THE JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

Volume 19, Numbers 1 & 2 **July 2012**

Articles

Dynamics of Political Ethnicity and Ethnic Policy in Ethiopia: National Discourse and Lived Reality in the Guji-Gedeo Case
Asebe Regassa Debelo

Conquest and Change in Boorana Traditional Polity: A Study of Dynamism and Resilience of Indigenous Political Institutions
Alemayehu Debelo Jorgo

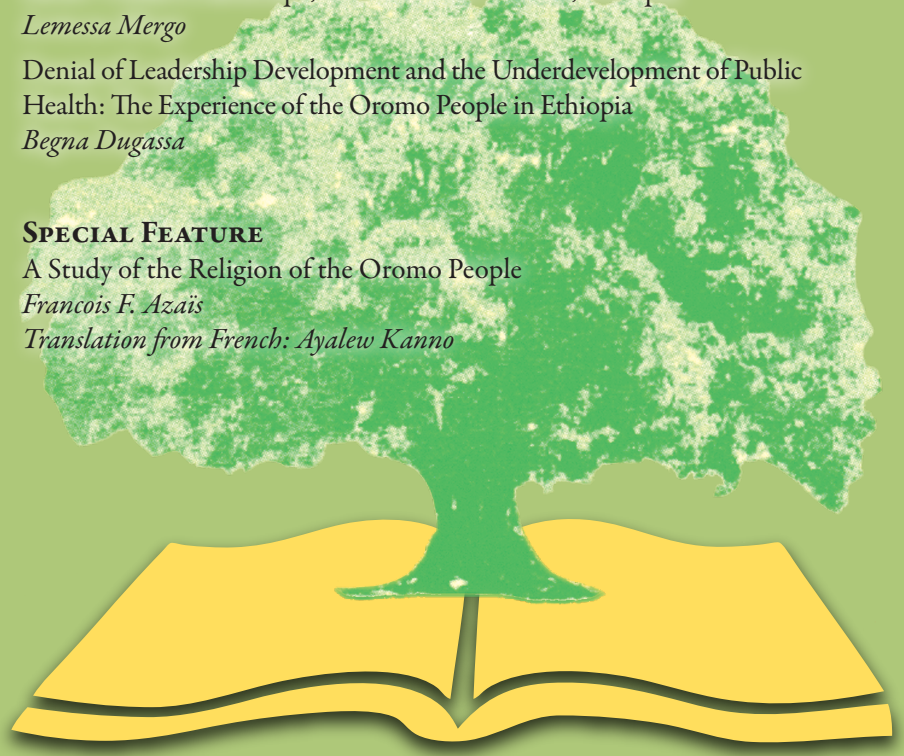
Boorana Political Culture and Rousseau's Concept of Popular Democracy: An Examination of Theory and Praxis
Taddese Lencho

"The Scene Does Not Speak": The Demise of Odaa Bulluq Sacred Forest from Horro Guduru Landscape, Northwestern Oromia, Ethiopia
Lemessa Mergo

Denial of Leadership Development and the Underdevelopment of Public Health: The Experience of the Oromo People in Ethiopia
Begna Dugassa

Special Feature

A Study of the Religion of the Oromo People
Francois F. Azaïs
Translation from French: Ayalew Kanno



A Publication of the Oromo Studies Association

THE JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

Volume 19, Number 1 & 2 **July 2012**

Publication of the
Oromo Studies Association

The Journal of Oromo Studies (JOS) is a leading scholarly publication of the Oromo Studies Association (OSA). Issued twice a year, the journal publishes articles pertaining to all areas of Oromo Studies past, present and future, including topics related to the Oromo diaspora worldwide. Its interdisciplinary scope and revisionary approach offers readers a critical view of the socioeconomic, political and cultural achievements of the Oromo people in their interactions with the people of the Horn of Africa and beyond.

Reflecting the diverse interests of OSA members, the journal emphasizes multidisciplinarity and embraces variety by publishing articles that allow both the specialist and the general reader to gain far-reaching insights and a thorough understanding of the Oromo people, the Horn of Africa and the international community of which they are a part.

All manuscripts submitted for publication consideration must be original work that has not been published previously and is not currently being considered by any other publication outlet. Submitted articles are evaluated by scholars who are experts in the field. The journal's editorial team is committed to communicating editorial decisions within a reasonable period to authors.

Published articles do not necessarily reflect the views of OSA or its officers. Individual authors are responsible for the views, data and interpretations presented in the articles.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Individual $35
Institutional $55
Single Issue $20
Add $15 annually for shipping.

Send in US currency payments and subscription requests to: Oromo Studies Association P.O. Box 32391, Fridley, MN 55432, (USA). Make checks or money orders out to the Oromo Studies Association.

Contents

Articles

Dynamics of Political Ethnicity and Ethnic Policy in Ethiopia: National Discourse and Lived Reality in the Guji-Gedeo Case

Asebe Regassa Debelo.....1

Conquest and Change in Boorana Traditional Polity: A Study of Dynamism and Resilience of Indigenous Political Institutions

Alemayehu Debelo Jorgo.....37

Boorana Political Culture and Rousseau's Concept of Popular Democracy: An Examination of Theory and Praxis

Taddese Lencho.....69

"The Scene Does Not Speak": The Demise of Odaa Bulluq Sacred Forest from Horro Guduru Landscape, Northwestern Oromia, Ethiopia

Lemessa Mergo.....101

Denial of Leadership Development and the Underdevelopment of Public Health: The Experience of the Oromo People in Ethiopia
Begna Dugassa.....139

Special Feature

A Study of the Religion of the Oromo People
Francois F. Azaïs.....*175*
Translation from French: Ayalew Kanno

Dynamics of Political Ethnicity and Ethnic Policy in Ethiopia: National Discourse and Lived Reality in the Guji-Gedeo Case

Asebe Regassa Debelo

Since the 1960s, latent ethnic consciousness has been reactivated and converted into a potent political force in Ethiopian politics. Diverse ethnic groups, political actors, and liberation movements in the country have used ethnicity for political mobilization and to organize resistance against forms of injustice associated with the birth of the contemporary Ethiopian state. They claim that Emperor Menelik's conquest of the southern part of present day Ethiopia introduced an asymmetrical power relationship between the Amhara

Journal of Oromo Studies, Vol. 19, No. 1 & 2 (July 2012), pp. 1-.

Asebe Regassa is a PhD Candidate at Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies, Bayreuth University, Germany. He is the author of *Ethnicity and Inter-ethnic Relations: The 'Ethiopian Experiment' and the Case of the Guji and Gedeo* (VDM verlag 2010). He has also published articles, including "Contrast in the Politics of Recognition and Indigenous Peoples' Rights" in *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* (2011) and "Emerging Ethnic Identities and Inter-ethnic Conflict: A Study on Guji-Burji Conflict in South Ethiopia" in *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* (2012).

and Tigryans on the one hand and the conquered peoples on the other. As Donald Donham (1986:24) notes, "By the early twentieth century, extractions from northern peasants lightened, just as those from southern peoples were made more heavy." They bemoan that the Ethiopian state comprised a dual system in which the political economy of the north was sustained by massive transfer of wealth from the southern regions and that the peoples of the south were, notwithstanding their region's contribution to the national economy, denied access to political power, economic resources, and cultural autonomy.

By the late 1960s, the question of nationalities had begun to lead the political agendas of ethnic-based social movements. These movements contributed to the Ethiopian revolution of 1974 and toppled the military regime in 1991, ushering in a new political order in which ethnic federalism was the principal organizing theme of Ethiopian politics. Defenders of ethnic federalism argue that granting administrative autonomy to ethnic groups is the only solution to redress past injustices (Kidane 1997). Ironically, inter-ethnic conflicts have escalated in the post-1991 period (Hagmann and Alemmaya 2008; Abbink 2009). Even ethnic groups who claim to possess shared values, cultures, beliefs and myths of common ancestry and have for centuries coexisted in harmonious and interdependent relationship were involved in bloody conflicts. One such conflict occurred in 1995 and 1998 between the Guji and the Gedeo peoples of southern Ethiopia.

The conflicts were essentially over sorting out the rights each group was constitutionally granted in the new political dispensation in Ethiopia. A transitional charter and a new Ethiopian constitution providing for ethnic-based administrative units came into force in

1991 and 1995 respectively. Under this arrangement, the Gedeo were given self-rule in an administrative zone within the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' (SNNP) regional state. Even though the constitution stipulates that the rights of nations and nationalities to self-government will be respected, a large number of the Guji Oromo were included in the Gedeo administrative zone. The Guji's persistent demand for self-government and their attempts to assert their constitutional rights were swiftly suppressed by the federal government. The fundamental questions to be raised here are: how did the old harmonious relationship between the Guji and Gedeo change into a conflict? What were the gaps between the discourse and the practice of ethnic federalism with reference to the Guji-Gedeo conflicts?

On the surface, it is clear that the constitution promised to the people rights of self-government and local autonomy. In practice, however, the failure of the promise and the activation of ethnic consciousness and a feeling of ethnic difference among both the Guji and Gedeo, fuelled tensions that eventually escalated into the bloody conflicts of 1995 and 1998. Several academic works have looked into the nature of Ethiopian ethnic federalism and its implications (see Clapham 2002, 2009; Abbink 1997, 2009; Turton 2006). Only a few have so far attempted to examine the relationship between the national discourse and its local implementation. Taking the Guji-Gedeo conflicts as a case study, this paper explores the nexus between the discourse on ethnic federalism and the practical challenges in implementing federalist policies. It shows that the conflict was an early outcome of the implementation of the Ethiopian experiment of ethnic federalism and that it resulted from the

discrepancy between the official promises of the political model and how power was actually exercised on the ground.

The Genesis of Political Ethnicity in Ethiopia

Some scholars posit that ethnic consciousness among different ethnic groups in Ethiopia emerged as a response to Amhara domination within the Ethiopian empire (Bassi 1996; Hassen 1996). The ascendancy of the Amhara to political and cultural dominance is rooted in the way the empire was created in the late nineteenth century. As noted earlier, the empire was created following the conquest of hitherto autonomous states in the west, east, and south of the present day Ethiopia and welded into the Kingdom of Shewa. At the end of the process, the Ethiopian empire emerged with its current geographical shape and ethnic composition (Tibebu 1995; Hassen 1996; Hameso 2001; Vaughan 2003). The creation of a new state was followed by the institutionalisation of the northern feudal system of economic exploitation, political oppression, land alienation, and imposition of Amhara language and religion on the peoples of the southern states (McClellan 1988; Markakis 1994).

In the subsequent decades, elites identified with the Amhara ethnic group dominated the political and economic affairs of the country (Hassen 1996). The subject peoples were forced to learn the Amharic language, convert to Orthodox Christianity, and adopt other aspects of Amhara culture as the only 'civilized culture' (Markakis 1994). In imperial Ethiopia, to use John Markakis' dramatic description, "it was easier for a non-Christian, who also did not speak *Amharigna*,

to pass through the eye of a needle than to enter the charmed circle of power and privilege" (ibid, 227). Poluha (1998:31) also states that; "...a person aspiring to power had to be a man who had mastered *Amharigna*, adhered to [Orthodox] Christianity and had developed a good relationship with a powerful patron."

In the 1960s, the pervasiveness of Amhara domination provoked a reaction from the subject peoples. Grievances that they were being economically exploited, administratively oppressed, socially marginalized and culturally stigmatized by the few Amhara elites operating within the ethnic-based oppressive system fomented a sense of ethnic self-awareness among the subjugated peoples. People who shared the historical experiences of oppression began to witness their dichotomized existence of privilege and deprivation based on ethnic distinctiveness. They clad themselves in on a repertoire of traditional values and deployed them as a fortification against the Amhara/Ethiopian ethnic hegemony (Bassi 1996; Hameso 2001). Gradually, ethnic consciousness – a sense of awareness of being oppressed, exploited and marginalized by elites of a particular ethnic group based on ethnic identification – grew up into sense of ethnic nationalism, mainly among the educated segments of the oppressed ethnic groups. These later contributed to the rise in ethnic self-representations and the sense of identity among their respective groups.

Among possible factors that transformed ethnic grievances into consciousness and later into ethnic nationalism, the role of education was significant. In the post 1941 period, the expansion of modern education, specifically the opening of a university and colleges, brought a particular group of students close to the centre

of political activity. Born in rural conditions, this group of students had direct experiences of the depredation of the oppressive ethnic-based system. The opportunity of higher education enabled them to conceptualize Amhara hegemony within Ethiopia within the broader international dimension of colonial oppression. This cohort played a pivotal role in articulating ethnic grievances as ethnic consciousness, then transforming the latter into ethnic nationalism, thereby generating support for ethno-nationalist liberation movements that included issues of ethnicity in their political agenda.

In effect, ethnic nationalism was articulated by the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) in the 1960s. This opened a new chapter for ethnic politics in a country where talking about ethnic diversity was condemned and viewed as a threat to national unity. The ESM was first organised by students at Hailesillasie I University (now Addis Ababa University) as a protest against exploitative class relations under the imperial regime, which had impoverished the rural life. After the mid 1960s, the movement added 'the nationality question' to its political agenda (Balsvik 1985).

For the activists of the ESM, Marxist-Leninist philosophy was initially their inspiration for setting their political agenda. The solution they prescribed as a cure for the problem of national oppression – the right to self-determination of nations and nationalities including the right of secession – was brought to public attention in 1969 by an article written by Wallelign Mekonnen. He became one of the leaders of the student movement, killed in 1972 during an attempted hijacking of an Ethiopian airliner (Balsvik 1985; Gudina 2003). The article sparked a political bombshell for the regime by

explicitly addressing ethnicity and exposing the Amhara dominance and oppression to the public. A portion of his article reads as follows:

> Is it [Ethiopian national identity] not simply Amhara and to a certain extent Amhara-Tigre supremacy? Ask anybody what Ethiopian culture is? Ask anybody what Ethiopian language is? Ask anybody what Ethiopian religion is? Ask anybody what is the national dress? It is either Amhara or Amhara-Tigray!! To be a 'genuine Ethiopian' one has to speak Amharic, to listen to Amharic music, to accept the Amhara-Tigre religion, Orthodox Christianity, and to wear the Amhara-Tigre *shama* in international conferences. In some cases to be an 'Ethiopian', you will even have to change your name. In short, to be an Ethiopian, you will have to wear an Amhara mask (Quoted in Balsvik 1985:277).

Wallelign's article broke the ice of silence surrounding the issue of ethnicity among Ethiopian students. His was a strong condemnation of the century-long illusion of the success of the imperial regime's 'nation-building' project. Thus, the political, historical, economic and social realities of the country expressed in the form of ethnic-based oppression became the basis for the rise of ethno-nationalist movements devoted to a struggle for liberation from the century-long 'colonial experience' or 'national oppression' (Gudina 2003). In short, ethnicity became an aspect of the call for political change issued by the major liberation fronts such as the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) and many others since the 1960s.

In the process, the last feudal regime was toppled in the 1974 revolution, bringing a military junta to the political scene. Although some signs of recognition of diversity were seen during the early years of the military regime, it could not move beyond rhetoric (Clapham 2009). Clapham argues that the early promises of the military regime (i.e. the *derg*) that attracted popular support became a nightmare to most of the Ethiopian masses as the centralist policy undermined the local autonomy of those who contested the structure of the state itself (ibid). By the end of the 1980s the TPLF managed to organise other ethnic-based movements to form the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front/EPRDF. In part because of its failure to address the nationalities questions, the military junta was ousted by the combined forces of different liberation movements. With EPRDF's seizure of state power in 1991, ethnicity has been formally institutionalized as the foundation of ethnic federalism as a new political arrangement (Clapham 2002; Turton 2006).

As a brainchild of the student movement TPLF/EPRDF emphasised the rights of nations, nationalities and peoples to 'self-determination' (Clapham 2009). The military regime which preceded the TPLF/EPRDF had attempted to resolve the country's most difficult issue – ethnic question *vis-à-vis* unity – through class struggle. In contrast, the TPLF/EPRDF sought resolution of this issue through 'voluntary' federalism based on ethnic- based autonomous units as a way to forge national unity (ibid). In this manner, the federal arrangement was conceived in the Transitional Charter of 1991 but was enacted by the 1994 constitution that actually came into effect in 1995.

The Ethiopian Constitution of 1995 can be described as comprehensive for embracing essential democratic values and declaring Ethiopia to be a party to all major international treaties on human rights and public law (Abbink 2009). Article 39 of the Constitution, which contains a reference to rights of nations, nationalities and peoples, reveals the centrality of ethnicity as the organising principle of the new political system:

> Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession...Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history...Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in state and Federal governments (Art. 39:3 of FDRE Constitution, 1995).

Although success of the political model is highly contested among scholars, it still remains short of fully delivering on its promises. Critics of the experiment range from those who consider it divisive and a threat to national integrity (Abbink 2009) to those who criticise the government in power for its failure to effectively implement the experiment (Turton 2006; Clapham 2009). However, as Dereje Feyissa (2010) argues, the success of the political order should be assessed on the basis of whether the discourse is translated into practice.

Guji-Gedeo Relations: From Harmony to Conflict

Both Guji and Gedeo belong to speakers of the Cushitic language family. While the Guji belong to the larger Oromo nation, the Gedeo constitute a smaller group. In the past, both the Guji and Gedeo claimed they have a common ancestry to emphasize their commonality rather than their differences. In recent years both groups have tended to contest their unity and the history of living together in the same area in relative harmony.

Coexistence

Before their incorporation into the modern Ethiopian state in late nineteenth century, the two groups coexisted as autonomous states in the southern part of today's Ethiopia with strong cultural, economic and religious interdependence. The Guji had a long history of warfare with their Oromo kin and non-Oromo neighbours, except with the Gedeo with whom they have a long maintained harmonious coexistence (Hinnant 1977; Berisso 1994). The generally peaceable relation of the Guji with the Gedeo was the exception to the hostile relationship that they had with their other neighbours, including the Arsi and Boorana Oromo.

Several factors contributed to the historically peaceful coexistence of the two groups. One important factor is a mutual interdependence embedded in economic and cultural interconnections, myth of common ancestry and Guji's sense of self-pride. In the past distinct economic activities enabled both the Guji and Gedeo to live in complementary rather than competitive relationship, an aspect of what Günther Schlee calls 'integration

through difference' (Schlee 2002:25). While the Gedeo inhabited the highland ecological zone of the eastern escarpment of rift valley, the Guji occupied the lowland areas to the south and the west. A pastoral community, the Guji supplied the agricultural Gedeo people with livestock and livestock products in exchange for crop products, particularly *enset ventricosum* (commonly called false banana). In other words, they lived in distinctive ecological zones and were engaged in different but interdependent economic activities which, in turn, reduced the possibility of conflict emanating from a competition over resources (McClellan 1988).

Cultural interdependence, though currently contested, also played a significant role in holding the groups together. Elders from both sides recall their participation in common religious practices and other rituals. Above all, the Gedeo used to pay regular visits to the Guji *qaalluu* institution that was used as a common platform for religious practice as well as a medium of conflict resolution. In this respect, the traditional conflict avoidance and resolution mechanism called the *gondoro* has been given due respect from both sides. *Gondoro* has similar meaning in both languages (Afan Oromo and Gede'uffa); it literally means to declare that an event shall not happen again. The tradition symbolically represents a process of reconciliation and purification where victims as well as the guilty/transgressor pass through some rituals guided by the Guji *Abba Qaalluu* (leader of the *qaalluu* institution), members of *gadaa* officials and other local elders from both groups. It was also associated with a belief that failing to pass through this reconciliation would result in ancestral curse as elders narrate below:

> Long ago, Guji and Gedeo elders made mutual oath to avoid homicide and any kind of conflict between each other. They pledged to keep their oath forever and to transfer it to the coming generations. The elders passed an enduring curse on anyone who transgresses the oath. However, in case of unintentional and/or uncontrolled loss of life in the hands of someone else, the curse had to be removed through complex purification process called gondoro (informants 2006, 2008).

While the belief in ancestral curse could be cited as one among many factors that curbed conflict between the groups, the reconciliation process contributed to limiting possibilities of conflict multiplication that would have otherwise spread in the form of revenge and counter revenge.

The shared myth of common ancestry is another important aspect in a harmonious relationship between the Guji and Gedeo. In the past, a myth embodying a common group image where the Gedeo were represented as elders in the clan system of the Guji and Boorana was extant in the area inhabited by the two groups. Although it is today highly contested on both sides, elders still narrate how that sense of brotherhood had once tied them in solidarity during conflict against neighbouring groups. As McClellan (1988) and Guji elders point out, the Gedeo used to ally with the Guji whenever the latter fought against the Sidama with whom the Gedeo have more in common culturally and linguistically.

An important dimension of the issue, one that indirectly contained inter-group conflict arises from the Guji's sense of self pride. As Berisso (1994) and Guji elders contend, in the past the Guji practiced honor

(*mirga* or *midda*) upon killing big game animals and/or human enemies from among their neighbours who they consider to be equals. It was not killing any human being that would grant the killer with the honor, since the Guji traditionally despised some of their neighbours, including Gedeo, as inferior. It can therefore be argued that Guji's self pride and its stereotypical representation of the Gedeo as an inferior group had its role in restraining the Guji from killing the Gedeo as part of the *midda* tradition. Whatever the factors might be, Guji-Gedeo relationship had been characterized by fairly harmonious coexistence for a long period before it was changed into conflict in 1990s.

Conflict

The change from peaceful coexistence to competing interests, and eventually to a violent conflict in Guji-Gedeo relations could be better understood by focusing on their position in the political economy of the Ethiopian state, its administrative strategies since the period of the conquest, and the post-1991 political experiment. Since early twentieth century, the Ethiopian state's 'modernist bias' has backed the agriculturalist Gedeo's gradual expansion into pastoral areas that were by custom Guji. This removed the ecological demarcation between the habitats of the two communities and allowed both to utilize the same ecological niche for different purposes. The state-sponsored expansion of the Gedeo had different phases. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the Ethiopian state encouraged and supported Gedeo farmers in their expansion into Guji customary lands to promote coffee production, through which the feudal landlords of the north were exploiting the human and material resources of the subjugated south.

The landlords supported coffee planting where the Guji traditionally grazed their livestock. Because the Guji were not engaged in crop cultivation, their presence in the middle altitude ecologies did not serve the settlers' economic purposes, unlike that of the agriculturalist Gedeo farmers. In fact, the Gedeo's expansion into Guji areas took place through strong inter-societal linkages between the two groups in the form of intermarriage and Guji's tradition of adoption. Although Guji's reaction to Gedeo expansion was not violent during the imperial period, elders recall that some signs of discontent were already evident among the Guji.

In the 1960s, another phase of official resettlement programs was undertaken by the regime of Emperor Hailesillasie in connection to a Gedeo revolt against the regime. In 1960 the Gedeo revolted against the feudal regime's oppressive policies of land expropriation, heavy taxation, maladministration and socio-cultural marginalization. After crushing the uprising, the state systematically resettled several Gedeo households far into the Guji land, such as in the Bule Hora areas, as a means of controlling both groups and weakening the uprising.

As part of its national resettlement schemes of 1980s, the military regime embarked on another round of resettling Gedeo farmers in Guji territories. The resettlement program was promoted as a device to ease high population density in Gedeo and as a mechanism of weakening ethnic-based movements by mixing groups. Therefore, it should be noted that increased number of Gedeo peasants' settlement on Guji land during the last two regimes had planted seeds of competition over resources, particularly following the Guji's gradual transformation via adoption of an agro-pastoral livelihood (Regassa 2010).

Unequal treatment of the two groups by the imperial and military regimes, particularly with regard to political representations and social service provisions, fuelled more discontent. Because of the mobile nature of their main economic activity and due to the state's lesser emphasis on pastoral communities in delivering social services, the largely pastoral Guji were excluded from opportunities for formal education as well. In contrast, the Gedeo had more opportunities to access mission and government schools. Hence there were more educated Gedeo than Guji who have been able to work in government since the time of waning years of the imperial period. Guji informants argue that, although the higher administrative offices in the Gedeo sub-province (*Awuraja*) were occupied by the Amharas, the Gedeo played key roles in lower administrative posts. Consequently, the Guji found themselves being ruled by the Gedeo they used to look down upon in a district bearing the name of their neighbour.

It is important to note that the changing power relationship between the two groups took place within the framework of a religio-cultural hegemonic structure imposed by the Ethiopian state and within a context which undermined the legitimacy and capacities of indigenous institutions of conflict management. Influenced by the illusion of cultural homogenization commonly known as 'Amharization,' the imperial regime discredited indigenous practices including the *gondoro* tradition. Traditions of conflict avoidance and resolution which were embedded in the belief systems of both groups were replaced by bureaucratic litigation in government courts. Regarding this, Hinnant (1977) describes that Abyssinian feudal administrative system took over

the role of the *gadaa* system while the Orthodox Church monopolized the religious space that had been the purview of the *qaalluu* institution. Prior to this, among the Guji – as was also common among other Oromo – the *gadaa* system played a central role in the society's socio-political and military affairs. Guji's inter-clan and inter-group relationships were regulated according to principles set in the *gadaa* assembly. Following the conquest, the Ethiopian administration and economy were institutionalised and the Oromo system of administration was delegitimized. People were prompted to take their cases to the state court system rather than handling it through traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution. In the field of religion, the effort of the state religion (Orthodox Christianity) in delegitimizing the *qaalluu* institution – the religious institution of the Guji – was paramount. This institution was a culturally eligible institution that served in mediating the religious aspects as well as the social issues of life in the Guji and neighbouring communities. The leaders of the *qaalluu* institution were the only legitimate and respected officials in prayers, blessings and conflict mediation processes together with *gadaa* leaders. Although the people did not loss faith in the *qaalluu* institution, the Orthodox Church launched a continuous campaigns against *qaalluu* practice.

Even so, one should not hasten to conclude that competition over resources ushered in by the political economy of the Ethiopian state, the reversal of power relations, and the delegitimization of indigenous institutions, were also the causes of the 1990s conflicts. One should rather cautiously contend that these factors created a sense of mistrust, dichotomies of 'us' and 'them' and eventually prepared the ground for ethnic entrepre-

neurs to exploit ethnic cleavages for political purposes. This takes us to another dimension of my analysis – the national discourse on ethnic politics and the way it was channelled down to local levels where it was appropriated by local ethnic actors.

The National Discourse on Ethnic Federalism and its Lived Realities

In Ethiopia, the principle of ethnic federalism was *presumed* to grant local autonomy or self-government to ethnic groups within administrative units carved out based on neatly-delineated linguistic boundaries. Its implementation was not executed with the precision the principle envisaged. As it has been discussed in the preceding sections, despite its envisaged promises, multiple inconsistencies became evident during the process of implementing the principles of ethnic federalism.

In the Guji-Gedeo example, the new territorial restructuring put into place by the EPRDF placed the Guji in two regional states. In 1992, some Guji were included in the Boorana Zone of Oromia regional state while others were added to the Gedeo Zone of the SNNP regional state. The Guji territories which were incorporated into the Gedeo Zone were two districts – the present day Abaya and Galana districts. The Guji who joined the Boorana Zone began exercising constitutional rights, including considerable measure of self-government and using Afan Oromo as the language of administration and education. Those who were included into Gedeo Zone were bureaucratically forced to conform to the realities in the zone. For instance, if at all they had to go to school Guji children had to learn in Gedeo language (Gede'uffa) because that was the only language

taught in the Gedeo Zone. For Guji civil servants, lack of language skill in Gede'uffa was presented as an excuse for inequitable job opportunity between the Gedeo and Guji. Ethnic affiliation was a covert criterion for denying the Guji individuals opportunities for self-advancement. Given the turbulent ethnic politics in the country, and in contrast to the applauded promises of ethnic federalism, the Guji found themselves in a new administrative trap.

On the contrary, with increased growth in Gedeo population, Guji territories were seen by the Gedeo as the only avenue of future territorial expansion. The Guji-inhabited districts in the Gedeo Zone – Abaya and Galana – were very fertile for agriculture and had low population density compared to the Gedeo-inhabited districts. Seen from both economic and demographic perspectives, the inclusion of Guji territories into the Gedeo Zone was a gift for the latter, though Gedeo politicians were not inclined to voluntarily provide equal opportunity for the Guji individuals in Gedeo Zone in political, social and administrative spheres.

Both Gedeo and Guji informants agree that the Guji were deeply dissatisfied with the new arrangement and felt that they were dominated by the Gedeo on their own land and separated from their ethnic fellows – those in Boorana Zone. Guji informants claim that they were excluded from employment in the zone's administrative and educational institutions on the pretext that they were poorly-educated and therefore unfit to work in different office responsibilities. Under the EPRDF regime, the Guji found themselves to be a new minority in their ancestral land. The unequal ways in which the Guji and Gedeo were incorporated into the state system and the eventual reversal of power relations between

the two groups has been similar to the situation in Gambella region. According to Feyissa (2011), though both the Anywaa and Nuer were incorporated into an ethnically-structured Ethiopian state, the modes of their incorporation differed significantly. While the Nuer 'benefited' from neglect by the state, the partial 'integration' of the Anywaa into the state system paralysed their traditional power and eventually reversed the traditional power relationship between the two (ibid). In contrast to the Anywaa, who lost their traditional power because of 'integration' into the state, Gedeo's 'integration' relatively benefited them in contrast to the Guji for whom neglect reduced their traditional power.

In the early 1990s, the Guji in Gedeo Zone began to view their relative deprivation as a consequence of the new administrative reconfiguration and as a denial of their constitutional right. They resented Gedeo dominance of the political/administrative structure which, in turn, gave Gedeo considerable power and influence in economic and social arenas. The new political arrangement created a new majority-minority relationship whereby the Guji became minority, demographically as well as in terms of representation in the political arena in the Gedeo zone. Eventually this fomented inter-group tension and hardened inter-ethnic boundaries.

From 1992 to1995 discontent among the Guji increased as Gedeo's assertiveness grew strong. Members of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) began to employ political rhetoric that accentuated Gedeo domination of the Guji. In response, the Guji in the Gedeo Zone began raising issues of reintegration with their fellow Guji who live in the Boorana Zone of the Oromia regional state. The striking point is that the new

claim for territorial reintegration with the Boorana might seem a break from 'norm,' if it is seen in the context of historically antagonistic relationship between the Boorana and the Guji. However, according to Berisso (2009), the new political arrangement after 1991 created propitious conditions for the emergence of new alliances between old enemies, on the one hand, and rivalry between old allies on the other. Although Berisso's thesis may be too contentious to generalize – as there are also many cases where the post-1991 political order reactivated antagonism between traditional enemies as well, the realignment of the Guji to the Boorana can best exemplify the fluid nature of ethnic identity. In any case, during this period, ethnic entrepreneurs, educated Guji individuals and businessmen, particularly OPDO members, emphasized differences and stereotypes rather than the historical commonalities between the Guji and the Gedeo. The Guji gradually began to deconstruct even the myth of common ancestry. For example, views from a few of my key Guji informants are shortly presented as follows:

> Elders, simply tracing the ancient friendship, some of them involved in intermarriage, and lived together with the 'Darassa' for long, used to assert that Guji and 'Darassa' are brothers. These elders - many of whom are not alive - failed to trace how the two distinct groups became brothers. She [Guji stereotypically represent the Gedeo with pronoun she] had her own language, practiced different religion [....] and in the past she lived in the highlands, and below the highlands lived the Guji. She had her own boundary and we our own. We searched so much but we could not uncover the line of common ancestry.

> She did not have *gaada* until she borrowed from us. Look at the Boorana, the Arsi, even you [the ethnographer], we are all the same, we speak the same language; we are all Oromo (Interview with Guji elders, July 2006).

On the side of the Gedeo, the question of the Guji was framed as Guji ambition for controlling resources, as a move towards separation from the old tradition of Guji-Gedeo friendship and brotherhood, and as external forces playing the a divisive role. Gedeo politicians and the federal government labelled the Guji's question as one instigated by OLF and thereby overlooked petitions brought by the Guji until popular sentiment reached a point of no return in 1994. But some Gedeo informants agreed that the discontent was real and acknowledged the relatively marginal positions assumed by the Guji in the new power distribution. Guji delegates took their case all the way to the office of the prime minister through regional government. Guji's insistence to their demand for reintegration into Oromia region, as per the constitutional provision, finally prompted the government to opt for a referendum as an option in the disputed vicinities of Gedeo and Boorana Zones of the SNNP and Oromia regional states respectively.

In 1994, the two regional governments organized a conference in Hawassa, the capital city of SNNP regional state, to decide on procedures for a referendum that would determine whether the Guji would remain within the Gedeo Zone or join their Oromo ethnic kin in the Boorana Zone. Some delegates from both groups took part in the conference, though many informants contend that it was conducted in a top-down approach with very low level of representation and grassroots participation.

Before the referendum was conducted, it was decided a bare majority (50 percent plus 1) of votes cast in each Peasant Association would determine in which regional state the residents be included. Historical aspects, such as prior settlement or cultural significance of locations, such as sacred places, were not taken into consideration. Regardless of procedural defects, a referendum was conducted from March to May 1995 amid inter-ethnic tension, suspicion and mistrust in districts like Wonago, Yirga Chaffe and Kochore.

While the referendum was going on, a conflict erupted between Guji and Gedeo individuals which eventually escalated into inter-group conflict (Jema 2002). The conflict was finally contained by the federal police force. This was a departure from the past where traditional institutions and elders were called upon to resolve conflict and restore peace through the *gondoro* tradition. Although it was suspended by the conflict, the referendum in some districts brought restructuring of few peasant association units (*qebeles*). For instance, a large portion of the territories joined Oromia region in the case of Wonago district while Oromia lost much land in the case of Kochore district where the Gedeo had become the majority due to resettlement schemes of the 1960 and 1980s. Informants from both sides expressed their dissatisfaction with the outcome of the referendum. The Guji were particularly aggrieved that a sacred *galma qaalluu* (compound of a *qaalluu*) located in Wonago, and an Oromo ritual site in Gadab district, were included into Gedeo Zone.

The 1995 conflict had increased the level of inter-group mistrust, further politicizing their differences, and created a potential for another conflict awaiting only a

trigger. For one, the referendum was suspended before fully addressing the initial questions. In the summer of 1998, another referendum was planned to take place in Guji district in Boorana Zone ostensibly to address the remaining issues. The Guji opposed the referendum but politicians pushed for it. A public meeting was held in Bule Hora town in the summer of 1998 to discuss and plan the referendum. Unlike the pre-1995 period, the Gedeo were the main actors in urging the revival of a referendum in Bule Hora district (in Boorana Zone) where Gedeo peasants had been resettled during the resettlement programs of previous regimes.

From the outset, Guji elders expressed their opposition to the idea of referendum in Bule Hora district, on grounds that the Gedeo were recent settlers and had no historical and customary right to the land. The Guji were also aware that the Gedeo constituted a majority in the contested areas and were likely to win in any referendum to secede from Oromia region. The Guji's position was that if the Gedeo settlers wanted to join their co-ethnic members in Gedeo Zone, they could move to territories historically occupied by the Gedeo.

Despite strong opposition from Guji peasants and pastoralists, politicians from both Guji and Gedeo sides insisted that the referendum should go forward, stating that it was a government policy that cannot be reversed. More strikingly, a senior representative from Oromia regional state commented at the public gathering where both Guji and Gedeo were in attendance stating that "if the Guji were against the intended referendum, they could go to the jungle and fight" (Jema 2002:80). Informants mention that OPDO representatives were of the view that the Guji's refusal to support the referendum was instigated

by OLF, the major opposition political movement with significant popular support in Oromia in the 1990s.

The government's insistence to go forward with the referendum, which by default would put the contested territories under Gedeo Zone, angered the Guji as a move to dismember the whole community and was opposed, not only by the Guji inhabitants in disputed areas, but also by the larger Guji community. The Guji showed their opposition to the referendum by sending local elders to the Oromia regional government and boycotting public gatherings. But neither the regional government nor local government representatives listened to their appeals. In the summer of 1998, a bloody war erupted after a Gedeo local administrator was beaten to death by Guji peasants. Unlike during the 1995 period, the war was more violent and covered large areas in the two zones. Although most figures about casualties in such context are terribly inaccurate, many informants state that several hundred or nearly a thousand people lost their lives while over thirty thousand were displaced, many of whom were Gedeo.

In the 1998 war, the Guji bitterly fought against the Gedeo and the state, labelling both as threats to their rights to self-determination. As a result, it became difficult for the federal force to stop the war until elders from different neighbouring groups, including the fighting sides, intervened through traditional approaches of conflict resolution. In the end, the state recognized the role of traditional institutions and opened a space for the *gondoro* ritual. The ritual was conducted by the Guji *abba qaalluu,* who had been imprisoned in connection with the 1995 conflict. He was brought out from jail only for this purpose because *abba qaalluu* is the only

legitimate person to undertake the ritual. After the ritual procession, the *abba qaalluu* was taken back to prison in Hawassa where he died two years later.

While the 1998 Guji-Gedeo conflict suspended the referendum, the *gondoro* conflict resolution mechanism that finally brought an end to the war restored relative peace between the groups. In contrast to most peace agreements in inter-ethnic conflicts in post-1991 Ethiopia, which are characterized by failure to restore sustained peace, the Guji-Gedeo case can be cited as a positive story that highlights the efficacy of the indigenous system in building sustainable peace. An analysis of the conflict and post-conflict relationship gives us an insight to reasons behind such a success story. There are four major contributory factors for this: 1) the 1998 peace agreement was participatory in involving the traditional institutions of conflict resolution; 2) both groups did not have strong historical memories of hostility and conflict apart from those (re)constructed by ethnic actors; 3) during the war, Guji demonstrated military dominance over the Gedeo. This restrained the Gedeo from provoking the Guji for further conflict; 4) the fundamental demand of the Guji right to self-determination was relatively addressed through the referendum. Thus, one may ask: is ethnic federalism a threat to harmonious coexistence of ethnic groups or a policy framework to ensure 'unity in diversity'? The next section addresses this issue.

Ethnic Federalism: Viable Solution or a Threat to Inter-Ethnic Coexistence?

As discussed in the preceding sections, the ongoing debate about the Ethiopian model of ethnic federalism

swings between two extremes on a continuum. There are also some in the middle of the continuum, particularly members of the excluded groups (especially the Oromo), who criticize the government for its failure genuinely to implement the federal arrangement (Clapham 2009).

In principle, ethnic federalism is intended to serve as a path to democratization and development, harnessing ethnicity for these purposes (Mohammed and Markakis 1998). However, Mohammed and Markakis (1998:8) critically warn us that the success of this unfinished project will depend on "whether the formal, i.e., constitutional, provisions of decentralization and democratization are realized in practice." On balance, the EPRDF regime has initially delivered on some of its promises, such as modest economic growth, opening of the political space, granting of administrative autonomy, the recognition of language and other cultural rights, establishment of civil society organizations, emergence of opposition political parties, and the expansion of infrastructure (Abbink 2009; Clapham 2009). My major aim in this section is to focus on two fundamental forms of backlash in the political experiment: the question of autonomy and the politicization of ethnicity, which in most cases drags groups into conflict. The first aspect lies in the core philosophy of the TPLF/EPRDF conception of ethnic groups or the constitutional definition of what constitutes nations, nationalities and peoples. The second emanates from poorly managed articulation of ethnic politics that hardens ethnic boundaries by reactivating or reconstructing identities, antagonism and a sense of enmity among competing ethnic groups.

The rationale behind ethnic federalism is to confront two competing and mutually incompatible crosscurrents

of ethnic group mobilization – to prescribe identity from above and/or to facilitate self-identification from within the groups in question. In the 1970s and 1980s, the TPLF successfully mobilized the Tigrayan masses using the group's ethnic characteristics (language, history, traditions and common memories) as political instruments of mobilization (Berhe 2009). In this approach, the modus operandi are to mobilize (indeed even define or create) a community for political engagement from within by its own members, in its own language, using its own cultural traditions and knowledge system (Vaughan 2003).

When TPLF/EPRDF took over the state power in 1991, it became clear that the approach that worked in mobilizing a culturally homogenous group was not directly transferable to mobilizing the heterogeneous ethnic groups that make up Ethiopia. Accordingly, the TPLF came up with a controversial approach regarding the political mobilization of diverse ethnic groups. According to this notion, "the criteria for [the mobilization of] 'nations, nationalities and peoples' are objectively and externally identifiable, and verifiable independently of the views of their members" (ibid). When this principle was put into practice, Vaughan further argues, it "resulted in the notion that a vanguard party may legitimately grant self-determination to a community from outside, *defining and prescribing the ethnic criteria of the group and demarcating its geographical borders*" (ibid, emphasis added).

Both approaches have been apparent in the new Ethiopian experiment of ethnic federalism. By recognizing the mother-tongue at some regional levels and by creating affiliate political parties along ethnic lines, the key architects of ethnic federalism attempted to mobi-

lize the diverse ethnic groups from within. However, by defining and demarcating ethnic groups on criteria including the geographical borders enclosing the groups from above, the vanguard party reserved for itself the authority of granting rights of 'self-determination.' This raises the fundamental dilemma of whether the act of "granting self-determination" compromises the rights and autonomy of ethnic groups who are supposedly the authors of the constitution. In the Guji-Gedeo case discussed above, for example, we witness a clear deviation from the principle of self-determination, whereby those that demand the rights are at once guarantors of those rights. The Guji Oromo, who clearly identified themselves as members of the Oromo nation, were lumped together with the Gedeo by an administrative fiat rather than through self-determination emerging from the group's identity.

In this regard, Fiseha (2006) critically observes gaps between constitutional theory and practice in the contemporary Ethiopian political experiment. Besides reluctance to effect genuine devolution of power both in the federal arrangement as well as in party composition, which Fiseha warns may lead to a single-party domination of the entire federation, there are practical cases where constitutionally-granted provisions have been left at the theoretical level (ibid).

Some critics of ethnic federalism opt for a form of federalism that divides the major ethnic groups. Rotimi Suberu (2006, 73-4), for example, suggests the Nigerian experience of territorial federalism as the best model, stating that, "indeed a major achievement of multination federalism in Nigeria has been the use of the federal structure to fragment, cross-cut and sublimate

the identities of each of the major ethnic formations of Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo". According to this argument, the congruence between ethnic identities and sub-national administrative boundaries would threaten the power of the federal government and the integrity of the federation through secession. In line with this argument, Christopher Clapham (2006:233-34) explicitly recommends the division of big nationalities in Ethiopia stating that "whatever the squeals of 'divide and rule' that such a move would doubtless trigger from the beneficiaries of 'big nationality chauvinism,' it is not difficult to predict the division of both Oromo and Amhara states as a prerequisite for a stable Ethiopian federation."

All these views are normative and practically infeasible when taking into account the historical antecedents that necessitated ethnic federalism and also impractical within the contemporary political climate where ethnic consciousness is intact in socio-economic and political interactions among ethnic groups in Ethiopia. It should be reiterated that current ethnic politics promises to deconstruct the old illusion of 'nation-building' founded on the centrality of one dominant culture sponsored by the Amhara ruling elite. To be specific, the strategy of dividing the larger nations and nationalities in order to 'save the federation' in fact amounts to changing the pillars of the ethnic federalism (self-government, empowerment, decentralization) and other accompanying constitutional privileges.

This proposition in effect calls for reversal of ethnic federalism into territorial federalism that by itself would lead into unprecedented repercussions, particularly a strong opposition from Oromo nationalists, both 'moderates' and 'radicals' alike. In the context of Ethiopia, if a

threat to the federation were to emerge, it would likely come from more power centralization at the federal and party level than from decentralization and empowerment of constituent members of the federation. As David Turton (2006:29) observes, "Ethiopia's experiment in ethnic federalism is at greatest risk of failure, not because it is too ethnic, but because it is not sufficiently federal." Therefore, solutions for sustaining the federal arrangement and ensuring harmonious coexistence between members of the federal arrangement will not by any means be achieved through divide-and-rule policy rather than genuine devolution of power and practical implementation of the theoretical provisions in the constitution. Here, it is important to emphasize that the dangers to national integrity lie not in the inherent premises of ethnic federalism, but rather in the approaches used in channelling national discourse to local contexts.

In the analysis of the nexus between ethnicity and inter-ethnic conflict, one should cautiously distinguish between ethnicity as an aspect of group categorization and ethnicity as instrument for justification of actions. In the Ethiopian context, ethnicity has been utilized as an instrument of political mobilization, as a license for access to state resources, and is used in the process of competition over resources. For instance, informants claim that ethnic membership was a prerequisite to get access to political power or job opportunities in Gedeo Zone in the early 1990s. Later in the decade, the Guji's perceived and real sense of exclusion by the Gedeos fueled inter-ethnic tension. In this regard, it can be contended that the political order promoted the creation of physical and subjective boundaries between groups that were later used by local actors in flaring up tensions. Such

boundaries are constructed on platforms of perceived, mythologized or real memories of antagonism and often give rise to inter-ethnic conflict.

The post-1991 period ushered misappropriation of the official version of ethnicity by politically-inexperienced EPRDF local cadres, members of opposition parties and other ethnic actors in their competition over human and/or natural resources. The Gedeo-Guji case in this study illustrates the role played by ethnic actors, mainly government cadres who have been indoctrinated and imbued with skills of articulating ethnic identity in line with their political interests. Through time the interaction between Guji and Gedeo brought dichotomies between the 'self' and the 'other' by which both groups covertly (re)constructed boundaries of difference. Based on objective markers of difference or subjectively constructed images, the groups began to build on these differences rather than on historical complementarities. Stereotypes were reconstructed by drawing boundaries of difference on the ruins of similarities. In inter-group relationships, "stereotypes allow people to see what they want to see, and overlook what they wish to ignore" (Ryan 1995:87). Building their self-pride on their mastery of warfare and cultural practices, the Guji despised their Gedeo neighbours in their representation of the latter – at least implicitly. The Gedeo also portrayed the Guji as cruel, warlike and inhumane groups contrasting with their own trustful and peace-like self-image.

It should be reiterated that neither the sense of self-identification of the two groups nor the principle that gave them the right to self-government was to be blamed for the conflicts that occurred in the 1990s. Rather several factors contributed to the flare up of conflict,

i.e., the new way ethnic identities were articulated as a political force, new ethnic boundaries were constructed by reactivating/inventing negative stereotypes, and new meanings were given to spaces, resource ownership, and territories. In reality, the main cause of the conflict was essentially the prevailing gap between the promises of ethnic federalism and the way it was implemented. Ethnic federalism has been abstractly articulated and channelled down to the local level for implementation without consideration of the practical issues. Creating minorities within newly-created majorities, like the Guji who suddenly found themselves as a minority in a Gedeo zone, is a clear example.

Conclusion

Ethnic federalism in Ethiopia could have been a viable political model to address questions of self-government, local empowerment, and access to economic opportunities, including ownership and utilization of natural resources, if these principles had been followed in the implementation of the program. As enshrined in the federal constitution, genuine devolution of power and local control of resources were supposed to foster harmonious coexistence among the nations, nationalities, and peoples of the country. However, in most instances, the experiment turned out to be counterproductive by dragging ethnic groups into violent conflicts. This article has revealed that there are evident gaps between the theoretical framing and the promises of ethnic federalism and the lived realities at the local level, particularly in areas of addressing inter-ethnic conflicts, self-government, access and utilization of resources and issues of autonomy. In practice, inter-regional relations,

conflict resolution strategies, and issues related to self-government were centrally regulated rather than locally addressed. It should nevertheless be noted that ethnic federalism itself is not the cause of inter-ethnic conflicts in post-1991 Ethiopia. Rather, conflicts resulted from ethnic entrepreneurs appropriating ethnicity for parochial political interests and scuttling genuine federalization of power and access to resources.

References

Abbink, Jon. 1997. "Ethnicity and Constitutionalism in Contemporary Ethiopia." *Journal of African Law* 41(2): 159-174.

_____. 2009. "The Ethiopian Second Republic and the Fragile 'Social Contract'." *Africa Spectrum* 44 (2): 2-38.

Balsvik, Randi 1985. *Haile Selassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1977.* East Lansing: Michigan State University African Studies Center.

Bassi, Marco. 1996. "Power's Ambiguity or the Political Significance of Gada." In *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries,* eds. Baxter P.T.W, Jan Hultin and Alessandro Triulzi, 150-61. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

Berhe, Aregawi. 2009. *A Political History of Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (1975-1991): Revolt, ideology and mobilization in Ethiopia*. New York: Tsehai Publishers.

Berisso, Tadesse. 1994. "Warfare among Guji Oromo of Southern Ethiopia." *Proceedings of the11th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* 11(2):309-23.

_____. 2009. "Changing Alliances of Guji Oromo and their Neighbours: State Policies and Local Factors." In *Changing Identifications and Alliances in North-East Africa:*

Ethiopia and Kenya, edited by Günther Schlee and Elizabeth Watson, 191-202. New York: Berghahn Books.

Clapham, Christopher. 2002. "The Political Framework: Controlling Space in Ethiopia." In *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After*, eds. Wendy James *et al.* 9-32. UK: James Currey Ltd.

_____. 2006. "Afterword." In *Ethnic Federalism: the Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, ed. David Turton, 231-40. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

_____. 2009. "Post War Ethiopia: The Trajectories of Crisis." *Review of African Political Economy* 36 (120):181-192.

Donham, Donald 1986. "The Making of an Imperial State." In *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology*, edited by Donald Donham and Wendy James, 3-51. UK:Cambridge University Press.

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995. *The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.* Addis Ababa.

Feyisa, Dereje. 2010. "Conflicts within the Ethiopian Federation – A Reappraisal." In *Ethiopian Federalism: Principle, Process and Practice,* ed. Alem Habtu, 215-25. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

_____. 2011. *Playing Different Games: the Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in Gambella Region, Ethiopia*. UK:Berghahn Books.

Fiseha, Assefa. 2006. "Theory versus Practice in the Implementation of Ethiopia's Ethnic Federalism." In *Ethnic Federalism: the Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, edited by David Turton, 131-64. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Gudina, Merera. 2003. *Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalisms and the Quest for Democracy, 1960-2000.* Ethiopia: Chamber Printing House.

Hagmann, Tobias and Alemmaya, M. 2008. "Pastoral Conflicts and State-building in the Ethiopian Lowlands." *Africa Spectrum* 43 (1):19-37.

Hameso, Seyoum. 2001. *Ethnicity in Africa: Towards a Positive Approach*. New York: iUniversity Press.

Hassen, Mohammed. 1996. "The Development of Oromo Nationalism." In *Being and*

Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries, eds. Baxter P.T.W, Jan Hultin and Alessandro Triulzi, 67-80. Uppsala:Nordic Africa Institute.

Hinnant, John. 1977. "The *Gaada* System of the Guji of Southern Ethiopia." PhD Diss., University of Chicago.

Jemma, Hussein. 2002. "Competition over Resource and Ethnic Conflict in Federal Ethiopia: the case of recent Guji-Gedeo Conflict." A research report submitted to OSSREA, Addis Ababa.

Kidane, Mengisteab. 1997. "New Approaches to State Building in Africa: The case of Ethiopia's Ethnic based Federalism." *African Studies Review* 40 (3):111-32.

Markakis, John. 1994. "Ethnic Conflict and the State in the Horn of Africa." In *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa,* edited by Katsuyoshi Fukui and John Markakis, 217-37. London: James Currey.

McClellan, Charles. 1988. *State Transformation and National Integration: Gedeo and the Ethiopian Empire, 1895-1935*. East Lansing: Michigan State University.

Mohamed Salih and Markakis J. 1998. "Introduction." In *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa,* edited by Mohamed, Salih and Markakis, 7-16. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

Poluha, Eva. 1998. "Ethnicity and Democracy – A Viable Alliance?" In *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa*, eds. Mohammed Salih, and Markakis, J., 30-41. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

Regassa, Asebe. 2010. *Ethnicity and Inter-ethnic Relations: The 'Ethiopian Experiment' and the Case of the Guji and Gedeo*. Germany: VDM Verlag.

Ryan, Stephen. 1995. *Ethnic conflict and International relations*. UK: Dartmouth Publishing Group.

Schlee, Günther. 2002. *Imagined Differences: Hatred and the Construction of Identity*. Germany: LIT VERLAG.

Suberu, Rotimi. 2006. "Federalism and the Management of Ethnic Conflict: the Nigerian Experience." In *Ethnic Federalism: the Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, edited by David Turton, 65-92. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Tibebu, Teshale. 1995. *The Making of Modern Ethiopia (1896-1974).* Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press.

Turton, David. 2006. "Introduction." In *Ethnic Federalism: the Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, edited by David Turton, 1-31. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Vaughan, Sarah. 2003. "Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia." PhD Diss. University of Edinburgh.

Conquest and Change in Boorana Traditional Polity: A Study of Dynamism and Resilience of Indigenous Political Institutions

Alemayehu Debelo Jorgo

Prior to the Abyssinian conquest of the 1890s, the Boorana Oromo administered their affairs through their indigenous politico-juridical institutions known specifically as the *gadaa* system. The Abyssinians introduced their own administrative and court systems relegating the indigenous democratic institutions. In the subsequent period, the indigenous institutions were neither successfully integrated into nor permitted to operate outside the formal state structures. Individual Boorana leaders, especially the *qaalluu* (religious counselors or superiors) whose political func-

Journal of Oromo Studies, Vol. 19, No. 1 & 2 (July 2012), pp.

Alemayehu Debelo Jorgo studied Sociology & Social Administration (BA) and Social Anthropology (MA) at Addis Ababa University (AAU). He is the author of *Indigenous Institutions vis-a-vis Encroaching States: The Case of Ethiopian State-Gadaa System Interactions among the Borana Oromo of Southern Ethiopia* (VDM Verlag, 2010). Currently, Alemayehu is lecturer in Social Anthropology at AAU. He has taught at Jimma University and Jimma Teachers Training College.

tion was to confer legitimacy on the ruling *gadaa* class, following the conquest, were coopted into the central government and participated in both the indigenous institutions and formal government systems. In time, this arrangement evolved into a phenomenon in which the fledgling state institutions and *gadaa* indigenous system began to function alongside one another, with the former regulating the latter.

This article analyzes the interactions among political actors in Boorana since the region's incorporation into the Ethiopia in the late nineteenth century. It looks specifically at interactions between the *gadaa* and *qaalluu* institutions on the one hand and the Ethiopian central governments and Boorana institutions on the other hand, as well as the impact of these interactions on Boorana political culture. In effect, the article examines how Boorana society was administered by the two forms of government (indigenous and Ethiopian) from the reign of Emperor Menelik (1889-1913) to the military regime (1974-1991). It begins with description of Boorana institutions before the land of the Boorana was incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire in the late nineteenth century.

Boorana Indigenous Institutions before Menelik's Conquest

According to the Boorana, their society's social organization began to take shape during the sixth *abbaa gadaa* of Arero Boru (1507-1515). By the early sixteenth century, the society was divided into two sub-moieties, Goona and Sabbo, which were further divided into clans and lineages. The Sabbo sub-moiety comprises three clans while the Goona has fourteen clans. The Boorana

Oromo traditionally inhabited two areas, Liban and Dirre[1], where the various clans and lineages have lived and intermingled.

Before its occupation by Emperor Menelik, Boorana was governed by a single *gadaa* system in which both sub-moieties were equally represented. Boorana informants describe this political unity as *Booranni tan gadaadha; gadaan tan Booranaadha, gadaanis tokkuma,* literally, "Boorana belongs to *gadaa*; *gadaa* belonges to the Boorana and *gadaa* is indivisible." Among the Boorana indigenous institutions, the *gadaa*, *qaalluu*, *Gumii Gayyoo* and *hariyyaa* have been central to Boorana judicial, spiritual, economic and political life (Baxter 1979; Bassi 2005; Helland 1996; Legesse 1973 ; Legesse, 2000). Legesse (2000) argues that among the Oromo, power was shared by various political groups that stood in a cooperative relationship with each other. In other words, political power was held by different kinds of groups who had different kinds of authority, and the groups have, at times, been on the same footing (not above and below each other with no set hierarchy of power). In the Boorana Oromo polity, leadership has been hereditary in the ritual sphere and elective in the political-military sphere. The balancing of these two spheres served a useful purpose making the elective offices responsible to the public will and keeping them constantly under its influence, whereas the hereditary officers contributed to continuity in institutional life and exercised their duties without being constantly exposed to factional pressures (Legesse 2000).

The *gadaa* system operated on the basis of *gadaa* classes (*luba*) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual

responsibilities. Each generation set, beyond the first three grades, has its own leadership (*adulaa hayyuu*) and its own assembly (*yaa'a*), but the class leaders become leaders of the nation when their class assumes power in the middle of the life course—a stage of life called *gadaa* among the Boorana. The class in power is headed by an official known as the *abbaa gadaa*. The age-set system (*hariyya*) has been a subsidiary institution that works as a supportive organization under the authority of the *gadaa* assemblies. It is organized strictly on the basis of age (Legesse 2000). Each class has its own role which every member plays accordingly.

Traditionally, the *qaalluu* have been hereditary dignitaries or religious leaders of Boorana. There have been five *qaalluu* in the two Boorana sub-moieties: Oditu *qaalluu* in Goona sub-moiety and four in Sabbo sub-moiety, namely, Karrayyu, Garjeda, Kukku and Karara. The difference in the number of *qaalluu* in both sub-moieties, however, has never meant the overall spiritual function of *qaalluu* institution to the people was imbalanced. Moreover, the Boorana believe that the *qaalluu* were spiritually chosen by God and not by a human being. Even though the Oditu *qaalluu* is senior, both the Karrayyu *qaalluu* and the Oditu *qaalluu* were central to both sub-moieties as far as religious and political leadership was concerned. They were also the ones upon whom *baalabbaata*-ship was conferred by the emperors (discussed below).

The *Gumii Gayyoo* was made up of all the assemblies and councils of the Boorana who met as a single body once every eight years, at Gayo, Mega District. This assembly stood above all other Boorana institutions, i.e., it is more powerful than the *gadaa* and the *qaalluu*.

Almost every Boorana could participate in the *Gumii Gayyoo* assembly. In such sessions, the retired *abbaa gadaa* presided over the assembly (Legesse 2000). The primary purpose of the meetings of the national assembly (*Gumii Gayyoo*) has been to re-examine the laws of the land, to reiterate them in public, to make new laws if necessary, and to settle disputes that have not been resolved by lower levels in their judicial organization. All unresolved cases of conflict are taken to the general assembly for mediation and adjudication (Legesse 2000; see also Bassi 2005 and Leus 2006).

Before the conquest, the general assembly evaluated, among other things, the work of those in power. If those in power failed to accomplish what was expected of them, the assembly had the power to perform *buqqisaa* (lit. uprooting, removal from office), and replace them by another group elected from among the same *gadaa* class (Bassi 1996, 2005; Legesse 2000). This was one of the methods of checks and balances of political power among the Boorana Oromo (Melba 1988; Legesse 2000).

The Boorana kinship system also provides a structural basis for another important distinction in the population. The Boorana are divided into two categories: *warra qaalluu* or 'people of the *qaalluu*', and *warra bokkuu (gadaa),* or 'people of the *bokkuu*'. In other words, some sections of Boorana are known as *warra qaalluu* while all the rest are *warra gadaa* (Bassi 2005). The distinction between *warra qaalluu* and *warra gadaa* has not been made on the basis of the principles of descent or settlement pattern. They are neither proper names of descent segments nor generic names like *mana* (household) or *gosa* (clan), indicating a certain level of segmentation. It is simply that certain groups, at different levels of

segmentation and in both the sub-moieties, are *warra qaalluu* while some others are *warra gadaa*. While the former refers to the institution of *qaalluu* or certain ritual and political prescriptions, the latter references the *gadaa* system (Bassi 2005). In both cases, certain societal problems could be solved at each level .

Their specific tasks as *warra gadaa* (*gadaa* system) and *warra qaalluu* (*qaalluu* institution) coalesced on the following occasions. First, *qaalluu* as the ritual leaders were entrusted with the authority to organize, oversee, and announce the outcome of *gadaa* elections on the occasion of *lallaba* ceremony. Second, *gadaa* class in power performed *muuda gadaa* pilgrimages, every eight years, to their respective *qaalluu*, i.e., either to Oditu *qaalluu* or Karrayyu *qaalluu* depending on their moiety affiliation. The *gadaa* class in power anointed the *qaalluu* and gave him gifts in return for his blessings. Finally, both groups met at *gumii gaayoo* where they participated every eight years (see Bassi 2005; Asmerom 1973).

The *qaalluu* institution had ritual and administrative functions. The ritual role was purely a religious exercise of the Boorana Oromo. For instance, *qaalluu* was seen as the intermediary between *Waaqa* (God) and the Boorana Oromo. The administrative role of the *qaalluu* was that of adjudication of conflicts and administration justice most often 'uncodified,' which made their rulings susceptible to religious interpretations. But *qaalluu* was a venerable institution among the two Boorana groups, trusted to discharge its quasi-political mandate honorably and impartially to the *gadaa* parties. It is important to note that there was no strict wall of separation between the religious and secular realms in the Boorana worldview. The *gadaa* officials did oversee religious

rituals, and the *qaalluu* were also expected to execute secular activities. But it was up to the *Gumii Gayyoo*, the assembly of both, to ensure the maintenance of balance of the activities of both.

Conquest of the Boorana Oromo and Political Restructuring under Menelik

According to my informants, the conquest of the Boorana by Menilek's army occurred during Liban Jaldessa's *gadaa* (1891-1899). No sooner had the *nafxanyaa*[2] appeared in Booranaland than the ruling *gadaa,* as the supreme body of the land, passed a resolution compelling all Boorana to defend their land in their respective borders. It ordered the Boorana people who resided in Liban to organize themselves under the *raaba-gadaa* and defend the territory on the Liban (Adola) side whereas those who inhabited Dirre were to organize under the leadership of the *qaalluu* and defend at the Bule Hora (Dilla) border. As ordered, the Boorana under the leadership of the *raaba-gadaa* fought the enemy. Those who were organized under the *qaalluu* did not. The decision of the *qaalluu* to take the side of the Abyssinians weakened the traditional rule by consensus, creating disharmony between the *qaalluu* and *gadaa* groups, and disrupted the peace and the role of the *aadaa-seera Booranaa* (Boorana custom and customary laws) in unifying the Boorana as a distinct group. The Abyssinian forces were able to isolate and defeat the *raaba-gadaa* and conquer Booranaland. Consequently, power shifted from the Boorana *gadaa* to the invaders and to the *qaalluu* that appeared to assist the former gain the upper hand (Waqo 2008; Bule 2008; Madha 2008).

According to these Boorana elders the *qaalluu* decided not to fight because of an incident that occurred between the 'British' (white people) and the Boorana that resided in Dirre whose majority were the *warra qaalluu* about two years before the arrival of the Abyssinians. During that conflict, the *gadaa* did not send the *raaba* (standing army) to support the *warra qaalluu*. Why the ruling *gadaa* failed to dispatch military assistance is not clear. It might have been due to existing disputes concerning power or the relative distance between the two centers or the short duration of the war which gave them little time to act. The incident nevertheless ended with immense human and material loss on the side of *warra qaalluu,* owing to the fact that the 'British' (white people) were armed with modern European weapons. Whatever the reason, the incident led to simmering tensions between the *qaalluu* and the *gadaa*, which later manifested in further division and dissociation between the two groups. This division played into the hands of Menelik II, who deployed Oromo speaking spies, military advisors, and leaders such as Leon Danegon, a Frenchman who led 15,000 Abyssinia soldiers to conquer Boorana (Melba 1988).

But at this point, one may ask how the *qaalluu* as religious persons fought the 'British' (white people) in the first place, violating the custom that deterred them from war, but later denounced violence against the Abyssinians. Further, how did the *gadaa* dare to accuse them of not participating in the war knowing that combat for the *qaalluu* was a cultural taboo? Obviously, it could not be assumed that the *qaalluu* were unaware of Boorana culture. Perhaps they violated the proscription for reasons of survival against the 'British' because they were

left without protection by the concerned body, *gadaa* system (*raaba*). It might also be the case that they were perhaps tempted by the favor (personal advantages) they would gain in return from Menelik whom, because of his superior military power, the *qaalluu* had determined would prevail in any conflict. Regardless of the *qaalluu's* motivation, the incident further weakened the unity of the Boorana people.

At the conclusion of the conquest, the elders relate that the *qaalluu* made an unexpected proclamation that Booranaland belonged to them and that *warra gadaa* had no say in its management. This dealt a further blow to the *gadaa* authority, signaling political power shifting to the *qaalluu*. As such, contrary to Boorana political and legal traditions, the *qaalluu* presented themselves as the "legitimate authority" of the land following their initial encounter with Menelik's forces at Bule Hora. On this point, my informant (Waqo 2008) unequivocally captured the spirit of the time in a poem:

> *Yeroo warri qaalluu sodaattee*
> When the *warra qaalluu* were scared
>
> *nyaphatti harka kennattee simattu,*
> surrendered and welcomed the enemy,
>
> *warri gadaa ni lolte.*
> the *warra gadaa* fought.
>
> *Looniifi tumaamessa hoolaa*
> They [*warra qaalluu*] accompanied with
>
> *gagabboo harkisanii*
> fattened bulls and sheep;

jala yaa'an, qalanii nyapha sooran.
butchered and fed Menilek's soldiers.

This poem claims that the *qaalluu* allied with the alien forces and welcomed them into Booranaland. It suggests that, they allied with the enemy of the pan-Boorana, feeding and strengthening them, against their Boorana brothers, the *warra gadaa*. Thus, the traditional unity between these two Boorana institutions was transformed into a deep rift of distrust and a relationship of mutual animosity.

The stage was thus set for tripartite interactions in Boorana (*gadaa* vs. *qaalluu*; *gadaa* vs. the central government and *qaalluu* vs. the central government). Aware that sustained confrontation between *gadaa* officials and the *qaalluu* institution would be advantageous to them, the Abyssinians proceeded to organize their rule in Booranaland in such a way that the indigenous groups were locked in a continuous power struggle. In the new political arrangement, the new rulers subordinated the *gadaa* system to the *qaalluu* institution.

In the aftermath of the occupation, the conquerors made radical political arrangements in Boorana. The first political measure they took was the appointment of the two senior Boorana *qaalluu* as *baalabbaata*,[3] local governors with judicial and administrative roles. All clans and lineages of the Sabbo sub-moiety were put under the Karrayyu *qaalluu* named Gedo Jilo while those of the Goona sub-moiety were placed under the command of the Oditu *qaalluu,* Anna Boru. By installing the rule of *qaalluu* as rulers, the conquering generals administratively separated the two Boorana sub-moieties previously united under one *gadaa* leadership (Jaldess 2008; Boro and Kokko 2008).

In effect, the two *baalabbaata* came to occupy an intermediate administrative position between the Boorana and the Ethiopian central government headed by the emperor. They were empowered to settle local issues, keep peace and collect taxes from the Boorana in the form of livestock. Informants relate that these *qaalluu* were often summoned to Finfinne for consultation on how to increase the flow of resources to the capital. Besides their intermediary roles, the *qaalluu* were also bestowed the power to preside over the selection of *gadaa* officials (*hayyuu*). However, my informants comment that they (*qaalluu*) increased the number of the *hayyuu* beyond the limit set by Boorana law and custom since they used the positions to extend favors and build a base of loyalists (Jaldessa 2008).

On the other hand, the position of the traditional *gadaa* authorities was rendered highly vulnerable. The *gadaa* system, no longer able to elect their *gadaa* officials lost its administrative authority, remained isolated and retained only its ritual activities. During the next eight decades, about ten *abbaa gadaa* were selected, but not elected, under the authority of the *qaalluu*. Having lost their power, they were gradually relegated to ordinary members of their community. The new local governance system maintained a veneer of an indigenous provenance as leadership remained in the hands of the two *baalabbaata* and their auxiliaries, but it lacked the moral and cultural legitimacy previously enjoyed by *gadaa* officials (Jaldessa 2008).

Assessing the change in the Boorana political system, Legesse (2000: 13) stated that Abyssinia, like Britain, was a colonial empire and the methods that both employed were not fundamentally different. Abyssinian colonialism, he argued, also employed the same kind of

royal mystique and system of honorifics bestowed upon the leaders of the colonized populations. Many of the Oromo leaders who submitted to imperial rule were fitted into various hierarchies. The two *qaalluu*, namely Gedo Jilo from Sabbo and Anna Boru from Goona, were appointed as *baalabbaata* with a variety of political roles to play in Booranaland besides their legitimate religious one. Some of the roles included maintaining peace and security, collecting taxes, selecting *gadaa* officials, and generally cooperating with the conquering generals.

Changes under Emperor Haile Sellasie

Emperor Haile Sellasie's accession to the throne coincided with the election of Bule Dabbassa as leader of the *gadaa* of his age-group (1929-1936). During Haile Sellasie's rule, the political field further gave rise to worsening relations between the central government and the *gadaa* system, on one hand, and the *gadaa* system and *qaalluu* institution on the other hand. The relationship between the emperor and *qaalluu* put in place by Menelik was further strengthened as Haile Sellassie conferred more titles on the *qaalluu* and took measures to undermine the *gadaa* system (Borbor 2008).

Right from the imposition of imperial rule, relations between the central government and the *gadaa* system was characterized by confrontation rather than cooperation. In contrast, cooperation was the mode of relationship between Ethiopian emperors and the *qaalluu.* My informants explain that, under the reign of Menelik II, the *qaalluu* became *baalabbaata*. This arrangement was further maintained under the regime of Haile Sellassie. As will be shown below, this cooperative interaction

between the central government and the *qaalluu* eventually jeopardized Boorana institutions. According to Boorana informants, Haile Sellassie elevated the position of the *qaalluu* and kept the *raaba-gadaa* at arm's length considering them too politically-engaged and hence dangerous (Borbor 2008).

The conflicts between the *gadaa* system and the emperor on the one hand, and the *gadaa* system and *qaalluu* institution on the other, later took on a different character. At times, the conflict between the *gadaa* system and the central government involved violence which broke out at intervals, but the *gadaa-qaalluu* conflict never descended to a direct confrontation. The *gadaa* officials considered imperial authority illegitimate and consistently disregarded the emperor's decisions over their affairs. This was manifested in a series of standoffs and conflicts. For instance, the *raaba-gadaa* resisted the rule of the *qaalluu*, the implantation of Orthodox Christianity into their land, the forceful conscription of their children for 'schooling', the expansion of garrison towns and other innovations that they considered incompatible with Boorana way of life (Boro and Kokko 2008). On the other hand, the emperor took measures that he thought would enable him destroy Boorana *gadaa* system permanently. To strengthen his power in Boorana, Haile Sellassie sought to weaken the Boorana through efforts that meant to neutralize and displace Boorana indigenous institutions in three important areas: religion, education and expansion of garrison towns.

Religious Conversion as a Means of De-culturation

Under Menelik, the *gadaa* system was already left politically impotent to merely undertake ritual functions. Measures taken by Haile Sellassie were aimed to

complete the emasculation of the *gadaa* system by depriving the *abbaa gadaa* of his remaining ritual roles. To that end, the emperor instructed his appointees to build arks (*tabot*) on Boorana sacred ritual sites and sent in priests to convert the Boorana people to Orthodox Christianity. As such, the emperor proceeded to build churches precisely on sites where Boorana religious shrines once stood. For instance, they setup Orthodox churches on the *gadaa* ritual sites at Arero and Guto though the latter was burnt down by the people organized by the *raaba-gadaa* leaders, namely Boru Lalo, Jaldessa Liban, Borbor Jilo, Guyyo Boru, and Arero Doyyo (Boro and Kokko 2008; Waqo 2008).

Most of the dissenters were consequently incarcerated in Yaballo prison, and the Abyssinians shaved the hairs of the *raaba-gadaa*. This was as much an effort to undermine the ritual and symbolic significance of those offices in the society as it was an attempt to gradually eliminate *aadaa Booranaa* especially the Boorana traditional religion. According to informants, eliminating Boorana religion meant expanding the sway of Orthodox Christianity. One means of doing this was baptizing the two *qaalluu*, i.e., *qaalluu* Anna Boru of Goona and *qaalluu* Gedo Jilo of Sabbo sub-moieties. Though the emperor had apparently hoped that the conversion of the *qaalluu* would be followed by conversion of the people en masse, the model did not work out as planned. The conversion of the above *qaalluu* did not lead to the conversion of Boorana society. In fact, the Boorana responded by burning down Orthodox churches that were installed on their ritual sites. Though reportedly angered, the emperor and ecclesiastical officials decided to acknowledge the inability of the *qaalluu* to convert

the Boorana into Orthodox Christianity. This realization made them opt for consultation with the *qaalluu* rather than to forge ahead with a model that was clearly a failure (Boro and Kokko 2008).

Informants relate that the emperor consulted in secret with the *qaalluu* in which the latter confessed that they were not the right agents for the conversion of Boorana. The more effective agent, the *qaalluu* recommended, would be the *abbaa gadaa* without whom planting Orthodox Christianity in Booranaland would prove a difficult undertaking. To substantiate this fact, my informants posited: *Booranni mootummaarra [warra qaalluurra] gadaa dhugeeffata,* literally, the Boorana have always trusted the *gadaa* system over the *qaalluu* and the central government. For the implementation of the plan, they set out to first baptize the *abbaa gadaa* (Boro and Kokko 2008; Madha, 2008).

Accordingly, around the mid 1950s, Emperor Haile Sellassie summoned the then *abbaa gadaa* Madha Galma (1952-60) to meet with him. In the first ever official contact made between an Ethiopian emperor and a Boorana *abbaa gadaa*, Haile Sellassie, before saying or doing anything else, provided Madha with a good deal of money and various material gifts such as clothing, and then raised the issue of conversion. Emperor Haile Sellassie allegedly told the *abbaa gadaa*, my informants report, that "everyone should have a religion, either [Orthodox] Christianity or Islam, but believing in Oromo indigenous religion is backwardness." The emperor subsequently commanded the *abbaa gadaa* that Boorana should follow either of these religions as they 'wished' (Waqo 2008; Bule 2008).

Although Emperor Haile Sellassie presented the two religions as options, my informants argue that he implicitly pushed the *abbaa gadaa* to accept Orthodox Christianity. The emperor was aware of existing conflicts between Boorana and the neighboring Muslim ethnic groups and, given a choice, the Boorana would undoubtedly turn to Orthodox Christianity. Stated plainly, the *abbaa gadaa* was too intelligent to fall for the emperor's scheme presented in the lofty rhetoric of religious equality. While the negotiations were proceeding in the capital, *abbaa gadaa* Madha sent his *makkala*, assistant-messengers, back to Boorana to inform the society about the upcoming plan of religious conversion. The essence of the message as narrated by Boorana elders would be put as:

> *Jarri amantii fudhaa jettee nu dirqisiisaa jirti. Ani silaa yoo ana ajjeesan malee hin fudhu. Boorannillee akka hin fudhanne. Yoo asitti anaan ajjeesanii dhufan immoo, amantii Isilaamaa sana fudhaa malee hin Kiristaanomiinaa.*
>
> They are coercing us [*abbaa gadaa* & his associates] to accept their religion. On my part, I would rather die than accept their faith. Neither should the Boorana. In case they kill me here [in Finfinnee] and come to force you to accept a religion, I would say that it is better to accept Islam than [Orthodox Christianity] (Waqo 2008).

Upon receiving the message from *abbaa gadaa* through *makkala,* the *raaba-gadaa* passed a resolution to take measures if Emperor Haile Sellassie were to execute *abbaa gadaa* Madha. Astonishingly enough, the Boorana people agreed to take their fate, i.e., declaring war on the

defectors, including the local government appointees, rather than sit idly while the *gadaa* was being stamped out (Waqo 2008).

In the meantime, the emperor unveiled the core purpose of the meeting with the *abbaa gadaa*. He told Madha that he wanted to delegate the task of converting Boorana to him (the *abbaa gadaa)* who would, in turn, consult with the *qaalluu* on how to embrace Orthodox Christianity, and not Islam. The *abbaa gadaa* Madha stood up and courageously told the emperor his position as narrated below:

> [After all], I would not consult with you on issues pertaining to the governance of my people [Boorana]; nor would I with the *qaalluu* or with anyone else. Ask why, I would say I am the sovereign leader of *gadaa*. I am not bestowed with authority to direct Boorana to become [Orthodox] Christians or Muslims. Hence, don't pretend that you summoned me for consultation. Tell me the truth that you called me to your palace to kill me. I would rather die than see the demise of *gadaa* because I would be a martyr. That day, it shall be known to the world that Boorana people were eradicated from the earth by the *Habesha*. Accepting death for truth is to be immortalized; let history be made, he called out, and *abbaa gadaa* Madha Galma left the room (Waqo 2008).

The emperor, understanding the consequences of the impasse, immediately decided to call Madha back to a negotiation. The emperor promised the *abbaa gadaa* that there would be no more negotiations over the issue

of *gadaa*. And the emperor even light-heartedly asked the *abbaa gadaa* not to tell the Boorana people about this incident. Instead it would be better, the emperor reiterated, if you pretend the king called you to give you prizes, money, and other support (Waqo 2008).

Upon his return to Boorana, the *abbaa gadaa* Madha was received with celebration and festivities. The safe and triumphant return of the *abbaa gadaa* Madha has had significant implications. For one thing, the impending war between the two Boorana groups (*warra gadaa* and *warra qaalluu*) was reversed. For the other thing, the delegate's victorious return symbolized the invincibility of their leaders and the solidarity of the Boorana people. What is interesting is that *abbaa gadaa* Madha put aside the emperor's plea not to reveal the content of their discussion to Boorana and presented the full account of the meeting to the people. In his report, he mainly focused on the inevitability of a future religious confrontation. In the event the Boorana were coerced to accept Orthodox Christianity, *abbaa gadaa* Madha alerted, they must know Islam should be their choice. *Abbaa gadaa* Madha tried to justify the rationale behind choosing Islam over Orthodox Christianity by the fact that: (1) linguistically and culturally Boorana are closely related to Muslim groups; (2) more of their land, Dirre, is adjacent with Muslim territories (he meant the Somali and other Muslim Oromo) and; (3) their relatives [other Oromo people], in majority, are also Muslims. Hence, he endorsed the few cultural traits Boorana people have had with the *Habesha* (Waqo 2008). (This might be, the ethnographer assumes, an indication that currently there are more adherents of Islam than either Orthodox or Protestant Christianity in Boorana but also we have

to be aware of the unfolding pressure coming from the Muslim Somalis.

Introduction of "Formal Education"

The introduction of 'formal education' into the Booranaland is the second significant political measure undertaken by Emperor Haile Sellassie to destroy Boorana *gadaa* system. In this regard, the purpose of education was cultural assimilation. As Edmond Keller (1988) posits, Ethiopianization or "Amharization of the Oromo and other groups was attempted 'without integrating them as equals or allowing them to share power in any meaningful way.'" Boorana's case was not immune to this problem as far as the education policy of the emperor was concerned.

From the emic perspective, the introduction of 'modern education' was designed to neutralize *gadaa* as a political system and cultural cohesiveness. Boorana elders suggest that, during his encounter with the *abbaa gadaa* Madha, it became clear to the emperor that the policy of elite cooptation and religious conversion would not be an effective means of political control. According to my informants, the emperor set out to open schools and encourage the Boorana to send their children to 'modern schools' to focus on the assimilation of the next generation. The elders say: *amantii isaa fudhachuu didnee jennaan maqaa daa'imman teessan isiniif barsiisna jedhuun dhufe*, literally means "faced with resistance to forced religious conversion, the monarch came in the name of 'educating' our [Boorana] children." To this end, in the late 1950s, the government setup quasi-educational institutions at Yaballo (Waqo 2008: Bule 2008).

The Boorana once again objected to the education of their children in "formal schools.'" Interviews reveal their motivations for doing so. First, in Boorana tradition, education meant essentially the socialization of children into Boorana history, culture, language and political life. None of these was part of the curriculum of the 'modern education' introduced by the emperor. Hence, they came to view "formal education" as a vehicle of propagation of Amhara cultural domination and a threat to their indigenous traditions. Second, the teachers in the 'modern schools' turned out to be the Orthodox priests who initially came to Boorana for religious proselytization. According to informants, the Boorana saw "modern education" as a ploy designed surreptitiously to convert them to the Orthodox churches faith they had already rejected. Thus persuaded, my informants recount, Boorana *hayyuu* on the meeting held in Yaballo in the late 1950s, told imperial government officials that an education that did not reinforce their Boorana identity, indigenous culture, and political system was not one they could embrace. The informants maintain that this occurred at an actual event, as the following exchange demonstrates:

> *Hayyuun Booranaa barumsa teessan tana teessa waa'een gadaa jiraa jedhanii gaafatan. Warri bulchiinsa Hayilesillaasees waa'een gadaa akka sagantaa barumsicha isaanii teessa hin jirre osoo hin dhoksiin himan.Waa'ee gadaa hin barsiistan taanaan tan biraa maal nu barsiisuu dhuftanree? jechuun gaafatan. Achumaan warri bulchiinsa Hayilesillaasees deebii tennuu dadhabnaan gargar galan.*

> The *hayyuu* inquired: in your education curriculum is there anything that teaches about our *gadaa* system? Officials of the emperor's government stated that the curriculum does not contain anything about the *gadaa* system. Then, what is the curriculum for us if it does not teach our children about the *gadaa*? The officials gave no answer. On that note, the meeting was over (Waqo 2008).

It is interesting to note that *gadaa* was the yardstick which Boorana use to evaluate the appropriateness of new ideas and practices for their community. An innovation that was not consistent with their worldview was interpreted as inimical to their very survival. Simply put, the end of *gadaa* system spelled the end of Boorana. In this connection, my informants told me the introduction of "modern education" was sanctioned as a quest to survive the people: *[Hayyuun] gadaan baduu mannaa doofummaatti hafuu wayya jedhee murteesse*, literally "It is better to remain 'uneducated' rather than witness the disappearance of *gadaa* (Bule 2008; Waqo 2008).

Soon after their encounter with the local representatives of the government, the *raaba-gadaa* assembled at Afura in Arero District, *abbaa gadaa's* office, to discuss and pass resolution to not send their kids to school. However, the refusal to accept 'modern education' did not sit well with the emperor and his officials. The informants relate that local militias were sent in to round up Boorana children and send them to schools at Yaballo and Finfinnee. In response, the majority of Boorana people evacuated their homesteads, they moved further into the forest along with their cattle and sons, to save

their children from being 'conscripted' into an alien culture and protect *gadaa* (their culture) from subversion. The militias managed to round up a few children and bring them to government schools. The Boorana *hayyuu* worked assiduously, for instance by giving bribes to the militias and/or local government representatives, to bring back the children they believed were seized by force and subjected to cultural indoctrination. As the reach and capacity of the government increased in the area, more and more children were forced to attend government schools, a process facilitated by the extension of towns and urban life to Booranaland.

Expansion of Urban Centers

As pastoralists, except for occasional market relations with towns to obtain basic necessities not available in rural areas, Boorana did not have a culturally-embedded use for towns. The conquest brought military camps close to Boorana life. As towns emerged around the camps, Boorana began to view urban culture as yet another means for encroaching on their *gadaa* culture and political system. As the towns were inhabited by Abyssinian soldiers and administrators, the new urban centers were seen as centers for the propagation of Amhara culture. Urban life came to be viewed as a space for the breakdown of lineage structures, indigenous culture, and eventually loss of identity. To substantiate this argument, it is worth quoting Asmarom's (1973: 49) informant as saying: "our [*aadaa*] (custom) has been destroyed. Nowadays it is done by giving bribes to the [*Qaalluu*] of the Oditu and the Karrayyu. In the old days we had warriors; nowadays we have 'bribers.' That much we have learned from the people of the city."

To protect the resources that maintained Boorana cohesiveness and unity for centuries, my informants report that *Gumii Gayyoo* promulgated a law against the establishment of towns and its socialization, specifically prohibiting the *raaba* from entering towns. According to one informant: *bara sana Booranni Boorana keessumaa warra raaba magaalaarraa ittisa ture*, literally "during the reign of the emperor, Boorana made a law that forbade any Boorana man, particularly the *raaba* (upcoming leaders) to visit towns (Waqo 2008).

Political Processes under the Military Regime

In 1974, a military junta, commonly known as the *Derg*, ousted Haile Sellassie from power. In Boorana, Gobba Bule (1968-1976) was the recognized *abbaa gadaa*. The *Derg* came to power at the time when the tenuous tripartite relations in Boorana among the *gadaa* system, *qaalluu* institution, and central government had deteriorated to a level of crisis. The military regime initially issued a proclamation ensuring the rights and equality of nations and nationalities, raising hopes that the political tension that had been simmering in Boorana would find a workable solution. The decision to issue a radical land reform measure suggested the *Derg* was committed to addressing Oromo grievances in order to get Oromo support in its quest to consolidate itself in power (Jalata, 1998: 10). Other measures, such as the banning of the use of derogatory names to refer to the Oromo, seemed to indicate that political power had shifted from the traditional hereditary Ethiopian aristocracy to politically-enlightened new elites. There was a glimmer of hope that the *Derg* regime would restore

justice and equality to the Boorana and other Oromo groups in the country.

'Restoration' of Power to the Gadaa System

The political changes in the central government that resulted in the collapse of the imperial system also negatively affected the *qaalluu* institution in Boorana. As an ally of the toppled monarch, the power that the *qaalluu* wielded had always been deemed illegitimate within the Boorana political culture. During the chaotic initial stages of the revolution the *abbaa gadaa* came to be recognized as the legitimate locus of power, effectively ending the usurpation of the *qaalluu* under the old regime and restoring the *gadaa* system and the *Gumii Gayyoo* legislative body. The *gumii gaayoo* issued a proclamation annulling the *qaalluu's* authority of supervising *gadaa* election in lieu of punishment for cooperating with the Ethiopian forces. This meant the *qaalluu* no longer had the authority to oversee *gadaa* elections and their position as *baalabaata*. In effect, the *qaalluu* lost their authority to confer legitimacy on *gadaa* officials and also their power to collect taxes and maintain order on behalf of the central government (Waqo 2008; Bule 2008; Borbor 2008). As Legesse (2000: 199) has rightly stated, this power restoration by the *gumii gaayoo* legislation, under *abbaa gadaa* Jilo Aga (1976-1984) also changed the role of the *qaalluu* and his lineage in Boorana political life.

According to my informant (Waqo 2008), Jilo Aga, the *abbaa gadaa* who played a role in organizing and facilitating the restoration of the *gadaa* system, which culminated with the declaration at *Gumii Gayyoo,* was an important historical figure for the Boorana people.

The restoration that he engineered ended the tripartite struggle in Boorana that lasted for about 86 years.

In his book, *Oromo Democracy* (2000), Legesse states that the Boorana people restored their *aadaa-seera Booranaa* to the *gadaa* system and *Gumii Gayyoo*. In fact, restoration must not be understood as a return to the status quo ante. First, the action of the *Gumii Gayyoo* to strip the *qaalluu* of their traditional role cannot be regarded as restoration of *aadaa-seera Booranaa*. The transgression of individual *qaalluu* should not have been the basis for reducing the *qaalluu* institution merely to religious activities. The discontent of the post-*Derg qaalluu* is palpable as evidenced by the following comments of an elderly Boorana *qaalluu*:

> *Aangoon Boorana bulchuu tan warra qaalluuti malee tan warra gadaa miti. Tana waan ta'eefis, baroota dargii dura bulchaa turre. Bara dargii immoo warri gadaa aangoo teenna nurraa fudhatte. Qaama itti himannu dhabnee lakkisne. Gadaan silaa aangoo sana barbaaddi. Dargiin immoo qaama aangoo tana tenneefidha eennutti himannaree jedhe.*
>
> The power to rule Boorana was vested in the *qaalluu* institution and not in the *gadaa* system. That was why we governed Boorana until the *Derg's* time. Under the *Derg*, the *gadaa* system took away our power. No body to appeal to, we finally gave up. The *gadaa* system had always been our rival for power. The *Derg* was the body that gave them power. Knowing that we had no recourse to appeal our case, we kept silent (Liben 2008).

It is clear that the *qaalluu's* claims were not consistent with what was known regarding where legitimate power resided in the *gadaa* system. I asked the *qaalluu* how long they ruled the Boorana or whether the power he claims was vested in him by the *aadaa-seera Booranaa,* Boorana custom and customary laws. He replied indirectly stating: *baroota axe Minilikiifi Hayilesillaasee Boorana warra qaalluuti bulcha ture; warri gadaa warra qaalluu kadhatti hayyuu nuuf naqaa jettee; gaafas qaalluuti Boorana bulcha jedhe,* which literally means "under Emperors Menilek and Haile Sellassie, the *qaalluu* governed the Boorana people. At the time, officials of the *gadaa* system requested us [*qaalluu*] to appoint *hayyuu* (advisors) for them [*gadaa*]" (Liben 2008). The statement shows the power to rule Boorana, according to *aadaa-seera Booranaa*, always belonged to the *gadaa* system, except for a brief time under the rule of Ethiopian Emperors, from *gadaa* Liban Jaldessa (1891-1899) to *gadaa* Gobba Bule (1968-1976), that shifted to the *qaalluu* institution.

Another reason as to why the return of the *gadaa* system cannot be accurately described as restoration is the fact that the *Derg* was heavily involved in the *gadaa* system. As was true in earlier periods, *Derg* officials routinely gave orders to the *abbaa gadaa* to select persons he approved as *hayyuu*. During the *gadaa* of Jilo Aga (1976-84), for instance, there were about forty *hayyuu* representing every lineage (*balbala*) in the various *yaa'a gadaa* and *qaalluu*. The *Derg* increased the number of Boorana *hayyuu* with a view to having in sufficient numbers of the important personalities in Boorana at its disposal for the purpose of mobilizing the local people to maintain law and order, and to secure the people's support for its devel-

opment schemes. This opened the way for corruption in the sense that some Boorana sought to bribe some government officials whom they thought would influence others indirectly to bring them to power. The normative *gadaa* canon which prescribed one clan-one *hayyuu*-one ritual site was violated as *Derg* officials appointed as many people as possible from a single clan. Ultimately the appointment of so many *hayyuu*, contrary to the limits imposed by the *gadaa* system constituted a breach of *aadaa-seera Booranaa*, rather than its preservation.

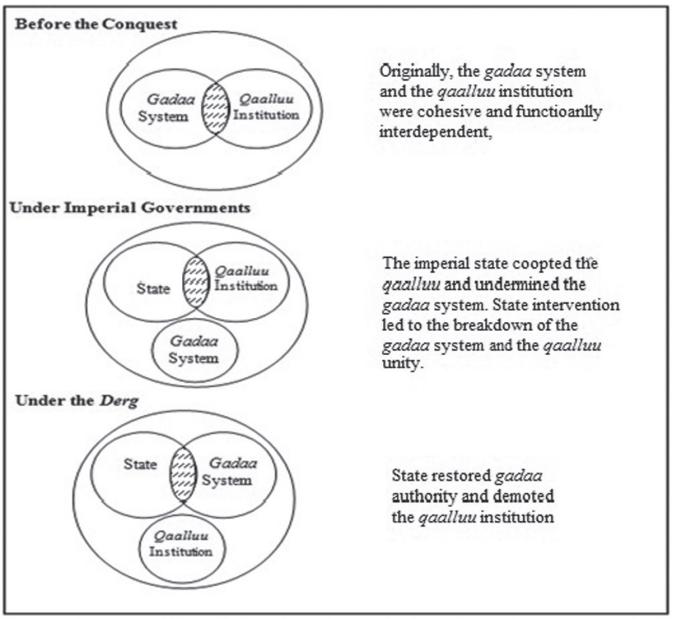


Fig. 1: Schmatic Representation of Political Interaction in Boorana

Even though the *Derg* regime restored the *gadaa* system to its original position, the measure was not meant to reverse the apparent injustice of the imperial policy. Rather, it was the result of the socialist ideol-

ogy the *Derg* had embraced which made it necessary to expunge religion from politics, even if it meant the indigenous religion the *qaalluu* represented. In addition, the *Derg* calculated that restoring the *gadaa* to its legitimate position would win the *warra gadaa* over and enable it to recruit fighters to be deployed against Said Barre's aggression of 1977.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the dynamisms of power relations between Boorana institutions mainly the *gadaa* system, *qaalluu* institution and *Gumii Gayyoo* and the Ethiopia governments at different times. It described the allocation of responsibilities or authorities by the Boorana customary "constitution" in the pre-conquest times, showing that the indigenous institutions constituted the core political, juridical and religious systems of Boorana. Generally, their institutions' authority and roles were complementary, with some functional overlap, and they existed and operated in a cohesive fashion.

With the conquest of Boorana by Abyssinians in the late 1890s, radical political changes occurred. First, the conquering generals imposed their own system of rule on the indigenous customary law. The Abyssinians rearranged the indigenous institutions in ways that served their own interest. The shifting of political power from the *gadaa* to the *qaalluu* institution marked the beginning of a dual government system in which the indigenous existed along the imposed in an uneasy relationship that can be characterized as both cooperative and confrontational.

The relationship between the *gadaa* system and the formal state structures was often confrontational because

of the former's responsibility to defend and maintain the autonomy of the 'Boorana country.' In the views of *gadaa* officials, the expansion of the Ethiopian state structure was an aggression that had to be stemmed. The *gadaa* officials considered imperial authority as illegitimate and consistently disregarded the emperor's decisions over their affairs. On the other hand, the relationship between the *qaalluu* institution and the imperial regimes, particularly during Haile Sellassie's regime, was marked by cooperation. As a result, the complementary relationships between the *gadaa* system and *qaalluu* institution in pre-conquest time lost balance, marking the disintegration of the hitherto cohesive indigenous institutions, *gadaa* and *qaalluu*.

The changes in the political organization of the Boorana from a polity based on the legitimacy derived from the *aadaa-seera Booranaa* (*gadaa* system) to one based on the support of imperial rule (*qaalluu*-ship) effected a dramatic change in the character and status of the *abbaa gadaa*. The restoration of the *abbaa gadaa* by the *Derg* to its prominent position did not seem to return the Boorana indigenous institutions power equilibrium and functional cohesiveness of the pre-conquest period.

References

Bassi, M. 2005. *Decisions in the Shade: Political and Juridical Processes among the Oromo Borana*. Trenton and Asmara: Red Sea Press.

Baxter, P.1979. *Borana Age Sets and Warfare*. Senri Ethnological Studies, Vol.3, Pp. 69- 95.

_____. Features of the Political System of the Boorana Pastoralists of Southern Ethiopia'. In *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*, edited

by P.T.W Baxter, J. Hultin & A. Triulzi. Pp.132-149. Uppsala: Nordiska. Afrika Institutet. 1996.

Hebo, Mamo. 2006. *Land, Local Custom and State Policies: Land Tenure, Land Disputes and Disputes Settlement among the Arsii Oromo of Southern Ethiopia*. Kyoto: Shoutadoh Book Sellers.

Helland, J. 1996. 'The political Validity of Boorana Pastoralism: A Discussion of Some

Jalata, Asafa. 1998. 'The Emergence of Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Reaction'. In *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: the Search for Freedom and Democracy*, edited by Asafa Jalata. Pp1-26. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.

Keller, Edmond J. 1988. *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Autocracy to People's Republic*. Bloomington: Indian University Press.

Legesse, Asmarom.1973. *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*. New York: Free Press, Macmillan.

_____. 2000. *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System.* Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press.

Leus, T. 2006. *Aadaa Boraanaa: A Dictionary of Borana Culture*. Addis Ababa:

Melbaa, Gadaa. 1999. *Oromia: An Introduction to the History of the Oromo People*. Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers.

Informants

Anna Waqo, 09.02.2008, Moyale

Jatani Bule, 03.04.2008, Yaballo

Dabbassa Madha, 14.03.2008, Didarra

Jilo Jaldessa, 11.03.2008, Reji

Babbo Boro and Wale Kokko, 17.03.2008, Yaballo

Bule Borbor, 19.03.2008, Dubulluq

Dabbassa Madha, 14.03.2008, Didarra
Waqo Liban, 09.03.2008, Matagafarsa

Notes

1 Liban was predominantly occupied by *warra gadaa* while Dirre was predominantly *warra qaalluu*.

2 Oromo term for Abyssinian gun bearers who colonized and settled amidst the Oromo people.

3 Amharic term originally referring to *rist* right among the Amhara-Tigrayans in northern Ethiopia. Following colonization, however, it took on a different meaning among the colonized parts of Ethiopia. And as such, it refers to a political position held by local chiefs who served as local officials and played a role of intermediary between the state and local communities, their major function being collection of taxes and tributes. While in the north the term denoted one's right to land but in the south, including Boorana, the term implied one's right to own (everything- word choice) of the colonized people.(see Mamo, 2006: 50)

Boorana Political Culture and Rousseau's Concept of Popular Democracy: An Examination of Theory and Praxis

Taddese Lencho

In 2006, I spent a week in Yaballo (pronounced Ya'a Ball'o), Boorana, to provide training to a group of pastoralists. Interacting with some very knowledgeable Boorana elders – the *hayyuus* – left me with two issues that fascinated me about the political outlook and laws of the Boorana. First, during my conversations with the elders, I noticed a group of children from the neighboring villages surrounded us anxious to hear what I (a stranger) and the elders were discussing. The elders told me that the children are encouraged to listen to and watch their elders conduct leadership matters and that this was their

Journal of Oromo Studies, Vol. 19, No. 1 & 2 (July 2012), pp.

Taddese Lencho, LL.B (Addis Ababa University), LL. M. (University of Michigan), is PhD candidate at the University of Alabama Law School, Tuscaloosa, and lecturer at Addis Ababa University, School of Law. He has published scholarly articles in the *Journal of Ethiopian Law, Mizan Law Review, Ethiopian Journal of Legal Education* and *Michigan State Journal of International Law*. He is a contributor on "Ethiopian Taxation" to the *International Bureau of Fiscal Documentation (IBFD)*, Amsterdam.

way of preparing their youth for future leadership. For me, the Boorana elders' attitude was the opposite of what I knew about paternalistic societies in Ethiopia in which children were kept out of the ways of elders.

The other thing that fascinated me about the Boorana was the range and quality of their laws. Marco Bassi described them aptly as "a society of assemblies." An alternative description would be "a society of laws." They have laws not just for humans, but also for domestic and wild animals, as encapsulated in the Boorana expression: "*seeri mumme, seeri sare*!" (lit., "laws for men, laws for dogs").[1] The Boorana claim that even the animals understand the laws humans have set for them, citing that the cattle in Boorana spend the nights outside untended in the presence of hyenas and foxes. I asked how it is that the hyenas and foxes did not molest their animals. The elders replied that the wild animals are also taken care of and therefore do not molest their domestic animals. The Boorana maintain that they have laws for the order in which the animals of the wild drink from their wells. I was told that the animals knew these laws. We observe from contact with domestic animals that their behavior towards us in many ways is defined by how well we treat them, and presume that animals in general know how to return kindness with kindness.

How did the Boorana manage to have such laws and institutions in their tradition? Is it the result of a strong constitutional tradition they have developed for centuries? Or is it a product of the rich tradition of popular participation in their assemblies? Or is it perhaps because the Boorana have refused to recognize the right to private property over land? (They regard land as the wife of the sky: since the sky is not appropriable, neither is the earth.)

In seeking answers, it is important to locate the underlying explanations which account for the internal consistency of their laws and the inherent integrity of their institutions. It is equally important to explore how the Boorana managed to preserve their institutions not only from the ravages of authoritarian invasions of the neighboring peoples but also from deterioration from within.

It seems there is a strong parallelism between Rousseau's concept of popular democracy and how the Boorana practiced their version of popular democracy for more than 350 years of Oromo history; perhaps for much longer period than that. The practice of popular democracy in Boorana preceded Rousseau's birth by at least a hundred years. Since Rousseau referred to the ancient Greeks as historical precedent and evidence for his theories, he was unaware that his version of popular democracy was being practiced somewhat closer to his time.

The purpose of this article is two-fold. The first is to draw some surprising similarities between some of Rousseau's political theories and the political traditions of the Boorana in Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya. Second, I argue that Rousseau's theories, generally considered too ideal to be of any practical utility, show surprising operability in the context of Boorana political tradition. In my analysis, I will specifically focus on Rousseau's theories of the "general will," which resembles popular sovereignty in Boorana. There are many areas of affinity between Rousseau's political theories and the political outlook and practices of Oromo in the Boorana land, where a unique indigenous African democracy is still functioning, albeit threatened by authoritarian practices and degeneration from within. I will juxtapose Rousseau's theories with the practices of Oromo democ-

racy among the Boorana, particularly as these institutions developed over centuries are practiced.

The Boorana Polity

Boorana is located in southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya. The Boorana are part of the Oromo people, the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. They Boorana still practice the *gadaa* system.[2] Traditionally the Boorana have been cattle herders. In recent years however, because of persistent drought, some have taken up irrigated agriculture to cultivate maize, vegetables and fruit.[3] A striking feature of Boorana is not their pastoralist lifestyle nor their adoption of agriculture in recent times, but their participatory political culture. In describing their political system, Marco Bassi wrote:

> [The] Borana polity, of which *gada* is only one component, may certainly be considered a democracy, if "democracy" is strictly taken in its classic meaning of "government of the people, by the people, for the people".... Participation into decision and the political process – in the juridical, legislative and other fields – effectively moving from the base to the center make it perhaps more democratic than modern states based on division of powers and universal suffrage. However, Borana polity does not imply a large number of features normally associated with modern democratic states.... The *gada* system works in unstratified and non-specialized society. Political integration is obtained among clans, hence among groups which are analogous to one another.[4]

There are three principal institutions in Boorana political organization: the national assembly (*gumii*), the generational organization (*gadaa*) and the dual organization (*qaalluu*).[5]

The national assembly – the *gumii* (assembly of the multitude) – is the most important institution. It is made up of many councilors, assemblies drawn from different sections of the *gadaa* institution as well as ordinary citizens who have the ability to express their thoughts on matters of national concern and interest to travel to the site where the assembly is held.[6] The one assembly that has survived to this day is the *Gumii Gayyoo* in Boorana named after a famous well in the area. In the sixteenth century, the *gumii* broke up into regional assemblies held by different Oromo communities in places like Malka Bollo (around Awash River) and in another place called Tule in central and western Ethiopia.[7] As distance and the large number of people involved became too unwieldy to govern from a single center, the people created their own assemblies so as not to lose the original spirit of such assemblies.

The other institution is the *gadaa* (which is more like the government that enforces the laws passed by the Gumi). *Gadaa* is a generational organization. In the words of Asmarom Legesse, in the *gadaa* system, "all generations take turns in assuming the authority and responsibility to perform domestic labor, take part in wars, lead their people, make laws, mediate or adjudicate conflicts, and during their partial retirement, sit in judgment of the ruling *gadaa* class, give legislative leadership to their people and end the life cycle in a sacred state."[8] To Asmarom, *gadaa* is "an effective method of distributing authority and responsibility across the whole

life course" and helps the Boorana society in attaining "intergenerational equity and separation of powers on a sequential scale."[9]

In the *gadaa* system, every male Boorana has a role appropriate to his age. Every male passes through generation grades: *Dabballe I* (childhood), *Junior Gamme II* (the age of looking after livestock), Senior *Gamme III* (the age of initiation and the period during which the boys elect their six leaders to practice political leadership), *Cusa IV* (apprentice warriors), *Raaba V* (the age of warriors), *gadaa VI* (the ruling age grade).[10]

The leader of the *gadaa* class in power is known as the *Abba gadaa* or *Abba Bokku* (father of the *gadaa* or Father of the Scepter). He is democratically elected.[11] The *gadaa* class remains in power for eight years. They assume power at a designated place called Nura and designated time, and power is transferred from one class to another in a ceremony called "*balli-wal-irra fudhuu*" or the "transfer of ostrich feathers"-the symbol of authority (See Appendix).[12]

After the six grades mentioned above, there are four grades (VII to X), collectively known as *yuuba*, that completes the *gadaa* life cycle. These are periods of partial retirement from active political leadership. The members are not actively involved in the day-to-day affairs of the *gadaa* government, but they continue to play an important role during the national assembly conventions.[13]

The third institution – the *qaalluu* – is a ritual institution representing the two great societal halves of the Boorana nation. The *qaalluu* are hereditary and hold office for life. They are empowered to oversee the election of *gadaa* leaders but they and their kin are barred from holding such office (the Oromo version of separa-

tion of state and religion). They are not supposed to bear arms or shed blood.[14]

In Boorana political system, participation is built into and permeates the whole system. The *Gumi* (assembly), as indicated before, represents the culmination of a societal culture that puts a huge premium on participation. *gadaa* itself is an embodiment of a culture that not only allows but requires a person to participate in all the phases of generational roles, including assuming the highest responsibility, that of holding political leadership in the society. Asmarom Legesse sums up the political philosophy underpinning Boorana polity in the following words: "At no point... does Borana society wholly transfer authority to any group of people. The society delegates limited kinds of powers to the leaders of a luba [*gadaa*], for a limited period of time, but that power is always subject to the higher authority of the assembled multitudes... ."[15]

Rousseau's Concepts of "Popular Sovereignty" and "General Will"

The "general will" is a central concept in Rousseau's political philosophy. It is the fountain of his theory of sovereignty. When the "general will" is declared, that declaration becomes an act of sovereignty and constitutes law. As he put it: "For either the will is general, or it is not. It is the will of either the people as a whole or of only a part. In the first case, this declared will is an act of sovereignty and constitutes law. In the second case, it is merely a private will, or an act of magistracy. At most it is a decree."[16]

The concepts of the "general will" and "popular sovereignty" have been a subject of some debate among

political philosophers and theorists. A number of scholars have criticized Rousseau's theory of "general will" for its obscurity and impracticality. John Plamenatz, for instance, writes:

> If we take some of Rousseau's more often quoted statements literally and try to elicit their meanings, we soon find ourselves caught up in a web of absurdity. For example, his distinction of the 'will of all' from 'the general will,' saying that the first is the 'sum of particular wills,' and the second the 'sum of differences' remaining when the pluses and the minuses of the particular wills cancel each other out. ... This is sheer nonsense. ... Beware of political philosophers who use mathematics, no matter how simple, to illustrate their meaning! God will forgive them, for they know what they do, but we shall not understand them.[17]

Similarly, Chester C. Maxey is puzzled by Rousseau's notion of "sovereignty," which is related to his theory of the "general will":

> How could sovereignty ever be anything but an abstraction? Could the whole people ever be assembled? If assembled, could they agree as to what should constitute the general will? If unanimous agreement was impossible, could a majority bind the minority? If so, how could it be contended that sovereignty belonged only to the people as a whole or that law was exclusively an act of the general will?[18]

Although Rousseau's theory of the "general will," which Maxey considers to be his most distinctive contribution to political thought, is rather ambiguous as a concept, his underlying assumptions and the sympathies which led him to construct his theory, as we will see, are not in doubt.

Rousseau had nothing but contempt for representative democracy and he wrote passionately against its tendency to legislate the particular wills of the few for the many, who are disenfranchised in the name of democracy. In his *Social Contract*, Rousseau scoffs at the democratic pretensions and claims of representative governments of countries like England:

> Any law that the populace has not ratified in person is null; it is not a law at all. The English people believes itself to be free. It is greatly mistaken; it is free only during the election of the members of the parliament. Once they are elected, the populace is enslaved; it is nothing. The use the English people makes of that freedom in the brief moments of its liberty certainly warrants their losing it.[19]

Rousseau mocks in more blunt terms the claims of his contemporaries to be free:

> ... As for you, modern peoples, you do not have slaves, but you yourselves are slaves. You pay for their liberty with your own. It is in vain that you crow about that preference. I find more cowardice in it than humanity. I do not mean by this that having slaves is necessary, nor that the right of slavery is legitimate, for I have proved the contrary. I am merely stating the reasons

> why modern peoples who believe themselves free have representatives, and why ancient peoples did not have them. Be that as it may, the moment a people gives itself representatives, it is no longer free; it no longer exists.[20]

The Boorana elder whom Asmarom Legesse quotes as saying "electing a man after hearing him give self-praising speeches is no wiser than marrying a woman after watching her sing and dance in the company of a crowd of admiring warriors"[21] is eerily similar in outlook to Rousseau's contempt for a representative form of government.

For Rousseau, "sovereignty is merely the exercise of the general will" and this should neither be alienated nor be represented by "anything but itself."[22] Rousseau obviously believed that direct democracy was possible and the classical popular democracies could be resurrected. An appeal to popular democracy might have been dismissed as a naiveté for his time, but it was a reality two thousand years before his time, and Rousseau did not believe that human nature had changed so much as to rule out popular democracy.

At a time when direct democracy was dismissed as "utopian" (in others words an impossibility), Rousseau's appeal for that type of democracy is striking for its boldness. However we may wish to see it, Rousseau was not willing to surrender citizens' right to participate in self-government. No amount of "impracticality" or even "impossibility" argument could have dissuaded him from pursuing the path that, in his mind, led to popular democracy. "The populace," says Rousseau, "itself cannot, even if it wanted to, deprive itself of this incommunicable right." For Rousseau, liberty is a supreme virtue, and

if the population has to assemble constantly at public squares (like the ancient Greeks), so be it.

At what cost could popular democracy be achieved for Rousseau? First of all, where does man (so busy with distractions of this world) find the time to fully participate in popular assemblies? Secondly, how does one overcome the logistical challenges of participation in large states with millions of people scattered all over the place? These have been vexing questions for those drawn to the political philosophies of Rousseau. Let's address ourselves to the second question.

There is no question that Rousseau's sympathies lay with small states and communities not just because he admired the ancient city democracies but also because he was concerned about the practical challenges of his theory is applied to a larger polity. He offers several reasons:

> ...how many things that are difficult to unite are presupposed by this government? First, a very small state where it is easy for the people to gather together and where each citizen can easily know all the others. Second, a great simplicity of mores, which prevents the multitude of public business and thorny discussions. Next, a high degree of equality in ranks and fortunes, without which equality in rights and authority cannot subsist for long. Finally, little or no luxury, for luxury either is the effect of wealth or it makes wealth necessary. It simultaneously corrupts both the rich and the poor, the one by possession, the other by covetousness. It sells the homeland to softness and vanity. It takes all its citizens from the state in order to make

> them slaves to one another, and all of them to opinion.[23]

In another passage, he writes: "All things considered, I do not see that it is possible ... for the sovereign to preserve among us the exercise of its rights, unless the city is very small."[24]

Since Rousseau wrote his theory surrounded by large states tending to grow even larger, he was not unaware of the difficulties of translating his political philosophy into the arena of large states. Rousseau was not intent upon providing a political philosophy for justifying the existing states. He was also not one to abandon his theory on the face of the practical challenges involved in implementing his philosophy on the ground. Rousseau was writing as a philosopher who saw his task as one of changing the world, not interpreting it.[25]

In responding to the first challenge of instituting Rousseau's political philosophy in reality, i.e., the question of where citizens find time to participate in political affairs, I think one needs to look at the kind of person Rousseau considered complete:

> This passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces quite a remarkable change in man, or it substitutes justice for instinct in his behavior, and gives his actions a moral quality they previously lacked. Only then, when the voice of duty replaces physical impulse and right replaces appetite, does man, who had hitherto taken only himself into account, find himself forced to act upon other principles and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations. ... he ought constantly to bless the happy moment

> that pulled him away from it forever and which transformed from a stupid, limited animal into an intelligent being and a man.[26]

Rousseau's *homo politicus* is not the individual who wishes to be left alone. Rousseau understands man and freedom in the context of society. Rousseau recasts the life of an individual as one whose life is taken up, perhaps even consumed by, his participation in public affairs. For Rousseau, an individual, for whom the "the boundary between public and private life" is erased, "has not much need of a private life," and by participating fully in public affairs, the individual "will be able to partake of the common happiness."[27] An "individual who tries to stand alone, who seeks to create his own values, who demands to be left to himself," for Rousseau, is not really free but "enchained."[28] This view of an individual in a society sets Rousseau apart from other political philosophers who fashioned their philosophies around the rights of man and the importance of private life not subject to encroachments from society.[29]

The other important contribution of Rousseau to political theory is his notion of legislation. Rousseau, we should remember, writes about legislation in two senses. The first sense in which he uses legislation is in the sense of the original social contract that creates the state. In this Rousseau simply reiterates the famous principle of contract that a contract is a law between the parties that have signed up to it (*pacta sunt servanda).* His famous remark that "those who disobey the general will should be forced to be free" is in that context not as draconian as it appears at first sight.

The second sense is what, in Rousseau's words, gives "it [the social compact] movement and will."[30] I am

interested in the second type of legislation: the form it might take when legislation is issued after the formation of the state. Rousseau, like others who focus on the social contract, speculated about how the birth of states came about, but it is his original ideas about the sovereignty of the people and the role of legislators that remain distinctive and provide insights into the nature of Boorana political traditions, like the *gumii* and the *gadaa* system.

A Society of Assemblies: The *Gumii Gayyoo* and Other Boorana Assemblies

For Rousseau, the sovereignty of the people is expressed through their supremacy over the making of laws, which "are the only authentic acts of the general will," and which are made "only when the populace is assembled."[31] Rousseau dismisses the idea of those who regard the assembly of the people as a chimera by appealing to the historical antecedent of the people assembling in the ancient Greece to make laws. In a telling passage, he writes: *With the populace assembled, it will be said: what a chimera! It is a chimera today, but two thousand years ago, it was not. Have men changed their nature?* (emphasis mine).[32]

In the Boorana political tradition, the sovereignty of the people is manifested in the supremacy of the *gumii* over all the other political structures, including *gadaa*. The largest of these popular conventions is the *Gumii Gayyoo* (literally the Assembly of Gayyoo). The *Gumii Gayyoo* occupies a singular position in being the popular legislative assembly in Boorana. Asmarom Legesse summaries the position and role of the *Gumii Gayyoo* in the following words:

> In Oromo democratic traditions, the highest authority does not reside in the great lawmakers who are celebrated by the people, nor the rulers who are elected to govern for eight years, nor the electors and ritual leaders who hold their office for life by hereditary right, nor the age-sets and age-regiments who furnish the military force, nor the abba dula [the war chiefs] who lead their people in battle. It resides, instead, in the open, national assembly, at which all Gada councils and assemblies, aspirant and in power, active and retired, are represented.[33]

The *Gumii Gayyoo* assembly takes place every eight years to "review the conduct of the ruling *Gada* council, punish any violators of law, remove any or all of them from office" and above all "to reexamine the laws of the land, to reiterate them to the public" and to make new laws, where necessary and "settle disputes that were not resolved by lower levels." [34]

To qualify as Rousseau's sovereign, the *Gumii Gayyoo* should represent the assemblies that Rousseau writes about and allow every citizen to participate. Here is where the first challenge arises. Asmarom Legesse writes that the *Gumii Gayyoo* is open to any citizen with views about the *gadaa* class in power or about the laws of the land, and has the initiative and ability to articulate those views.[35] Even people from outside Boorana who have the knowledge about and interest in their institutions would be welcome to participate in the *Gumii*.

According to a well-known Boorana "man of knowledge" (*hayyuu*) who participated in this grand convention, the people of Boorana (both in Kenya and Ethiopia) regard the day the *Gumii Gayyoo* is in session as a

national holiday that every one (except the aged and the sick) looked forward to celebrating. I asked the *hayyuu* if everyone (having gone there) was allowed to participate, including women. He responded: "women are not allowed to participate, but they are often powerful behind the scenes because they exert great influence over men, particularly their husbands." There is therefore a nuanced version of participation of women in *Gumii Gayyoo* proceedings. Since women were allowed to travel to the proceedings with their husbands, the reality is that they probably exerted indirect influence on the proceedings.

The pre-*gumii* meeting could remain in session for as long as a month to hammer out the main issues and propositions (hence the eight year interval between the assemblies). At the main meetings, the discussions are dominated by the *raaba-gadaa* (the warrior class) leaders and the assembly men of the *yuuba* or the semi-retired *gadaa* classes.[36] Others do not have the right to participate at this stage but they can speak through the *gadaa* representatives with whom they had shared their thoughts in advance. There is a third level meeting called *Gumii* el Dallo (held in the vicinity of another great well called Dallo). Here the outstanding decisions of the *gumii* are finalized and proclaimed as laws of the people.[37] Here we have an indigenous model of democracy which operates at three levels, only the first of which could be called truly popular while the other two are conducted through representatives. The Boorana are perhaps unique in the annals of human history for consecrating shrines (their great wells – the source of sustenance of life) to the making of legislation, not quite to the worship a god.

Apart from the large number of people that are involved in the *Gumii Gayyoo*, there are other challenges

which can only be overcome through well-developed procedural rules. The first procedural challenge is that the absence of the concept of "quorum, but that is the very essence of the assembly of multitudes."[38] The second challenge is decisions are not passed by a majority that can impose its will on the minority. Discussions must go on until a consensus is reached by all members.[39] Indeed the Boorana take the right of all eligible participants seriously.

How are these challenges of the *gumii* overcome? Asmarom notes that managing the assembly requires knowledge of laws, rituals, *gadaa* history, chronology and time-reckoning. If the members do not have the knowledge, they seek the advice of the men of knowledge, the expert legislators, whose roles will be dealt with later in this article.

Secondly, effective methods of pressuring the participants in *Gumii Gayyoo* have been developed. One such method is the exhortation to refrain from adversarial language during the debates.[40] Participants are reminded at the beginning of the assembly that the assembly is not a place for "clever disputation" and sophistry. Attempts to pull rank or resorts to self-praise are discouraged. According to Asmarom Legesse, the presiding *gadaa* officer starts the assembly by saying the following:

> Dubbin dubbi *Gumii Gayyoo* ti. Dubbin dubbi Gumiiti. Dubbi qorumman dubbatani mit. Warri qaro qarumman laf keyyadha. Fula tun, fula wan adaa dubbatan male. Fula qarumman dubbatani miti. "An hayyu, an qaro, an duressa" wabeeka jedhani. Dubbi akkas akka hin jiranne. Dubbi kara adaati, nam ada ch'aqasa!

> We are assembled to conduct the business of the Gumii Gayyoo alone. As such, this is not the place for clever talk. Clever people! Leave your cleverness behind. This is the place for discussion on custom. It is not the place for clever talk. Some [people] may want to brag: "I am knowledgeable, I am clever, I am rich" and so on. Such claims are not allowed here. Our talk focuses on custom. Pay attention to ones who speak of about [in accord with] custom! [41]

How is consensus possible in such a multitude? If the "father of the laws" who presides over the meetings is ready to formulate a decision that might be acceptable to most of the participants and if tolerated by the rest, he asks members if there is consensus. If the assembled multitude overwhelmingly responds by chanting: "Peace! Peace! Peace!" it means that there is a meeting of minds. If not, the debate continues.[42] In order to pressure dissenters into following the voice of the many, all members of the *gumii* chant "Bless! Bless! Bless!"[43]

Now that the procedures of the *Gumii Gayyoo* are outlined, the differences between *gumii* as an expression of popular democracy and the standards laid down by Rousseau should be immediately clear. First of all, the *Gumii Gayyoo* is not just a legislative body. It is also involved in adjudication of outstanding conflicts not settled by other bodies of the Boorana political system. Rousseau famously proscribed the involvement of a sovereign body in adjudication of particular cases because, to him, the sovereign body loses its general character when it is entangled in particular matters.

Secondly, the *Gumii Gayyoo*, although it starts its proceedings with all the "citizens" of Boorana, its later

deliberations are dominated by *gadaa* councilors. The pre-*Gumi* proceedings may meet Rousseau's stringent standards but the later stages may violate his injunctions against surrender of any legislative authority to a representative body.

I have described the *Gumii Gayyoo* as an example of Rousseauan popular democracy in Boorana (it is certainly the supreme body on pan-Boorana matters). According to the Boorana political tradition, what the *Gumii Gayyoo* decides cannot be reversed by any other assembly.[44] But several other assemblies make binding decisions concerning virtually all spheres of life in conformity with the decisions reached in the *Gumii Gayyoo*.[45] These assemblies make decisions regarding such matters as collecting funds for communal responsibilities, such as assisting the needy, making arrangements for the management and use of natural resources, and conducting juridical proceedings.[46] The participants in these assemblies can only involve the members of the community concerned with that specific assembly and all binding decisions are reached through consensus.[47] It is this political phenomenon of the Boorana that Marco Bassi refers to as "una societa assembleare" or a society of assemblies.[48] With all the other assemblies around it, the *gumii* remains the supreme body for making fundamental decisions regarding pan-Boorana affairs.

Rousseau's Legislator and Boorana Legislators

Several political philosophers have cast doubt about the ability of the average citizen to handle political matters. Plato favored a philosopher-king as a just ruler of his ideal Republic in part because of his ambivalence

about the ability of the people to govern themselves.[49] Even Rousseau, the great champion of the natural goodness of the average citizen, could not resist a condescending statement at times: "How will a blind multitude, which often does not know what it wants (since it rarely knows what is good for it), carry out on its own an enterprise as great and as difficult as a system of legislation?"[50]

For Rousseau, the "general will," the source of laws, inheres in the people but in the apt expression of Andrew Hacker "at the collective unconscious."[51] This collective unconscious needs an articulator, whom Rousseau calls "legislator":

> By itself, the populace always wants the good, but by itself it does not always see it. The general will is always right, but the judgment that guides it is not always enlightened. It must be made to see objects as they are, and sometimes as they ought to appear to it. The good path it seeks must be pointed out to it. It must be made safe from the seduction of private wills. ... Private individuals see the good they reject. The public wills the good that it does not see. Everyone is equally in need of guides. The former must be obligated to conform their wills to their reason; the latter must learn to know what it wants. Then public enlightenment results in the union of the understanding and the will in the social body; hence the full cooperation of the parts, and finally the greatest force of the whole. Whence there arises the necessity of having a legislator.[52]

Rousseau does not identify the kind of oracular prowess that enables the legislator to unlock and read the general will. He seems to attribute mystical powers to the legislator when he says "Gods would be needed to give men laws." Nonetheless, the position of the legislator in Rousseau's imagination is not as exalted as it appears. The legislator is just a person with a power to "compel without violence and persuade without convincing."[53]

In addition, Rousseau does not want his legislators to be involved in the passing of actual laws for that taints and undermines their position as legislator. "The office of the legislator" says Rousseau, "is neither magistracy nor sovereignty."[54] In another insightful passage, Rousseau says "he who has command over the laws [the legislator] must not have command over men."[55] Why did Rousseau insist so much on this detachment of the legislator? Because Rousseau was afraid that a legislator so involved would use his "office to perpetuate injustices" and allow his "private opinions" to taint "the sanctity of his work."[56]

The legislator draws up the laws and will have no business getting the laws passed. "He who frames the laws," says Rousseau "does not or should not have any legislative right."[57] "The populace cannot, even if it wanted to, deprive itself of this incommunicable right, because according to the fundamental compact, only the general will obligates private individuals and there can never be any assurance that a private will is in conformity with the general will until it has been submitted to the free vote of the people."[58]

How can a legislator that is involved in the drawing up of the laws resist the temptation of passing these laws or manipulating the process of passing these laws? For

a legislator to maintain detachment from the fray of making laws, Rousseau would be content to have the legislator abdicate his office (as Lycurgus of Sparta was said to have done) or even come from a foreign country as was the custom in ancient Greek city-states and the Republics of Italy and Geneva of his day.[59]

It is not altogether clear in Rousseau's philosophy at what point the legislator should stop and let the people decide. The legislator must, after all, communicate to the people (or assembly of people) the laws he has drawn. At what point is the legislator going too far? Rousseau wants his legislator to master the arts of persuasion, blend fact with fiction, reason with emotion, with science, with myth.[60] It is unclear how the legislator who employs these "tricks" would remain faithful to the general will, granted that the latter can be known. In Rousseau's case, however, the use of ambiguous language may be excused as an example of his romanticism. Rousseau was seeking to achieve rational legislation and at the same time leave ultimate power in the hands of the people.[61]

Let us now come to the Boorana polity and examine the role of legislators (though obviously that is the not the word they use). The *Gumii Gayyoo*, being an assembly of a large number of people, requires management by individuals who possess knowledge of the laws, rituals, history, chronology and time reckoning.[62] A tradition has been developed, therefore, to seek the advice of men "of knowledge." Rousseau mentions Lycurgus of Sparta as a paragon of legislators in history, and among the Boorana, there have been renowned legislators of comparable stature. One such legislator used in the 1950s and 1960s was a man of knowledge named Arero Rammata, who is said to have known the entire *gadaa*

chronology – three hundred and sixty years of history stored in his mind.[63] A mathematician named M. Ascher used his knowledge to examine the nature of mathematical concepts and techniques of reckoning in non-western communities and archeo-astronomers; B. M. Lynch and L. Doyle, used Ascher's extensive knowledge to confirm that the Boorana calendar is based on a clear understanding of lunar motion. Rousseau says that "the legislator is in every respect an extraordinary man in the state." Arero Rammata, for one, meets that profile.

Rousseau also says that if a great prince is a rare man, a great legislator is even rarer. Arero Rammata is from a recent history, but there have been some illustrious legislators in Boorana and indeed in Oromo history in general. Asmarom Legesse cites two well-known legislators in history: Dawwe Gobbo (of Boorana) and Makko Billi of Macha (western Oromia).[64] These two men were credited with formulating the fundamental laws that stood the test of time, as has the *gadaa* system itself. A better understanding of Boorana political traditions in general and of the *gadaa* system in particular will require understanding the role these and other political personages played in the formulation and shaping of the *gadaa* system.

An interesting feature of the Boorana political organization is that the *yuuba* class becomes most active during the *Gumii Gayyoo* conventions, which is a time in their lives when they retire from active *gadaa* leadership.[65] Because of the enormous experiential knowledge they accumulate during their previous leadership, their influence in directing the *gumii* convention and in formulating the right kind of laws is undeniable. Rousseau, it must be remembered, wanted his legislators to follow

the example of Lycurgus: resign from office to occupy a more exalted position of a legislator. In the Boorana political system, that very philosophical premise seems to be built into the system.

That said, the similarities between legislators as Rousseau imagined them in his *Social Contract* and Boorana legislators should not be overemphasized. First of all, the legislators in the Boorana political tradition participate in the *Gumii Gayyoo* as both law-makers and as individual citizens or members of the multitude. In his insistence that those who frame the laws shall have no dominion over men, Rousseau might consider this as going too far. He might nevertheless approve of their participation as long as they submit their laws to the consent of the assembly. Boorana legislators are retired from *gadaa* government leadership and not from the influence of legislation. That is why they are deemed semi-retired (*yuuba*).

Secondly, there might be other legislators from active *gadaa* classes. Some indeed became great legislators in the tradition during the time the own social age group was the ruling *gadaa* class. Dawwe Gobbo and Mako Bili are two prominent examples. That is because the members of the ruling *gadaa* class were also involved in the deliberations of the *gumii* in their capacity as citizens. This duality gives them an opportunity to show their mettle during the deliberations, but they must submit their proposals to the *gumii*.

Although Rousseau might at times seem to approve of legislators having recourse to the intervention of heaven and to crediting the gods with their wisdom, the Boorana are usually suspicious of those who invoke the name of God to persuade them.[66] The Boorana listen to

their legislators but do not worship them. The Boorana generally admire men of knowledge but usually with rational detachment. Their legislators "are not bearded old patriarchs with divine inspiration but gifted parliamentarians [sic] known for their wisdom and/or eloquence."[67] The evidence for that is that the proposals of legislators were not always approved. In one instance, Dawwe Gobbo, *abba gadaa* from 1706-1714, is said to have proposed a law that proscribed the practice of keeping lovers from one's own moiety (the Boorana had a law which proscribed marriage within a moiety but not keeping lovers). However, his proposal was rejected by the *gumii* he presided over. Because of the threat of HIV/AIDS epidemic, however, the law which was rejected in the eighteenth century is now being reconsidered for revision in the upcoming *gumii*. Times change, and the Boorana change with it.

Conclusion

In his *Social Contract*, Rousseau expressed the fear that the general will and popular sovereignty faced continual threats from particular wills.[68] In the absence of a corporate will to counterbalance and resist the particular will of those in government, Rousseau said the sovereign people will finally succumb to tyranny.[69] The canker of vice in the body politic, for Rousseau, is as natural as old age and death are to the human body, leading to the degeneration of popular democracy.

Contemporary governments fiercely fight counterfeit money through their criminal justice systems. But they do not show half the effort to restrain themselves from counterfeiting what is currently a fashionable political currency: democracy. Popular democracy has been

a subject of much abuse in the hands of unscrupulous governments and representative democracies alike that satirists like Ambrose Bierce lampooned it as an endless round of tedious meetings in towns and rural areas to seek the peoples' approval or sometimes "disapproval of a matter already decided upon."[70]

If it has been a historical truism that popular democracy inevitably hurtles towards degeneracy without rigorous checks and balances to rein in private interests from taking hold, it is quite remarkable that the Boorana have preserved their popular institutions all these centuries. What is interesting about the Boorana is that they have developed both versions of a democracy. They have institutions for popular democracy (like the *Gumii Gayyoo*) and they have institutions for representative democracy (like *luba*). This remarkable political tradition is worth-preserving, not just in anthropology classes, in annual festivities or commemorations, or as exhibits in museums but as a living political system for the present and future generations. With some caveats, the Boorana qualify as the people who lent themselves to the discipline of "popular democracy" throughout their history.[71]

In the twentieth century, despite the threat posed by intrusions by Ethiopian government institutions, the Boorana have managed to preserve their democratic system of government by keeping the government's bureaucracy at bay. For instance, they have managed to keep crimes committed in Boorana areas low through their indigenous systems of dispute avoidance, and when conflicts do happen, by deploying their indigenous mechanisms of dispute resolution, which allow them to settle disputes out of the government's court system.

The political functionaries of the Ethiopian government at times express bewilderment at the tenacity of the Boorana (while secretly admiring their peaceful lifestyle) but the Boorana know that their indigenous institutions are more effective in their context than the government agencies around them. Rousseau believed that a "healthy constitution" and "good government" are the first thing one needs to look for in a good society, more than "the resources furnished by a large territory" or the abundance of natural resources,[72] and the faith of the Boorana people in their indigenous institutions is perhaps born out of the realization that they have indigenous institutions in place for good governance.

The question now is how long can the Boorana manage to keep degeneration at bay in the face of the encroachment of external agency? An interesting recent study by Israel Ittansa shows that the integrity of the whole political tradition of the Boorana is being undermined at a faster rate than ever by the convergence of internal and external factors impinging upon the Boorana political order.[73] The task in the future is not just understanding Boorana political traditions but also preserving the original intent of these traditions so that, to borrow the words of Abraham Lincoln "the government of the people, by the people and for the people" will not perish from Boorana.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Rousseau, who railed against the corrupting influences of science and art in his First Discourse, showed so much admiration for societies able to implement a social contract of the kind described in his writing. That the spirit of Rousseau is alive in the political traditions of societies like the Boorana tempts one to believe that his Social Contract

is a continuation of his basic philosophy expressed in his First Discourse.

Notes

1. Asmarom Legesse, *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2006), 201.
2. See Johan Helland, "The Political Viability of Borana Pastoralism: a Discussion of Some Features of the Political System of Borana Pastoralists of Southern Ethiopia," in *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiry*" eds. Paul T. Baxter, Jan Hultin and Alessandro Truilzi (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1996), 137; *Gadaa* is a common heritage of the Oromo people which was practiced over the entire territory they inhabited before it was engulfed by authoritarian and less egalitarian political practices in the second half of the nineteenth century. *Gadaa* is a system of classes (*luba*) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political and ritual responsibilities.
3. Gudrun Dahl, "Sources of Life and Identity," in *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiry,* eds. Paul T. Baxter, Jan Hultin and Allessandro Truilzi (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1996), 164.
4. Marco Bassi, "Power's Ambiguity or the Political Significance of Gada" in *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiry* eds. Paul T. Baxter, Jan Hultin and Allessandro Truilzi (eds.), (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1996). 159
5. Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 97
6. Ibid
7. Ibid, 99.
8. Ibid, 128.
9. Ibid
10. Ibid, 124-125

11. For a list of *abba adaa*s of the Boorana since 1659 see, Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 267.
12. Ibid, 125
13. Ibid, 126
14. Ibid, 101.
15. Ibid, 126; the power of the multitude sometimes involves 'removal' of officials who abuse their powers through proceedings that resemble contemporary impeachment proceedings. The Boorana use the word '*buqqisu*,' literally translates as 'to uproot,' to describe the process of removing from office incompetent, unjust, abusive, or otherwise morally deficient officers. This power of the people signifies the supreme authority of the people over political officers.
16. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 154.
17. John Plamenatz, *Man and Society: A Critical Examination of Some Important Social and Political Theories from Machiavelli to Marx*, Vol. I (London: Longmans,1963), 393.
18. Chester C Maxey, *Political Philosophies* (New Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 2007), 362
19. Rousseau, 198
20. Ibid, 199
21. Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 221
22. Rousseau, 153
23. Ibid, 180
24. Ibid, 199
25. Karl Marx, who was born half a century after the death of Rousseau, famously prescribed the task of philosophers as 'to change' the world, not merely to interpret it
26. Rousseau, Ibid, 151
27. Andrew Hacker, *Political Theory: Philosophy, Ideology, Science* (New Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 2006), 327
28. Ibid

29. Ibid, 327-328
30. Rousseau, 160
31. Ibid, 195
32. Ibid
33. Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 211
34. Ibid
35. Ibid
36. Ibid, 212
37. Ibid
38. Ibid
39. Ibid
40. Ibid
41. Ibid, 213. Translation slightly modified by the author.
42. Ibid, 213-214
43. Ibid, 214
44. Asmerom Legesse, *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society* (New York: Free Press, 1973) 93
45. Bassi, 153
46. Ibid
47. Ibid, 153-154
48. Ibid, 215
49. Hacker, 323
50. Rousseau, 162
51. Hacker, 323
52. Rousseau, 162
53. Ibid, 164
54. Ibid, 163
55. Ibid
56. Ibid
57. Ibid, 164
58. Ibid
59. See Ibid, 163-164

60. Hacker, 325
61. Ibid
62. Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 211
63. Ibid, 131
64. Ibid, 209
65. Ibid, 99
66. Of this Asmarom Legesse writes: "Several ethnographic facts lead me to believe that the Oromo conception of authority is not as awesome as it is among their monarchic neighbors to the north and west. Neither God, nor the Kallu, nor the Abba *gadaa* are conceptualized in the language of pious dependence that is pervasive in monarchic cultures." Legesse, *Gada,* 44.
67. Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 209
68. Rousseau, 192
69. Ibid
70. Ambrose Bierce, the American writer, famously and cynically defined the word 'consult' as 'to seek another's disapproval over a matter already decided on"; see Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*
71. Rousseau wrote that 'one people lends itself to discipline at its inception, another not even after ten centuries'; Rousseau, 163
72. Rousseau, 168
73. See Israel Ittansa, "The Quest for the Survival of the *Gada* system's Role in Conflict Resolution," in *Customary Dispute Resolution Mechanisms in Ethiopia*, eds., Gebre Yntiso, Fekade Azeze & Assefa Fiseha (Addis Ababa: The Ethiopian Arbitration and Conciliation Center, 2011), 312-320. Israel Ittansa writes that *gadaa* representatives are being actively co-opted by the Ethiopian political establishment scouts eager to bank on the traditional political legitimacy of the *gadaa* system; there are also encroachments from the formal legal system of Ethiopia as well as the inevitable socio-economic changes

"The Scene Does Not Speak": The Demise of the Odaa Bulluq Sacred Forest in Horro Guduru, Northwestern Oromia, Ethiopia

Lemessa Mergo

The way indigenous people view their natural environment depends to a large extent on their indigenous knowledge systems. Some writers contend that these systems are more directly conditioned by their environment than societies whose attitudes are shaped by a dependence on Western science (e.g., Steward 2006). Acquired through long processes of interaction with the natural surroundings, indigenous knowledge forms the foundation of a people's overall knowledge about a particular environment (Purcell and Onjoro, 2002). This kind of cultural construction about

Journal of Oromo Studies, Vol. 19, No. 1 & 2 (July 2012), pp.

Lemmesa Margo is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at Panjab University, Chandigarh. He has published in peer-reviewed journals such as *Indian Journal of Physical Anthropology and Human Genetics* and book chapters, including in *Global warming, human factors and environment: Anthropological perspectives* and *Ecology and Health: Anthropological Dimensions*, both edited by K. Sharma. His current research interests are processual ecological anthropology, customary knowledge and forces external to indigenous people.

the natural environment emphasizes interdependence of all living things – a perspective that calls for maintaining a delicate balance between human needs and ecological stability (Steger 2003).

The Oromo are often referred to as "naturists,' (see Kanno 2008:3) suggesting that they have no concept of "wilderness." In the Oromo worldview, for instance, there is no concept of vacant or uninhabited natural environment which waits for human subjugation. Nature is an avenue of solace and reverence (Mergo 2009). For the Oromo, natural elements such as land, forests, and trees are co-dependent and belong to early ancestors, no matter how large the expanses they may cover. The whole universe in general belongs to their *Waaqa* (cosmic creator and master) and therefore needs to be approached and utilized with a thoughtful attitude of adoration of this master. (De Salviac 1901, trans. Kanno 2008).

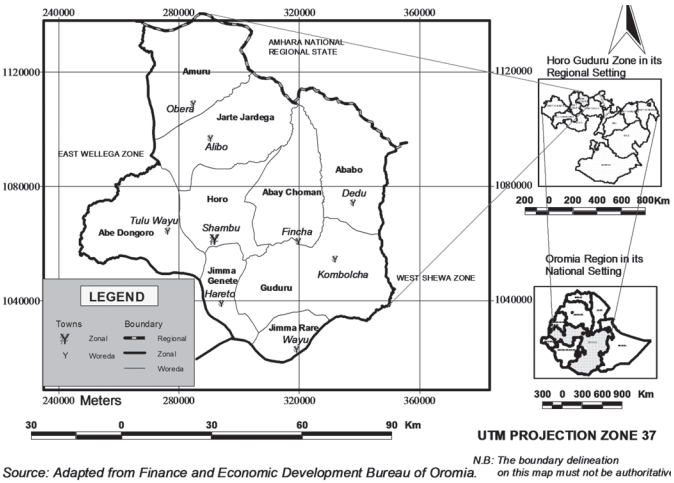
This attitude toward nature prevailed prior to the imperial conquest of the Oromo by Emperor Menelik in the nineteenth century. That event caused disruption to the Oromo naturist outlook. The concept of wilderness was imposed on the people by the new order. This was accomplished through the spread of malicious misinformation, demonizing indigenous religious practices and venues and destruction of indigenous sacred sites. For example, in Horro Guduru at least nine indigenous Oromo natural and cultural heritage sites were obliterated by an Amhara-Christian cultural invasion. Some of the revered moorlands and springs were converted to sites for Orthodox Church buildings and rituals. When the Caabirra moorland in Horro and the Dingoo Garbaa spring in Abee Dongoro districts were destroyed, Orthodox Churches were built on the sites.

This paper explains the role of Oromo indigenous knowledge systems in protecting natural forests. It focuses on the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest and the associated indigenous belief systems of the Horro Guduru Oromo in northwestern Oromia, Ethiopia. It shows that the Horro Guduru Oromo traditional knowledge of environmental harmony has remained intact, despite the losses that occurred in pristine environments such as the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest as a result of the activities of external forces and internal changes in the area. I argue that the major factors responsible for the demise of the Odaa Bulluq are colonial conquest, the state's neglect of the forest and indigenous forms of preservation, as well as religious change in Horro Guduru society. This religious change is particularly evident in the rapid spread of the Protestant faith in the area after the mid 1990s. The paper also shows that the rapid expansion of the town of Saqalaa has contributed greatly to the loss of the religious significance of the sacred forest and, ultimately, to its demise.

The Setting

The Horro Guduru landscape, identified as an *awuraja* during the Derg's regime (1974-1991) and currently named as *godina* (zone), has diverse relief features. According to Firdissa Sadeta's illustration (2007:24), the zone has a total land area of about 7869 km^2 and an average elevation ranging between 1000-3300m AMSL (above mean sea level) a vast plateau (58.56%), a very small proportion of lowlands (23.76%), mountains (6.64%), and other topographic features (11.04%).

Figure 1: Location Map of Horo Guduru Zone



Source: Sadeta, 2007. Odaa Bulluq sacred forest is located at about 16km north of Shambu town.

Presently, the zone has nine *woredas* (districts) and one special administrative town, Shambu, the zone's capital. The zone has now more than 198 rural *ganda* (lowest administrative unit consisting of an average of about 500 households) with the nine districts, each having an average of twenty-two *ganda* (Mergo 2009). The Odaa Bulluq sacred forest is situated in *ganda* Odaa Bulluq of Horro district. This *ganda* encompasses the center of the spring *Irreecha* festival of Horro Guduru Oromo. According to informants, a specific area known as *Burqaa Bulluq* (spring of Bulluq) was first discovered in this *ganda* by a certain mother of Horro named Badhaatuu[1] in early 1370s.[2]

Odaa Bulluq Sacred Forest[3] and Horro Guduru Oromo Belief Systems

Some natural forest environments have peculiar attributes often ascribed to them by the indigenous communities residing alongside. Special forests that are imbued with religious or spiritual attributes are called sacred forests. According to Sponsel (2008), such forests "may tend to evoke a feeling of some mysterious and transcendent power that merits special reverence and treatment." Individuals may experience such forests in different ways as sites of fascination, attraction, connectedness, danger, healing, ritual, and identity (Anderson et al. 2005; Wadley and Colfer 2004; Byers et al. 2001).

The Oromo who follow their indigenous religion observe sacred forests and specific trees as shrines. They practice annual ceremonies celebrating sacred forests (Tolera 1999). The Oromo religion attaches special importance to forests and the people treat the physical environment with tremendous respect and reverence. As Kelbessa notes, "[the] Oromo in any way could not utilize trees [they consider sacred]; instead, they sacrifice domestic animals under sacred or *Dakkii* trees to maintain peace and to avoid disease" (2001:43).

Local traditions hold that the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest has been distinguished as a unique site in the Horro Guduru Oromo belief systems ever since a hot springs named *Burqaa Bulluq* was discovered in the early 1370s by Badhaatuu—a woman whom the community believed possessed exceptional powers. Badhaatuu reportedly received revelation *Burqaa Bulluq* was special site of *Waaqa's* (or the Creator God's) manifestation. The local community accepted Badhaatuu's revelation and thereafter designated the Odaa Bulluq a sacred forest

area. One local elder describes the spiritual significance as follows:

> Horro had a large livestock population at that time (1370s or so), but there was a chronic shortage of water for such a large cattle population. As a consequence, Horro suffered a series of catastrophic livestock losses. Because of this, Horro families began moving their cattle from one corner of Horro Guduru to another in search of water. They arrived at Odaa Bulluq and took a rest there. Meanwhile, Badhaatuu was spending her nights praying about the problem to *Waaqa*. One day, *Waaqa* had told her to insert her finger into one of the numerous small holes on the ground under the Odaa tree. As soon as she did that, hot water sprang from the hole. Thereafter, abundant water continued to flow down to the surface below the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest (Interview, 23 April, 2009).

The Horro Oromo believe that Badhaatuu's discovery of the hot spring alleviated the water shortage for their livestock. The Odaa Bulluq forest has ever since been widely recognized as a unique site where *Waaqa* intervenes and resolves intractable problems of the Horro Guduru. Because of the absence of recurring incidence of drought, the Horro Guduru interpret Badhaatuu's experience as a moment where *Waaqa* offered his blessings and mercy to the community. Underscoring the sacredness of the site, the Horro Guduru have been performing the *Irreecha Birraa* (fall harvest festival) ritual at the Burqaa Bulluq or Odaa Bulluq sacred forest every year on 18 September (according to the Ethiopian

calendar) to give thanks to *Waaqa,* for his deliverance in the past and also to mark the arrival of a bright and tranquil autumn season and end of a gloomy rainy season.[4]

Recognized as sacred, the Odaa Bulluq forest was protected for a long time through customary practices rooted in Badhaatuu's story about the discovery of the hot spring. The sacred forest is believed to have been endowed with a cosmic agent, known as Booqaa Bulluq, which acts as the guardian of natural forest on behalf of *Waaqa*. This Booqaa Bulluq is the specific manifestation of a cosmic force which the Oromo refer to *ayyaana*, a power responsible for sustaining *Waaqa's* order of nature on the earth. Thus, human attacks against such culturally protected sacred places are believed to provoke retaliation from the *ayyaana* of the sacred forest. And these are said to be manifested in the form of change in climate, a chain of droughts, a series of crop failures, air-borne diseases, inter and intra-family and community conflicts, and other natural and social afflictions. For instance, the community faced an episode of drought in 2003, which devastated the large livestock population of the area, leaving some farmers with empty kraals. Local elders report that the community attributed this incident to violations of the protected status of Odaa Bulluq sacred forest.

The sacred forest has now been effectively destroyed. Before its demise, the forest is said to have magnificent trees and climbers. Each is believed to have their own *ayyaana* responsibly for endowing them with vitality and splendor, and protecting them from cutting and destruction. For example, *Hoomii (Pygeum africanum)* is a huge evergreen tree associated with danger, particularly lightening while *Birbirsa (Podocarpus gracilior/falcatus)* is associated with a favorable climate. Other large trees

include *Harbuu (Ficus sur)*, *Somboo (Ekeberigia capensis), Ejersa (Prunus africanum)* and *Bakkanniisa* (*Croton macrostachys*). From among the climbers (climbing plants and vines) (*hidda*), *hidda aannannoo,* is associated with peace and fertility of livestock. The trees and climbers of the sacred forest were protected by custom from being cut for personal use because it is widely believed that any attempt to cut them prompts spiritual vengeance from *Waaqa* or from the forest's *ayyaana*.

The trees are believed to be *muka abdaarii* (trees serving as abode of supernatural beings). The diverse vegetation under the canopy of the trees and the margins surrounding the forest in which they stand are also considered sacred. Local elders assert the belief that the trees are protected because their majesty and magnificence is a clear reminder of the presence and glory of *Waaqa.* The practice nevertheless should not be interpreted to mean the Oromo worship the trees. Studies show that the Oromos "believe in *Waaqa tokko* (one God), unique universal creator and master; they see his manifestations in the great forces of nature, without mistaking them for him; at the most...we...call them naturists (Kanno 2008:3).[5]

The primary reason that the indigenous community protected the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest appears to be a cultural one, especially regarding the religious and ritual significance of its trees and climbers. From climbers, *aannannoo* is the most adored ritual herb. Natural trees and climbers of the sacred forest were a part of the celebration of various localized rituals. Most of all, observing many customary rituals is almost impossible in the absence of some culturally meaningful and ritually useful trees and climbers that naturally grow in the

sacred forest. To celebrate traditional rituals such as *maarima loonii* (biannual ritual honoring livestock), *Irreecha Birraa* (spring thanks-giving to *Waaqa)*, *qaalluu* ceremonies, *ateetee* (fecundity goddess) and the *boorantiicha* (annual ritual in favor of the *ayyaana* associated with a rushing whirlwind), the people make use of several natural forest resource products. These include *Birbirsa, Aannannoo* (*climber*), *Ulumaayii (Ekebergia capensis), Urgeessaa* (*Premna shimperi*), *Kusaayee (Lantana trifolia)*, *Waatoo* (*Osyris quadripartita*), *Ancabbii* (*Ocimum suave*), *Eebicha* (*Vernonia amygdsliha*), *Abbayyii (Maesa lanceolata)*, *Anfaaree* (*Budellejja polystachya/Nuxia congesta*), *Agamsa* (*Carrisa edulis*), *Arangamaa* (*Pterrolobium stellatum*), *Biitee* (*Sideroxylon oxyacantha*), *Andoodee* (*Phytolacca dodecandra*), *Ceekaa* (*Calpurnia aurea*), *Mixoo* (*Rytigynia neglecta*), and others. Ritual celebrations furnished with these trees and vines are believed to delight and calm the *ayyaana* who are revered and revealed during various ritual celebrations. Wrong deeds wrought either collectively or individually must be revoked before they lead to vengeance from *ayyaana.* As a result, ritual celebrations mainly center on a kind of repentance and giving due glory to respective *ayyaana* (*ayyaana kabajuu*). Thus, ritual celebrations are meant to please and calm the *ayyaana*.

Rituals of various types are performed to appease different *ayyaana,* each of which is associated with and thus requires distinct vegetation from the sacred forest. During the *qaalluu* ritual, freshly cut leafy branches of *ulumaayii*, *abbayyii, urgeessaa, anfaaree,* and *mixoo* are held up to symbolize the community's quest for peace and mercy from *Waaqa*. The *qaalluu*, a religious institution embodied by person who possesses its *ayyaana*, used

to intercede between *Waaqa* and the Oromo. Wrong deeds, such as harmful attacks against sacred venues, were corrected and good ones encouraged during the ritual observances. During the *boorantícha* (a ritual of anointing), only two tree species (freshly cut leafy branches of *ejersa* and *anfaare*) were needed to appease the *ayyaana's* destructive whirlwind, locally called *bubbee*. This force used to destroy residences in dry seasons so the *boorantícha* ritual is believed to provide protection. Trees such as *ejersa* and *anfaaree* are believed to calm the spirit though locally prepared drinks (*farsoo*) and bread (*bixxillee*) which are offered to the spirit as libation and sacrifice. *Ateetee* refers to an annual ritual always celebrated by a group of adult and elderly women in the month of June. In this ritual observance females hold in their hands plants (*kusaayee*, *urgeessaa*, and *ulumaayii*) to use in prayer against demographic stress, especially bareness. These forest resources are believed to allure the fecundity goddess and put the female ritual leader into a trance in order to communicate with the goddess. Oromo believe that if the *ateetee* ritual is observed annually, making use of the tree species identified with it, human fertility will be sustained. *Irreecha Birraa* is usually observed only at the Odaa Bulluq sacred venue in Horro Guduru, but other rituals are observed at several localities. This ritual is performed by local elders under the auspices of the *angafa* (the firstborn) of the area clan (the *Guta* clan in Oromo genealogy) residing in the Horro hinterland. The elders never offer blessings, thanksgiving and prayer without holding freshly-cut grass and *ulumaayii*, since these green (*jiidha*) forest products symbolize the quest for peace. Two types of *maarima loonii* ritual are performed for the health of livestock and affluence. One

is dedicated to *korma* (bulls and calves) and the other is for fertility and health of *sa'a* (cows and heifers). Three types of forest resources are needed in the *maarima loonii* rituals: freshly cut *ulumaayii*, young *birbirsa* and *aannannoo*.

In general, it appears that the local community practiced these traditional rituals by making use of environmental resources in order to be rescued from potential difficulty. The Horro Oromo believe demographic problems (infertility), environmental stresses (whirlwind), economic problems (crop and livestock failures) usually emanate from human violations of the natural order, especially the entrenched establishment of revered natural settings such as the Odaa Bulluq sacred scene. Therefore, the various types of customary ritual observances are more likely adaptive strategies against all such believed stresses. These all in fact emphasize how culture mediates in environmental conditioning.

The preceding rituals not only necessitate periodic and reverent connection of the local community to the forest but also ensure careful utilization of its resources. The fact that the forest is considered sacred implies that it ought to be protected from exploitation; this may appear to contradict the notion of utilizing forest products for rituals. Yet, the local elders maintain that *Waaqa* condones the use of forest resources for indigenous ritual purposes. They explain that *Waaqa* examines intention and punishes self-indulgent utilization of natural resources. This means that he permits abundance for sacred rituals and basic human needs (fodder for livestock which provide milk and milk products for food and sale), but not for the satisfaction every person's greed. The moment the forest is exploited for self-indulgent

urges, that is the moment that the norm of forethought and prudent utilization is sullied and *Waaqa's* retribution provoked.

In general, prior to Amhara colonial conquest, the Horro Guduru Oromo maintained an intimate relationship with nature by regulating natural resources through the *gadaa* system. The people had no concept of "wilderness" because nature remained part of their spiritual, psychological, and material attachment for many centuries in the area with the Odaa Bulluq sacred venue. Odaa Bulluq was a natural space per se, but was distinguished for politico-religious, socio-cultural purposes (*gadaa* system) by the Oromo forefathers (the Kudha-Arfan Horro) for several reasons. First, the setting has moorland with elevation above 2500 meters. Moorland is always believed as *qananii* (respected) in the Oromo worldview. Second, it has a spring emanating from the forest. Third, the scene has diverse and natural tree species, most of which are sacred in the Oromo belief system. Finally, both the spring and the *harbuu* tree are recognized among the locals in the community to have miraculous qualities. The spring is believed to have nine holes and the *harbuu* is said to have fallen once in the past, but soon has resumed growth with three roots which are now standing about 5 meters apart from each other. And the nine holes of the spring of Odaa Bulluq sacred venue coincides with the cabinet members of Oromo the democratic government structure of the *gadaa* system known as *Saglan Yaa'ii Boorana* (the Nine Boorana Assembly), clearly demonstrated in the literature (Melbaa 1985:22; Erana 2009:143).

For several centuries, therefore, the indigenous beliefs espoused by the Horro Guduru Oromo remained

an effective mechanism for protecting the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest against destructive human activities. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the indigenous belief system began to erode and the mechanisms of forest protection start to break down as well. Consequently, the Odaa Bulluq forest was exposed to overexploitation. Despite this, the sacred forest contained stands of dense indigenous trees and closed forest canopies until the 1990s. In addition to the beliefs and practices highlighted thus far, local communities had conserved the density and diversity of its trees and tree-climbers for medicinal uses (e.g., extraction of healing herbs, roots, leaves and shrubs, etc.) and ecological reasons (e.g., reproduction of wildlife and other forms of biodiversity). By the late 1990s, however, Odaa Bulluq had completely lost its standing as a sacred forest.

The Demise of Odaa Bulluq Sacred Forest

As noted, multiple factors are responsible for the destruction of the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest. In the next sections, I will describe how external forces contributed to the demise of Odaa Bulluq sacred forest. First, the conquest of Horro Guduru by Menelik's forces exposed the sacred forest to overexploitation. Then the current state's actions, despite its well-meaning intention, proved detrimental due to officials' disregard for indigenous knowledge and conservation practices. Thirdly, the rapid expansion of Protestant Christianity accelerated forest clearing because of its successful battle for the demystification of traditional beliefs that had hitherto protected the forest. Finally, the development of urban centers

undermined the religious significance of the venue and the ultimate demise of the sacred forest.

Impact of Imperial Conquest

The conquest of Horro Guduru occurred as a result of a competition between two rival Abyssinian leaders, *Negus* Takla Haymanot of Gojjam and *Negus* Menelik of Shewa, over the resources of the Gibe Valley in the 1870s and 1880s. Valuable trade items like civet, ivory, coffee and other forest-based products were transported to Red Sea ports through Horro Guduru, making the region an arena of devastating conflict. For the monarchs, control of the routes and the resources was needed for wealth accumulation, but most importantly for purchasing European firearms on the presumption that whoever controlled them would be ensured supremacy in the entire region (Gemeda 1996). In the Battle of Embabo between the Shewan forces of Menelik and the Gojjame forces, fought on 6 June 1882, the Shewan army, led by *Ras* Gobana Dacche, defeated Gojjame commanded by *Ras* Darrasu. This victory established a permanent colonial administration in Horro Guduru.

Intent on securing access to resources and control of trade routes, the Gojjame and Shewa conquerors showed little concern for the adverse environmental and cultural impact of their action. Jabeessa (1995) and Nagara (2010) contend that the wars between these two forces were destructive to the Horro Guduru physical environment.

The Shewan military garrisons in the area include various rural towns in Horro Guduru, such as the present Caabir/Caabiirra village in the Horro district. Stationed at Caabirra, the forces of Bitwadded Mekennon Damesaw (chief Amhara imperial governor of

Horro Guduru following the death of Takla Haymanot in 1901) refused Oromo autonomy at Odaa Bulluq through the indigenous *gadaa* system of governance. It is partly the confinement of the conquering forces to such areas in response to local resistance which basically led to cultural erosion and shrinkage in the contemporary beauty of that natural environment. According to Mohammed Hassen, the Oromoland before the conquest had abundant natural beauty. In the 1840s, the French explorer Antoine d'Abbadie commented on "the beauty of Oromoland. In crossing the River Abbay to enter Oromoland, the traveler is struck ... by the abundance of trees, the change in costume and language..." Hassen further explains that Antoine's brother, Arnauld d'Abbadie, participated in *Dajazmch* Goshu's wars against the Oromo during the 1840s, and then expressed the Oromo's profound love for trees, and the gracefulness of their country in these words:

> No enemy would come to break the branches or fell the trees which the Oromo love so much that they plant them near the dwellings, the greenery and the shade delight the eyes all over and give the landscape a richness and a variety which make it like a garden without boundary. Healthful climate, uniform and temperate, fertility of the soil, beauty of the inhabitants, the security in which their houses seem to be suited, makes one dream of remaining in such a beautiful country (Hassen 2007:151).

The beauty of Oromo territory and its bounty captured the imagination of Amhara leaders and their soldiers to such an extent that one dying Amhara soldier

commented with a sense of regret: "What a pity that this land is not Amhara" (Hassen 2007). After the Amhara conquered and occupied Oromoland, it was not only the people who suffered, but also the trees which Antoine d'Abbadie admired so much, were destroyed. In addition, Martial de Salviac, witnessed the crude ravaging of trees in Oromo country. The Amhara settlers devastated the forests by pulling wood laths for building houses and firewood for their dwellings without reforesting or protecting the roots of trees. Based on Martial de Salviac's reports, Mohammed Hassen (2007:151) writes that the Amhara were accused of exercising their barbarity against the forests for the sole pleasure of ravaging.

Under Amhara imperial rule, the indigenous belief systems that were responsible for forest conservation were dismantled or fell into disuse. With the cultural ethos of protection disintegrated, exploitation of the forest resources ensued and introduced unabated environmental degradation. Hassen (1999:139) further notes that, "following the conquest of the Oromo...a process of colonization was systematically undertaken by the imperial regime; two-thirds of Oromo lands were expropriated and distributed to officials of the conquering army, church dignitaries and members of the royal family. To fulfill the demands of the new overlords, local people resorted to extracting products from the physical environment. Oromo cultural practices and ways of life were systematically undermined, altering the balance between extraction and preservation that the Oromo had long maintained (Hassen 1999:142).

An interview with Jabeessaa (81 years old) shows the other striking agony that the Horro Guduru Oromo faced with the forest destruction following the Amhara

colonial conquest. He describes what happened in the following way:

> Horro Guduru Oromos had been brutally oppressed and exploited by Amhara rulers; indigenous communities had become serfs in which they were obliged to transport wood on their shoulders from Horro Guduru to Finfinnee (averagely about 320km, just traveling on foot in hostile environments of the time)". Wood, including wood cut from sacred forests, was used for fuel and house and fence construction in Finfinne and at the nearby royal settlement centers like Addis Alem. Overexploitation of forest resources through free labor used in forest clearing and crop cultivation for Amhara imperialists inevitably affected the environment adversely (Interview, 21 April, 2009).

The conquest led to a decline in the practice of folk religious rituals and cultural practices. Oromo traditional religious practices were distrusted as politico-religious institutions. The priests who followed the colonizers worked assiduously to see that "the Christian grace is cultivated among them [Oromo] so that the [supposedly] 'heretic' Oromo belief system no longer holds back the arm of the sowers of the Gospel" (Kanno 2008:143). Religious conversion undermined the ethos of the Oromo religion that had preserved the natural forest as religious shrines. As Tolera (1999:100) notes, "the introduction of official religion has to a great extent led to the destruction of forests, since no tree or plant is sacred in official religion [thus] the spread of official religion led to the declining size of forest reserves." Churches were

constructed on indigenous sacred sites, particularly on forest-covered mountains, with wood obtained from the forests and the free labor of the indigenous communities.

During imperial rule, which lasted to 1974, the Shewans ruled from an entwined politico-religious center in Horro Guduru. At Caabirra, for instance, the Churches of St. Markos and St. Gabriel served as both religious centers and palaces of *Bitwaded* Mekonnen Damesaw, a Shewan governor of Horro Guduru. Both the political and ecclesiastical communities, unconcerned about the religious and environmental significance of Odaa Bulluq, ordered construction and fuel wood from the sacred forest. At other times, they sought to clear it altogether for farming. My informants relate that shortly before the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in 1936, *Bitwaded* Mekonnen ordered nine Oromos to clear the sacred forest for maize cultivation. Booqa Bulluq retaliated against the nine men by sending *golfaa* (disease of misfortune and misdeed) against them from which they died swiftly. Booqaa Bulluq's fury was physically manifested for weeks in the plain south of Bullluq (*Goodaa Bulluq*) during the aborted attempt to clear the forest. Only an offering of a bull's blood as a sacrifice at the scene calmed down the situation. The wrath of Booqaa Bulluq narrated by the informants is indicative of the reverence the local people have for the forest. In fact, nearly 5 hectares of the sacred forest has been lost during the imperial era, through gradually extending courtyards of nearby settlements and farmlands.

In the mid-1980s, the military regime (1974-91) partially implemented programs that further contributed to decline of the sacred forest. The villagization scheme, a project in which farmers were ordered to dis-

mantle their homesteads and move into a single village, was particularly destructive. Large numbers of houses were constructed both in Odaa Bulluq villages and the nearby Saqalaa town, making use of construction materials from the sacred forest. For instance, a certain farmer named Nagaraa was able to clear about 0.25 hectares of the sacred forest for crop field from its southern fringe in late 1980s. Although the scheme soon became a failure as the farmers returned to their original homesteads in a couple of years, the damage was already done to the sacred forest at Odaa Bulluq. Thus, the policies of the Derg era were also part of the problem in disregarding the sacred venue, at least in thinning it out and paving the way for further misappropriation.

Neglect of Indigenous Knowledge and Practices in Forest Management

In its 1995 constitution (FDRE Constitution, 1995) the current federal government of Ethiopia has formally endorsed the preservation and promotion of the cultures of its diverse ethnic groups. Those provisions are seldom executed regarding religious shrines or culturally significant sites, however. For example, instead of preserving and promoting the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest as a religious shrine and in accordance with indigenous practices, in the summer of 2008 the Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE), the forest and wildlife conservation agency of Oromia regional state, introduced invasive trees like eucalyptus into the setting of Odaa Bulluq. These trees do not have sacred or ritual significance in the local Oromo culture unlike most of the naturally-grown tree and plant species which the local society holds with special reverence as discussed

above, seen to be the abode of *ayyaana* and other spiritual forces. The eucalyptus tree has no religious, cultural, or medicinal value for the local people to expect them to nurse the seedlings to maturity.

The regional state was convinced that the sacred forest was lost to pressures from livestock and human population rather than other factors, including its own disregard for local knowledge and practices. The state never examined the pros and cons of planting invasive trees on the land covered by sacred forests. The reforestation project planted invasive trees in the entire area previously occupied by Odaa Bulluq (now about 15 hectares, but its original area is estimated at 37 hectares) sacred forest. The new trees overwhelmed the indigenous ones and eventually contributed to the loss of the sacred forest.

The state is in part responsible for the ultimate demise of the sacred forests. To begin with, the reforestation program was implemented nearly two decades after its constitutional mandate was issued. By the time it woke up to its responsibilities, it was too late to save the forest resources. Secondly, the state's approach to reforestation was doomed to failure since the local community members were not regarded as owners of the project or agents capable of its implementation. Had this been the case, it could have elicited local opinions on how best to protect the sacred forest and empowered the local community to safeguard its own valued resource. Thirdly, the reforestation program was not implemented as a project to promote and develop the Oromo indigenous religious and cultural rights, as pledged in the constitution. The local Christian and Muslim communities were granted exclusive sovereignty over their religious centers, churches and mosques. But the Odaa Bulluq sacred

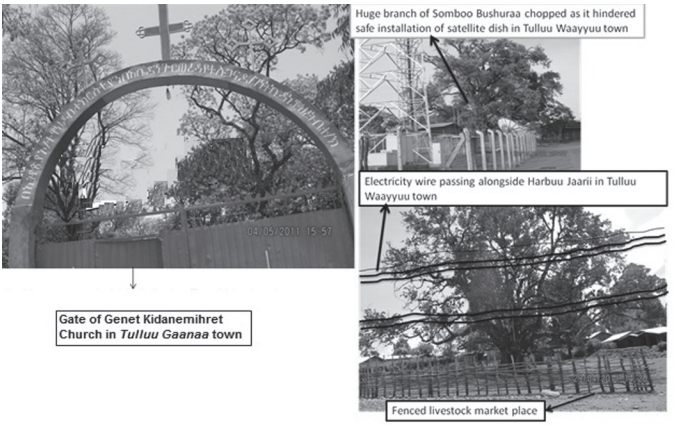
forest is a natural temple for the adherents of Oromo indigenous religion in Horro Guduru that should have been accorded similar religious rights.

The state's disregard for local knowledge and its erroneous approach to religious rights has led to the destruction of several other indigenous Oromo shrines. According to local beliefs, the *Harbuu Jaarii* and *Somboo Bushuraa* in Tulluu Waayyuu town (Abee Dongoro district's capital) belonged to the Dingoo Garbaa, a pioneer ancestor of the area. These two sacred shrines were destroyed because of the shoddy handling of those sacred venues. In 2008, the former was converted into a livestock market and huge branches of the shrine tree were cut to make way for electricity lines for the town. The branches of the hitherto revered *Somboo Bushuraa* were cut install telecommunication towers. The fact that the town got electricity and wireless telecommunication service is a good thing, but the power lines could have been routed around the sacred tree had officials considered the value of indigenous religion in preserving the natural environment.

On the other hand, officials of the regional state intervene regularly to protect the religious rights of Christians and their worship centers. For example, regional state officials decided to cancel a proposed construction of water pipelines rather than allow them to pass through the compound of Genet Orthodox Church in Tulluu Gaanaa town of Abee Dongoro. The differential treatment is not the result of some sort of double-standard but the preconception on the part of state officials that religious shrines are only recognizable as manmade structures. This contrasts with the view of indigenous Horro Guduru Oromo, for whom religious

shrines were not manmade, but natural settings such as huge trees, dense groves or forests, springs, and mountains that deserve to be revered and protected.

Figure 2: Comparative View of Christian and Oromo Religion Sacred Scenes and their Recognition



The Horro Guduru landscape has numerous historical, cultural and ethno-ecological heritage sites which have not yet attracted the state's attention. From among the sacred forests, Caato natural forest (about 11,900 ha) still appears pristine because the Oromo consider it sacred and have protected it through *Garanfasa Hagayyaa* annual ritual observances; the government regards it as protected state forest. Other sacred forests, however, in addition to Odaa Bulluq have been lost. Burqaa Urgoo was lost mainly due to the installation of the Amartii Nashee hydroelectric power project, whose dam construction devastated the sacred forest (its size is almost equal to Odaa Bulluq). Several other sacred groves, however, each of which constitutes more than

0.185 ha, remain standing, in Horro, Abee-Dongoro, Jaardagaa Jaartee districts, and in the Abbay Coomman district. There are also cultural heritage sites, including Goodaa Imbaaboo in Habaaboo Guduruu district, Hulaa Bookee in Abbay Coomman district, Gadaa Nafuroo in Amuru district, and Odaa Jimmaa in Jimma Raaree district. These distinguished sites deserve state protection and promotion as per the constitutional stipulations. At the moment, they are left vulnerable.

Impact of Protestantism

As mentioned above, prior to the advent of Islam and various Christian denominations, the Horro Guduru Oromo followed indigenous Oromo religion, which generally held belief in one Supreme Being known as *Waaqa*. Christians and Muslims began to get a foothold in Horro Guduru in the 1840s (Tujuba 1994:82; Tolera 1999:108). The Ethiopian Orthodox and Protestant Christians both rejected the indigenous belief systems and competed for souls through conversion to Christianity as they practiced it (Tolera 1999:111). It appears that Protestant missionaries have succeeded in gaining more converts among the Horro Guduru Oromo than the Ethiopian Orthodox. Their success is perhaps the result of their missionaries' use of the Oromo language in contrast to the Orthodox priests who consider it too unholy and wicked to be used in divine services (Tolera 1999:114)

In the process of conversion, it became almost axiomatic for the Protestants to extricate their converts from their old religious practices and rituals. Given that forest reserves were religious shrines or sites of religious significance, the Protestants viewed their destruction as a triumph of the new faith over the old. As Tolera (1999:

111-12) notes, "These forest reserves (which either follow the courses of rivers or surround mountains [sic]) were places where people used to worship and their destruction by the missionaries was taken as evidence to refute the already accepted power of the forests or any other body except the supernatural power of Almighty God." The new converts, acceding to the missionaries' prodding, turned against the symbols of their traditional religion. Tolera argues "adopting the preaching of the missionaries that the forest does not have any power, the local people cleared the forests to plant maize and to cultivate other crops in subsequent years, making it very difficult to become reforested" (Tolera 1999:100). As such, the new faith has enabled its adherents fearlessly to preach against the veneration of the sacred sites such as the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest. The spread of Protestantism in Horro Guduru has at least complicated the ecological balance that the people have traditionally maintained vis-à-vis their natural environment.

In just one decade, the Protestant faith has successfully diminished the power of the indigenous belief system and the reverence due to the sacred forest. This can be evident from the following interview:

> The Protestants do not revere Booqa Bulluq; they do not hesitate to cut trees from its sacred forest because they do not accept and abide by its order; they never fear the *ayyaana* of Odaa Bulluq; they snatch out, in our absence, the offerings and gifts we offer the *ayyaana*. In all, they don't seem to face any danger, which is odd for us; in the past, one of the children who were looking after cattle near the sacred forest took home a hen offered to the *ayyaana* and found

> dead soon after. Yet, no harm happens to the Protestants though they have been almost stealing every kind of gift item, like mirrors, from the scene; this is an unusual thing for us. The Protestants have snatched almost all the young generation from us. Those converted youngsters have almost entirely forsaken customary beliefs and are preaching to the local communities to abandon the practice of thanksgiving to the guardian spirit of the sacred forest, asserting that traditional people were not performing thanksgiving to *Waaqa* but worshipping Satan; however, we have no concept of Satan; all we know is *Waaqa*." They can proclaim their Gospel without infringing on our belief systems and our sacred scenes" (Interview, 14 April, 2009).

As we notice from the above narrative, the indigenous communities consider Odaa Bulluq forest a sacred domain, and indeed, they fear and revere it. The Protestants do not. This has sweeping psychological, moral and ecological implications. Protestants describe the reverence and thanksgiving to Odaa Bulluq sacred forest as evil spirit worship and extract sacred items from the forest with impunity. The local community eventually began to question the sacredness of the forest and the power of its guardian spirit. This has left a lasting impact on the young generation's perception of indigenous belief systems regarding the sacred venues, compelling them to disrespect the sacred forest and to abuse its trees and disregard the proscriptions of the indigenous belief systems. Indeed, it has led to ecological loss through the loss of the immense biodiversity and ritual tree species of the scene. On balance, it is safe to say the spread of the Protestant

faith has revitalized the local culture in enhancing the use of the Oromo language but has undermined the cultural forces that have protected the natural forests of Odaa Bulluq in Horro Guduru.

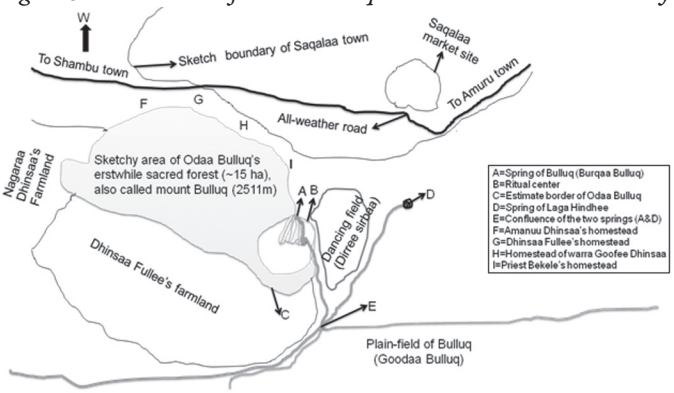
Dynamics of Development

In the last three decades, the landscape in Horro Guduru has undergone several changes. One major change affecting the Odaa Bulluq natural forest is the expansion of Saqalaa town and intensification of the use of the *gememee* farming pattern. In both cases, population increase has been the main driver of change that has contributed to the demise of Odaa Bulluq sacred forest.

The center of Saqalaa town (see Saqaalaa market site in the picture below) is situated about ½ km from the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest. Over the last three decades, its southern border has been encroaching on the scene. Until the mid-1980s, Saqalaa did not exhibit any kind of physical growth. In 1986, the villagization program of the military government (in power 1974-1991) increased the number of households in the village by about two-thirds. In the subsequent years, the town's population increased relatively slowly, but still it remained a small rural village with under 1000 people. It had no urban amenities that would have attracted rural people into the village.

In 2008, Saqalaa was connected to the regions' electricity grid. Almost immediately, people from the nearby rural areas relocated to the emerging town in search of electricity. As a result of the increasing rural population in the town, the immediate vicinity of Saqalaa witnessed unprecedented growth. Within two years, the town incorporated almost all areas around the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest on its northern and western fringes.

Figure 3: Aerial View of Odaa Bulluq Sacred Scene and its Vicinity



Although the density of the sacred forest, its big trees and wild life, had been lost in large part in the years since the late 1990s, the remaining forest relics and climbers (vines) were lost due to growing demand for fuel and construction materials from the town's expansion.

Even a casual observation shows that houses constructed on the side of Odaa Bulluq were fenced with remnants of naturally grown trees and climbers of the sacred forest. The majority of the owners of the new houses have planted eucalypts trees fenced by cuttings from the sacred site to protect the young eucalyptus trees from destruction by livestock. This phenomenon is indicative of the more profound change of attitude which has contributed to the denuding of sacred forests. That is, the people now view their eucalypts trees as private property to be protected at the expense of the hitherto communal forest resources of the sacred venue. Saqalaa town residents now plant eucalyptus in large quantities for personal use and also for the market since that wood is needed for construction and fuel material. The depletion of the Odaa Bulluq sacred site has prompted

the exploitation of forest products from other sources such as Caato sacred forest (about 10km) and Cunqullee forest (about 3km), both located west of Saqalaa.

In addition to urban expansion, the *gememee* (ecotone) farming pattern and overgrazing also contributed to the loss of the sacred forest. An ecotone farming region is one situated between a farmland and forestland. It is a desirable land because it is more fertile than the land that has been under cultivation for some time. The presence of ecotone compels farmers who have farmland adjacent to such lands to clear the forest persistently, bringing under cultivation more land every plough season. During my field work, I observed that the farmlands of six households and the area's Orthodox priest, named Bekele, located around the forest scene, had gradually encroached on the sacred forest location. Indeed, the farmers extend the *gememee* or *gataa* farmland into the forest attracted by the fertility of its soil, without regard for its impact on the venue's status or its resources. This is because the *gememee* farming pattern happens gradually, but inexorably, almost unnoticed by the farmers. Moreover, the encroachment of this type proceeds with impunity out of view; state conservation agents seldom notice the transgressions.

Further, since there is no other forest in close proximity, livestock herds of the local community have grown beyond the carrying capacity of the sacred forest. Consequently, overgrazing in the sacred forest, especially since the late 1990s (the time it was denied its sacredness), has contributed its share to the demise of the forest. In Horro Guduru, livestock are not tended after the dry season *(bona*) harvest, so that they move around freely to wherever they can find pasture. For the Odaa Bulluq

sacred forest, the problem is in fact not just untended livestock, but the fact that the time is the driest season when livestock seldom find pasture in areas surrounding the forestlands. The free-roaming livestock predictably move into the sacred forest in search of pasture. In Horro Guduru, the cultural strictures that have constrained people from overexploitation have now broken down to the extent that even animals have been free to contribute to destruction of the sacred forest.

Local authorities claim they have taken the necessary measures and are regenerating Odaa Bulluq. They assert they have reinvigorated peoples' awareness about their culture which was decimated during previous regimes. Evidence for this includes the current political rhetoric often uttered at district and *ganda* level assemblies. Such utterances go like this, "*Aadaa Oromoo bulchiinsi sirna nafxanyaa fi mootummaan abbaa irree Dargii barbadeessan deebisnee ijaarreerra, ijaaraas jirra*" ("we have reconstructed the Oromo culture destroyed by the naftagna—Amhara imperial firearm holders—and dictatorial Derg's administrative systems, and still we are doing that"). Such narrations are mostly articulated as slogans and touted as good deeds of the officials of the current "decentralized" administrative system, which has allegedly allowed local authorities to promote indigenous cultural practices of conservation of natural resources.

Despite the official rhetoric, informants report that in real terms the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest was in fact lost in the period of "decentralized" administration. Contradicting official pronouncements about restoring local cultural practices, informants insist that the site actually lost its *ayyaana*, sacredness, and forest cover within the last two decades of "decentralized" administration. From

the standpoint of the local people, this current administration in fact ignored the Oromo cultural complex of connectedness to the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest when it introduced invasive trees. The evidence generated during fieldwork does not show the sacred forest improving. In fact, field observation in April 2009 shows the devastated scenes of Odaa Bulluq sacred forest with remnants of large trees still standing. Today, Odaa Bulluq's sacred forest is a mix of newly planted and natural forest relics. The current trend of conservation, one of protecting the planted forest from human and livestock, harms rather than nursing the sacred forest back to life. What may reappear in the future would not be the venerated sacred forest, but a de-natured forestland mostly replaced by invasive trees.

Plate 1. Full view of the scene of Odaa Bulluq sacred forest, as viewed from the eastern direction



Plate 2. Right side view of the scene of the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest, as viewed from eastern direction; the specific scene bearing stands of closely grown huge trees at the margin are still believed to be abode of supernatural force.



Conclusions

The Odaa Bulluq sacred forest is the product of Oromo indigenous culture. Oromos living in Horro Guduru have always revered it, until its demise in the last decade. The site was once firmly believed to have transcendent power that warranted special protection and treatment by the indigenous communities; they spoke up for and protected the venue. From a cultural ecology perspective, once traditional cultures disappear, much of their knowledge is bound to be lost (Sutton and Anderson, 2004:97). Preserving indigenous knowledge is a critical concern. The community's capacity to maintain environmental biodiversity and ecological sustainability depends on it (Nazarea, 1999).

This paper has revealed that the Odaa Bulluq sacred forest scene is currently almost bare, if not already extinct,

and has demonstrated the causes of its demise. Its indigenous tree species are currently overwhelmed by invasive plants; any attempt to regain them is subject to many adverse and powerful factors. Even with reforestation, time looms as a major factor. There would be a considerable time gap between the beginning of reforestation and its maturity. The contemporary generation which comes up to observe Odaa Bulluq but finds only bare ground at the historical scene is unlikely to have the same degree of reverence for the sacred forest as the previous generation. In all likelihood, the present generation will deviate from their ancestors' ways of revering and protecting the forest; for they are observing so many modern developments and changes that they will have very limited customary knowledge to transmit to posterity.

It should be clear that both the state and the society have played a major role in the destruction of the forest. The generation that participated in the destruction of the forest cannot help regenerate it using methods it had tried in the past. What is needed is a genuine attempt to protect the sacred forest using strategies that take into consideration the history of the area, modernity, and local people's constraints.

Acknowledgement

I am indebted to Gaddafaa Toleeraa Sanqallee for his guidance during the fieldwork and his academic contribution to my educational career as a role model and teacher at Shambu Secondary School. I am also grateful to Belay Shiferaw and Takele Gaanfuree (experts on the culture and practices in Horro Guduru area of the Wallaga Zone Culture and Tourism Department) for offering me some

important archives. My special thanks also goes to the local elders for their willingness to provide such a scarce but crucial data about indigenous knowledge. Jimma University has granted financial support and the permissions needed to conduct the fieldwork.

Editorial Note

The paper was originally submitted by Lemessa Margo. After several revisions, A.K. Sinhaa and Dr. K. D. Sharma, currently professors in the Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India, contributed to improving the paper significantly. Their help is duly acknowledged.

References

Anderson, M. D., Salick, J., Moseley R. K., and Xiaou, O. 2005. "Conserving the sacred medicine mountains: A vegetation analysis of Tibetan sacred sites in northwest Yunnan." *Biodiversity and Conservation* 14: 3065-3091.

Bulcha, Mekuria. 1993. "Beyond the Oromo-Ethiopian Conflict." *Journal of Oromo Studies* 1(1):1-16, 1993.

Byers, B. A., Robert N. C., and Andrew T. H. 2001. "Linking the Conservation of Culture and Nature: A Case Study of Sacred Forests in Zimbabwe." *Human Ecology* 29 (2): 187-218.

Erana, Eshetu. 2009. *Ye Oromo Tarik: Ke Tint iske 1890 woochu mechereshа* [Oromo History From Ancient Times to the Late 1890s]. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.

FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization). 2003. Forests, Grasslands, and Drylands—Ethiopia: Earth Trends Country Profile. Accessed on 14 November, 2010 from

http://earthtrends.wri.org/searchable_db/variablenotes_static.cfm?varid=296&theme=9

FDRE (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia). 1995. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa.

Gemeda, Guluma. 1996. "Conquest and Resistance in the Gibe Region, 1881-1900." *Journal of Oromo Studies*, 3(1&2): 53-61.

Hassen, Mohammed. 2007. "The Significance of Antoine d'Abbadie in Oromo Studies: A Commentary." *Journal of Oromo Studies* 14(1):147-164.

_____1999. "A short history of Oromo colonial experience 1870s-1990s: Part One, 1870s-1935." *Journal of Oromo Studies*, 6: (1&2):109-158.

Kanno, Ayalew, trans. 2008. *An ancient people, great African nation: The Oromo.* Finfinnee: Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau.

Kelbessa, Workineh. 2001. "Traditional Oromo attitudes towards the environment: An argument for environmentally sound development." *OSSREA social science research report series*-No.19. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Enterprise.

Marcus, Harold G. 1995. *The life and times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844-1913.* Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.

Mehta, S. and Priscilla, W. 2009. *Globalized environmentalism and environmental organizations in India.* Chandigarh: UNISTAR.

Melba, Gada. 1985. *Oromia: An Introduction to the History of the Oromo People.* Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers.

Mergo, Lemessa. 2009. "Envisaging Forests: Ethnography of people-forest interactions and execution of state policies in Horro Guduru, Northwestern Oromia." A preliminary study. Unpublished Manuscript.

Nagara, Ginbar. 2010. *Seenaa Abiishee Garbaa (c.1835-1877) fi Gootota Oromoo Biroo [Biography of Abishe Garbaa*

(c. 1835-1877) and Other Oromo Heros (Heroines)]. Adaamaa: Rift Valley University Press.

Nazarea, Virginia, D., ed. 1999. Ethnoecology: Situated Knowledge/Located Lives. Tuscon, AZ: University of Arizona Press.

Purcell, Trevor and E., A., Onjoro. 2002. "Indigenous knowledge, power and parity: Models of knowledge integration." In *Participating in development: approaches to indigenous knowledge,* edited by Paul Stillitoe, Alan Bicker and Johan Pottier,162-188. London and New York: Routledge.

Sadeta, Firdissa. 2007. The impact of road transportation on socio-economic development in Horro Guduru, Northeast Wallagga. MA Thesis., Addis Ababa University.

Shinn, David Hamilton, Ofcansky, Thomas P., and Prouty, Chris. 2004. *Historical dictionary of Ethiopia*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Sponsel E. L. 2008. Sacred places and biodiversity conservation. Environmental anthropology. Retrieved on 27 December 2008 from http://www.eoearth.org/by/Author/Leslie.sponsel

Steger, Manfred, B. 2003. *Globalization: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Steward, Julian. 2006. "The Concept and Method of Cultural Ecology." In *The environment in anthropology. A Reader in Ecology, Culture, and Sustainable Living*, edited by Haenn, Nora and Richard, R. Wilk, 5-9. New York and London: New York University Press.

Sutton, M. Q. and E. N. Anderson. 2004. *Introduction to cultural ecology.* Oxford: BERG.

Tolera, Assefa. 1999. "Ethnic integration and conflict: The case of indigenous Oromo and Amhara settlers in Aaroo Addis Alem, Kiramu Area, Northeastern Wallaga." *Social Anthropology Dissertation series No. 5.* Addis

Ababa University, Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Administration.

Tujuba, Oljira. 1994. "Oromo Amhara relations in Horro Guduru Awuraja (Northwestern Wallaga)." C.1840s-1941. BA Thesis, Department of History, Addis Ababa University. Unpublished.

Wadley, R. L. and C. J. P. Colfer. 2004. "Sacred forest, hunting, and conservation in west Kalimantan, Indonesia." *Human Ecology* 32(2):313-338.

Notes

1. Badhaatuu, in the Horro Guduru Oromo context, can be identified as the Biblical Agar whom God has used to open out spring for her son in the wilderness (Middle East). She was said to be mother of Horro.
2. Some publications (e.g. Nagara, 2010 and Wakewaya, 1988) report the presence of *Jawwii* descendants such as Horro in the area today called Horro Guduru in the first decade of the 16th century. Some recent studies, however, (e.g. Erana, 2009; Haile, 2006) and interviews with Macca descendants of Horro Guduru, indicate that early Macca Oromo settlement in the area could be as early as the 1370s. Nagara observes that the area was almost wilderness before their presence in Horro Guduru (2010).
3. Until the late 1990s the *Odaa Bulluq* sacred forest has a forestland area of more than 37 hectares. Identified with this parameter, *Odaa Bulluq* sacred forest definitely falls within the internationally working definition of a forestland area (e.g. see FAO 2003).
4. Ways of observing this annual ritual are extremely close to what Tolera (1999:97) has observed at the *Dukkan* sacred forest, which is venerated by Kiiramu area Oromos. He writes, "*Dukkan*...was not only venerated but also worshiped by the people every year, at ceremo-

nials which involved sacrifices of sheep, bullocks and goats". The difference is perhaps that *Irreecha Birraa* ritual observance at Odaa Bulluq sacred forest involves horse galloping at *goodaa Bulluq* (plain field of *Bulluq*) for the sake of entertainment, which is one of the most popular cultural practices in the area.

5. Such a custom is often in tune with nature and are being promoted in different parts of the world. Several case studies, from Zimbabwe (Byers et al. 2001), India (Mehta and Priscilla 2009), Indonesia (Wadley and Colfer 2004), and Tibet (Anderson et al. 2005), have affirmed this fact. Mehta and Priscilla (2009), for example, maintain that forests have remained temples for some tribal populations of India as dictated by the Hindu Indian belief systems wherein the state has been promoting the pervasive symbiotic relationship between the tribes and temple forests thus ensuring their cultural survival. This is perhaps for they are considered environmentally benign.
6. The Amhara's lack of concern for nature and the people in the areas where they have colonized was not limited to Horro Guduru. Mekuria Bulcha (1993), for example, notes that, "[most] regions in Oromia were covered by dense forests at the turn of the century and during the entire period of the present century, these forests were subjected to intensive encroachment and degradation; the colonization of Oromia and the kind of land tenure policy followed by consecutive Ethiopian regimes had a role to play."

Denial of Leadership Development and the Underdevelopment of Public Health: The Experience of the Oromo People in Ethiopia

Begna Dugassa

The health of a society is influenced by a complex interplay of biological, behavioral, environmental, socio-economic, and cultural conditions. In sovereign or autonomous societies, leaders coordinate human and natural resources to tackle social and economic conditions that increase public health risk. Public health institutions and community leaders play a critical role in promoting healthy lifestyles. Subjected to Ethiopian colonial policies, the Oromo people have not been allowed to develop their indigenous institutions and the independent leadership needed to mobilize their own resources and improve their standard of

Journal of Oromo Studies, Vol. 19, No. 1 & 2 (July 2012), pp.

Begna Dugassa, PhD (Toronto), is Community Nutrition Educator at Toronto Public Health and Researcher in Public Health & Leadership in Health Equity. He has published several articles in *Journal of Health & Development, Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, Health Care for Women International, Health and Development Research* and *Journal of Oromo Studies.*

living. This situation has led to the gradual deterioration of public health conditions in Oromia and exposed them to situations that have led elsewhere to the annihilation of several colonized peoples (Waldram et.al 2006, 14-15, Crichlow 2002; Fein 1997). If the Oromo people are denied leadership and public health is allowed to decline, Oromia will not be able to escape the fate of other colonial subjects. There is an urgent need to better understand the relationships between denial of leadership and public health.

The major focus of public health intervention is the prevention of disease through the promotion of healthy behavior and healthy social conditions by understanding the social determinants of health (Raphael 2004). Given that a community's health status is directly linked to lived realities, public health endeavors aim to ensure that all members of the community have access to reasonable housing, balanced diets, access to clean water, peace, justice, and social stability (Farmer 1999). To make the social determinants of health equitably accessible, in addition to providing health information and offering biomedical solutions, public health promotes equity and social justice. Leadership is critical in achieving these goals.

This paper examines the public health impacts of the Ethiopian government actions that have prevented the development of an independent and legitimate Oromo leadership. It aims to raise awareness about the importance of leadership and the need for independent institutions in critically analyzing trends, identifying health risks, monitoring change, and fostering a healthy society. It begins with setting the framework for analyzing the relationship between colonialism and public health. It then explores indigenous Oromo leadership and institu-

tions and their role in maintaining the overall well being of Oromo society. Finally, examines the mechanisms by which the Ethiopian government has denied the Oromo people their own leadership and assesses the public health impact of denying the Oromo people leadership.

Conceptual Framework: Colonialism, Leadership, and Public Health

Colonizers frame their colonial agendas as a civilizing mission pretended to be healers (Crichlow 2002, Fisher & Mann 2004). The colonized perceive colonialism as de-civilizing and a disease-causing agency or disease-causing conditions (Fanon 1967, 252; Thornton et. al 1991; Thorpe 1989). Indeed, the relationship between colonialism and public health problems manifests itself through disruption of social, economic, political, cultural and environmental conditions of the colonized people (Harrison 1994). As Fanon (1965, 12) describes it, the objective of the struggle for self-determination is not only the struggle for bread, it is also the struggle for human dignity, which includes wants of bread and better public health conditions.

Colonizers aim to maintain their privileges without having to face resistance. To that end, their policies include disempowering, incapacitating and controlling the colonized. One way of incapacitating the colonized is the prevention of indigenous leadership development and the limitation of access to the social determinants of health i.e. balanced diets, clean water, reasonable housing, proper education and others (Scutchfield and Keck 1997; Keating and Hertzman 1999).

Often driven by racism and economic interests, colonialism is in effect an attack on public health or an obstacle to the development of good public health. Even when colonial rule attempts to promote public health, its projects are based on colonial "science" that allowed the development of racist theories and practices (Brantlinger 2003). It is most unlikely to offer solution to the social problem of colonized people (Packard 1989; Smith 2002).

That colonialism adversely affects the social well being of the colonized and the link between social justice and health are well known (Farmer 2003; Rosen 1993; Harrison 1994; Krieger and Birn 1998; Czyzewski 2010). In fact, scholars have long identified the social determinants[1] of health, specifically looking at the health impacts of colonial power relations and the impacts of the economic exploitation of laborers on their social well being and prescribing social medicine as a cure. For example, one of the World Health Organization (WHO 2008) reports states, "social justice is a matter of life and death." The report makes it clear that social and economic policies determine whether children can grow and develop to their full potential and live a flourishing life, or whether their lives will be blighted. It is this close relationship between policy and public health that makes the role of leadership critical to the development of public health (Dugassa 2003).

In this paper, leadership is understood to be the activities of individuals and groups that create constructive dialogue between leaders and followers; set plans of action; provide directions, guidance, and vision for the future of society; and foster social transformation or change in the political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental affairs of the Oromo people. Denial of

leadership is a violation of political rights. Such an action deprives the people of the opportunity to seek direction, envision the future, and initiate actions designed to promote the long-term interests of the people.

Leadership identifies needs, opportunities and risks; and articulates vision and direct change. The absence of effective leadership makes all of this impossible and can allow preventable public health problems to persist for a long time (Rowitz 2001). This absence of effective leadership also makes the recovery from colonial trauma slow (Dugassa 2008a). From a public health perspective, leadership plays a critical role among colonized and marginalized peoples in rebuilding social structures that can fortify them against the ravages of social change and rife competition. However, the relationships between the denial of leadership and public health are rarely articulated. The United States Institute of Medicine (IOM) recognized the importance of leadership in public health for the first time in 1988.

Oromo Indigenous Institutions of Leadership

The Oromo people have a well-developed philosophical system that influences their social, economic, cultural and political affairs. The Oromo indigenous philosophy teaches the need to continuously seek *nagaa* (peace), *fayya* (health) and *tasgabbi* (social order) with humans and the natural world as well as the divine.

Put another way, they secured *tasgabbi* (social order) within their society and *nagaa* (peace) with their neighbors, the natural environment, and *Waaqa* (the supreme deity of Oromo religion). In the Oromo democratic system of governance, *gadaa* leaders and the *qaalluu* (the

highest spiritual leader in Oromo religion) play a pivotal role in the maintenance of peace, stability, equity, and security (Legesse 2000, 139). *Gadaa* formulates principles that govern the Oromo society, sets up a series of laws that govern the conduct of those who are alive among each other, towards those who are not yet born, and to those who have passed on. *Gadaa* leaders formulate the social, economic, political, cultural, and military policies and the *qaalluu*[2] is responsible for spiritual, cultural, electoral, and ethical matters (Lamu 1994; Legesse 2000). These Oromo institutions work together to ensure the security and safety of the Oromo people and maintain the internal *nagaa* (peace) and *tasgabbi* (stability and social order); and harmony with the natural environment, neighboring people, and divine power.

In the *gadaa* system, decisions are made through consensus. Thus, the interests of all members of the society are equally considered, minimizing the cause for conflict and hence any disruption of *nagaa* and *tasgabbi*. All *gadaa* officials are held to high moral standards. They are expected to avoid any killing and the disruption of the peace and health of others. They even avoid saying words that suggest the affecting of the peace of others. For example, *qaalluu* leaders never say killed, burned, wounded, or other words that suggest someone has inflicted harm on other human and the natural environments. Instead of saying, "killed" they would say, "rested;" instead of "burned," they would say, "cooled;" instead of "wounded," they would say, "healed." *Abba bokku* and *qaalluu* always seek peace and maintain harmony in the community and with neighboring people. My informant, Qondala, discussing the concept of *nagaa* (peace,) in relation to *gadaa* said,

> If there is no peace, is there any life? If there is no peace, *gadaa* cannot function. For that reason, *nagaa* –peace, is an essential condition for *gadaa* to function. In *gadaa* there is no war and yet there are war leaders. *Gadaa* leaders never say war...knife and meat. You see you can use knife to kill humans and animals. You cut animals for meat. It is hurting the living body that is why they avoid the term. They give terms that are peaceful. *Gadaa* stood for peace not for war.

For the Oromo people, the concept of peace is sacred and has deep meaning (Sabaa 2007). The domination of one group over the other or the exploitation of the human and natural environment is considered contrary to the core idea of peace.

The Mechanisms of Denying Leadership

The Ethiopian elites who reaped handsome benefits from the colonization of Oromia worked hard to protect, enlarge, and entrench their well-established privileges. They systematically prevented the Oromo people from rebuilding autonomous social and political organizations and institutions (Jalata 2007, 33). At the community level, according to my informants (Mottuma and Jobir), the Ethiopian elites describe the Oromo educated group who articulate the Oromo cause as troublemakers. For this reason, the Oromo educated classes are often targeted for elimination. When I asked whom the successive Ethiopian regimes target, Kumme, one of my informants answered "*warra ijaa fi gurra qaban,*" literally, 'those who have eyes and ears,' which implies the visionaries and the informed are targeted the most.

In the last two decades, individuals whom the Oromo regard as their leader or future leader have been killed with impunity by the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF)-led Ethiopian government security forces. When one such individual dies, the Oromo people mourn as they say, "we have lost our eyes and our ears"; as a result, "we are now blinded and deafened." These concepts make clear that, for the Oromo people, leadership is about visioning, collecting, and providing information. My informants agree that Oromo individuals who have been targeted the most by the Derg (1974-91) and TPLF security officials are those who are informed about the social conditions of the Oromo people. They believe that all of the successive Ethiopian regimes intend to eliminate *Oromummaa* or Oromo identity. The goal is to deprive Oromos of consciousness about the socio-economic-cultural-political condition of the Oromo people, knowledge about Oromo history and culture, and activities to protect the Oromo interest, and competent leadership that is essential to overcome the tragedy of colonial power rule (Dugassa 2008a).

Politically conscious groups always resist exploitation and demand equity and respect for human rights. From the perspective of the Ethiopian elite, there is no hope of protecting and enlarging the well-established Ethiopian privileges unless the Oromo elite are eliminated (Abiyotawi Demokrasi 1992). Ethiopian political leaders understand that if there were no elites, the Oromo people would not be able to get organized, articulate their causes, or mobilize their resources. My informant (Jobir) relates that Ethiopian officials seem to believe that the eliminations of the Oromo elite is a necessary precondition to extend their rule over the Oromo

masses. Obviating the development of or elimination of existing independent Oromo leadership has been a long-standing Ethiopian government policy implemented through a variety of mechanisms.

Assimilation

One of the mechanisms through which the Ethiopian government denies the Oromo people leadership is cultural assimilation (Darkwah 1978). The assimilation process focuses on emasculation of indigenous socio-cultural, ideological, and institutional structures and the alteration of the worldview and morality of the Oromo. For instance, although Emperor Menelik granted local autonomy to Oromo indigenous rulers such as Abba Jifaar of Jimma, Morodaa Bakaree of Leeqaa Naqamtee, and Jootee Tulluu of Leeqaa Qellem, he refused to recognize *gadaa* leaders. Legesse (2000) explains that it is not because the former had a better system of government than the latter. It is because the Ethiopians preferred hierarchical leadership where command would flow from them to the colonized people. Ethiopian elites realized that the Oromo leadership elected by the people would be accountable to the people and they preferred war chiefs. Through religious conversion, several influential Oromo individuals were assimilated and used to fight against their own people (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990, 166-67).

The assimilation agenda is designed to colonize and control the minds of a few Oromo whom the Ethiopians intended to use them as their agents. In the *Pedagogy the Oppressed* (2002), Paulo Freire emphasizes that the oppressed groups are taught to host their oppressors in their minds. My informants discussed the nature of the Ethiopian government schooling as it is intended to weaken Oromo leadership. If a person is assimilated

into Ethiopian culture, then he/she is made to think in Ethiopian ways; this makes the person look at the world from the Ethiopian perspective and interests. In effect, Oromos who are assimilated into the Ethiopian culture are inclined to accept the transfer of power from one leader to the other through biological lineage than through a democratic process (Dugassa 2008, 45). The Ethiopians imposed their worldview on the Oromo with an eye on changing values, systems of morality, and the Oromo cultural norms in order to control the minds and aspirations of the Oromo people. Assimilation through indoctrination destabilized the Oromo family, disturbed community relations, and legitimized the occupation of Oromia by Menelik's forces (Dugassa 2011).

Several Oromo elites were the victim of cultural assimilation practices. My informants cite *Ras* Gobana who led Menelik`s army invading Oromia as a prime example. He is an Oromo man who Ethiopians had assimilated through religious and regional affiliation. As a result, he collaborated with Menelik in the conquest and built a number of Ethiopian Orthodox Churches (EOC) throughout Oromia. The Oromos explained his action as "*qotiyyoon qalbii hinqabu, harka kolaasee arraba,*" which can be translated, as "an ox has no brain, it licks the very hand that castrated it" (Legesse 2000, 16). Assimilation is about controlling the mind and human aspiration, and reprogramming the thinking of the person.[3] In the views of my informants the Ethiopian government's intention in working to assimilate the Oromo people is to enfeeble them politically.

The strategy has worked for the Ethiopians on many occasions. Two of my informants cite the case of *Dejazmach* Kabada Buzunash as an example of assimilation turning

a hero into a coward. The informants personally knew Kabada, a patriotic figure who bravely fought against the Italians during the occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941). My informants (Dirbsa and Shantam), claim that when the British forces reinstated Haile Sellassie during the Second World War, *Dejazmach* Kabada entertained the idea of forming an independent state of Oromia but soon gave it up in favor of maintaining "Ethiopian unity." When *Dejazmach* Kabada realized what unity meant for the Oromo people, with his colleague, General Taddasa Birruu, they rebelled against Haile Sellassie's regime. Given that these men were influenced by the teachings of the EOC, when the priests warned them that if they did not surrender they would face a "curse", they decided to settle the conflict through arbitration (Dirbsa and Shantam).

The EOC has played a crucial role in the assimilation of the Oromo people. Following the involuntary conversion of many Oromos to Orthodox Christianity in the late nineteenth century, they reportedly embraced the notion that Ethiopian kings were "divine" beings who enjoyed the right to colonize and subjugate the Oromo people and other non-Christians (Plowden 1968, 53; Perham 1948 217). The assimilated Oromo were conditioned to look at Oromo society through the cultural lense of the Ethiopians. Given any sign of resistance against the Ethiopian rulers, the EOC reacted fast and first (Dugassa 2008). In several cases, the church leaders brought the *tabot* (a replica of the Tablets of Law) to the hideout of the resistance fighters and asked them in the name of God to surrender or else be cursed. Many Oromos took for granted the EOCs teachings, and thus responded to the call of the priests. In the words of Paolo Freire (2002), they were made to maintain in their

mind the social and political aspiration of the dominant members and the teachers.

Political Marriage

Intermarriage is one of the ways in which Abyssinians denied Oromo people leadership. Marriage is looked at differently in the Ethiopian and Oromo cultures. The Oromo avoid intermarriage between family members. For marriage the Oromo people require the couple to be nine generations apart.[4] In the Oromo a prospective marriage is not only between two individuals but also between two communities. For Oromos, marriage is a means of establishing friendship between two communities.[5] Ethiopian elites use marriage as a means of reaching the region and the people whom they planned to conquer (Tafla 1972).

The children born from intermarriages between Ethiopian and Oromos are often assimilated into the Ethiopian line of thinking and many of them were forced to take the worldview of the Abyssinians. From the Oromo perspective, identity is transmitted down patrilineally. It is taboo for someone to betray his fathers' line. The Oromo people accepted individuals born from Oromo-Ethiopian intermarriage as their own. And yet, *Ras* Gobana, who has Oromo bloodline on his father's side and believed to be born of an Amhara mother fought as a military general of Emperor Menelik betraying the Oromo. This is also true of *Ras* Mekonnen – the father of Emperor Haile Sellassie. He was born from an Oromo father – Guddisa and an Amhara mother-Tenanye Work Sahle Sellassie[6] (Steffanson and Starrett 1977; Brhan 2005). The marriages that produced these distinguished Oromo scions were arranged not to sanction love affairs but systematically to deny the emergence

of an Oromo leadership class whose cultural identity was not bifurcated.

Elimination of Leaders

Successive Ethiopian regimes have always targeted Oromo leaders for elimination. One of the most blatant campaigns aimed against independent Oromo leaders was directed against the Macca-Tuulama Self-Help Association (MTSHA), the first modern Oromo institution—formed in 1963. The motto under which the organization was formed and functioned was "love your brother as you love yourself; things that you would like others to do for you, do it for others" (Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulama 1992). As the motto states, the objective of the organization has been to bring social transformation to Oromia. To achieve such a noble goal, the founders of the association gave their own land for the construction of schools. The members contributed money to build schools and several small bridges (Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulama 1992).

A few years after the organization was formed, it was banned and some of the leaders were hanged; others were sentenced to life imprisonment. Among the leaders of the organization, Mamo Mezemir was hanged. Haile Mariam Gamada, Seifu Tesema, and Brigadier General Dawit Abdi died in prison from torture and maltreatment. One of the visionary men General Taddasa Birruu was charged for a crime he did not commit and was sentenced to lifetime imprisonment during the imperial regime; he was then assassinated by the military government (Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulama 1992).

In 1991, the MTSHA renewed its license and started to function. In 2004, the present Ethiopian government

arrested 30 members and leaders of the MTSHA for opposing the relocation of the administrative capital of the Oromia regional state from Finfinne to Adama and for helping 328 students who were expelled from their university education for protesting the decision. Among them, two were killed in prison (Oromia Support Group 2006).

The fate of the leaders of another independent Oromo organization, the Oromo Relief Association, is no different. In 1978, the late Rev. Guddinaa Tuumssa, the former general secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), realizing the grave situation of the Oromo, initiated the formation of the Oromo Relief Association (ORA) in consultation with some European and American church leaders (Informants: Shantaam and Tolera). In 1979, the military government of Ethiopia killed the founder of the association but other individuals took over the leadership and used it to support Oromo refugees. In 1991, when the Derg regime collapsed, the ORA was legally registered and started to work in Oromia. Two years later, the TPLF government confiscated ORA's property and banned the organization. Many of the ORA leaders were put in prison and others were forced to leave the country (Human Right Watch 2010).

Although short lived, after the collapse of the Derg government, one of the official changes that occurred in Ethiopia was promoting human rights. Within a short period, a group of Ethiopians formed a human rights organization. Hoping to work with the Ethiopians, several Oromo elders participated in this organization. Soon the Oromo elders realized that when the imprisonment and the killings of Oromo individuals are brought

to the attention of this organization very often it underreport the crimes committed by the Ethiopian government. This observation forced the Oromo elders to form an alternative human rights organization and they formed the "Human Rights League." However, soon after the TPLF government imprisoned the founders and the leaders of the organization (Boru and Wakessa).

The Ethiopian government does not tolerate independent Oromo organizations because they are fundamentally incubators of leaders. Oromo individuals who are involved in political organizations, specifically the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) are cruelly treated. As one of the former political prisoners and OLF members (Gutama 2003), speaking of his interrogators, posits, "One of the objectives of the Ethiopian government's investigation team was to break the morale of the alleged members and then find out the secrets of the organization." However, says Gutama (2003), the interrogators did not discover anything hidden, they nonetheless manifested to the Oromo people the deep-rooted Ethiopian hatred. One former political prisoner I interviewed described the torture he was put through:

> When I arrived in the prison I saw many Oromo prisoners whose feet were bleeding and who were in tears. Soon they started to torture some one that they had just picked out. To let me know what to expect they made sure that I saw that they took this person. After that they instructed me to go to the torture chamber and ordered me to kneel down. They put a stick between my legs and hands and tied them together. Then they picked me up by the sticks, my body was reversed upside down and they started beating me on my foot.

> To silence my scream, [they] put a small ball in my mouth. They left me hanging for two hours and went for lunch break. When they returned they tortured me again. After that, they returned me to the prison cell. They let me stay for a few days. As I stayed with no painkiller…the pain got worse over time. After a few days, they tortured me again beating me on the wound that has not yet healed. After such torture, I lost feeling in my feet…. When I walked, I felt as if I was walking in the air. After few days they took me back to the torture room. After some time they could not torture me any more, because when they hit me my blood spilled on the wall and on their faces… One of the methods used was they fill water in a big barrel and they inserted my head in it and suffocated me (Firdissa).

He described the prison cells:

> There were different prisons. The first prison was in the palace and we were kept on cold cement with no proper clothes and foods. The prison is in a palace thus, you have no access to family and friends and you do not get enough food. We had only old and dirty clothes that former prisoners had used. We go for washroom in the early morning and in the evening. We ate left over foods of the military guards…that had looked after the palace… The foods that were left…are collected in a barrel and brought it for us.
>
> There is another prison…known as Maikelawi and it is overcrowded. When I arrived, in a room of 3 by 4 meters, there were already 59 people in

> it.... It was overcrowded and hot; we could not sit, sleep or stand at the same time. From the human perspirations water was poured like rain on the walls. To have space when we sleep we faced with the next person in different directions. When one group sleeps the others stand. We could not sleep on our backs only on our sides. Most of us were tortured and could not stand for long or lie in one side for long (Firdissa).

Gutama (2003, 194) describes this very experience of the torture and the conditions in the Ethiopian prison cell and the effects: "There is no word to tell how it affects [you]. Because the deed was inhuman, human beings did not see the need to invent vocabulary for properly expressing it."

In addition to the physical torture, Oromo political prisoners are subjected to acts of dehumanization. According to Gutama (2003), Ethiopian ethnic slurs are used to break the prisoners psychologically. He recorded one of the slanders as "*yet abbaatk areeraahin maxaxx-aat titehi ganaa arihin tibelalehi* – (lit. "You bastard, you should have been satisfied with your whey milk, now you shall eat your shit"). As my informant (Diribsa) put it, the racist slander suggests that the crime of Oromo political prisoners was not just participating in Oromo political movements but being involved in politics at all instead of seeing themselves as simply breeding cattle for supplying products to Ethiopians. That is why Oromos, who were imprisoned for participating in Ethiopian political organizations, were subjected to harsher cruelty than Ethiopian political prisoners. My informants (Informants: Oggesa and Dirbsa) told me that Oromo political prisoners were treated differently during the

Derg regime. Other Ethiopian political prisoners never experienced this type of racist slander. The Oromos were considered as "the Ethiopian enemy" or a threat and subjected to severe treatment and murder with impunity.

Separating the Leadership from the People

One of the techniques the Derg government used to deny the Oromo people leadership is by blocking communication between the Oromo leaders and Oromo masses. The Derg separated Oromo leadership from ordinary people through various government schemes. The villagization program, which forced millions of Oromo families to dismantle their homesteads and move to newly-formed larger hamlets, was intended to accomplish this purpose (Dugassa 2008). The regime used the villagization program to contain the Oromo national movement forces in Bale and Harer and forced some of the OLF leadership to move to Western Oromia. With proven success, they applied the scheme in other regions to control any movement that would threaten the stability of the government. Using this method, the military government made efforts to stop the flow of information and food supplies from the people to Oromo insurgent guerilla forces.

Distorting the Image of Potential Leaders

Just as human capital can increase productivity, social capital affects the flow of information and productivity of individuals and groups and fosters social transformation. Aware of the long-term political implications of Oromo individuals with accumulated social capital—a potential to lead their community, profound knowledge Oromo culture and indigenous institutions—Ethiopia's ruling elite have always worked to neutralize them. Those who

refuse to cooperate are often subjected to relentless propaganda and misinformation aimed at discrediting them. According to Gutama (2003), one of the first Oromo student leaders whom the Ethiopian elites categorized as a troublemaker was Gabayyo Firrisa. Many Ethiopian elite condemned and charged him for being ungrateful to the system that brought him out of village life. His Oromo name was pronounced in twisted way to suggest a different meaning: that his existence portended a bad omen. The same was also true of Haile Fidaa, who was a leader of an influential political party, the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement or MEISON. Those who disagreed with the political platform of the party were called the party of Fidaa, which in Amharic meant abject misery.[7] Such was the Ethiopian elite's subtle way of expressing their disapproval of a political party bearing the name Ethiopia led by an Oromo man.

Corruption and Cooptation

Prior to Menelik's conquests, Oromo leaders were elected to office based on their lifetime achievement. After Oromo polities were incorporated into the Ethiopian empire, the traditional Oromo leadership was supplanted by Ethiopian administration. Oromos who had ambitions to lead the community, without the consent of the community members, simply bought the entitlement to be a community leader. The traditional *gadaa* leadership was reduced to a ritual institution. For example, the TPLF government official document reveals that it planned to bribe and use low-level intellectuals and perhaps starve those who did not cooperate. The document states,

> To attract these groups and use them we need to fill their bellies and pockets.... If they stood against us, we need to show them that their bellies and pockets would not be filled...We need to make efforts to attract all intellectuals. We need to make more efforts to attract low-level intellectuals. We can simply attract low-level intellectual mass. It is easier to convert those who are from the countryside. For this reason we need to emphasize low-level intellectuals and more specifically those who are in the countryside (Abiyotawi Democrasi, 1992, 54).

The document also details TPLF's instructions to its political cadres regarding ways they should act toward Oromo organizations and intellectuals. Describing the ways they would infiltrate and incapacitate independent Oromo organizations, the future action plan states: "In principle agreeing with them [Oromo leaders], using our members and supporters in the organization in unexpected ways we need to change the direction and make efforts to lead the organization. When our political pressures widen its scope our ability to lead these organizations will be enhanced" (Abiyotawi Democrasi, 1992, 54)

The scheme of indirect rule is in fact the way the TPLF rules Oromia with an iron fist while projecting an image of self-rule to the outside world. Given that the OLF[8] enjoyed popular support in Oromia, the TPLF needed to come up with a mechanism which at the same time allowed it to maintain control and give the appearance of Oromo self-rule. The TPLF formed a pseudo-Oromo political organization known as Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO). The party's rank-and-file membership is made up of Oromo prison-

ers of war who never rise to higher echelons of power. The decision-making body of OPDO is dominated by Oromo-speaking Amhara and Tigray nationals.

According to Biyya (1996), the OPDO is not an autonomous Oromo political party. Meles Zenawi, the Ethiopian prime minster, and head of the TPLF made it clear that the OPDO was formed to establish contact with the Oromo people. Meles described the beginning of the formation of the organization saying: "They were few in number. They had no experiences in the struggle. They were not well armed. The source of power was not their number or their armament; it was the political line of revolutionary democracy" (Cited in Biyya's work 1996 254). Though the OPDO has overwhelmingly "won" three consecutive national and regional elections, winning legitimate authority has remained its Achilles Hills. I asked my informants if they believe they have representation locally and at the federal level. My informant Kumme replied: "The Ethiopian government determines the outcome of the election at the federal and regional levels. Elected individuals cannot do what the community wants them to do. These elected officials act according to government plans and policies. The elected individuals are made to serve the government."

Another informant explained the perspective of those Oromo individuals who are forced to collaborate with the Ethiopian government and hurt their own people.

> It is to survive that many of them became like a robot. When the Abyssinians ask them to do certain thing they will do it. If not, either the person has to leave the country or go to the jungle. In this country you have no choices; you

> cannot say "I disagree" with what they do. If you show some disagreement then you are categorized as the enemy and soon you will be either killed or lose your job. Either you have to agree with them and do what they want you to do and keep your job and get some income or you have to go to the jungle. You cannot be neutral in that country.

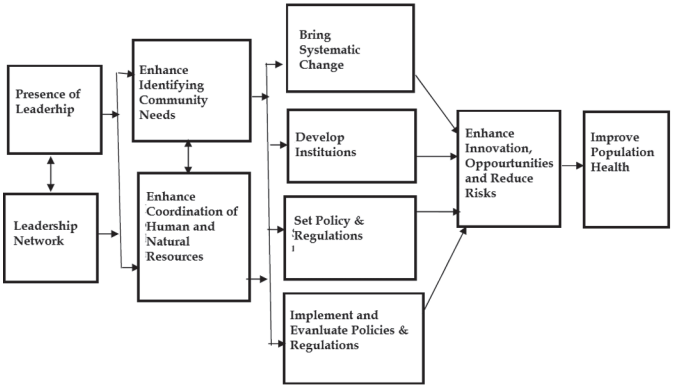
To be sure, the elections are conducted perfunctorily since the TPLF had cleared the field off credible candidates. In the 1992 election snap elections, realizing that the OLF was poised sweep the races in Oromia, TPLF forces harassed, imprisoned, and killed OLF candidates and supporters, forcing the OLF to withdraw from the election. Subsequently, the TPLF government instructed the OLF leadership to leave the country. In the words of one OLF executive committee member: "the TPLF government bought them plane tickets and flew them to Europe."[9] Oromo activists who remained in the country were subjected to waves of human rights violations. Thousands of Oromo leaders, the intelligentsia and businesspersons, were periodically harassed and eventually forced into exile (Oromia Support Group 2010; Bulcha 2002). The forced emigration of Oromos was preceded by involuntary resettlement and forced migration, which evicted the Oromo people from their homes and pushed them to dry and malaria prone zones and conditioned them to poverty and malnutrition (Clay and Holcomb 1986; Bulcha 2002). In all, the forced migration deprived the Oromo people of leaders who would lead the effort to solve the social, economic and environmental problems of Oromia.

Impact of Denial of Leadership Development on Public Health

The crucial determinant of health is the environment in which the people live and work throughout their life cycle (Keating and Hertzman 1999). The physical and social environments can either serve as a medium to instigate diseases or prevent them. Integrating the knowledge about the determinants of health into public health policy and implementing it requires individuals and groups who understand these links and institutions that are entitled to decide on the behalf of community members. This means political decisions can have public health impacts. For example, Gebissa (2010) shows the Oromo traditional environmental management system is more sustainable than the Ethiopian government policies. In the absence of leadership, the Oromo people are conditioned to lead a stagnant and sluggish life and exposed to new and old social and natural problems.

Figure 1 shows the presence of leadership facilitates a network with other leaders. The presence of leadership and network enhances knowledge construction and dissemination and this makes it easy to understand the needs of the community and coordinate the human and natural resources of the society and address these needs. If necessary, leadership facilitates system change, develop institutions, sets up policies and regulations and implement policies and evaluates them. The power to resolve or even address enormous public health challenges lies on planned activities intended to reduce the risks members of society face and to enhance their opportunities. As a result it improves population health; however, in the absence of leadership these opportunities are barely used.

Figure 1: Logic Model on Leadership and Public Health



In societies where the public sector is not well developed, self-help associations provide essential services in promoting health. The idea of self-help goes with principles of empowerment and self-management. The latter refers to methods, skills, and strategies by which individuals and groups can effectively direct their own actions toward the achievement of objectives. Development of such institutions is essential to identify the need of the community and effectively find culturally-acceptable and financially feasible solutions that are critical to the promotion of public health. As we have seen, successive Ethiopian governments have used physical and psychological methods to deny the Oromo people the opportunity to develop their indigenous institutions.

At its founding, ORA's purpose was to help Oromo refugees cope with life in exile. In 1992 it opened its office in Finfinnee and started to work in Oromia. It was active in the Oromia regions that were vulnerable to draught and famine. ORA was instrumental in quickly identifying the need of the Oromo people and effec-

tively delivering relief supplies to needy people (Dugassa 2004), thus playing a critical role in the prevention of micronutrient deficiencies such as iodine and providing clean water. Iodine deficiency and in access to clean water are the major public health problems. In 2008, for example, only 5 percent the population in Ethiopia have access to iodized salt, 38 percent have access to clean water and 12 percent of the population use improved sanitation facilities (WHO 2008). Given that iodizing salt is an easy way to prevent mental retardation, ORA would have filled the vacuum in public health leadership and taken the issue of iodine deficiency seriously.

Politics and health are inextricably intertwined. Health policy, which the WHO (1998) defines as the decisions, plans, and actions that are undertaken to achieve specific health goals are set by those who are in power, projects a vision for the future, outlines priorities, builds consensus and informs people. Indeed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) guarantees the right of everyone to take part in the government and participate in the decision-making process. One of the major motives in participating in politics is to promote a specific social agenda. However, as one of my participants put it "the Ethiopian government penalizes the Oromos not only for being involved in an opposition party but also for participating in politics, depriving them of participation in shaping policies that affect health. In a way, human rights violations increase deprivation of basic necessities in life, vulnerability to diseases and as a result it endangers the very survival of people.

Political representation can guarantee information to help us understand and address health issues and facilitate access to determinants of health. The Declaration

of Alma Ata recognizes that health would be achieved through a shift in power and control of resources (Alma Ata Statement, 1978). The Sundsvall Statement on supportive environments for health stresses the urgency of the need for social justice, a shift in power relations and control of resources to make comprehensive advantage toward the highest attainable health (Sundsvall Statement 1991). The expulsion of OLF leaders in 1992 and banning of the organization in 2010 has deprived the Oromo people of the main advocate of the Oromo people for their entitlement to property rights, particularly land, and the cultural rights to use of Oromo language in administration of justice, instructional media, and everyday social interactions. These deprivations amount to increasing public health risks and a decline in well-being.

In the villagization program undertaken by the Derg regime, the dispersed villagers were forced to dismantle their homesteads and move to government-sponsored hamlets. The villagization program was ill-planed and the issue of sanitation and access to clean water was not delivered as promised. In the new villages, contagious diseases were easily transmitted from one herd of cattle to the other leading to loss of cattle for many Oromo farming households. Consequently, ox-drawn plough reverted to hoe-cultivation in several places. This affected their productivity and caused widespread malnutrition and famine (Dugassa 2008). According to Kaplan (2003), about 50,000 Oromo farmers left the country to escape the depredations of villagization and became refugees in Somalia. Kaplan explains that before the villagization program, the "age-old Christian dominated state on the Horn of Africa had its own, grim

method of dealing with its subjects: surrender or starve." Yet the state did not control every aspect of their daily life as it did during the villagization program (Kaplan 2003 12). Life in the forcibly-constructed hamlets, with increased risk of contentious human and animal diseases and heightened vulnerability to political violence, is a health hazard of gargantuan proportions, as it is. Loss of control over one's live is the ultimate loss of well-being.

Conclusion

The denial of the Oromo people the opportunity to develop their own leadership is a violation of the rights to political representation. Violation of such rights compromise the Oromo people's decision-making ability, denies them the capacity to identify the risks and opportunities and envision the future. From the experience of several indigenous people, we learn that the more people are forced to be dependent upon the colonizer's legal and political institutions the more they experience erosion of their own political power, land, and natural and human resources; the easier they are assimilated (Ryser 1984, 28-29). Hence, denial of an independent leadership is an obstacle to the development of healthy social conditions. This necessitates developing an institution and leadership that is organized to see the past, the present and foresee the future.

Given that leadership provides direction, vision of the future, and sets goals and policies as well as organizes the community's resources for the betterment of the society, if the Oromo people were entitled to develop their own institutions and leadership, when the HIV/AIDS became known as a public health threat, they could have identified critical forces of change to combat the epidemic.

They could have mobilized the society to a) identify the social and cultural conditions that put them at risk and set social and cultural changes necessary to contain the epidemic, b) use indigenous health knowledge to curb risky behaviors and help patients, and c) take steps to minimize the economic impacts of the epidemic.

Leaders are knowledge synthesizers and transmitters (Rowitz 2001). They link the past and present and envision an alternative future. To achieve the desirable goals, they coordinate the human and natural resources of the society and monitor and direct change. For example, in the Oromo worldview, peace and health are intertwined. Personal health is connected to the community as well as the peace and health of the natural environment. Based on that, contemporary Oromo leaders could have advocated for peace and environmental health. If the Oromo people are empowered in their affairs and entitled to develop their own leadership and institutions, there could have been less deforestation and environmental pollutions resulting in better peace and fewer human rights violations.

I have discussed the organizations and institutions that the Ethiopian government targeted for dismantling, including the MTSHA, the ORA, Human Rights League of the Horn and the OLF. The objectives of these organizations were to empower the Oromo people, provided relief assistance, promote regard for human rights and expose human rights violations. These are issues of human rights and are essential components of public health. That is one of the reasons why the Ethiopian government policy is seen as an attack on public health and contrary to the development of public health.

If the Oromo people had been allowed to determine their own affairs and develop their own leadership, they would have been able to identify their community's strengths and weaknesses, understand the conditions that put them at risk, and find culturally acceptable and economically viable solutions to health problems. An indigenous leadership is organically linked to the community. As such, it is an essential condition for the survival of a society and improvement in public health conditions. International organizations can provide assistance for more sustainable development through an autonomous Oromo leadership rather than simply continue to provide relief assistance. The Oromo people need to understand that the development of independent Oromo institutions and leadership are vital in the development of public health in Oromia and then play their part in the achievement of this goal.

References

Abiyotawi Democrasi Alaamawochachiniina Qexayyi Tegbarochachiin. (Sene, 1985 E.C) or June, (1992).

Biyya, Mooti. 1996. *Oromiyaan Befereqa. Abissiniyocracy Weyisi Dimokrasy* [Alternating on Oromiya: Abyssiniocracy of Democracy]. Jiituu, Fine Arts, Publishing, Finfinnee.

Brantlinger, Patrick. 2003. *Dark Vanishings. Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races.* 1800-1930. Ithaca, NY: Cornell, University Press.

Bulcha, Mekuria. 2002. *The Making of the Oromo Diaspora: A Historical Sociology of Forced Migration.* Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers.

Crichlow, Wesley. 2002. "Western Colonization as Disease: Native Adoption & Cultural Genocide." *Critical Social Work* 2 (2): 104-126.

Czyzewski, Karina. 2010. "Colonialism as a Broader Social Determinant of Health." *The International Indigenous Policy Journal* 2 (1): 5-16.

Darkwah, Kofi. 1978 *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire 1813-1889*. New York: Holmes & Meier.

Dugassa, Begna. 2008a. "Colonial Trauma, Community Resiliency and Community Health Development: The Case of the Oromo people in Ethiopia." *Journal of Health & Development* 3 (1-4): 43-63.

Dugassa, Begna. 2008. "Indigenous Knowledge, Colonialism and Epistemological Violence: The Experience of the Oromo People Under Abyssinian Colonial Rule." PhD diss., University of Toronto.

Dugassa, Begna. 2004. "Human Rights Violations and Famine in Ethiopia." *Journal of Oromo Studies.* 11 (1-2): 47-68.

Dugassa, Begna. 2003. "Powerlessness and the HIV/AIDS epidemics in the Ethiopian empire. *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 10 (1–2): 31–66.

Fanon, Frantz. 1965. *A Dying Colonialism, Translated from the French by Haakon Chevalier with an Introduction by Adolfo Gilly*. New York: Grove Press.

Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. C.L. Markmann. New York: Grove Press.

Farmer, Paul. 2003. *Pathologies of Power Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*, Los Angeles: University of California Press

Farmer, Paul. 1999. *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press

Fisher, Harald and Mann Michael. 2004. *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*. London: Anthem Press.

Freire, Paulo. 2002. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Anniversary Edition. With an Introduction by Donaldo Macedo. New York: Continuum.

Gebissa, Ezekiel. 2010. "Leadership From Below: Farmers and Sustainable Agriculture in Ethiopia." In *Leadership for Environmental Sustainability*, edited by Redekop Benjamin. New York: Routledge.

Guutama, Ibsa. 2003. *Prison of Conscience. Upper Compound Maa'ikalawii. Ethiopian Terror Prison and Tradition.* New York: Gumbirmans Publishing.

Harrison Mark. 1994. *Public Health in British India: Anglo-Indian Preventive Medicine, 1859-1914.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holcomb, Bonnie & Ibssa, Sisay. 1990. *The Invention of Ethiopia, The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in North Africa.* Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press.

Human Rights Watch. 2010. *Development without Freedom, How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia*, http://www.hrw.org/en/node/93604/section/10 (Retrieved, May 26, 2011)

Jalata, Asafa. 2007. *Oromummaa. Oromo Culture, Identity & Nationalism*. Atlanta: Oromia Publishing Company.

Kaplan, Robert. 2003. *Surrender or Starve. Travels in Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea*. New York: Vintage Books.

Keating, Daniel and Hertzman, Clyde. 1999. *Developmental Health and the Wealth of Nations. Social, Biological and Educational Dynamics*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Krieger, Nancy, and Birn Anne-Emnanuelle Birn. 1998. "A Vision of Social Justice as the Foundation of Public Health: Commemorating 150 Years of the Spirit of 1848." *American Journal of Public Health* 88 (11): 1603-1606.

Legesse, Asmarom.2000 *Oromo Democracy. An Indigenous African Political System*. Lawrenceville, NJ The Red Sea Press

Oromia Support Group. 2010. *Ethiopia Exports More than Coffee: Oromo Refugees, Fear and Destitution in Kenya*. Oromo Relief Association UK/Oromia Support Group, December 2010.

Oromia Support Group. 2006. *Press Release No. 42 July 2005-2006*, Oromo student, demonstrations, killings and arrests http://www.oromo.org/osg/pr42.htm.

Packard, Randall. 1989. *White Plague, Black Labor: The Political Economy of Health and Diseases in South Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Perham, Margery. 1948. *The Government of Ethiopia*. London: Faber and Faber.

Plowden, Walter. 1868 *Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla Country*. London: Longmans.

Raphael, Dennis. 2004. *Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives*. Toronto Canadian Scholars Press.

Rosen, George. 1993. *A History of Public Health*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Rowitz, Robert. 2001. *Public Health Leadership: Putting Principles into Practice*. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishing.

Ryser, Rudolph. 1984. "Nation-States, Indigenous Nations, and the Great Lie." In *Pathways to Self-Determination: Canadian Indians and the Canadian State*, edited by Leroy Bear, Menno Boldt, and Anthony Long. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Sabaa Maatii. 2007. *Daaniyaa, Oromia Publishing Company*. Atlanta: Oromia Publishing.

Sereke-Brhan, Heran. 2005. "Like Adding Water to Milk: Marriage and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Ethiopia," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 38 (1): 49-77.

Smith, Linda. 2002. *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples.* London: Zed Books.

Steffanson, Borg and Starrett, Ronald.1977. *Documents on Ethiopian Politics.* Vol. II. Salisbury, N.C: Document Publications.

Scutchfield, Douglas and Keck William. 1997. *Principles of Public Health Practice*. Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers.

Tafla, Bairu. 1972. "*Marriage as a Political Device*: an Appraisal of a Socio-*Political* Aspect of the Menilek Period, 1889–1913," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies 10 (*2): 13-21.

Thornton, R; Miller, T and Warren J. 1991. "American Indianan Population Discovery Following Smallpox Epidemics." *American Anthropologist* 93 (1): 28-45.

Thorpe, Ethel. 1989. *The Social Histories of Smallpox and Tuberculosis in Canada*. University of Manitoba, Anthropology Papers, No. 30, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba.

Vaughan, Diane. 2002. "Signals and Interpretive Work: The Role of Culture in a Theory of Practical Action." In *Culture in Mind: Toward a Sociology of Culture and Cognition*, edited by Cerulo Karen. New York: Routledge.

Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulamaa. 1992. *Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulamaa. Ayyaana Yaadannoo Waggaa 30ffaa* [The Macha Tulama Association 30th Anniversary]. Finfine: Commercial Printing Press.

Waldram, James; Herring, Ann and Young, Kue. 2006. *Aboriginal Health in Canada. Second Edition. Historical, Cultural and Epidemiological Perspectives*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

WHO. 1998. *Health Promotion Glossary,* WHO/HPR/HEP/98.1Distr: Limited, Geneva, Switzerland.

WHO. 2008. *Closing the Gap in a Generation Health Equity Through Action on the Social Determinants of Health.*

http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241563703_eng_contents.pdf (Retrieved May, 26, 2011).

Informants

All are immigrants to North America and were interviewed in Toronto and Washington DC for my PhD thesis.

Shamsadin Boru is one of the founders of Human Rights League (HRL), interviewed in summer of 2011.

Dirbsa (pseudonym), 65 years, interviewed in summer 2006 and winter 2007.

Firdissa (pseudonym), 60 years, interviewed in fall of 2006.

Jobiir (pseudonym), 55 years, interviewed in summer of 2006.

Kumme (pseudonym), 50 years, interviewed in summer of 2006.

Motuuma (pseudonym), 60 years, interviewed in summer of 2006.

Oggesa (pseudonym), 60 years, interviewed in summer of 2006.

Shantam (pseudonym), is 75 years, interviewed in fall 2006 and winter 2007.

Tolera (pseudonym), 65 years, interviewed in summer of 2009.

Garoma Wakessa is one of the founders of HRL, interviewed in summer of 2011.

Notes

1. The concept of the social determinants of health are understood as the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, including the health system that directly and indirectly influence the health outcome (Raphael, 2008).

2. *Qaalluu* leaders are not elected officials. In search of corresponding meaning in European languages, some researchers say that Qaalu is an Oromo spiritual leadership. Conceptualizing Qaalu simply as a spiritual institution reduces its functions. In my PhD thesis research I found that Qaalu is the guardian of the culture, a guide of the society in morality, ethics and elections.
3. For example, in the apartheid South Africa reprogramming entails validating invalid power relations and providing the dominant ethics and morality (Hartshorne, 1992 p41).
4. From childhood Oromo parents teach their children their biological lineage and in doing that teach children not only their roots but also about the concept known as Jilba Jaluu – bended knee -- which implies with whom they can establish sexual relation. When the parents of a young man ask the parent of a young girl for marriage they would say, ìsiniit firoomu barbaadna` - which means we want to be part of your family.
5. Traditionally when Oromo elders are sent to ask a young girl for marriage to a young man, they carry with them year-round green grass known as Coqoorsa and coffee beans. When they arrive in the home of the young girl, after wishing the family peace, health and prosperity they state that they are there to establish community and family friendship through marriage. Family and community members who entered a marriage refer to each other as a kin by marriage.
6. Tenanye Worki Sahle Selassie is the younger sister of Haile Melokot and Ras Darge. Haile Melekot is the father of king Menilik.
7. Haile is an Amharic name which means power. Fida is an Oromo name, which means someone who brings. When the last name is twisted to Fiidaa it becomes an Amharic word meaning unbearable problem. In the Ethiopian

and Oromo culture a person is referred in his/her first name, however, in Haile & Gabayyo cases they referred them twisting their last names.

8. The population of Tigray people is less than five percent of the people in Ethiopia. If the TPLF wants to promote one political party they will face challenges. First they fought to liberate Tigray, if they changed the objective of the organization and adopted inclusive agenda; they will lose the support of their members. Second, TPLF is known as the Tigray national organization, and others would not trust to join the organization. Third, even if other groups of people ignore what they know and join the TPLF, the Tigrayans would be a minority in the organization and this will be an obstacle for their dream of coming to power.
9. Dima Noggo – the Minster of Information during the Transitional Period (1991-1992), in a speech to the Oromo community in Toronto, mentioned the way the OLF leadership was forced to leave their home country.

A STUDY OF THE RELIGION OF THE OROMO PEOPLE

Father F. Azaïs
Translation from French by Ayalew Kanno

The Concept of God

The Oromo people have always been - and still remain monotheistic. This people have preserved, by coincidence of extraordinary and unknown circumstances, a shipwreck of primitive traditions on the subject of the unique God, which has engulfed Hamitic peoples that surround them.

The "Great God" that the Oromo adore, without symbol, without figure or disguise, is [as they say] "the

Journal of Oromo Studies, Vol. 19, No. 1 & 2 (July 2012), pp.

Ayalew Kanno received his Ph.D. in Communications from Indian University. He was Dean of the Faculty of Education at Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia and also served as Ethiopia's Ambassador to Senegal, Director of Office of Management Services in the Department of Labor of the State of Michigan. He is the translator of *An Ancient People, Great African Nation: The Oromo*. (East Lansing, MI: 2005) from the French by Martial de Salviac, *Un Peuple Antique au Pays de Ménélik: Les Galla (dit d' origine Gauloise) Grande Nation Africaine* (Paris, 1901).

God that we must adore and serve," *Ya Waaq, sii nan bula, sii nan oola*. He is "the sovereign king, master of all the thrones of the earth," *Mootii, sireen jalati hin qabamne*. He is the creator of the universe; by His command, "the blue arch of the skies, pure and deep, remain suspended without strings or columns, resplendent with colors that the hand of man does not at all brayed, gathering clouds and dispersing, like seed, host of stars." He is "the universal Father that reigns in the skies," *Abbaa kenya, samaii keesa kan mootuu*.

In the meantime, we do not find, in the Oromo religion, as in certain ancient theologies, like that of primitive India, for example, positive traces of the incarnation of the Divinity. Only the Arsi tribe would utter the following words in their chants: "*Sagaleekee nu ergii, yaa Abiyo*" "Oh our Father, send us your words." The elders of this clan assert that their ancestors believed that God descended on earth one day and talked to men.

The Oromo therefore have multiple epithets to designate the unique God. After the name *Waaqa*, God, "the one who is,," they also call Him *Gooftaakoo*, "[My] Master;" or *Gooftumma hundaarra Gooftummankee kan caaluu*, "the Almighty, in front of whom all powers give way"; or *kan dhabdee hin waakkannee, kennitee hin fixxannee*, "whose benefaction toward men is inexhaustible, and lacking nothing, would never runs out of what to give;" also the one whose knowledge is unlimited, etc. We would not list all the titles that the Oromo give to the divinity in their prayers and their sacred chants.

Angels

This concept holds a large place in Oromo theology (an account of the origin and descent of God). With the

notion of the unique God, the Oromo have kept that of good and bad spirits that have only a subordinate role. The former are instruments of God, benefactors and protectors of men. The Oromo call them *Ayyaana* or "good spirits." The latter are *jinnis* or "bad spirits," representing the demons that perform the role of tempters and seductors. The serpent is the living symbol of *jinnis*. Oromo tradition does not exaggerate the role of these good and bad spirits opposite to the role of God. Even though the Oromo practice discretionary astrology and regard the stars as angels or good spirits to terrestrial things, and that men are subordinate, that does not go as far as constituting a cult of adoration, which the Oromo render only to God. If they pay tribute to the serpent, a living image of the demon, it is to enchant its power to harm; only the *qaalluu* or sorcerers, a despised caste, are considered to be acting in concert with *saitan* and the serpent.

The Oromo, even though sometimes their emphatic and exaggerated expressions seem to betray it, have hardly slipped into idolatrous worship of nature, tempest, trees, rivers, etc. What saved the Oromo from this is the pure and precise notion they have of *Waaqa*. Now, when they are seized by deep awe of listening to the storms growl on the abrupt mountains of the land; when they step in front of the fertilizing streams in order to venerate the guardian *jinnis* that God appointed to watch over them; when they suspend narrow and long cuttings of ox hide on sacred trees; when they look for the secret of the future in the peritoneum of sacrificed animals; when they anoint the big granite stones with oil or butter; when they see prognostication of the future in the cries of certain animals and in the great turbulences caused

by the wind; all that is more or less a jest of superstition from which no people have been able to escape.

Sky, Hell, Purgatory

The Oromo believe in the immortality of the soul and in a future life of reward and punishment. From that comes the extraordinary veneration of the Oromo for their dead, their respect for the tombs, their prayers and sacrifices on the tombs of their ancestors during times of calamity. They describe paradise in these words: *Ayyaana Waaqa* or "the Happiness of God," *Bayaannacha Waaqa*, or "the Repose of God."

They call hell *Ibidda Ajabaa*, or "the fire of punishment." This eternal punishment does not however instill great fear in the Oromo. They say that God is too good, and the Oromo too weak and too ignorant for God not to have pity on them. As for others [non-Oromos], they do not talk about them.

But, for the Oromo, paradise is all too simply "the possession of God, the final repose in the house of whose wealth is inexhaustible and who would never runs out of whatto give."

The Oromo also have a dogma of purgatory. That which they call *golfa*, "suffering," that is a stage between the sky and the earth. This dogma lacks a bit of clarity.

Sacrifices[1]

The Wadaja

The Oromo give sacrifices to God, but this sacrifice is never human: "It is only the demon, say the Oromo, which could bring a man to sacrifice his brother to appease divinity." It is, in general, in the forests, that the

Oromo sacrifice to God the prime of their herds, milk, honey, and the first fruits of their fields. Here is a description, according to the high authority of Mgr Jarosseau, of this great solemnity of *Wadaja* or "alliance," a religious act par excellence, of the Oromo people, always accompanied by prayers, offerings and sacrifices:

> "The *Wadaja* is a religious pact par excellence which gathers all the Oromo clans under the same worship and the same religion. All the Oromo ceremonies are connected to the *Wadaja* and have value only with it. The *Wadaja* ceremony has the objective of honoring God, to praise Him, to glorify Him, by rendering to Him an appropriate worship under the mysterious word of *Wadai.* The *Wadaja* is always used for attracting divine benedictions over the families, the village and the land, or for the removal of plagues. In one word, they go to the kind God and obtain his favors for all their needs; such was the practical end of their homage. The manner of *Wadaja* prayer consists of a form drawn up as a type of litanies. These forms are deprecatives or curses. To the deprecatives that relate to the kindness to be obtained, the audience responds *Amin*, *Amin* or *Megen*. To the curses, which have features of plagues or misfortune that must be removed, the audience responds *Jakoun.*
>
> "The *Wadaja* is regional, local or familial, depending on that which is celebrated by the entire country, by a particular village or by a family. If it is regional or local, it takes place in open air, ordinarily under the shades of some

venerated grave; if it is familial, it takes place even in the family's foyer. It is the latter that is most frequent. Generally, in each village, each family does the *Wadaja* in turn.

"During the big *Wadaja* in open air, they sacrifice animals. The prayer, the drink and the food come evenly, according to tradition, without any confusion. The slightest transgression of the traditional ceremony would result in the cancellation of the *Wadaja*. Also the Oromo are meticulous in the execution of every detail.

"It is fitting to add that intoxication and misconduct are forbidden at these sacred assemblies."

"Attendance includes all the available married persons. The young men and children are excluded, except when it is the familial *Wadaja*, where they call them, at certain moment, to bless them. A sort of pontiff called *Rabsaa* presides over the ceremony. Each region has its great *Rabsaa* and each locality has its lesser *Rabsaa*.

"The *Rabsaa* is aided by two assessors; one is called *Katabé* and the other *Bulé*. The congregation, thus presided over by the *Rabsaa* and the two associates, constitutes the *Wadaja*; and the family where the ceremony is celebrated takes the name of *Agobara*.

"The *Rabsaa* naturally occupies the first seat; to the right and to the left are the *Katabé* and the *Bulé*. The father of the family takes the function

> of the intendent. In the middle of the audience, the *Rabsaa* begins invocation, turning from his seat toward the large pot, which contains the *Hojja*, or [a beverage made of] coffee leaves. He blesses everyone by extending the arm and by throwing from between his teeth a fine jet of saliva. After that, the entire audience, repeating his invocations, revives the same benedictions. That done, the mother of the family, who is seated near the big pot, begins to pour the coffee. Each *gebba* (goblet) filled is passed by hand to the father of the family, who takes it to the *Rabsaa*. The latter blesses it and distributes it to the audience until each one, first the men and then the women, has received his/her goblet. Note that the privilege of blessing applies only to men. The women are content to respond and to shout from time to time strident cries of joy."

As we have already said, the *Wadaja*, above all in former times, before Mussulmanism made it deviate from its purity and from its primitive value, the regional *Wadaja* in particular, was accompanied by great slaughtering of young bulls and male-goats.

In good part of other occurrences, the Oromo shed the blood of sacrificed animals. They sacrifice to conjure up plagues; to express to God his recognition; to atone a crime; the Oromo culpable of murder never oversteps the sill of his house without being purified by the sacrifice of a bull. The principal annual feasts, particularly the *Atara* and the *Atete*, are never celebrated without the sacrifice of a bull or a male-goat. The *deega*, or funeral service, also requires the immolation of an animal, bull or cow, on the grave of the deceased. This immolation takes place

a short time after burial. To miss a *deega* would be for the Oromo the worst ingratitude. The family that does the *deega* does not eat from the sacrificed animal. It is distributed to the poor and to the people of the area. The rich renew the ceremony of the *deega* each year.

Consumption, in Oromo sacrifice, follows the immolation of the victim [the sacrificed animal]. God Himself, as in the burnt offering of ancient law, is invited to take part in it. They put a small piece of the victim on a stone. That is *Waaqa's*, God's portion. The eagle that first takes away this portion is the one that *Waaqa* has sent to collect the offering. If no eagle shows up, it is a sign that *Waaqa* has not found the sacrifice agreeable. Then they distribute to the sacrificer and to the father of the family their portions; after them, everyone that took part in the sacrifice consumes the entire victim.

Sacrifice of Bread, "Kimismadal"

Other than the bloody sacrifice of the male-goats and the young bulls, the Oromo also make sacrifice of bread, which reminds that of Melchizedek. In the eastern regions, they call this sacrifice *kimismadal*, made up of two substantives: *kimis*, which signifies in Somali language "a sacred bread.," or *hebist*, "Eucharistic bread," in Geez language; and *madal*, probably an abbreviation of *madhan alem*, "savior of the world."

This sacrifice of bread rises from long time ago origin of Oromo religion. If you question the elders on the subject of *kimismadal*, they respond like this: "Well before our first contact with Christian people of Abyssinia, the bread was part of the substance of our sacrifices. Even more, with us it constituted a sacrifice apart." When several centuries ago the Oromo nation

divided itself into two great sections, i.e. the section of the east and that of the west, the *Bareentu*, who departed to the east (from that came the name *Barentu*, i.e. from *"barii,,"* sunrise), in separating from their brothers the *Boorana* (form "*boruu,,*" of the west or sunset), brought with them the treasure of their old traditions: those were the *maxarri*, representing blood sacrifice of animals; the *bokuu*, a sort of scepter, insignia of the government; the *loko*, a thin rod of very strong wood whose bark was forbidden to be removed, symbol of the law that must be observed; and finally, the *killee bunaa* (coffee beans), which is also one of the substances of Oromo sacrifice. Don't they use for coffee the same word that expresses the act of immolation – *killee bunaa hin qalla*, "we immolate coffee beans"? That was in the end the *kimismadal*, sacrifice of bread, which holds such a great place in their religious rite.

The most important goal of *kimismadal*, by acknowledgement of all Oromo, is to chase away the demon and to obtain peace for man. It is easy to remain convinced by looking at the diverse circumstances of the sacrifice.

The first who benefit from *kimismadal* are the little children. Solitude of the family, particularly of the mother, surrounds them in a jealous manner. It is a question of chasing away evil that could come to cast over them. Well, from among the evil, the one the Oromo fear the most is that of the demon. When the demon vowed the loss of one of the little charming beings, it disguises itself as a perfidious serpent and, while the father works in the fields and the mother and the young girls have gone to fetch water or wood, it slips in as far as the pillow of the sleeping little beings, and if it cannot devour it, imparts evil to it leading the infant quite fast as far as

death. In order to set a snare for the demon, of which the serpent is only a symbol, the parents, as soon as the infant falls ill, are advised by the elders to have to hold the *kimismadal* ceremony. "Bring, they tell them, three loaves of flower bread made of ordinary flour, put them near the infant: the serpent coming to eat this bead, will die from it." After the advice from elders, they begin preparations for the ceremony. On the eve, mother of the family and the young girls knead the finest dough with wheat or purest grain, *dararaa Waaqa*, "flower of God.." They spread the freshest butter on the hot bread. Such is the content of what must be served the next day at the sacrifice. Very early in the morning, the elders assemble in the domestic foyer where the *kimismadal* must take place. One among them, called *Bulé*, takes up the role of the sacrificer; to his side stands the *Rabsaa*, also called the *Hirtuu*, distributor of bread. Around the basket containing the breads of sacrifice, the father and mother of the family take their place, attended by all their children. The elder *Bulé*, extending his hand over the breads, blesses them and pronounces the deprecative (disapproval) and the imprecative (cursing) forms that the entire audience repeats on his order. Then, with the help of sharp object, he cuts the first of the three breads into three pieces. After meticulously completing this mysterious rite, he sands up, holding the bread of sacrifice in his hands, he proceeds towards the infant whom the father of the family is holding in his arms. There, after breaking a piece from a portion of the bread, he puts in the mouth of the infant and tells it to eat. If the very little infant is still not able to eat, it is the mother who collects that piece. *Bulé*, then taking the three pieces of bread that was cut, puts the first on the sill of the door, the second at the foyer,

the third very close to the head of the infant. When the serpent, that is the demon, eats the bread at the entrance of the house, if it is not strangled by the first blow, and if it dares penetrate into the domestic foyer, the second portion of the bread which it will devour must kill it. In entering, if it somehow still survives, that third portion that it will eat would kill it instantly. And the infant is saved. No serpent or demon will ever come near it.

The sacrificer *Bulé*, after completing the first action, cuts up the second bread in the same way, but into eight pieces. He himself eats the first one, gives the second to the *Rabsaa*, the third to the father of the family, and *the other five* to the mother of family.

The third bread remains. At this time, every informed villager flocks, saying, "*Sadaqaa fudhanna*," "Let us partake in the offering of the bread." The ceremony continues, always mysterious. *Bulé* cuts the third bread in the shape of the cross, and then breaks it into multiple fragments. Now, young girls reputed to be the most pure (*durba qulqullu*) first come forward. The *Rabsaa* gives them a piece each. Then come the turn of the mature men (*dhira*) and elders (*jarsa*), who receive a piece each. Among those who take part in this "sacred meal," if there is hatred that has caused fall-out, they must mutually pardon each other.

It must be added that the *kimismadal* is celebrated not only on behalf of the infants, but also well during other occasions of the year.

During sawing time, the whole village assembles, under a large nearby tree, and the ceremony goes on according to the rite discussed above. The people demand there also, the chasing away of the demon, "*Ya Waaqa*," cry the Oromo, gathering around the bread

blessed by *Bulé*, "as you have delivered our infants from serpent demon that prowled to devour them, remove the scourge servants of the demon from our field; give us your benediction."

When the scourge of grasshoppers threatens to devour the green fields of sorghum, maize, barley, wheat, etc., the *kimismadal* gathers again the distressed families who seek to appease the divinity in their own way.

During harvest time, they collect grain by grain of the most beautiful wheat in order to offer to God as sacrifice. "*Ya Waaqa*," say the Oromo, "You have given us without measure the bread which nourishes us each day. Make your kindness to overflow, by chasing evil away from us as you have already done for our little infants."

During big public calamities, on the eve of combats, the *kimismadal* is celebrated in the largest proportions. It becomes regional. The elders traverse the land, and announce it in these words: "Assemble all, in order to prepare yourselves to sacrifice and to celebrate it with the most solemnity possible." Each family now prepares three breads and the villages of the entire country, mothers of family and young girls in front, carrying on their heads objects that must be for the sacrifice, go to the graves of their ancestors; and the customary ceremony begins. Here the sacrifice is more extended. The dead themselves are invited to partner in the ceremony. The sacrificer *Bulé* lets these words be heard: "Those among you who have differences and whom hatred still divides you, forgive each other and give each other the kiss of peace." All are now reconciled: husband with his wife; the village chief with his subjects; and the rich with the poor. *Bulé* now pronounces the incantation: "*Ya Waaqa* forgive the sins of the living who have rekindled your anger; forgive also

the sins of the dead, of our forefathers, whose sad effects are probably still manifested among us." And the people repeat: "Forgiveness for the living and the dead." The ceremony continues on, in the same way described above.

Finally, they celebrate the *kimismadal* at the bedside of the dying. The ceremony takes place as usual. Before distributing the bread to the attendants, *Bulé* gives it to the moribund saying to him: "May this bread heal you, and give you strength! But if truly your end has come, may it be your nourishment in your voyage to the sky."

Note on sacred books. – The Oromo do not have a sacred book. They say, "Yes, in former times, we had like all others, a book which contained marvelous secrets. But the cow ate it. That is why we look into the peritoneum of this animal, in order to read it there the truths that were contained in our book."

Notes

* Translated from: François B. Azais, , "Etude sur la religion du peuple Galla," *Revue d'ethnographie et des traditions populaires* 7 (26), (1926), 113-120.

1 From Enrico Cerulli, *FolkLiterature of the Galla of Southern Abyssinia*, Harvard African Studies, vol. III (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1922), 186ff; Father Martial de Salviac, *Peuple Antique Au Pays De Ménélik: Les Galla (Dit D'origine Gauloise) Grand Nation Africaine* (Paris: H. Oudin, 1901), 130-151