of an ongoing philosophical discourse on morality amidst social and political change.

For the Oromo peace is not given, instead it is achieved through persistent efforts. Their faith and commitment to facilitate the existence of conditions that are suitable for peace to flourish inspire intellectual inquiry. Particularly at this moment in time when millions are longing for peace, but when the modern mechanisms of keeping peace do not seem to meet the needs of people, it is imperative to explore the roots that

peace has in the traditional values of indigenous societies. In this light, this paper explores what peace means for the Oromo both at the individual and societal levels, what goal it has for them, what moral values underlie it, and the mechanisms by which the Oromo make, restore, keep and promote peace. The last section of the article ventures into a critical assessment of the applicability of Oromo conception of peace and its mechanisms of peacemaking to twenty-first century situations.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

According to Royce Anderson, as noted in his article "A Definition of Peace," peace is a condition of having a well-lived life.[2] Since not all who seek and need it attain a well-lived life, clearly peace is a value-laden concept denoting a desirable way in which people live together harmoniously. Louis P. Pojman, for example, states, "We want to live a meaningful, fulfilled life as individuals, and we want to live together in a prosperous, flourishing community."[3] A.C. Grayling adds, "Almost everyone wants to live a life that is satisfying and fulfilling, in which there is achievement and pleasure, and which has the respect of people whose respect is worth having."[4] The nagging question that deserves answer for these influential philosophers is "how should we live our lives?"

Since all humans aspire to have a well-lived life, peace is the common need for all. As Grayling again observes, "it is impossible to be truly happy when people around you are not; for our natural sympathies make the happiness of others a part of our own."[5] It is conceivable that one can be happy while others are suffering from war and violence, terror and fear, poverty and hunger of different scales. However, peace in the true sense of the word may not be maintained in a society "where wealth and opportunity are unfairly distributed."[6] In such a context, one denies to others the peace that he/she wants for him/herself. Grayling tersely asks. "Which would you prefer: machine-gun fire in the next street, fear, danger –

or warmth in winter, holidays in summer, a good job, hope, enjoyment? If the answer is obvious, why should the peace and prosperity alternative be yours alone?"[7]

The implication of Grayling's question is clear. No rational human being should expect an island of peace and serenity in a sea of want and deprivation. Even though no one has preferred war and violence to peace, war and violence have been the tragic realities of human existence. Why has humanity that needs peace more than everything, lacked the power to put an end to events that violate peace? Responding to Grayling's invitation to provide a philosophical foundation of how humans can pursue a well-lived life, this article maintains that the Oromo traditional concept of peace can provide practical solutions to the perennial problems that disturb peace.

Philosophers are not unanimous concerning the application of tradition, regarded as "that body of practice and belief which is socially transmitted from the past,"[8] into a context of modernity, which is seen as the rational and scientific views, beliefs, knowledge and life of the present.[9] Traditionalists seem to advise humanity to embrace the past without any critical concern and are thus accused of being "so engrossed with the past that they have little care for the present and future."[10] They contend that tradition or the past has the authority to guide the present, because it contains "the rules of conduct for personal and social life, the duties and responsibilities of person in different walks and stages of life."[11] In contrast, the very idea of tradition is an anathema to the anti-traditionalists. They dismiss the authority of the past or tradition in favor of the present. According to Karl Popper, a prevalent modern attitude to the past holds that "I am not interested in tradition. I want to judge everything on its own merit…quite independently of any tradition…with my own brain, not with the brains other people lived long ago."[12]

The "either this or that" option does not present realistic choices. The traditionalists' position is unsound, because tra-

dition might have been stuffed with bias and prejudice, irrational and non-rational beliefs, superstitious and mythical imagination. The uncritical, wholesale adoption of tradition can hamper development and threaten the well-being of life. Tripathi comments, "in spite of its stabilizing role in social life, unquestioned acceptance of customary morality has had many negative effects on the growth of human life and human personality."[13] If we recognize tradition as it is, we may not only lose sight of both its merits and demerits but also consideration of the realities of the present.

On the other hand, the uncritical acceptance of the anti-traditionalists position may deprive us of the vital qualities entailed in tradition. This is particularly harmful to societies such as Ethiopia to which traditional values and systems are not a dead fact, but lived experience that is sacred and always meaningful. In fact, tradition is a life that the majority of traditional societies still live and the rigid demarcation between the tradition of the past and the life of the present is only imaginary. The past is in the present, in its good or bad, relevant or irrelevant, form. As Grayling noted, "seeing into the past is a necessity for seeing the present and the future more clearly."[14]

Therefore, traditional beliefs and values should not be accepted or rejected as a whole. Instead, they should be critically examined in order to disentangle the pertinent and good from the obsolete and bad contents in the best philosophical tradition of examining "the validity of every belief to see which is good and which is spurious"[15] with a goal of "liberating, freeing us from prejudice, self-deceptive notions and half truths."[16] The purpose is not prescribe the past as the remedy for present predicaments, but to present a balanced and critical assessment of Oromo traditional concepts and practices of peace and suggest their possible application in conflict resolution today. The ideas are presented as a response to the longstanding philosophical question, "what good do traditional

beliefs have for human development at the present?"[17] As such, the article has the dual purpose stated above: to present Oromo traditional concepts of peace while at the same time addressing the philosophical debate over how to regard and assess traditional belief systems.

Definition and Meaning of Peace

Nearly all Western languages define peace as the absence of war, violence or strife. In non-Western languages, the definition of peace emphasizes spiritual or inner tranquility. In addition, there are those who define peace as a harmonious relation between different parts of entities or systems (orders).[18] The Oromo term *nagaa* literally means peace, but a definition that encompasses everything that it implies has yet to be given. Observations of Oromo ritual and ceremonial activities suggest that peace is the harmony of things or parties involved in certain relations–it is the harmonious relation between the different parts of the human and cosmic orders.

In many cultures, peace is commonly understood in terms of human well-being, particularly in politics. Among the Oromo, the concept of peace goes beyond the human domain. In his book, *Oromo Democracy,* Asmarom Legesse writes, "Peace is a pervasive and sustained concern in moral life. The long blessings that are given daily by Oromo elders are prayers for peace. The theme of peace is everywhere."[19] Thus the Oromo believe that everything must be at peace for societal well-being. This can be gleaned from the following Oromo prayer, very often offered in Western Shawa.

> O, *Waaqa* (God) give us peace
> Peace to the land and sky
> Peace to humans
> Peace to *uumama* (nature)
> Peace to animals
> Peace to the wild beasts
> O, God listen to us, we pray to you

> Make us live in peace, we know that you can do it
> O, God you are the only Father we have
> Protect us from evil, protect everything from evil
> We do not want to do evil to anyone, protect us from those who intend to do it to us
> Save us from the spears, swords, and fires of war
> We do not want to set fire to any one, help us in keeping away from those who want to set it to us
> Help us in our effort to do away with evil
> O, God, peace matters most to us, keep away from us all those anti-peace forces
> O, Father, give us your light that leads us to sustainable peace[20]

That the Oromo pray for the peace of everything, even for such things as stone, water, and air, shows that, in Oromo cosmology, everything is the interconnected through myriad webs and threads. Human beings are related not only to fellow humans but also to nature, and even to the spiritual power believed to be supernatural. Lambert Bartels writes the remark of his assistant, Gemetchu Megerssa, who says, when Oromo pray for peace, "there are not two but three parties. The third party is Waaqa with whom peace is made, too, and through whom people make peace with each other."[21] But in the light of the above prayer, the parties are not only three but more.

If any one of the parties is not in peace, according to the Oromo, it is unlikely that the other parties can enjoy it. Humans cannot enjoy peace while nature suffers turmoil. The Oromo strongly believe that making peace with nature is as essential as being at peace with oneself and with other human beings. Being at peace with God is an incomparable experience, and one can be at peace with God only if he/she is in peace with every thing else in nature. Thus for the Oromo peace is holistic, it is the harmonious relationship among all the parties involved.

Prayers for peace are made not only in groups but also separately or individually. They ought to be made particularly in the morning and evening, before meals, and during special occasions such as holidays, weddings and mediations. In the morning, for example, the Oromo pray; "O, Waaqa, God you made us spend the night in peace; make us also spend the day in peace."[22] In the evening, shortly before going to bed, they say, "O, Waaqa, God you made us spend this day in peace. We thank you. Make us spend this dark night also in peace. Give us a lasting peace."[23] When meal is served, they pray, "O, God here is food; make us have it in peace. Bless it for us, so that it satiates us. We thank you for your boundless generosity."[24]

In "*Being and Becoming Oromo*," Gufu Oba, citing Baxter, writes, "The maintenance of the proper and correct ritual vocabulary, particularly in prayers and blessings, was a prominent feature of the "Peace."[25] Oromos value, respect and make peace because they believe that it positively gives values to human life. It is a condition in which human life, individually or collectively, is free from tension, fear, terror or violence in general. Very often Oromo seniors are heard saying, "We respect peace because all humans need it, and God loves it. All humans need it because it is the opposite of violence that threatens the good of life."[26] Put very comprehensively by Jan Hultin, peace for the Oromo "is a moral state that is a necessary condition for fertility and life, and for the well-being of people and society. Where there is no peace there is misery and death."[27] Thus for the Oromo peace is understood as one of the necessities of life. In the absence of peace, even the fulfillment of all other basic necessities can not be adequate for the preservation and development of human life.

Internal and External Peace

The Oromo seem to ascribe both intrinsic and extrinsic values to peace. It is extrinsic since people pursue it as a means for the survival and the flourishing of their lives. It becomes in-

trinsic when people view it as the highest or most valued condition to achieve, not just as a means to an end. Nonetheless, there is no rigid demarcation between the two, since peace can simultaneously be extrinsic and intrinsic. When, for example, elders resolve conflicts, they say that they endeavor not for the sake of individuals involved in them, but for the sake of peace. Viewed as such peace is intrinsic. However, when they say that they make peace to relieve the disputants of tensions and hostilities, the good of these individuals is valued as an end. This makes peace extrinsic. Moreover, the peace that humans may pursue for its own sake probably generates a desirable value for the pursuer. In general, however, the value of peace, for the Oromo, is superior to any individual or collective achievement.

In many societies, peace is commonly promoted, valued and advocated primarily in contradistinction to violence or conflict. Where and when evil is absent or mitigated, it is believed that peace reigns; but when evil is prevalent peace is absent or undermined. In Oromo traditional belief, "peace is much more than a mere absence of strife." [28] It is understood and explained not merely in terms of the explicit presence or absence of physical confrontation, but in relation to the implicit, internal, and psychological experiences or states of life.[29] Internal, implicit and systematic strife, violent acts and behaviors, arrogant and aggressive attitudes, unfair and abusive treatments, are all threats to peace.

In traditional Oromo worldview, therefore, any human action or behavior that is harmful to the flourishing of human life is contrary to peace. One may lose peace and experience evil because of one's own deeds, because of the actions of others or due conditions beyond one's capacity to control. Personal peace is threatened when someone does to another individual, to society, to God or even to self, something that she/he knows is proscribed by custom or even personal conviction. This is self-inflicted evil. Poor living conditions, as

the Oromo believe, sap the basis of individual peace. This is evident in Boorana elders' rhetorical question, "What does peace really mean, for a person who is forced to go to bed with an empty belly because of poverty?"[30] In this sense, a person or a community that suffers perpetually from injustice because of lack of good governance cannot have peace. This is other-caused evil.

From this follows the notion that the Oromo perceive peace to have internal and external dimensions. Internal peace is the expression of the harmonious relations of the different units of the community. It includes personal peace, which is a state of an individual experience in which a person does not have physical, mental, social, spiritual or legal troubles or is not in conflict with himself. Such states are achieved as a person obeys his/her inner feelings that are governed by his/her moral principles. In the belief of the Oromo, a person who is at peace with him/herself is likely to live in peace with others. If a person is not at peace with him/herself, then he/she is likely to do evil to them—individuals, society and *Waaqa*. Thus, Oromo always strive for the peace of one and of all. If every member of a given community has peaceful life within himself/herself, then the community very likely will enjoy peace.

This belief is fostered by *gadaa* values that teach the Oromo not to be violent towards one another, but instead cultivate a sense of caring, sharing and valuing one another. "The Gada system and the institution of Qallu" writes Lambert Bartels, "essentially form a ritual system stressing the basic principles of internal peace and cooperation"[31] among Oromo. *Gadaa* officials, *Qalluu* ritual leaders, and Oromo elders teach that Oromo people should not "break the peace among them. Aggression should be directed against [non-Oromo] outsiders,"[32] not against one's community. In prayers and blessings elders are very often heard saying, "O, God, make our peace everlasting. Bless our harmony which is our source of strength and beauty. Do not divide us. Make us stand and

remain together—when we stand together being shoulder to shoulder anti-peace forces get frustrated and those who love peace get encouraged."[33]

In the traditional context, thus, individual Oromos are expected to behave and act towards one another and towards others according to a commitment to the value of peace. The Boorana Oromo in particular give special emphasis to the maintenance and promotion of internal harmony or peace among the members of their own community. They maintain that peace is the supreme value for which every person should persistently strive.[34] Witnessing this Johan Helland says, "The maintenance of internal peace is a strongly expressed ideal in Borana public life."[35] The same point is underscored by another scholar, Mekuria Bulcha, who cites Baxter in this regard, "Between Boran there should be peace and gentleness, … violence even angry violence between Boran is a sin"[36] That means, "In everyday personal interaction, Borana men are expected to treat each other's physical and psychological integrity by not using violence…nor insults to each other."[37] In these manners, the Boorana Oromo endeavor to reduce the possibility of a conflict of serious nature.

While internal peace emphasizes personal peace and peace within the Oromo community, external peace refers to the peaceful or healthy relation that the Oromo have, make or establish with other, non-Oromo, communities. In the relationships that they establish with non-Oromo ethnic groups, the Oromo prefer friendship, cooperation and tolerance to enmity, mutual exclusion and intolerance. Many scholars and researchers of sociology, anthropology, history, religion, politics, etc., [with the exception of some Abyssinian writers] assert that the Oromo do not act with arrogance and violence, aggression and confrontation solely because of the bias and prejudice they have towards non-Oromos. The principle of tolerance and peaceful-coexistence is inherent to their culture and values.[38]

Intensive interviews conducted by the author in 2005 with Oromo elders in various Oromo regions reveal that Oromo notions of peace and tolerance emanate from their conceptualization of human differences and oneness. The following is this author's summary: difference is regarded as a matter of fact, and hence it should be recognized, valued, or respected. Even though human beings have differences, according to Oromo traditional belief, they all have sprung from a single source. The Oromo maintain that all humans are the children of the same father, *Waaqa* or God. As descendents of the same God, all people are distant siblings, even though spatial-temporal differences have made them appear as strangers to one another. The Oromo traditional perception of human differences, in essence, is the same as the difference between identical twins, that is, the difference within the same human family. Because this kind of difference is one of diversity within unity, the fact that difference exists is not a source of conflict. Both unity and diversity become bases for conflict when humans abuse them.[39]

Oromo elders observe that ideally, therefore, there has to be a reasonable balance sought between human differences and their unity. There is a possibility of exaggerating one and underestimating the other when the human mind is infested with bias and prejudice, ignorance and arrogance, greed and lust. In the Oromo *gadaa* system human differences (whether social or natural, mental or physical, shape or color, wealth or knowledge, etc.) are not characterized by the differences of superiors and inferiors, but rather by those between social equals and friends. Oromos treat non-Oromo persons not only as equals but also as brothers and sisters.[40] If people treat one another as brothers and sisters, peace will prevail. "We Oromo" as many of them very often say,

> do not want to ill treat others, because we do not want also to be unfairly treated by others. It is our duty fairly

> to treat others if we need others to make us fair treatment. Why ill treatment if we recognize what they want us to recognize for them, and if they recognize what we want them to recognize for us? Ill-treatment does not exist in the language of our g*adaa*. We want everything to remain in peace."[41]

An apparent reason for treating non-Oromo fairly is the expectation of reciprocal treatment by others. The more concrete reason is the moral obligation sanctioned by religion. In view of their indigenous religion, treating a brother or sister (who is considered a child of *Waaqa*) unfairly is an offence against God. In Oromo traditional belief, being human alone is reason enough for treating another human being morally. Throughout their history, the Oromo have welcomed and assimilated people who settled among them. As observed by some researchers the Oromo have developed the culture in which every right and privilege an Oromo enjoyed is granted to outsiders who dwell among the Oromo. Oromo law forbids a distinction between biological and social descent when adoption takes place.[42]

Oromo Peacekeeping Mechanisms

The Oromo consider that peace is invaluable condition achieved and maintained at a very high cost. Despite their unswerving commitment to peace, the Oromo have been at war for centuries, fighting external aggressors and colonizers. As one Boorana informant summarized, "the Oromo never made or make war or violence our choice."[43] However, peace cannot be maintained by good will and naïve wishes. As one Oromo elder retorted, "You can not enjoy peace simply because you love and want it. How can you enjoy it as long as there are others who willfully set fire to your house? We Oromo go for fighting only if we do not have any other means to protect our peace. Just as we know how to make peace, fortunately we also know how to do war."[44] The wars Oromos waged were defensive in

posture and were fought to ensure survival in the face of aggression and diminishing resources, and to defend peace itself. In other words, peacemakers are also fighters for peace who are expected to struggle on all possible fronts to win the battle against anti-peace forces. It is always indispensable for peace forces to confront those who harbor ill will against peace.
The readiness to fight wars in defense of peace does not belie the Oromo belief that peace is sustainable if it is obtained by peaceful means. As such, talks and dialogue are the more effective tools for maintaining an enduring peace. Oromo elders almost invariably stress that any peace obtained by force is perpetually haunted by force.[45]

Because of this belief, as evinced in Oromo oral and written history, the Oromo pursue preventive and remedial strategies to avoid acts of conflict or violence. Through the first strategy, they attempt to avoid or reduce actions, behaviors, relations, situations and factors that undermine the condition of peace; and through the second, they attempt to restore the peace to the situation that was disturbed by some kind of violence. The first aims at attacking the causes of conflict or violence, the second to heal the injurious effects of violence.

In the preventive strategy, the Oromo use two mechanisms for the prevalence of peace. These are socio-political and ideological/spiritual mechanisms. Both are embedded in the *gadaa* system. The first refers to the political and legal aspects of the *gadaa* system, and the second is the guiding principle of the system. It aims at cultivating and inculcating a desirable attitude in people.

Gadaa as a System of Peace

Asmarom Largesse defines *gadaa* as "a system of generation classes that succeed each other every eight years in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities."[46] As such, *gadaa* is a very complex system. Its essential content and prime objective is the maintenance of

peace and order. Paul Baxter, another *gadaa* authority, states that the *gadaa* system "is a cognitive system [which] "epitomizes what social relations should be, not what they are. In that sense *gadaa* is a political philosophy and a theology."[47] I perceive *gadaa* to be not only a political philosophy and a theology, but also a moral philosophy since it attempts rationally to explain the moral quality that human acts and behaviors should have in the intricate nature of human relationships.

The features of the *gadaa* system serve as premises and conditions for the maintenance and promotion of peace. The *gadaa* system is organized according to age-sets that consist of men who belong to the same genealogical generation.[48] Age-sets are formed by grouping the sons of the *gadaa* class of their fathers into a generation set. If a son is born to a father who is a member of the ruling *gadaa* class, those between the ages 40 and 48, then he passes through various functionally differentiated stages and responsibilities until he becomes a member of the ruling *gadaa* class 40 years after his father's *gadaa* class took office. In this arrangement, *gadaa* generation-sets assume different positions, roles and responsibilities every eight years associated with different grades.[49] The same individual assumes different social positions and performs particular duties associated with the various age grades. An individual who has been experiencing these different stages or grades of personal development and social norms becomes a member of the *gadaa* ruling class at around the age of 40, and stays in office for eight years.

Five *gadaa* classes take power from each other within a period of forty years. Each of these groups has its assigned responsibilities, but each comes to power at the age of forty. The term of office of one *gadaa* class is eight years. When the ruling *gadaa* class leaves office, the next class succeeds it, and the process goes on for another forty years. That means each *gadaa* generation comes to power once every forty years. When that cycle is completed, a new cycle begins. The ruling class

of the new cycle is the sons of the members of the generation that goes into old age (*jarsaa*), completing the eighty year generational cycle.[50]

Even though the five *gadaa* classes are in some ways comparable to modern political parties competing for power, the *gadaa* political system is devoid of the vices of the fierce and sometimes violent competition that characterize modern politics. It is necessary that one of the five *gadaa* classes rules within a forty year period. The transfer of power does not involve political campaigns of modern elections that are characterized by introducing serious allegations, and even confrontations that often lead to bloodshed and death. In the *gadaa* system, the classes hold power in rotation and transition from one to another class occurs at a scheduled time. The outgoing *gadaa* classes clearly know which *gadaa* class is the legitimate one to take the next term of office. Because the term of office is defined and responsibilities of each class fixed, the transfer of power in the *gadaa* system always takes place peacefully. The outgoing class retires with praise and blessings, and the new group takes over with blessings and good wishes. No confusion, curse or blame is involved, nor is violence employed in the process of power transfer. Using any means for seizing power other than peaceful means does not exist in the nature of *gadaa*. Even an exchange of unhealthy language is forbidden legally, religiously and morally.[51]

In the Oromo *gadaa* system, as Lambert Bartels observed quite sometime ago, "power emanates from the people, and if those to whom it is entrusted fail in their responsibility, it can be withdrawn. This is the Oromo version of 'government by the people.'"[52] If power belongs to the people and if these people have the right to bring down those who abuse their responsibilities, then the society enjoys good governance, which is a necessary condition for peace to flourish. Though the power of relieving officials of their duties is a crucial safeguard against the abuse of power, such a practice may not even be neces-

sary since officials are term limited. In the traditional Oromo system of government, the entrenchment of power is virtually impossible since the class that has been in office for eight years does not intend to stay in power beyond its term.[53]

The Rule of Law as Guarantor of Peace

Gadaa is a law-making system, creating laws that clearly define what ought to be done, and what ought not to be done. Marco Bassi says, the Oromo have "traditional norms and laws recognized by everybody as binding."[54] Every member of the community, according to the *gadaa* notion of law, is expected to know what her/his rights are to exercise and what her/his duties are to perform. Laws, in the context of *Gadaa* system, are made not with the intention of restricting the freedom of people, but, as Asmarom observed, "to meet some of the great challenges that confronted them [the Oromo] in history."[55] The maintenance of peace is one such challenge. For the Oromo the law is the strongest tool for the maintenance and promotion of peaceful life.

Laws are made in the general interest and with the consent of the society. Once in every eight years the assembly of *Gumi Gayyo* of the Boorana, *Mee'bookko* of Gujii and the *Chaffe* of Macca and Tulamma Oromo were convened. These assemblies are higher political bodies that stand above all other institutions.[56]All the members of the *gadaa* class, as representatives of the society actively participate in these institutions. According to Legesse's observation, the assembly "sits as a law making body, revises existing laws, and proclaims new laws."[57] It is these laws that according to Gufu Oba "provided the requisite social and political order which enabled them to move in and live with each other in peace."[58]

For the Oromo the rule of law is the decisive parameter of peace. They believe that when laws rule all men, the possibility for the prevalence of peace is high, but when men rule, peace loses ground. The major source of conflict, according

to the perception of many Oromo, is the violation of the laws and norms of the society. This is very frequent when men rule. Peace is maintained when laws rule men, and laws can get this power when men respect them as binding on all. The love and respect Oromo have for peace has made them a law-abiding community. With regard to this point Asmarom says that Oromo "are one of the most orderly and legalistic societies in Black Africa and many of their laws are consciously crafted rules, not customarily evolved habits."[59]

In the Oromo society under the *gadaa* system, both the governing and the governed are law-abiding. There is no one who could be an exception (standing above the law) to the law. Asmarom Legesse states "Oromo idea of rule of law is reflected in the notion that those who govern the people must also be judged by the same laws they are empowered to enforce."[60] He illustrates this point by quoting an Abba *Gadaa* by the name of Galma Liban, who clearly states that even the Abba *Gadaa* himself is subject to the rule of law.[61] Not only the rulers but also the ruled are aware of this and the abuse of power is subject to checks and balances. If *gadaa* officials exercise power in a way that deviates from the spirit of the law, their action will be characterized as *seera cabsa*, an act of breaking the law. Such behavior forces a *gadaa* official to stand before and be tried by the same law he defies.

One interesting point is that *gadaa* officials are not authorized to use force to enforce the law. They do not have a police force, a prison system and any coercive mechanism to govern the society. Commenting on this, Marco Bassi has written, "[the] Boran do not dispense any executive force, nor can any one including the political leadership impose any thing on others by the use of force or violence."[62] The law is not backed by force; rather the latter is kept away by the peaceful implementation of the former.

Civility and Egalitarian Ethos of Gadaa Officials

Gadaa officials are expected to be always at peace with each other. Lambert Bartels quotes an Oromo elder who states of the officials, "I have never heard of any quarrels among themselves."[63] *Gadaa* officials are in power to enforce the mission of *gadaa*, which is to make people live in peace and harmony. Officials with this duty should not be at odds with each other. Rather, as leaders, they must set good examples for their people whom they lead.

In addition to the structural safeguards against abuses of power, the institutions of the *gadaa* system promoted an egalitarian ethos that discouraged competition for supremacy and power. On the basis of his study of the Boorana, Bassi asserts that the Oromo "have successfully developed an egalitarian but efficient political system in pastoral context, with the *gadaa* system promoting social integration."[64] This is true of most Oromo communities in their traditional context. Donald N. Levine also states, "Where the Amhara system is hierarchical, the Oromo is egalitarian. Where the Amhara is individualistic, the Oromo is solidaristic."[65] In their social relationships, the Oromo emphasize equality rather than inequality, and hence treat one another as equals. Among the Macca Oromo, when community leaders meet to discuss important issues, they are guided by the notion of *qixxee*, a term denoting equality.[66]

Indeed, the Oromo recognize differences but consider them as less significant compared to equality. There are persons who are given high esteem because of the importance of their social roles and positions, yet this does not entail a sense of superiority and unfair treatment. This egalitarian style of life obviates the need for severe repression, thereby providing for a condition necessary for the maintenance of peace. When oppression and unfair treatment become dominant among the members of a given community because of inequality in access to resources or treatment before the law, conditions are

ripe for conflict. Egalitarian values, however, encourage peace and at the same time discourage violence.

Spiritual and Ideological Teaching about Peace

Peace can be maintained not only by administrative activities and legal procedures but also by raising the awareness of people about its importance. Through blessing, prayer, ritual gathering, ceremonial undertaking and meetings, assemblies, work places, and occasional performances, the Oromo reinforce values that promote peace. According to Mario Aguilar, "Prayers and blessings are important part of the daily life of every Oromo. In those prayers, the most important word is peace. In every moment of prayer, peace is asked for the community."[67]

At these and other occasions, one gets the impression that everything that the political and ritual leaders of the *gadaa* system say and do is for the sake of peace. Not only teaching the good, but also denouncing evil is also part of peace maintenance. Behaviors such as jealousy, stealing, telling a lie, speaking evil of others, failure to keep promises and using bad or obscene languages are condemned because they are believed to be threats to peace. This instills in the mind of the people strong faith and unswerving commitment to peace. Bassi makes the point that "the values expressed in *Gadaa* rituals condition the behavior and attitudes of individuals; and therefore, they also have an indirect, but not marginal, political effect."[68]

Most of Oromo *gadaa* assemblies, meetings or gatherings are convened under the shade of big trees. Besides the teachings, prayers and blessings, information is exchanged about anything that threatens peace, and discussions are conducted to avoid the threats. In the Oromo belief, every member of the society is responsible for the maintenance of peace and security, since such could be achieved only if everyone acts and behaves in favor of it. It is mainly through prayers and

blessings that everyone is made to know this responsibility, and be committed to it.[69]

Peace and Poverty

According to Oromo, poverty is seen as a great evil, anathema to peace, since it harbors conflict or violence and provides a ground for it. "A person with an empty belly," according to Oromo elders, "does not only know what peace really means, but also does not have the power to discharge his/her social responsibility."[70] As Gufu Oba articulates, the Boorana Oromo in particular believe that "[a] man without cattle can not perform his social obligation; marry or participate in rituals. In effect he loses his identity as Borana."[71]

Therefore, there is an assumption that the problem of poverty should be tackled, since deprivation and want are known seriously to threaten peace. In Boorana, for example, when a son is born to a family, he is given cattle, camel, sheep or goat. The child grows with wealth of his own. When he comes of age, he is already a self-sufficient person, according to the standard of the community, prepared to perform his social duties. On the other hand, if somebody is unable to support himself/herself, then it is the moral duty of the clan to rehabilitate him/her. The rationale for rehabilitation is that, by meeting the needs of its less fortunate members, the community makes them somehow live on equal basis with others. According to this ideal, no one is forced to go out begging, to become a dependent person or to live in a condition that is contrary to a healthy and peaceful life.

Conflict Resolution

Oromo have a long-standing indigenous mechanism to resolve conflicts and restore peace. Even today, many people in Oromo society do not like resorting to state courts or any government office for resolving conflicts. They prefer the traditional conflict settlement mechanism called *jaarssumma*. The word

jaarssumma has double meaning – literally, it means being or becoming elderly (senior in age) and, figuratively, the mechanism of conflict avoidance undertaken mostly by seniors in the community. It is a council of elders that mediates between conflicting parties or sometimes issues a ruling when restitution is required for damages.

In Oromo tradition, whenever conflict occurs, it must be brought under control quickly. Otherwise, animosity keeps on festering by drawing into the conflict more parties than those who are directly engaged in the conflict. Moreover, it may develop into revenge, another serious threat to peace, which the Oromo regard as an endless evil. For the Oromo revenge, which means attacking violence by violence, serves no good purpose. In situations infested with a climate of revenge, the well-being of all parties involved is constantly haunted by all sorts of evil, the end of which is not in sight. Because the *gadaa* system does not permit any revenge to take place, the common knowledge among the Oromo is that war, force or violence does not solve conflicts. Non- peaceful means may create a temporary calm but not a lasting peace. In Marco Bassi's words, "Revenge, internal war, and reciprocal fear do not have an institutional place in Boran political organization."[72]

Even in conflicts that cause minor or major injuries, damages or losses, including death, the Oromo prefer restoration and peace through peaceful means. *Lubbu ballessu*, literally destroying the soul or life, in the Oromo belief, is the most serious crime any human can commit. According to the ethics of *gadaa*, if a person is killed, neither the relatives (clan) nor any person is allowed to take an independent action. Rather they ought to bring the case to the attention of *gadaa* officials or to the elders of the community – who are believed to have the power and experience to fairly and peacefully handle such serious cases. Marco Bassi writes, "When a dispute arises it is taken to [the] assembly where people are confronted with the established norm."[73] *Gadaa* officials deal with cases involving

conflicts over the loss of human life in one of two major ways. One way is sentencing the perpetrator to death, and the other is making the wrongdoer pay compensation for the loss of life encountered. Capital punishment was given to a person who had committed not only a heinous crime, but also someone who is believed to be potentially dangerous to the peace of the society.[74] Gufu Oba quotes an Oromo elder saying, "serious and persistent disturbers of the peace could be put to death by beating on the open palm of the hand and in the groin, *haama mudanmuudi,* with a club*, bokku*"[75]

Indeed, according to Oromo traditional morality, the death penalty itself is not a cherished recourse, since it is an act that deprives a person's inalienable right to life. Yet it is the price that should be paid for maintaining peace and security. In Oromo belief, putting a criminal to death for the peace of the society is eminently preferable to permitting him to stay alive and perpetually threaten the peace of many. Averting the greater evil by committing the lesser one is justified essentially on utilitarian grounds. When they comment on such dilemmas the Oromo say, "Waaqa, God, knows why this is done, and hence it does not offend him."[76]

The second means of conflict management is paying a compensation for loss of life. This compensation is called *guma* as the practice is known among the Macca and Tuulama Oromo. This penalty is given only when it is ascertained that the crime that was committed was manslaughter, not a murder.[77] Very often Oromo people are heard of saying, "human blood is dangerous and that a man with blood in his hands has to cleanse himself from it as soon as possible."[78]And this is done through the payment of *guma* to the victim's relatives.

The *guma* is not just restitution for the damage done, but also serves as a demonstration to discourage others from committing violent crime. The culprit is excluded from the community until he paid all of the required compensation. Although the criminal's life is spared, he or she is not allowed to stay at

home and make a comfortable life. They are required to walk around with chains in hand and ask people for help. Whenever the criminal approaches a passerby, he or she drops the chain to the ground and says, "I am guilty of taking the life of a person. I did it unknowingly or accidentally. Let God save you from such accident. Please help me with what you have so that I can pay the *guma* of the victim."[79] The person that was approached may help the criminal with the *guma* payment. If the perpetrator is someone who can afford to pay the *guma*, without wandering around and asking for help, it is necessary that he should do so, because this is the essential part of the punishment.

Upon the submission of the required amount of money for compensation (or number of cattle), elaborate and complicated negotiations, ritual and ceremonial activities are performed through the mediators. When this is over, the relation between the two parties is believed to go back to the peaceful state that existed before the conflict, which means peace is restored.[80] This process makes peace not only between the parties but also with *Waaqa*, God. An Oromo eyewitness to such a ritual told Lambert Bartels that "Peace making is always concluded with prayers and rituals of reconciliation with Waqa (God)"[81] Oromo believe that whenever people have conflicts with one another they also have it with God. Lambert Bartels reports that Oromo say, "Waaqa does not hear our prayers if we are not in peace with each other."[82] God is said to be happy when humans (and all of his creatures for that matter) are in peace and hates when they are in conflict.

Critical Assessment

In the foregoing section, I have tried to explain the Oromo conception of peace as a harmonious relationship between the different orders of the human and cosmic systems and the mechanisms by which conditions that promote peace are sustained. In the following section, I present a critical evaluation

of the moral dimension of these concepts of peace and the associated social mechanisms. The purpose is to explore the possibility of restoring the Oromo traditional views of ethics in ways that are applicable to the life style of the present generation.

Peace as Antithesis of Violence

In Oromo traditional belief, peace and violence are expressions of attitudes that individuals or people hold towards the life, right, dignity, interest, and freedom and consequently the way they treat one another in these relations. Peace demands fair treatment and as such it is what morality requires, and unfair treatment is violence and hence immoral. Morality at a basic level, according to Grayling, relates how people treat each other.[83] The Oromo believe that it is their moral imperative to treat all people, regardless of human differences, with respect and honesty.

Peace prevails when people behave in accordance with the society's moral values and social norms. That means the life and work of virtuous individuals in society is a necessary precondition for peace. According to the Oromo, a virtuous person is one who behaves and acts in accordance with *saffu,* which is, as Gemetchu Megerssa succinctly put it, "the ethical basis upon which all human action should be founded.…[a moral category] which directs one on the right path.…[and] shows the way in which life can be best lived."[84] When individuals separately or as a group act in violation of *saffu*, their behavior is described as *hamtuu*, vicious, and regarded as the life and work of the wicked. Peace is virtuous because it is beneficial to life, and violence is vicious because it is harmful to this life. That is why the Oromo believe that violence is contrary to peace and anathema to morality.

Peace as a Product of Virtuous Life

The value the Oromo ascribe to and the respect they have for peace is rooted in their perception of what it means to be human. To be human is to achieve a well-lived life, which, according to the Oromo worldview, is the basis of peace. Indeed peacemaking is possible only by valuing human life, regarding its well-being as intrinsic, rising above one's own interest, controlling one's own emotions, being far-sighted, having sympathy and compassion, care and concern, forgiveness and tolerance, and respect for others. At the heart of all these qualities is humanness. Ironic as it is, a well-lived life, a virtuous life in the Oromo sense of it requires moral courage because being moral does not directly and immediately benefit the individual moral agent. This view of the Oromo corresponds well to Grayling observation that "heroism is first and foremost part the property of peace makers. It takes infinitely greater courage to salvage a people or an epoch from conflict than to start or continue it."[85] In the long run nevertheless, the peace of all is a *sine qua non* for personal growth and success, but it takes courage to look beyond the here and now.

Living a virtuous life for the sake of promoting peace requires resisting coercion and violence, particularly in a world, as Grayling has noted, where "it is very much easier to be intolerant, angry, jealous and resentful than it is to be generous, patient, kind and considerate"[86] and it requires extraordinary courage and commitment. Peace needs goodwill and it cannot be achieved unless people are willing to give up immediate personal benefits for the sake of transcendent values such as peace. Thus, the Oromo indigenous concept of peace should not only be appreciated, but also appealed to if there is a genuine need of peace-building in Ethiopia.

Peacemaking as a Grassroots Enterprise

The world suffers from wars, violence and conflict mainly because the promotion of peace is left to the discretion of a few

leaders. Yet it is the majority of the people, particularly the weaker section of the society, that suffer the incommodities of the presence or absence of peace. The passivity and unconcern of the majority toward peace building and the defense of peace creates opportunities for leaders to abuse their power. In most cases, leaders become tyrants not because they have unbeatable power, but because of the indifference of the majority. In Grayling's view, "it is in the laziness and inattention of majorities that tyranny finds its toehold, so that by the time people bethink themselves, it is too late to bestir themselves."[87]

Thus, peace should not be the agenda of politicians alone; rather it must be the responsibility of each member of a given community. In the Oromo *gadaa* system, almost all members of Oromo community participate actively in the promotion and maintenance of peace. The place of the concept of *nagaa* in Oromo society shows that Oromo culture is predominantly a culture of peace. If Ethiopia as a nation has a need to build peace and security, in the true sense of the word, it must genuinely empower its people towards making it. Luckily, the material for the construction of peace is available in the traditional values of the various communities. The *gadaa* system of Oromo society has its own mechanism to make its people work for and live in peace. The egalitarian ethos, communal solidarity, democratic governance structure, separation of powers, and civility in political deliberations are elements of the *gadaa* system that allow people be in control of their destiny and thus promote peace for the wellbeing of collective.[88]

Respect for Peace as a Mechanism of Peacemaking

In the Oromo worldview, peace will develop and prevail if life conditions and environments are free of violence, strife and antagonisms. One necessary condition for that, according to their belief, is good governance and justice. Peace requires good administration. In the *gadaa* system, as we have noted,

power belongs to the people and is transferred peacefully to the legitimate age-set that rules on behalf of and is accountable to the people. Under ideal circumstances, Oromo laws are made by the people's representatives in ways that promote the interest of the people. The rule of law is a cardinal principle that governs politics and administration. The society upholds the values of caring and sharing and fights back against harmful and unethical acts and behaviors. These desirable moral and democratic values diminish the development of a political environment that fosters violence. Viewed from this angle *gadaa* is a democratic system that promotes peace and social harmony.

In the Oromo thought system, human actions are born and flow from the human mind. The idea of peace or violence is conceived in the minds of individuals and then spill over to social life and relations. People practically act out and behave, according to what they think about peace or violence. A person who has respect for peace is inclined to act in favor of peace and a person who has little respect for peace, according to Oromo conviction, acts more in favor of violence. In either case, the individual's disposition is not an innate condition, but a learned behavior. *Gadaa* officials thus endeavor to teach people to guard their minds from being polluted by evil thoughts and wicked ideas. In fact, the framework of predetermined actions given to age sets and classes in the *gadaa* system implants the notions of peace, which are explained through demonstration and then take form in the mind. The assumption is that a person with a mind guided by *gadaa* moral principles and egalitarian ethos is likely to act towards peace and harmony.

Traditional Peacemaking Mechanisms and the Modern Legal System

The Oromo indigenous conflict resolution mechanism has an important role in restoring peace that has been disturbed by conflict or violence. Conflict is intrinsically harmful, destructive, and expensive socially. The goal of conflict resolution, in the Oromo context, is the reconciliation of the parties engaged in conflict. In a broader sense, it not only aims to remove ill feelings between the reconciled parties, but also to facilitate cooperation and comity. This has immense contribution to the wellbeing and peace of individuals and society. The moral strength of the Oromo mediation mechanism can be shown in comparison with the modern legal mechanisms as executed largely in Ethiopian courts and government agencies. This comparison is necessary to understand how practical, beneficial, and enduring the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is. Some of the major points are identified as follows.

Verdict vis-à-vis Resolution

When a verdict is passed in the court of law, the conflict is resolved by making one of the litigants the winner and the other the loser. This may punish the culprit but does not uproot animosity or diminish the urge for revenge. Instead of a chance to cleanse themselves of the mutual hostility, the parties in conflict are left with fresh ill feeling towards one another. In this case, the conflict is not resolved but suppressed, and the resolution is temporary and reversible.

In contrast, conflict resolution in the context of the Oromo traditional mechanism is not an issue of winning or losing the case for one or the other party, unless the conflict emanated from the loss of life. Upon attainment of resolution, none of the disputants is declared winner or loser. Frequently, elders stress that the settlement of conflict is the triumph of the community over evil, not a victory of one party

over the other. When conflict is resolved, what ensues is mutual understanding, not a feeling of euphoria for the victor and melancholy for the vanquished. The community holds the view that conflict resolution is an agreement arrived at by the two conflicting sides through the efforts of mediators. Unless it changes the hostile environment between the parties into one of friendship, a resolution cannot be viewed as complete and fair. As such, the Oromo traditional mechanism of conflict resolution seems to be morally superior to the modern legal mechanism.

Adjudicating Facts vis-à-vis Restoring Values

In the Oromo traditional context, conflict resolution deals with facts and values—both indispensable to moral life. The modern method of settling conflicts through the court system, however, treats only the factual aspect of conflicts and ignores the values that are intertwined with the facts. Judges or juries do not look into the social norms and mores that were violated by the crime that was committed. They deliver a verdict based solely on the facts of the case to make resolution. The decision is incomplete because it does not resolve the issue at a deeper level, perhaps at a level where the criminal needed to be at peace with principal aggrieved party, *Waaqa*.[89]

The Oromo indigenous conflict resolution mechanism takes into account, not only facts but also values involved in the conflict. This is done with reference to the already existing value system. Conflicts arise mainly when the value system that creates harmony is violated. Thus, when resolution is made the individuals get reconciled not only with each other but also with the value system of the society that they had violated. In this sense, the Oromo traditional way of settling conflicts deals with conflict in more profound and complete ways than the modern court system does. Quite startlingly, the Oromo faith in the effectiveness of the traditional way of making peace, which is normally associated with the *gadaa* system,

was the preferred means even among Christian converts as recently as the 1970s.[90]

Professional Duty vis-à-vis Social Responsibility

In the modern conflict settlement mechanism in general, and Ethiopian state courts in particular, legal activities and procedures (that may not be clear and transparent to the parties of the conflict) are pursued strictly as matters of professional routine. Judges and attorneys are motivated by the desire to get something done or to win a case for someone at any cost. The pursuit of truth and resolution of conflict are not the prime objectives of those who practice the law. This makes the court mechanism susceptible to abuse, opening the way for doing what is morally objectionable, such as rushing justice or winning on false premises, rather than what is morally indispensable, such as seeking truth and upholding the law. Where the greater good of society is not the ultimate goal, justice may be denied to one who deserves it and given to one who ought to pay the price for violating it. Then justice itself, in the sense of administering deserved punishment and reward, loses its meaning.

In the Oromo traditional method of conflict resolution, mediation is neither a profession nor a means for earning a living. It is the extraordinary social responsibility that comes with being a member of a given age group. No compensation is paid or received for participating in resolving conflicts. The mediators render this social service motivated by good will and the desire to apply principles and conform to social expectations. It is thus assumed that they treat the case presented to them in good faith and to the best of their knowledge. What matters for them is the unconditional resolution of the conflict and the greater good of their society.

Moreover, the possibility that exposes the mediators to corruption is very limited. Even if there is an opportunity to resolve conflict unfairly, the demand for transparency in the

mechanism militates against corruption. The main reason why the Oromo indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is incorruptible is the care with which mediators are selected and the oath they take in the name of *Waaqa* to resolve the conflict in good faith. Elders with rich experience in mediation very often say, "We make mediation mainly not for this or that person, but for the truth and for our soul. Doing good or bad in such matters is ultimately for or against oneself. To the best of our knowledge, we do what is good and right mainly for our conscience and soul."[91] The Oromo mechanism of conflict resolution, therefore, reduces the probability of abuse and corruption. In this sense, the Oromo traditional conflict resolution mechanism seems to be more practical and profound for the maintenance and building of peace than the modern court mechanism.

Other Practical Benefits

In indigenous conflict avoidance, peacemaking is an important mechanism of creating and applying an indigenous solution to local problems. In Ethiopia, the Oromo peacemaking has moral and social implications as well as a political mission. Local solutions reduce physical hardship on people. If a conflict is taken to the court of law in an urban setting for resolution, then rural disputants and other people directly or indirectly associated with the case have to travel long distances to get to the location where the case is being adjudicated. In the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, such hardships are virtually eliminated. Since the conflict is treated locally, using local norms and venues within the rural community, the parties are spared suffering the vicissitudes of travel to and from the court.

Dealing with conflicts locally and through indigenous means has economic benefits. It minimizes the waste of money and time. For the management of conflict tried at the court of law relatively more money is needed for personal logistics,

writing of documents, retaining of a lawyer, and maybe for bribery. It is not only a lot of money that is spent, but also time that could be used for other productive purposes. In the indigenous mechanism, however, the disputants do not need to spend much money or time. They may spend small amounts on meal as an expression of respect and gratitude to the mediators for resolving their conflict. Since such cases are always mediated on Sundays and on holidays, as is the case in West Shawa, the time that could be used for productive activities would not be wasted.

The process in the traditional conflict mechanism is transparent to all participants, including those who have a stake in the outcome. In contrast, the procedures to be pursued and the mechanisms to be employed to make a ruling may not be easily transparent and accessible to the disputants. As legal jargon replaces the layperson's language in court proceedings, the plaintiff and the defendant lose control of their case to a system that is foreign to them. It may not be the truth that wins, rather the art and the language of the presentation, money, nepotism and the system itself. But in the traditional mechanism the conflicting parties know each and every detail of the mediation process. Thus, both parties have faith in the process and are willing to accept the decision even when it is not favorable.

Moral and Practical Weaknesses in Oromo Peacemaking

Despite its comparative moral strength outlined above, the Oromo traditional peacemaking has practical weaknesses that should be rectified for smother operation in the modern context. One serious problem is, there is no written record or document of value that governs the process of peacemaking. References are largely based on orally transmitted laws and experiences. Even the details of the peacemaking procedure are not well documented. In recent times, the terms of agreement

between the mediated parties have begun to be written and signed at the end of the process.

The lack of written reference and documentation is an area of traditional practice requiring articulation with current demands rather than a moral issue needing rectification. In the past, participants were aware of the authority of the word of the mediators. The norms, conventions, and the experiences of the society were used as points of reference. More importantly, the trust in the traditional authority of mediators and the evidence of the case in point were sufficient to keep the process from falling into grave subjectivity. In an era where people have recourse to other avenues of conflict resolution, it is worth stressing the importance of record keeping in the process of peace making.

One can observe unfairness in Oromo peacemaking when the contest to be mediated is between a man and woman. When the conflict between a husband and wife is presented for mediation, it very often yields results that favor the husband. Such practices are observable in many areas in Oromia, as evidenced in my research area in West Shawa. It is true when the issue of divorce is raised between husband and wife the mediators use all means to make them remain together. Even if both parties decide that they should be divorced, the mediators do not let them do so before they make a thorough examination, because there is a perception that separation has a detrimental effect on the life of the couples' children (if they have any), and on the peace of the community.[92] When divorce is unavoidable, the mediators divide the assets owned in common equally or unequally, depending on the case. Nevertheless, the wife is required to leave her home for the house is considered the husband's patrimony. The resolution consigns the wife to homelessness and landlessness while giving the husband the opportunity of remaining with his possessions. This makes the mechanism unfair.

The moral unfairness of the mechanism towards women can also be considered from another angle. Women are not eligible to participate in conflict resolution as mediators or judges. Although they play crucial roles in society, it is not clear why they are excluded from traditional conflict resolution. In fairness, Oromo culture requires a husband to be friendly, brotherly, and respectful to his wife. This is exemplified in the essence of the term *jartii*, literally an elderly women, an affectionate reference to a wife.[93] The exclusion of women from mediation and unequal treatment in settlements of marital disputes is another moral weakness of the Oromo peacemaking mechanism. Despite the weak points, the Oromo traditional conflict resolution mechanism, *jaarsumma*, immensely contributes to the maintenance and building of peace.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that, not everything of traditional nature must be considered as useless and irrelevant and not everything of modern development should be believed as morally desirable and solution offering. Both must be considered in terms of what problems they solve, and consequently to what extent they make life worth living.

The second important lesson to be learned from this inquiry pertains to the concept of peace in general. There has been fierce struggle between peace and war. It is still ongoing. And yet no one knows whether peace or war wins the battle at the end of the day. The mystery is, however, it is man who makes both war and peace, and it is again man who suffers from the destructive effect of war or enjoys the fruits of peace.

Let us put these questions as an invitation for further exploration of peace and war. If both peace and war are the work of human beings, then why is war so hated? Why is peace universally the most sacred, cherished and respected? Why, then, is peace, which has the support of the billions, not able

to win victory over war, which is despised by billions? What is the invisible force that inspires war? Why does peace that is the most desired to triumph over unwanted war pursued with less vigor and determination?

The lesson to be learned from the discussion of the Oromo conception of peace, its mechanism of peacemaking, and exploration of its practical application is that not everything traditional is useless and irrelevant, and not everything modern should be embraced as morally desirable and practical. In the current context, both must be considered in terms of what problems they solve, and to what extent they make life worth living.

Notes

1. A. C. Grayling, *The Heart of Things: Applying Philosophy to the 21st Century* (Phoenix, London, 2005), 258.
2. Royce Anderson, "A Definition of Peace," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 10:2 (2004), 103
3. Pojman P. Louis, *How Should We Live? An Introduction to Ethics* (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2005), xi
4. Grayling, *The Heart of Things,* Introduction
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.* 248.
7. *Ibid.*, 258.
8. Edward Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* vol. 9 (London and New York: Routeldge, 1998), 445.
9. *Ibid*
10. A. N. Tripathi, *Human Values* (New Delhi: New Age International Publishers, 2003), 15.
11. *Ibid.*, 16.
12. Craig, *Routledge Encyclopedia,* 445.
13. Tripathi, *Human Values,* 116
14. Grayling, *The Heart of Things,* 33.
15. *Ibid.*, 248
16. Louis P. Pojman, *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2000), 2.
17. A.C. Grayling writes that philosophers, "sought and offered answer to such questions as: what is truly valuable? How should one live? What is the nature of the good? How should we understand love, death,

grief, hope, freedom, truth, justice, beauty…and how should we live according to that understanding? What must we do to live courageously and successfully? How should we treat others? What are our duties as an individual, a citizen, a member of human community? What are the rights we humans have? How might we best respect the world we live in? These questions overlap; and answers to them jointly define the life truly worth living. Grayling, *The Heart of Things,* 264

18. Anderson, "Definition of Peace," 102.
19. Asmarom Legesse, *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System*, (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2000), 77.
20. West Shawa elders, group interview by author, Ambo, Dendii and Gindeberet, West Shawaa, 2005.
21. Lambert Bartels, *Oromo Religion: Myth and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia-An Attempt toUnderstand* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983), 252.
22. *Ibid*., 291.
23. The following is an example of evening prayer form Boorana, given in Gemetchu Megerssa, "Identity, Knowledge and the Colonising Structure: The Case of the Oromo of East and North-East Africa" (Ph.D. diss., School of Oriental and African Studies University of London, 1994),

    In peace you made us pass the day
    Make us pass the night in peace Waaqa
    Watch over our inside and our outside
    Keep away the evil foot from us
    Divert evil shoes from reaching us
    Enclose us with your turban of peace

24. Dewo Abettu, interview by author, Gindeberet, West Shawa, 2005; Dagaagaa Cuucee, interview by author, Ambo, West Shawaa, 2005.
25. P.T.W. Baxter, "Oromo Blessings and Greetings," in *The Creative communion: African Folk Modles of Fertility and the Regeneration of Life*, eds. A. Jacobson-Widding and W. van Beek (Uppsala: Act Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1990). Cited in Gufu Oba, "Shifting Identities along Resources Borders: Becoming and Continuing to be Boorana Oromo," in *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries,* eds. P. T. W. Baxter, Jan Hultin, Alessandro Triulzi (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), 119.
26. Boorana elders, group interview by author, Boorana, 2005; West Shawaa elders, group interview by author, West Shawa, 2005

27. Jan Hultin, "The Land is Crying: State Intervention and Cultural Resistance among the Matcha Oromo" in *A River of Blessings: Essays in Honor of Paul Baxter*, ed. D. Brokensha (Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1994), 78
28. *Ibid*., 78
29. This conception of peace comports well with the Royce Anderson's survey of various definitions of peace. He writes, "Whereas most Western definitions of peace tend to emphasize the absence of violence, Eastern definitions tend to be positive in the sense that peace means the presence of certain characteristics rather than the absence of negative characteristics. A truly global understanding of peace should include both the absence of factors such as violence and the presence of factors such as balance, harmony and unbrokenness. Anderson, "Definition of Peace," 102.
30. Jaatanii Diidaa, , interview by author, Yaabbello (Boorana), 2005.
31. Marco Bassi, "Gada as an Integrative Factor of Political Organization," in *A River of Blessings: Essays in Honor of Paul Baxter*, ed. D. Brokensha (Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1994),25.
32. Hultin, "The Land is Crying ," 78
33. Dagaagaa Cuucee, interview by author, Ambo, West Shawaa, 2005.
34. Mekuria Bulcha, "The Survival and Reconstruction of Oromo National Identity," in *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries,* eds. P. T. W. Baxter, Jan Hultin, Alessandro Triulzi (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), 51.
35. Johan Helland, "The Political Viability of Borana Pastoralism: Discussion of Some Features of the Political System of the Borana Pastoralists of Southern Ethiopia," in *A River of Blessings: Essays in Honor of Paul Baxter*, ed. D. Brokensha (Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1994), 140.
36. Bulcha, "Survival and Reconstruction," 51.
37. Gudrun Dahl, "Sources of Life and Identity," in *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries,* eds. P. T. W. Baxter, Jan Hultin, Alessandro Triulzi (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), 175
38. Bassi, "Gada as Integrative Factor," 24-25; Bulcha, Survival and Reconstruction," 51; P.T.W Baxter, "Repetition in Certain Boran Ceremonies," in *African Sytems of thought*, eds. M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen (London: Oxford University Press for International African Institute, 1965), 65.
39. Caalaa Sorii, interview by author, Negele Boorana (Gujii), 2005
40. Through a ritual known as *horomsuu*, literally making someone Oromo, outsiders are incorporated into Oromo society. In Gemetchu Megerssa's

words, "In the Oromo sense of this word [*horomsuu*], non-Oromo, even those captured in battle, can be socially transformed and acquire an absolute equality of rights and privileges with those who are Oromo by 'biological' descent." Megerssa, "Identity, Knowledge and the Colonising Structure," 24.

41. Caalaa Sorii, interview by author, Gujii Zone, Nagale Boorana, 2005.
42. According to Gemetchu Megerssa, "traditional Oromo law strictly forbids and severely punishes anyone who attempts to make a distinction between social and biological descent" Megerssa, "Identity, Knowledge and the Colonising Structure," 24, 256-260.
43. Boorana elders, interview by author, Yabello, Boorana, 2005; Caalaa Sorrii, Gujii Zone, Nagale Boorana, 2005; West Shawaa elders, interview by authors, Ambo, 2005.
44. Dagaagaa Cuucee, interview by author, Ambo, West Shawaa, 2005.
45. Dagaagaa Cuucee, Fufaa Jiraanee and Mixaafaa Hurisaa, interview by author, Ambo(West Shawa), 2005
46. Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 104.
47. Quoted in, Lambert Bartels, "Pilgrimage to a Holy Tree," in *A River of Blessings: Essays in Honor of Paul Baxter*, ed. D. Brokensha (Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1994), 2.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid*, 20.
50. For a detailed description of the *gadaa* generational organization, see Asmarom Legesse, *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society* (New York: Free Press, 1973), chapter 3.
51. *Ibid*, 219-220.
52. Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 126.
53. Ibid, 114-116.
54. Bassi, "Gada as an Integrative Factor," 26.
55. *Ibid*, 259
56. Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 33
57. *Ibid*
58. Oba, "Shifting Identities," 118
59. Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 29
60. *Ibid.* 200
61. *Ibid.* .
62. Bassi, "Gada as an Integrative Factor," 16
63. Bartels, "Pilgrimage," 4
64. Marco Bassi, "Power's Ambiguity or the Political Significance of Gada," in *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries,* eds. P. T. W. Baxter, Jan Hultin, Alessandro Triulzi (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), 159.

65. Donald Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution Multiethnic Society* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 128.
66. Herbet Lewis, "Wealth, Influence, and Prestige among the Shoa Galla" in *Social Stratification in Africa*, eds. Arthur Tuden and Leonard Plotnicov (New York: Free Press, 2000), 173.
67. Mario Aguilar, 1996. "Keeping the 'Peace of the Waso Boorana': Becoming Oromo through Religious Diversification," in *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries,* eds. P. T. W. Baxter, Jan Hultin, Alessandro Triulzi (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), 190.
68. Bassi, "Gada as an Integrative Factor," 24
69. Donald Levine, "Oromo Narratives," *Journal of Oromo Studies* 14:2 (2007): 51.
70. Doyyoo Wuqaa and Jaatanii Diidaa, Yaabbello(Boorana), 2005. Although it is expressed in different wordings different informants have the same view of the issue.
71. Oba, "Shifting Identities," 120
72. Bassi, "Gada as an Integrative Factor," 27
73. Bassi, "Power's Ambiguity," 155
74. Antoine d'Abbadie, "On the Oromo: Great African Nation Often Designated under the Name "Galla." trans. Ayalew Kanno, *Journal of Oromo Studies* 14:1 (2007): 136-137.
75. Oba, "Shifting Identities," 119
76. Dewo Abettu, interview by author, West Shawaa, 2005
77. Bartels, *Oromo Religion*, 242.
78. *Ibid*., 257.
79. West Shawaa elders, interview by author, 2005.
80. For details on peacemaking and reconciliation ritual, see Bartels, *Oromo Religion*, 2238-254.
81. Bartels, "Pilgrimage," p. 5
82. *Ibid*., 9.
83. Grayling, *The Heart of Things,*18
84. Megerssa, "Identity, Knowledge, and the Colonising Structure," 17.
85. Grayling, *The Heart of Things,* 149.
86. *Ibid*., 150
87. *Ibid*., 144.
88. Levine, "Oromo Narratives," 46-51.
89. See page 5 and endnote 22 above.
90. Bartels, *Oromo Religion*, 253-254.
91. West Shawa elders, interviews by author, West Shawaa, 2005
92. On the indissolubility of marriage among the Oromo before the Menelik's conquest and incorporation of Oromia into Ethiopia, See

Martial de Salviac, *An Ancient People Great African Nation: The Oromo*, trans. Ayalew Kanno (East Lansing, 2005), 246-250.

93. *Ibid*, 250.

The Nagaa Boorana:
Contemporary Discussions on Ritual and Political Diversity

Mario I. Aguilar

Contemporary scholarly discussions on the religion and politics of the Oromo have been dominated by works on the *gadaa* system (Legesse 2006, cf. Legesse 1973). In *Oromo Democracy,* Legesse (2006) proposes and reconstructs, diachronically, a political system in which ritual and religion are central to Oromo social organization but in which other modes of decision-making, particularly the military organization of the Oromo based around the *gadaa* system, seem to be prominent. In his reconstruction, this is the case, even when the system ceased to exist with the Abyssinian expansion towards southern Ethiopia during the nineteenth century. Within that work, there is a strong challenge to the view of Paul Baxter. On his part, Baxter had argued that *gadaa* was not a military organization because it never had the power to rule or control but only a ritual

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system that provided initiated males into a system that allied them in age-sets that could be called upon at times of crises, depending on their location within the wider system (Baxter 1978a: 153, 1990a: 236, 1994a: 180-182).

In this paper, I examine some of those diverse nuances in ritual and politics by focusing on the possibility that diverse views of the same concepts exist among the Boorana and, further, by focusing on the 'contrarieties' that exist in the inherent social possibilities of religion and politics (or of both) looked at from different perspectives. Rapport borrows the expression from William Blake and refers to "a place, both mythical and ubiquitous, where contrarieties are equally true" (Rapport 1997:653). The idea of peace (*nagaa*) as an all-encompassing, unifying idea remains central to the Boorana Oromo. This paper explores the notion that the sense of a unified cosmos with a creator and a social organization that reflects that daily communication provides a philosophical framework that has allowed the Waso Boorana to remain as part of the Oromo through the colonial and post-colonial period in Kenya. Within that unifying system, the Western distinction between religion and politics, ritual and decision-making become united by a larger over-arching concern for the whole of society and therefore provides a holistic understanding of a political philosophy that allows for Legesse and Baxter's interpretations of *gadaa* not as contradictory propositions but as complementary interpretations of the same socio-political understanding. It is that commonality of Oromo understanding that provides for the possibility of further explorations on Oromo philosophy and for a comparative approach to the systematic study of such ideas vis-à-vis other African philosophical systems.

I argue that center/periphery discourses of the same social phenomenon are different and that in the end one must search for principles of unification that embrace diverse social practices and their interpretation. In this case, I return to

discourses of Boorana political philosophy through the *Nagaa* Boorana (the Peace of the Boorana) in order to suggest that, regardless of the diversity of specific practices, both religious and political behavior practices reflect a philosophy of politics deeply rooted in a common understanding of the cycle of unity between physics and metaphysics, between religion, politics, and the cosmos. In that sense, the religious and the political remain unified within African philosophical systems in general and in the case of the Oromo, in particular.

Oromo Religion and Politics

Several decades ago, Legesse's seminal work on *gadaa* had created the awareness that already during the sixteenth century observers who witnessed the *gadaa* reported a complex and elaborate mode of social existence practiced by the Oromo, firmly grounded on the custodians of ritual, the Boorana, who in turn developed a system of age-sets that functioned as a military organization. Paul Baxter explored the significance of those age-sets and of the *gadaa* system and disagreed with Legesse on the possible power and military organization that could be granted to the *gadaa* system. Baxter argued that the *gadaa* system had ritual power but not political power. Within that larger perspective, Legesse's controversy with Paul Baxter seems to be not about the historical existence of military organizations or the centrality of religion vs. politics. Rather the difference is one of perspective on the same social diversity. Both regard the Oromo as an all-embracing ethnic and linguistic category for several groups who were united linguistically and ritually and in pre-colonial times became creatively diversified in order to face the challenges of European colonial expansion, Abyssinian conquest and the resulting localized warfare, trade and competition for resources—all within contemporary Ethiopia and northern Kenya. In other words, the disagreement could be understood as the possibility that social systems, religious and political, can be interpreted from

the center or from the periphery, from the view of an insider or outsider (known as emic/etic terms in anthropology) or, in the case of historically incomplete data, by stressing some historical moments more than others.

It can be argued, for example, that issues of ethnicity and nationalism respond to socio-historical processes that arise out of previous historical partitions, geographical isolations, military conquests and formations of a diaspora mentality. Issues of center/periphery require a dialectic hermeneutic in which a double-sided lens of sociability is applied in order to suggest that unified discourses or historical givens are not always understood in the same way by centers and peripheries. The challenge becomes even more complex when one analyses historiography and social change in the diachronic, as Legesse does, and the other confronts a reading of social change from the synchronic instance of anthropological fieldwork, as it is the case of Baxter. There is no doubt that the disagreement comes out of a reading of sources in history that could be read some other ways, but that in the case of Legesse aims at a centralized unification of tradition while in the case of Baxter creates a newly constructed view from the periphery of the ritual centers. This view takes into account that as Legesse remarks 'the active *gadaa* councilors were prohibited from traveling beyond a defined perimeter within Dirre and Liban, on the Ethiopian side of the border' (Legesse 2006:72).

South of the Ethiopian border the Boorana of contemporary Kenya were incorporated into a colonial British system by which they became part of a national and colonial periphery as well as of an Oromo ritual periphery. A short examination of the case of the Boorana of the Waso Nyiro area of Eastern Kenya could illustrate the effects of a forced peripheral existence. It forced them out of the *gadaa* ritual system but allowed them to keep a Boorana identity, an identity shaped by a utopian belonging to ritual centers that they never visited and a belonging to a nationalistic struggle that brought them

famine and destitution at the time of Kenya's independence in 1963.

Historical Processes in the Waso Area

While groups of Boorana were already present in the Isiolo District at the beginning of this century (Aguilar 1993b, Dalleo 1975, Hogg 1981: 20), a single group of 1,500 Boorana was escorted into the Waso area from Wajir by the British colonial police in 1932 (Aguilar 1993b). The arrival of that group of Boorana in the Waso area, and the settlement of colonial boundaries in 1934, meant that the Waso Boorana became geographically isolated from other groups of Boorana in Northern Kenya and Southern Ethiopia. After their settlement in the Waso area and throughout the colonial period, the Waso Boorana came into close contact with the Somali and as a result, they underwent a process of 'Somalization' (Baxter 1966) and became Muslims (Aguilar 1998).[1] The colonial administration encouraged their conversion to Islam, and the Boorana saw the Somali as successful people when dealing with the administration (Aguilar 1995a).

At the time of Kenya's independence, the Waso Boorana sided with the Somali in a war of secession (1963-1968) known as the *shifta* war.[2] Already in 1962, Somalia made claims of parts of the N.F.D. (Northern Frontier District). In Kenya as part of a so-called 'Greater Somalia,' the Waso Boorana supported the Somali claim on the lines that they were supporting their Muslim brothers. The conflict meant a guerrilla conflict, during which mines were planted on the roads and vehicles were attacked. The response by the Kenya Army was firm and a state of emergency was declared. As a result, the Waso Boorana were confined to camps and they lost most of their animals, as they were not able to bring them for water and grazing outside the internment camps.

As a result of the *shifta* emergency, the Waso Boorana felt that they had been used by the Somali for their own politi-

cal purposes (Aguilar 1998:13-14). The loss of animals meant that the Waso Boorana became impoverished pastoralists. During the 1970s and 1980s the Waso Boorana tried to re-build their herds helped by development agencies and churches. All those efforts meant that an area that in colonial times was closed to other peoples became the focus of national policies to change famine relief efforts into development projects (e.g. National Council Churches of Kenya Report 1971, available at archives of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London CA2/A/8/2).

It has been during the last twenty years, due to their disenchantment with the Somali and therefore with Islam, that the Waso Boorana have diversified their religious practices. While the older men continue practicing Islam, younger generations have revived some Boorana traditional practices, as they perceive them. Some of the Waso Boorana, especially children, are also following Christian religious practices at the Catholic and Methodist churches in the area. I have suggested elsewhere (Aguilar 1993f: 106) that any study of Waso Boorana religious practices cannot be carried out with the general presupposition that they are Muslims, instead their religious practices go through constant and dynamic processes of change, re-evaluation and adaptation. The Waso Boorana claim allegiance to Islam, and are considered Muslims by the rest of Kenya, but their religious practices show different traditions interacting in local communities of the Waso area, for example the trading center of Garba Tulla.

Religious Diversification in Garba Tulla

Garba Tulla is located 120 kilometers east of Isiolo. It stands as a trading center in the middle of the semi-desert of Eastern Kenya. It has a population of a few thousand people and has intermittently been an administrative post in which a Kenyan district officer resides.[3]

Garba Tulla town has a center, the main road that links Malka Daka and Kinna, where shops and plots are located. In the same main street, there is a local police station and a few *hoteli*, places for lodging in the East African sense. One can get food and some communal accommodation to spend the night. The centre of town has a mosque, a white building in which the Muslims gather five times a day for prayers. The center of town provides the center for an Islamic influence and, through the Qur'anic school, imams (or teachers) representing the orthodox core of Islam try to influence the Waso Boorana religious practices and beliefs.

Outside this established centre of town, *manyatta* are located. They correspond to settlements of Waso Boorana who need a place to reside, to keep their few possessions, their women, children and young animals. In those liminal settlements, life has a different character than in the town itself. During the rainy season, there is a constant flow of visitors and people staying for a few months, however during the dry season people are fewer. *Manyatta* that are located near the mosque in the West of town, tend to follow Islamic religious practices more closely than those further away. In town, it is the mosque that constitutes the centre of attraction for religious gatherings, public meetings and trade in general. Important links between people are established through conversations before and after the daily prayers. Thus, those Waso Boorana men who gather at the mosque before and after daily prayers are older men, interested, I would suggest, on being recognized as religious and wise, while, at the same time, keeping up with news about transportation and the stock trade.

Traditional practices which are more emphasized in the settlements outside the centre of town also provide opportunities for Waso Boorana men and women to establish their own networks and personal authority, though on a more limited scale, within their own *manyatta* or with the other *manyatta* in Garba Tulla.

The historical process of gradual conversion by the Waso Boorana to Islam took place over a period of approximately twenty years, the period between their arrival in the area in the 1930s and 1952, when the colonial archives report that most of the Waso Boorana were already Muslims. Thereafter, from 1952 until now to be a Waso Boorana in Garba Tulla has been to be a Muslim. In practice though, only men of the older generation have been consistent with their self-identification as followers of Islam and their daily attendance of prayers at the mosque in Garba Tulla. Those older men were instructed on Islam when they were young and, even those who cannot read or write have learned Islamic prayers and rituals.

Younger men were not instructed on Islam because of the disruption of Waso Boorana life during the emergency of the 1960s. Thirty years ago they saw all the suffering and violence that their fathers and families had to endure because of their support for the Somali cause. Their questioning of that historical period took place in the 1970s. At that time they not only realized that the Waso Boorana were still associated by other Kenyans with people who, though living in Kenya, were not really Kenyans (the ethnic Somali), but further that being Muslims and close to the Somali, the Kenyan government associated them with the *shifta* (bandits). Therefore the Waso Boorana tragedy after the emergency was not only the loss of animals and resources, but also the fact that since that time, they have been looked at with suspicion by other communities in Kenya.

In addition to questioning the validity of Muslim religious practices and their close association with the Somali, those younger men showed interest and began to ask questions about the traditions of the Boorana (*Ada Boorana*) and the practices of the Boorana in the past. That rethinking of their ritual life led to a new appreciation and re-actualization of their traditional practices, e.g. the sacrifice of coffee-beans,

the traditional Boorana prayers and naming children with Boorana names rather than Muslim ones.

A younger generation of children born during and after the *shifta* war was also influenced by processes of rethinking Waso Boorana identity. As traditional Boorana prayers became more frequent in the different households of Garba Tulla after the emergency, children learned about their Boorana traditions from their mothers. Waso Boorana women during and after the emergency had "their own ways of expressing their religious discourse, their identity, their aspirations and their religious reality" (Aguilar 1994c: 54). They in turn taught their children traditional Boorana prayers on a daily basis, in what I would call a school of Waso Boorana tradition. Children born in the 1980s in Garba Tulla have also been influenced by the Christian tradition via the local Catholic school and the interaction with development work carried out by the Methodist and Catholic churches.

Another historical factor that influenced the re-appearance of traditional religious practices after the emergency was the resurgence of Oromo nationalism and the improvement of roads and communications with Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s. Due to that communication with Ethiopian Boorana, practices such as the cult of Sheikh Hussayn of Bale (Dahl 1989:158) together with processes of divination related to Boorana spirits (*ayyaana*) became common practices in the *manyatta* of Garba Tulla and across the Waso area (Aguilar 1994a).

The Peace of the Boorana

Prayers and blessings are an important part of the daily life of every Boorana. In those prayers the most important word is peace (*nagaa*). In every moment of prayer (morning and evening), peace is asked for by the community, and that action of praying together is understood as a public statement of peace. A Boorana community gathers in unity to pray to God

(*Waaqa*) and also to express their own unity, namely the peace of the Boorana (*Nagaa Boorana*). That Peace of the Boorana becomes the ideal for society and it is kept through the efforts of every individual and of every household.

The *Nagaa Boorana* has been in the past associated with the traditional rituals of the Boorana, those communal moments related to the *gadaa* system. At the celebrations of *gadaa*, a new group of responsible Boorana took over the leadership for a period of eight years, assuring the continuity of the community and at the same time the peaceful relation among the Boorana themselves, and between the Boorana people and God. That Peace assured the fertility of the land, animals and human beings (Bartels 1983: 373), through the re-enactment of "a dramatized philosophy or a way of acting out a folk rather than an instrumental organization" (Baxter 1978a: 179).

Due to historical and political changes (conquest by Ethiopian rulers, conversion to a world religion, geographical isolation, etc.) some groups of Boorana did not celebrate the *gadaa* festivals any longer. In those cases, other religious practices began to take place at community level and replaced the ritual and social order generated by *gadaa*.[4] In the case of the Waso Boorana of Kenya, the *gadaa* festivals were never celebrated in the Waso area,[5] but other religious practices and ritual moments have been assumed as important for the keeping of their communal ideal, the Peace of the Boorana. In other words, those other religious practices have served the same communal purpose as the *gadaa* festivals served in the past. A particular process of religious diversification within the history of the Waso Boorana has allowed them to celebrate a new set of ritual moments. All those ritual moments, as outlined by Aguilar (1998), contribute to the keeping of the *Nagaa Boorana* in the Waso area, and they have also allowed them to feel united with other Boorana groups in Kenya and Ethiopia.

A Philosophy of Oromo Politics

Within Western society, and indeed in much of Western thought, religious systems are mentally separated from political systems. In practice the two operate in the same lines of practical engagement whereby symbolic structures are very much part of diversified political systems but separated in the possible effects and challenges of the both/and. All African political systems in the pre-colonial era stood the passing of time as single socio-political entities because they embraced all people within those systems. Religious leaders reinforced those political systems that were part of a larger cosmological understanding. Myths of origin and oral tradition pointed to the sources of those systems. Changes in these systems were rare while they were under pressure during wars, military invasions or famine. This was the case of the Oromo. Segments of the linguistically unified Oromo peoples came under pressure by Islam, the advancement of the Abyssinian colonial armies or the European conquest of African territories. As described above, the Oromo of the East converted to Islam relatively quickly while those further south first became part of the British controlled territory of Kenya. Further events within the 1960s made the Boorana of the Waso area and those at the Tana River into Muslims as a cultural process of 'Somalization' took place.

It is significant that linguistically the Oromo remained a unified group while politically the segments of the Oromo became part of diverse political systems based on the spoils of colonialism, nationalistic wars and the end of the Abyssinian Empire. Within that situation, a diverse view of religion and politics emerged as outlined by the diverse views of Legesse and Baxter. However, the centrality of Oromo thought remained because it has been through ideas of unity, commonality and origin that the Oromo could speak in contemporary discourse of a unified people. Within that unified idea of a common history and a common origin, *nagaa* remains as a prin-

ciple of cultural unification in diversity because there are ethnic Oromos who, due to processes of educational assimilation, do not speak the Oromo language or, through a process I have called 'religious diversification' (being Christian, Muslims or even secular Oromo), have little knowledge or practice of Oromo religious traditions. It is the common philosophical sense of a worldview and the genesis of the social Oromo systems that provide a commonality that could be called an "Oromo political philosophy." Such a system returns to the genesis of *gadaa* as a secondary mechanism of social identity— the first one being the creation and sustenance of Oromo from *Waqqa*, the Oromo God, the creator and giver of life of all Oromo.

The *Nagaa* Boorana operates as an idea, part of a unified philosophical system, in which all Oromo, and particularly the Boorana as a central ethnic segment to all Oromo, understand the idea of peace as an all-encompassing idea that guides their search for ritual and political responses to their communal life. Thus, in the midst of a history of war, colonial conquest, cultural depravation and famine, the Waso Boorana retained a system of ideas that united their ongoing existence with those of their ancestors, with God and with nature. In their understanding God created the world, their cattle and their environment, and in an ever-ongoing cyclical philosophical understanding of a united physical and meta-physical world. God sends the rain so that the grass can grow, grass so that cattle can eat in order to grow and multiply, thereby providing food and financial resources to the Waso Boorana. In a more complex way the following parts of the cycle of physics and metaphysics take place:

a. *Waqqa* provides rain – the rain goes onto the soil
b. The soil is fertilized – the soil produces grass
c. The animals eat grass – the animals grow and multiply
d. The animals are kept and eaten by the Waso Boorana

e. The animals provide identity, social organization and status for the Waso Boorana
f. An animal dies and produces fertility for the earth,
g. The earth produces grass and therefore feeds more animals
h. A man dies and goes back to the earth, the earth produces grass to feed animals and animals benefit Waso Boorana society.
i. A man dies and goes back to God who in turn sends rain to the earth [and the cycle begins once again] (Aguilar 1998:138).

Within that unified system the Boorana exchange daily greetings asking for peace. During every communal gathering for prayer or making decisions they request from God that peace remain or be restored as in the following prayer:

> Let the animals live in peace [without being stolen, etc.]
> Let the Warta live in peace,
> Let the calves be in peace,
> Let Saq be in peace,
> Let the Sakuye have peace,
> Let Bor be in peace,
> Let the Boorana have peace,
> Let us be in peace wherever we stay,
> Let the *bada* [three sacred places of the Boorana in Ethiopia] be in peace
> Let the nine spring wells be at peace,
> Let peace be with us throughout the day,
> Let peace be with us throughout the night,
> May God grant us peace throughout the day,
> May God make us rich [in terms of animals].[6]

The daily utterance of blessings and prayers articulates a philosophical system of unity and understanding of ideas that remains central to Boorana life throughout historical changes and social crisis upon social crisis. However, there have not

been major works within the Oromo literature on a common Oromo philosophy. The division between religion, ritual and politics has outlined the rich practice of the Oromo in general and the Boorana in particular without articulating a larger system of thought related to the *Nagaa Boorana*. Indeed, the work of Gemetchu Megerssa (1993) has linked the symbolic connotations of a local knowledge that passed from ritual specialist to ritual specialist preserving the common explanation for the body, nature and God. But in his works, there is no engagement with other African philosophical systems as part of a larger African discourse on the richness of philosophical systems.

I refer here to the possible cross-cultural engagement of an Oromo ethno-philosophy with other African discourses and with the possibility of a systematic narrative of Oromo ideas within a larger history of ideas, a history of African philosophy (see for example the collection of essays on African philosophy in Wiredu 2004). Indeed, political models, such as the Oromo democratic system described by Legesse, arise out of the exchange and development of ideas on the cosmos and out of articulating sociability and political systems within a larger philosophical system. With this in mind, it is possible to regard the challenges of colonialism not only as possibilities of freedom and self-determination but also as a stimulus for comprehension and common understanding of a political philosophy that allows, through a historical reading, a contra-narrative against colonialist who despise ethnic systems of understanding the world. This is particularly true for those systems as do not fit within European and Western philosophical concepts that are heavily influenced by Greek philosophy (see Mudimbe 1988, 1994). However, the possibility of acceptance of a localized system of thought such as the *Nagaa Boorana* depends on the possibility of accepting that philosophical systems require engagement with other systems and also accepting that the unification of a single understanding of an ethno-

philosophy cannot be reached as an agreement vis-à-vis hard science. In the words of D.A. Masolo "Debate and the desire to get our concepts properly understood are two vehicles of intellectual enquiry that have helped in the establishment of philosophy as a special intellectual activity; and we have no reason to exempt African Philosophy from them. Such intellectual enquiry is, however, possibly only where we will all be open to the historical processes affecting and conditioning our needs, experiences, and general historical choices" (Masolo 1994:251).

Conclusions

This discussion brings us back to the idea of peace as an all-encompassing unifying idea remains central to the Boorana. In the words of Paulin J. Hountondji "every society in the world possesses practico-theoretical codes or 'practical ideologies' on the one hand and, on the other, written or oral texts, transmitted from generation to generation" (Hountondji 1983:178). With regard to the Oromo, the challenge for scholars is to synchronize systems of knowledge with political philosophy, such as the case exemplified by the *Nagaa Boorana,* within a broad comparative perspective. Such common philosophical ideas can challenge post-colonialism as a Westernized paradigm which introduces cultural neo-colonialism. Such a perspective articulates once and again the possibility of an Oromo identity arising not only out of 'nationalism' per se but out of the richness of systems of ideas that attest to a common humanity rather than to a repetitive contestation of lack of diversity within African societies and Africa in general. In the words of Omoregbe: for "just as the cognitive element of point of view is intrinsic to the concept of truth, so is the concept of knowledge intrinsic to the concept of being or existence" (Omoregbe 1998:8).

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Notes

1. The idea of a 'Somalization' of the Waso Boorana is a process that can be verified by comparing the Waso Boorana and those Boorana who live in Northern Kenya. The Waso Boorana way of dressing (e.g. pictures in Reyes-Cortez 1994a, 1994b, 1994c) resembles that of the Somali (e.g. pictures in Buchholzer 1959: 80, 144) and not of the Boorana of Marsabit (e.g. pictures in Baxter 1979: 83, 90) or Ethiopia (e.g. pictures in Bartels 1983: 381, 383; Van de Loo 1991).
2. The word *shifta* means bandit and is derived from the Amharic language (Hogg 1990: 30; Schlee 1989: 51).
3. It was not an administrative post in the 1950s, and it became a post again after independence, when administrative posts proliferated.
4. Conversion to Islam therefore assumes the replacement of the *gadaa* ritual structures among the Oromo by other systems of ritual with its own practices (Lewis, H.S. 1965: 131).
5. Baxter (1979: 87) suggests that the *gadaa* ceremonies have not been held in the Isiolo District since the nineteen thirties. According to the testimony of the older people in Garba Tulla, those ceremonies were never performed in the Waso area (e.g. GTHT/KOR/f.n./1992/48) Cite this and the following reference in the bibliography. [GTHT = Garba Tulla Historical Texts, being the creation of written texts from interviews I conducted during my 1992 fieldwork, following Sobania (1993: 117, footnote 2).]
6. Taken from the section 'Prayers and Blessings' in Aguilar (1998:171, cf. 170-177).

The Oromo in Medieval Muslim States of Southern Ethiopia

Mohammed Hassen

A Review Essay of *Islamic History and Culture in Southern Ethiopia: Collected Essays* by Ulrich Braukämper. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers. 2003.

Before his research interest shifted to the Sudan in the 1980s and to Nigeria in the 1990s, Ulrich Braukämper was a well-known anthropologist studying the Hadiya and Kambata people in southern Ethiopia. Though most of his published works are in the German language, he has also written a number of articles in English, including the essays collected into the anthology under review. The essays deal with Muslim states that emerged during the medieval period in the central and southeastern regions of today's Ethiopia. Various scholars, including Enrico Cerrulli, G. W. B. Huntingford, Taddesse Tamrat, Merid Wolde Aregay,[1] have discussed the geographic positions, ethnic composition, social organizations, and economic foundations of these states. Braukämper provides arguably the most comprehensive description of these states, their Muslim peoples, the process of Islamization, and the sig-

nificance of Muslim shrines in the region. In the final chapter, the author discusses medieval Muslim survivals, which serve as a stimulating factor in the revival of Islam in southern Ethiopia. These issues are discussed in chapters three to six with accuracy, detail, and verve. In contrast, the first two chapters are provocative and controversial.

The medieval Muslim states of central and southeastern Ethiopia came into existence at different times between the ninth and fourteenth centuries. Their emergence was largely due to the revival of the Red Sea trade in the tenth century, which revitalized the caravan routes that connected the Port of Zeila with the commodity-rich region of southern Ethiopia, and the concomitant influx of a large number of Muslim merchants and immigrants. The first of these states was the Muslim state of Shawa, which flourished between 896 and 1285. Other Muslim states that developed during the thirteenth century included Ifat, Bali, Dawaro, Hadiya, Adal, Fatagar, Harar, Waj and a number of other smaller ones.

Braukämper introduces the essays by explaining the rationale for collecting previously published essays into one volume as follows.

> It was the repeatedly forwarded proposal by Ethiopian scholars which finally convinced and encouraged me to present this re-edition of a series of articles of Islam in southern Ethiopia. Materials on this topic are mostly scattered in journals, periodicals, proceedings of conferences or anthologies which are not easily accessible to readers in countries where the library conditions are limited. The historian Mohammed Hassen urged me as early as 1979 to provide an improved publication of the work on Islamic principalities between the 13th and 16th centuries. (p. IX)

I remember urging my friend, Ulrich Braukämper, to revise his articles and publish them in a book form in 1979. However, what he published twenty-three years later in 2002 leaves much to be desired. First, the views he expressed about the early Oromo history in his articles of 1977 are repeated in the present anthology without the benefit of the scholarship on the Oromo that has flourished since 1977. At least, Braukämper could have expressed awareness about the existence of such scholarship, even if he still prefers to reject the content. Even more surprising is that Braukämper does not seem to have consulted contemporary Christian documents, which demonstrate the presence of some Oromo groups within the Christian kingdom itself, almost two centuries before the sixteenth century.

With the exception of the Semitic language speaking Argoba, Harla, and Harari (Adare) of the Harar highlands, the overwhelming majority of the peoples of the Muslim states were Cushitic language speakers, of which a significant portion were Oromo. Neither Braukämper nor any one of the aforementioned scholars ever considered the possibility of the presence of some Oromo groups within these Muslims states. The reason for their reticence is not the dearth of sources but their unswerving, if inexplicable, commitment to the theory that the Oromo entered these states only in the first half of the sixteenth century in the wake of the disastrous jihads of Imam Ahmad (1529-1543). The major historical sources on which the history of this period is based clearly attest that Oromos lived in some of these states centuries before the time of Imam Ahmad.

One such source is the Chronicle of King Amda Siyon (1314-1344), which makes a clear reference to a people called Galla and their country as "Hagara Galla" ("the country of the Galla"). In addition to confirming the presence of sedentary Oromo groups around the Awash River during the 1330s, the chronicle implies that Amda Siyon may have conducted

war against some rebellious Oromo groups. More importantly, the creation of a powerful Christian kingdom during the reign of Amda Siyon might have stemmed a northward flow of Oromos from the present administrative region of Bale. During its southward expansion against the Muslim states, Amda Siyon organized regular garrisons along the frontiers to keep powerful groups, including Oromo pastoralists at bay.[2]

By the fourteenth century, Oromo groups who had lived in the region of Shawa had become an integral part of the Christian Kingdom. This fact is recorded in King Amda Siyon's Chronicle. According to Getatchew Haile's translation, the king,

> during his reign…had been to the country of the Galla. On April 28 [1332] the king first passed through and reached the Galla country. On June 7, he left the Galla country, along with his army. These statements refer to the king's movement within the country. They do not imply that the king ever left Ethiopia.[3]

By Ethiopia, Getatchew Haile means the medieval Christian Kingdom. From the time he arrived until the time he left *Hagara Galla* (the country of the Galla), Amda Siyon appears to have stayed in a district located near Dawaro. This district must have been heavily cultivated and densely populated to have supported Amda Siyon's large army for five weeks. Amda Siyon's campaigns, accompanied by an appalling carnage and destruction, probably sent different groups, including the Oromo, fleeing from the line of attack. Thus, the displacement of people that accompanied the southward expansion of the Christian Kingdom seems to have altered the ethnic composition of the Muslim states during the second half of the fourteenth century.[4] That does not change the fact that the contemporary sources attest about the presence of the Oromo in the region during Amda Siyon's campaigns.

Regardless, Braukämper did not suspect much less discuss the presence of some Oromo groups in some of the Mus-

lim states conquered by Amda Siyon. Instead, taking the sixteenth century migration of the Oromo as a settled issue, he blames the Oromo for destroying an indigenous historiography and for extinguishing even its memory centuries later.

> The Oromo (Galla) migration in the second half of the sixteenth century abruptly discontinued the indigenous historiography concerning southern Ethiopia in both Arabic & Ethiopic. Moreover, the expansion of this people was the main reason why the Islamic principalities were completely extinguished, and their memory is only kept in the oral traditions (p. 13).

In blaming the Oromo for anything that goes wrong in Ethiopia, Braukämper follows the well-trodden path of characterizing the Oromo as "vandals," which has been the staple of Ethiopian historiography. Even though he does not explain the nature of indigenous historiography that was discontinued, Braukämper has no qualms blaming the Oromo for its destruction. Moreover, the Muslim principalities that were purportedly destroyed by the Oromo were actually incorporated into the expanding Christian Kingdom between 1330 and 1332 and destroyed during the Christian-Muslim conflict of the sixteenth century (1527-1567).

Implying that the Oromo did not live in this province before the middle of the sixteenth century, Braukämper states that the inhabitants of the province of Dawaro were probably Hadiya/Sidama (p. 75). He goes on to suggest that the vast area between the Omo River and the Indian Ocean coast, "was occupied in the thirteenth century by groups of the Ethiopic race who partly spoke Cushitic or Semitic languages" (p.15). What the Ethiopic race refers to is not clear from Braukämper's work. What is clear is that Braukämper is intent on establishing as a fact his belief that the Oromo did not exist in this vast area before the middle of the sixteenth century. His view was probably influenced by Eike Haberland's theory that the en-

tire area stretching from the Gibe Valley to Harar highlands was occupied by a large group of Semitic-speaking people who were split up and fragmented after the middle of the sixteenth century during the pastoral Oromo migration.[5] Haberland's theory in turn is not different in content from that of Cerulli's, who claimed that the whole region between Bali and the Gibe region was peopled by the Sidama.[6] Interestingly Braukämper replaced the theories of Haberland and Cerrulli by his own, claiming that the Hadiya people inhabited the area from Hararge to the Gibe region. The evidence he presents in support of his theory is the oral tradition he gathered in Hadiya land.

> The intensity with which the original connection is perceived is manifested in the fact that the ancestor of Hadiyya is considered the son of Abadir, the legendary founder of Harar, and an indigenous (Sidama) woman. This indicates that the Hadiyya ethnogenesis [i.e. the birth or formation of Hadiya identity] probably took place in the Hararge region and that the forefathers were representatives of a relatively homogenous culture based on a symbiosis of autochthonous Africans with a thin substratum of Muslim Arabs. The study of historical and ethnologic details proves this to be true. (p.61).

There is no study that proves what Braukämper claims to be true. In fact, his conclusion is inaccurate on several grounds. First, the Hadiya are part of the eastern Cushitic language-speaking people, who have lived in the region for thousands of years. It is historically inaccurate to establish an Arab ancestry for the Hadiya based on traditions that may have only symbolic value. For instance, some Oromo groups in the Gibe region claim that Sheik Abadir (the 13th century Arab missionary) was their ancestor. Such a claim only reflects the importance of Abadir as the standard-bearer of Islam in the region and has nothing to do with Oromo ancestry. Even more confusingly, Braukämper makes the Hadiya both Cushitic and

Semitic language speakers (p. 66). How could they become both Cushitic and Semitic language speakers at the same time?

Notwithstanding Braukämper's conclusive assertions, even Amhara oral traditions are unanimous that the ancestor of the Oromo was born in Dawaro. What the traditions suggest is supported by Arab Faqih, historian of the jihad of Imam Ahmed, who states that in 1529 the Muslim force in Dawaro invaded the country of Warra Qaalluu, where they ravaged and burned houses, captured weapons, and carried the inhabitants into slavery.[7] The Warra Qaalluu were sedentary Oromo groups who lived in Dawaro long before the time of Imam Ahmed's jihads. Today the descendants of Warra Qaalluu Oromo are found in Wallo, Hararge and Wallaga regions.

Braukämper claims, "the Oromo who invaded Bale (historical Bali) after 1530, became the culturally and linguistically prevailing element" (p. 84). He goes further and states that "the ancestors of the Oromo did not expand beyond their country of origin west of the upper Ganale River …before the beginning of the 16th century"(p. 135). In truth, historical Bali was the original home of the Oromo. Even if one accepts the historically inaccurate notion that the Oromo did not live in Bali before the sixteenth century, it is bewildering that Braukämper did not even suspect that a pastoral society, which was not subject to any law, save its own, could have crossed into a neighboring territory even though written records did not record the event.

Braukämper also claims that the name Galla originated during the second half of the sixteenth century, from what he calls Daudi Galla[8] ("the time of dispersal in Hadiya language"). He does not appear to realize that Galla had been in use in the literature of Christian kingdom at least since the thirteenth century, if not earlier. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Galla became a generic name for all the conquered people of southern Ethiopia, including the Hadiya. The oral tradition Braukämper gathered in the land of the Hadiya

was most likely a backward projection of the events of the nineteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth century. Interestingly Braukämper claims that, "Before the great Oromo expansion at the beginning of the 16th century, the present-day dwelling-areas of the Arsi were occupied by the states of Bale, Hadiya, Ganz, Sharkha (Shirka) and Wag, whose inhabitants were predominantly Muslims of Hadiyya-Sidama stock" (p. 153).

It then follows that none of the Oromo groups lived in the areas mentioned above. However, historical evidence ranging from Christian sources to the monumental book of Arab Faqih make it clear that some Oromo groups, who lived in the areas mentioned above, suffered from the Imam Ahmed's jihad war.[9] Arab Faqih specifically refers to Oromo groups who lived in Dawaro[10] (what is today northern Bale and western Hararge or Chercher), in Ifat, Waj,[11] Fatagar and other areas mentioned by Braukämper. Beyond mentioning the simple fact of their existence, Arab Faqih suggests that these sedentary Oromo groups lived under the control of Christian administration as part of the medieval kingdom of Abyssinia and fought on both sides of the conflict during the jihad wars (1529-1543), depending on their location and the exigencies of the situation.

It is important to note that these sedentary Oromo groups were separate from the sixteenth century pastoral Oromo who lived in the Ganale River Valley, Sidamo and Gamu Gofa. They lived beyond the boundaries and outside the control of the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia. It was these pastoral groups who launched the sixteenth century Oromo migration or population movement, which Braukämper asserts were responsible for splitting "… the Hadiyya-Sidama …[and] Semitic block to small spots in Gurageland, the islands of Lake Zway, and the town of Harar"(p. 18). The fact is, a single Muslim state that extended from Harar to Lake Zway did not exist for the Oromo to split. Instead, there were several states, including Hadiya. The migrating pastoral Oromo did not destroy these Muslim

states. They were the victims of the sixteenth century jihad wars. What is more, the area between Harar and Lake Zway was inhabited not only by Hadiya-Sidama, but also by various groups, including the Oromo.

Even Braukämper offers evidence that contradicts his sweeping conclusion when he writes, "the Tullu Moti (Oromo "king's hill") near Asba Tafari [Chiro in western Hararge] was so named because it is said to have served as a place of residence for Christian rulers….This place Tullu Moti is especially connected with Zara Yai'qob" (p. 36). If the Oromo were not in the region mentioned by Braukämper, what explains the fact that the Christian rulers' palace was named Tullu Moti or "the hill of the king" in the Oromo language? Could non-Oromo speakers give unmistakable Oromo place name, without the presence of the Oromo themselves? What Braukämper fails to realize is that there are a number of historical evidences confirming Oromo presence in the said region during the reign of King Zara Yaeqob (1434-1468).[12] For instance, based on oral interviews conducted in 1972 and 1973 Braukämper claims that the Oromo did not live in the Muslim state of Waj before the middle of the sixteenth century. This conclusion is based on the story his oral informants told him 1972/73 about events that took place more than five hundred years ago.

> When questioned about Wag, informants in the Ethiopian Lake region immediately refer to the Wagi-Oromo near Asalla (in Arsiland) who, in fact, live in the probable center of the ancient district….With the exception of this clan (gossa) name Wagi[Waji], the Oromo obviously have not much traceable connection with Wag (pp. 46-47).

Braukämper did not suspect that oral traditions are helpful when they are eyewitness accounts. Oral traditions about remote events need to be supported by other historical evi-

dence. Without corroborating evidence, the scholar's conclusion is nothing more than a conjecture.

Contrary to Braukämper's conclusion, the Oromo in fact have traceable connection to the historical province of Waj. According to Marcel Cohen, the Waji Oromo clan got its name from that of the province of Waj.[13] Besides the obvious linguistic association, Braukämper's reference to "genealogical traditions in Arsi [that] report a marriage connection between the Oromo ancestor [Waji] and the Ulbarag, the Semetic-speaking Hadiyya" (p. 47) confirms early Oromo presence in Waj. This conclusion in turn matches a Boorana Oromo tradition recorded by Haberland that describes Waj as the place where the original Oromo fell from heaven.[14] All this traditions agree with Arab Faqih's reference to the land of Orm (the land of an Oromo group) in the province of Waj. According to his record, when Wazir Adole, the commander of Imam Ahmad's army was either in or near Waj, in 1531:

> He sent scouts of a hundred horsemen to Maya, under the command of Zahroubi Osman. From Maya, the Muslim army went to the land of Aran where they looted and destroyed. From there, they went to the land of Orm…where the Muslim force was attacked by the infidels. After defeating the infidels, the Muslim army left the land of Orm.[15]

Clearly, Arab Faqih's account establishes that there was a group known as Orm (Oromo) in the province of Waj. Given the unanimity of oral traditions from different sources and the support of a written record, the Oromo presence in Waj before the sixteenth century is an established historical fact by any standard of historical interpretation.

Among Braukämper's many misrepresentation, his assertion that "the Oromo tribes have apparently never possessed a centralized political authority" (p. 143) is the most perplexing. One thing that all authorities on the Oromo, apparently

with the exception of Braukämper, agree is that the *gadaa* system was a political structure that made the Oromo militarily a powerful nation in the whole region of today's Horn of Africa from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. What is more, Braukämper boldly asserts that the Arsii Oromo developed a separate ethnic entity only towards the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (p. 153). This simply is a historically untenable proposition. The author even makes a shocking accusation against Asma Giyorgis for presenting an anachronistic information by "explicitly [linking] events of the 16th and early 17th centuries with the Arsi" (p. 154). Braukämper does not appear to have consulted the chronicle of King Susenyos (1607-1632), which contains numerous references to the Arsii Oromo as part of the Barentu or eastern Oromo confederacy, but he is quick to fault Asma Giyorgis who apparently had read Susenyos's chronicle. If historical record is the test of historical accuracy, then Asma Giyorgis's conclusion about the Arsii Oromo is on a stronger foundation than Braukämper's assertion.

Despite serious problems of interpretation in the first two chapters, *Islamic History and Culture in Southern Ethiopia: Collected Essays* is a very useful book. The last four chapters contain a wealth of useful information on Islam in southern Ethiopia. Braukämper is accurate in stating that Islam in Ethiopia is a neglected theme (p. x). The statement is especially valid regarding the state of scholarship on Islam in southern Ethiopia, where very little work has been done since the publication of Trimingham's *Islam in Ethiopia* in 1952. Braukämper's collection of essays is a welcome addition to the literature. It also has an excellent index, which makes it handy for researchers. It is a much-needed book on Islam in southern Ethiopia and will remain very useful for years to come.

Notes

1. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom 1508-1600 (Ph.D. diss. University of London, 1971). Works by the rest of the authors cited in the text are cited below.
2. G.W.B. Huntingford, *The Glorious Victories of Amda Seyon, King of Ethiopia* (London, 1965).
3. Getatchew Haile (trans.ed), *The Works of Abba Bahriy with other Documents Concerning the Oromo* (Koleville, Minn.: self-published, 2002), 26.
4. Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 150, note 1.
5. Eike Haberland, *Galla –Sud Athiopiens* (Stuttgart, 1963), 77-78.
6. Enrico Cerulli, *Studi Ethiopici II: La Lingua a La storia di Sidama* (Roma: 1938), 1-2, 31-33
7. Abdel Aadir, Chihab Eddin, also known as Arab Faqih, 1897. *Futuh Al-Habasha* (*Histoire de Ila Conquete de l'Abyssinie XVI Siecle*) trans. & ed. R. Basset, (Paris, Reprinted in Cairo, 1974), 135-37
8. Ulrich Braukämper, 1980. *Geschichte der Hadiya sud-Athiopiens den Anfangen bis sur Revolution 1974* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1980), pp.130-33.
9. Arab Faqih, *Futuh Al-Habasha*, 135-37.
10. Ibid., 135-37, 269,298.
11. Ibid., 269, 291,298, 355, 382.
12. Haberland, *Galla Sud Aethiopiens*, 276.
13. Cohen, M. *Etudes d'Ethiopie Meridionale*, (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1931), 78-80.
14. Haberland, *Galla –Sud Athiopiens*, 137-38.
15. Arab Faqih, *Futuh Al-Habasha*, 254-55.

Book Review

Paulos Milkias. *Haile Selassie, Western Education and Political Revolution in Ethiopia*. Youngstown: Cambria Press, 2006. Pp. xxii, 392 Pages. $ 99.95 (cloth), $ 49.95 (paper)

This book examines the interrelationship between politics, the demand for sociopolitical change, and the development of education in Ethiopia during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie. It is based on the premise that the role of education, students, and teachers in precipitating a revolution in underdeveloped societies deserves scrutiny. Given the fact that Ethiopian society has been going through profound social and political changes over the last forty years, Paulos Milkias's stated intent is to analyze the role Western (modern) education played in facilitating a revolution in the country in 1974. Undoubtedly, the book is an excellent addition to the meager literature that expounds upon how education facilitates change in a given society.

In writing the book, the author has unearthed a vast amount of data that has thus far not been readily available to the general readership. Documents from the World Bank and the United Nations, as well as Ethiopian, British, and United States' government archives are used to support the writer's arguments. In addition, a questionnaire developed and distrib-

uted to expatriate staff that had taught and served in high level administrative posts at institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia assisted in providing insights for the book. To this collection, the author has added his personal account as one of the leaders of the Ethiopian student movement in the 1960s, substantiating his assertions by narratives of his encounters with the various power brokers of the time, including members of the royal family, high ranking military officers, and civilian administrators. The book therefore provides first-hand information as experienced by the author as a college student at a time when the country was going through major social and political upheaval.

In the first chapter, the book provides a brief historical background about the people and the country. Following this, Milkias examines theories of underdevelopment, exploring and analyzing divergent views showing the role of Western education as an important variable in the sociopolitical transformation of the country that culminated in the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974. In Chapter 3, the author highlights the level of destruction sustained by the emerging Ethiopian educational system during the Italian occupation of the country between 1936 and 1941. The chapter further examines the influence of the British after the defeat of the Italians as well as the role of Americans in restructuring the educational system. In this chapter, several issues relating to education are raised: regional disparities in educational attainment, curriculum construction, gender inequities, and language (medium) of instruction. The author in this regard makes a cursory review of the issues and leaves a historical footprint for educators and policy planners interested in delving into the study of the politics of education in Ethiopia.

Attention then turns to the abortive coup d'etat of 1960, where the author assembles the facts, showing in detail the partnership between the architects of the uprising and the Ethiopian college students at the time. This event marked a

turning point as the beginning of an alliance forged between the forces of change and the intelligentsia in recent Ethiopian history.

The author further elaborates on the role played by the Americans in their efforts to preserve the status quo. He elucidates the students' zeal in demanding free speech and the right of assembly. He then asserts, based on the opinions of the expatriate staff at the U.S. embassy and his own analysis of events, that American educational influence had a major effect on the psychosocial development of the student movement. He writes: "There was without doubt a direct correlation between United States involvement in Ethiopian education and the consequent politicization of the campuses that led to the dramatic events of the 1960s and finally brought down the Haile Selassie regime in 1974" (p. 111). In addition, United States' cultural penetration, channeled through the Ethiopian school system, "not only radicalized the young scholars but also made them reflect upon the magnitude of U.S. interest in influencing the course of Ethiopian politics since 1945" (p. 142).

In their struggle for change, the author argues, students employed innovative approaches in developing a close affinity with the working class and the peasantry citing examples such as the Ethiopian University Service and the National Literacy Campaign. In documenting the challenges that the Ethiopian educational system faced towards the end of the 1960s, the author carefully summarizes the work of the National Commission for Education, a government-appointed body that undertook a major review of Ethiopian education and produced a monumental document called *The Education Sector Review.*

Milkias devotes Chapter 9 to assessing educational policy and its implications for the Ethiopian student movement. In particular, he analyzes the active involvement of the students in exposing a national human tragedy that resulted from the

famine of the early 1970s that affected a significant segment of the population. Students were not alone in the forefront of the effort, paying a hefty price to bring about desirable social and political changes in the country. According to Milkias, teachers were also involved in garnering support for the student movement, putting their lives and livelihood at risk.

The final three chapters assess developments following the 1973 famine, the insurrection of the military, the power struggle among the aristocrats and other groups vying for political upper hand, the emergence of the *derg* (the military junta that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991), and the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie. In addition, the author provides a postscript of the events that took place in Ethiopia following the demise of the monarchy as a leading force on the Ethiopian political scene.

The author concludes by stating "an authoritarian, penetrated system that attempts to introduce Western education and all the accompanying values without changing the intrinsic character pertaining to itself carries the seeds of its own destruction" (p. 245). The statement is accurate in the sense that the Haile Sellassie government actively supported Western education which proved its undoing. The book is an outstanding resource for students of history, political science, sociology, public administration, and education. Milkias has produced a well-documented account of the confluence of power, politics, and education in Ethiopia's recent past.

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