

THE JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

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*Goshu Eten, *Asafa Jalata's Migration and the Making of a Mass Exodus: May-july 1941-1974* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2007). Reviewer: Muhammed Hassan.*

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COMPARING OROMO AND ANCIENT EGYPTIAN PHILOSOPHY

Charles Verharen

Scholarship on Oromo thought has reached the critical mass necessary to encourage extensive comparisons of Oromo thought with that of other cultures (Bartels 1983, Baxter 2005, Tablino 2005, Legesse 1973, Hassen 1990, Megerssa 1993, Zitelmann 2005, Gutema 2004, Jalata 2002). This article compares basic Oromo ontological and ethical principles

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with those of ancient Egypt. Its primary purpose is to encourage the development of comparative research programs on ancient Egyptian and Oromo philosophies. The term *philosophy* here means the most general and foundational guiding principles of life, expressed in oral or written form, together with critical reflection upon them (Odera 1997, Verharen 2008). The article's scope cannot include questions of diffusion between the two cultures, although that direction would be a logical next step.

The article singles out ancient Egyptian culture for comparison with Oromo culture for several reasons. First, the lead article in a recent issue of the *Journal of Oromo Studies* hypothesizes that Oromo culture is derived from the ancient Meroitic culture (Megalommatis 2007). Its author proposes the hypothesis that an Ethiopian emperor, Ezana, displaced the Meroites in an assault against Egypt up the Nile River in the fourth century CE. The Meroites fled south to occupy the traditional Oromo territory in the southern, southeastern and southwestern areas of what is now the modern state of Ethiopia.

Little scholarship exists on possible connections of Meröe to ancient Egypt, but Bruce Williams (1986) and David O'Connor's (1994) research determines the autonomous character of Nubian culture, as well as the possibility of two-way diffusion between Nubia and ancient Egypt. If links can be established between Nubia and ancient Egypt, Meröe must be examined as well. If Megalommatis' hypothesis should prove fruitful, then direct links may be established between ancient Egyptian and Oromo cultures.

Another reason for comparing the two cultures is Gemetchu Megerssa (1995) and Aneesa Kassam's (1995) hypothesis that Oromo culture is a part of the ancient Cushitic cultures that extended from what is today called *Ethiopia* through ancient Egypt as far as India over the past three thousand years. This hypothesis suggests possibilities of direct linkage between Oromo and ancient Egyptian culture.

A further reason for the comparative study is that ancient Egyptian texts speak of travel between Egypt and the land of Punt to the south. The most famous text that supports this assumption is the letter from the Pharaoh Neferkare to his vizier, Harkhuf. Harkhuf was on a voyage from Egypt to the extreme south and he reported to his Pharaoh Neferkare that he had found a Twa (formerly called *pygmy*) in these southern regions. The Pharaoh issued an urgent reply to Harkhuf's report: "You have said in this dispatch of yours that you have brought a Twa of the god's dances from the land of the horizon-dwellers....Come north to the residence at once! Hurry and bring with you this Twa whom you brought from the land of the horizon-dwellers, live, hale, and healthy, for the dances of the god, to gladden the heart, to delight the heart of King Neferkare who lives forever!" (quoted in Asante and Abarry 1996: 451).

This exchange reveals that the Egyptians had the technology for coastal voyaging on the Red Sea. It is possible that the ancient Ethiopian empire of Axum very likely started not only in the Ethiopian highlands but also on the shores of the Red Sea at Adulis in the first millennium BCE (Casson 1989). Coincidentally, Adulis was the "port through which Meröe exported

its produce” (Reader 1997:204). Archaeologists have dated the ancient temple of the Axumite culture at Yeha in northern Ethiopia only to around 500 BCE. It should be noted however, that very little archaeological work has been done to establish a time frame here by reason of the Italian/Ethiopian conflict which dates back to the birth of archaeology as an academic discipline. Internecine strife between Ethiopia and Eritrea after the Italians had been removed from the scene continued to keep the area inaccessible to scholars. The Axumite Empire straddled the present border between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The fourth reason for comparing Oromo and ancient Egypt is the recurrent hypothesis, most forcefully advocated by the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop, that ancient Egypt exerted a strong cultural influence on more southerly Africa. This hypothesis begs examination in the region immediately south of Egypt—Oromia. Diop’s research compared Egyptian and West African cultures at a far distance from Egypt. His claims about language affiliations between the ancient Egyptian language and his native Wolof are sketchy at best (1991/1981). African research institutions such as his own IFAN and Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar have had little incentive and no research funds to pursue his research hypotheses since his death. The most significant book showing deep affinities between ancient Egypt and other African cultures, *Egypt in Africa* (Celenko 1996), is a relatively recent production and it has so far generated few successors. Comparing ancient Egyptian and East African cultures would be a means to test Diop’s hypothesis.

These four reasons admittedly are highly generalized yet they still furnish an intriguing, attractive rationale for conducting comparative research on ancient Egyptian and other African cultures. More specific reasons for comparing Oromo thought with ancient Egyptian are fourfold. First, the ontological and ethical analogues between the two cultures are so strong as not to be coincidental—consequently a hypothesis of cultural diffusion calls out for investigation. Second, finding strong analogues between these two cultures and evidence of cultural diffusion should motivate further research, both in Ethiopia and other African nations, into the mechanisms of cross-fertilization of philosophy and culture throughout Africa. Third, Oromo culture is an excellent starting point for such research because of the advanced state of its study and because of its geographical and conceptual proximity to ancient Egypt.

The fourth reason is that this cross-cultural research can lead to a re-conceptualization of African philosophy. This rationale is far more abstract but paradoxically has all the more force for a re-conceptualization of Africa herself. This reason assumes that philosophies are the guiding foundations of cultures (Verharen 2003, 2008). Non-African philosophies have failed Africa in the harshest possible ways, from the Arabic and European enslavement of African persons to the colonial plundering of Africa's resources (e.g., the Belgian Congo) to the post-colonial manipulation of African nation-building in the Cold War (e.g., Lumumba's assassination) to the present chaos in southern (e.g., Zimbabwe), western (e.g., Ivory Coast), and eastern (e.g., Sudan, Somalia, Kenya) Africa (Ver-

haren 1997). Speaking more generally, non-African philosophies have failed the world itself. A philosophy should at the very least be an instrument for survival. Western-style cultures have found it expedient to develop technologies capable of mass destruction. We now confront the annihilation of life as we know it through nuclear winter or global warming. Let us return to Africa herself, as Cheikh Anta Diop has said in his *Civilization or Barbarism*, to seek an African way out of impending catastrophe that threatens both Africa and the world. And let us see whether within Africa we may discover an already existing philosophy that has the potential, as Frantz Fanon said, to make Africa one (Fanon 1963:178; Verharen 2006).

BEGINNINGS AND ASPIRATIONS

My initial interest in Oromo philosophy derives in part from my research into the writings of Messay Kebede, a former chair of the philosophy department of Addis Ababa University (2004, 1988; Verharen 2008). Kebede's writing attracted me because he was searching through African philosophy for a salvific myth for the decolonization of Africa. For Kebede, the myth had to come out of Africa—not out of a European utopia, whether Christian or Marxist.

In my opinion, Kebede's search failed. After rejecting prominent African philosophers' ideas for decolonization, Kebede seized upon Leopold Senghor's Negritude and what he calls Diop's Afrocentrism. Kebede faulted Senghor because his version of Negritude was deterministic. Kebede would correct Negritude philosophy by claiming that Africans were emotional (rather than rational, as were Europeans) and artistic

by choice rather than by genetic or environmental constraints. Kebede does not advert to the fact that Negritude presents a false image of Africans (Kebede 2004:219-220).

Kebede holds that Diop's virtue is to help Africans feel good about themselves because their ancestors created the pyramids (*ibid.*, 219). Kebede does not begin to grasp Diop's real virtue. Diop believed that the Egyptians were African and that Africans can claim the pyramids as part of their cultural heritage. But that fact is immaterial to Diop's Sankofa view of Egyptian culture: Look back and take it! What is important about Egypt is not the past, but rather what use Africans can make of ancient Egyptian culture in the present. The Sankofa bird, an Akan symbol from Ghana, looks back over its shoulder in order to recapture its history to plan for the future. Diop believed that the ancient Egyptians laid the foundations for rationality and science in the Mediterranean basin. In his words, "by renewing ties with Egypt we soon discover an historical perspective of five thousand years that makes possible the diachronic study, on our own land, of all the scientific disciplines that we are trying to integrate into modern African thought" (1993:4).

Thus, this paper searches for analogues between ancient Egyptian thought and traditional Oromo thought in Ethiopia. I am particularly interested in determining whether there may be an homologous philosophy shared by many African cultures. What has become of ancient Egyptian philosophy in Africa over time? Has it been extinguished, like ancient Egyptian culture itself? Or has it been transformed into other African variations readily accessible to those who keep

their eyes open to the real Africa, not the Africa of myth and distorted history? And what influence might other parts of Africa have had on ancient Egypt?

Striking parallels between ancient Egyptian and Oromo thought may be explained by cultural diffusion from ancient Egypt to today's Ethiopia region. But the opposite must be considered as well. Some scholars argue that Oromo culture derives from an earlier Cushitic culture that stretched from present day Ethiopia to ancient Egypt to ancient India three thousand years ago, with connections to ancient Egyptian culture (Megerssa 1995: 11-12; Kassam 1995:10). Since ancient Egyptian thought may be dated back some 5000 years due to specialized methods of record-keeping, diffusion from the Cushites to the Egyptians is at present difficult to investigate using current methodologies. The paper's scope cannot consider these wider questions. Its principal purpose is to furnish good reasons for initiating a comparative research program on ancient Egyptian and Oromo philosophy.

My interest in traditional Oromo philosophy started while on sabbatical in Ethiopia at Addis Ababa University doing research on Kebede's program for decolonization of Africa. My motive was to start a research program on traditional Ethiopian philosophy. One of my colleagues, Bekele Gutema, an Oromo who is keenly interested in Oromo philosophy, introduced me to Gemetchu Megerssa, an Oromo and a social anthropologist who wrote his dissertation on Oromo worldview. I was privileged to spend many hours of conversation with both scholars, and to conduct field research in Ambo (a small town 100 kilometers west of Addis Ababa) with Bekele, interviewing two Oromo elders.

Because of the prescriptions of Alain Locke (1989), the first chair of my department at Howard University, I felt strongly that anthropology had to play an important role in philosophical research. The essay relies on Megerssa's revised Ph.D. dissertation for its analysis of Oromo ontology and ethics. His interpretation of Oromo ontology is holistic, as we shall see, and it differs from those of other scholars of the Oromo, such as Lambert Bartels (1983) and Bekele Gutema (personal communication, April 1-July 31, 2007). My intention here is not to argue for the merits of Megerssa's version of Oromo ontology, but to examine it for the purpose of stimulating research.

OROMO ONTOLOGY

Why is Oromo traditional philosophy a fitting beginning for studying analogues to ancient Egyptian philosophy in the Africa outside of Egypt? Consider Megerssa's version of the cosmology of the Oromo taken from his informant, Dabassa Guyyo. In the beginning, the primordial monotheistic God, *Waaqa*, created the universe out of water: "in the beginning there was nothing but water" (Megerssa 1993:58). My research does not yet indicate whether *Waaqa* and water co-exist primordially, or whether *Waaqa*'s first act of creation is water. In either case, water here is not the familiar water of our experience but a "primordial substance" designated as *Walaabu* (ibid.). *Waaqa* creates the universe out of this first element, using principles, thoughts, words called *ayyaana* whose origin "is linked to that of the sun" (ibid.). Megerssa defines *ayyaana* as "the creative act of thinking in which a thought becomes that which it mentally represents" (ibid., 126).

Ayyaana is a complex concept. God causes all existence through the creative force of the *ayyaana*, but a principle of *ayyaana* actually “becomes that which it has caused to come into being” (ibid.).

The concept of *Waaqa* is even more complex than that of the *ayyaana*, but both existences share a common property. Both become what they have created. *Waaqa* is often translated as the *sky god*, but the term suggests a god beyond creation rather than a literal or anthropomorphic sky god (ibid, 50). *Waaqa* is often modified by the term *guraacha*, which ordinarily means “black,” but can also mean that which is “in its original state” (ibid., 8). According to Megerssa, the Oromo believe that “darkness is the original state, while light is interference with the original state” (ibid.). *Waaqa* is *guraacha* in the sense of “blackness,” the mystery that cannot be revealed, that which is unknowable or incomprehensible. The fact of *Waaqa*’s existence is not a mystery; it can be known through the principle of causality. However, the nature of *Waaqa* must remain completely opaque, *black* in the deepest sense. Megerssa translates *Waaqa Guraacha* as “Black Creator for lack of a better word” (ibid.).

What is distinctive about this “Black Creator” is its holistic nature, which makes it quite distinct from the monotheistic God of the Hebrew, Christian, and Muslim traditions. The God of “The Book” is an infinitely perfect spiritual being that creates a physical universe out of nothing. In these traditions, the spiritual and material are distinct kinds of existence, so their cosmologies must be dualistic. God’s nature is not mysterious in that “He” is revealed as a divine person with intelligence and will in the biblical texts. What is

mysterious is how what is physical can come out of what is spiritual.

In contrast to the God of the Bible, *Waaqa* creates the universe out of itself. On Megerssa's account of Oromo holism, God is both the creator and the created: "*Waaqa* exists at the same time through his creation and independently of it. He is both the Creator and his Creation" (ibid., 137). Paradoxically, God is both "one and many" (ibid., 50). The clearest analogue to this cosmology in European philosophy is Benedict Spinoza's (2000/1667) concept of God as *Natura Naturans* and *Natura Naturata*. God and the universe or nature constitute a single being. However, this being may be viewed as nature in the act of creating itself, or as nature in the state of having been created. *Waaqa* is analogous to Spinoza's God in that "God, through his creative power, is placed within the world" (ibid.).

However, Megerssa would insist on a distinction between the two Gods. Emphasizing the "blackness" or mysterious nature of *Waaqa*, Megerssa claims that the Oromo cosmology sees "*Waaqa* as part of the world as well as external to it"; in this way, "the Oromo cosmology unites under a principal single function what are otherwise considered opposites" (ibid., 137). By the principle of causality, we can know that *Waaqa* has made the universe out of himself. By the principle of *Waaqa's* "blackness," we cannot begin to know what other universes he may have created, or indeed whether his creation extends far beyond a universe as we can conceive it.

Making this point explicitly, Megerssa claims that "*Waaqa*...represents the highest form of abstraction unifying the whole of nature and more...more because

Waaqa is believed to be greater than the sum of His creation” (ibid. 138). Reflection on the term *abstraction* is in order here. The term comes from roots that mean literally “pulled away from.” An abstraction is a conceptual pattern extracted from experience or imagination and used to link together all similar experiences. To abstract is to unify experience. Abstractions approximate the “highest form” that Megerssa speaks of when their patterns begin to cover all possible experience. The pattern that all things in the universe share is their derivation from *Waaqa*. As the “highest form of abstraction, *Waaqa* is the “Totality of Nature” (ibid., 139).

Yet we are not certain whether Oromo cosmology follows a principle of creation via emanation or creation as evolution. The former has parallels in Plotinus’ philosophy wherein the universe “emanates” from an original light. The latter has parallels in contemporary cosmology where a chaotic universe organizes itself according to evolutionary principles that yield life and finally intelligent life. Parallels to the Oromo holistic ontology are found in the Chinese philosophy of Taoism which holds that reality is a composite of two opposing principles, *yin* and *yang*, the passive and the active.

The strongest analogues to Oromo cosmology, however, are to be discovered in ancient Egypt. Both philosophies insist on the mysterious nature of the origins of the universe. Both claim that the first principle of creation is a primordial water, although the Egyptians further specify its nature as chaotic. As we have seen above, the Oromo call this creative water *walaabu*, which must be distinguished from *Madda Walaabu*, water in a specific geographic location. The

ancient Egyptians call it *Nun*. Both philosophies hold that primordial water is organized by creative principles, called *ayyaana* by the Oromo and *khepera* by the Egyptians. *Khepera* is translated as *becoming* (Hornung (1990/1982). The principles of *khepera* are immanent within *Nun*, and their self-organizing process creates the powerful force manifested as the sun or *Ra*. As we have seen above, the creative principles of *ayyaana* are also linked to the sun. Both traditions postulate an evolution from an inert substance, water, to an active principle, the sun. The *ayyaana* in the Oromo tradition constitute the ordering process whereby the sun emerges from the primordial water. The *ayyaana* through the sun start “the process of time and creation, through which all things come to life (Megerssa 1993:58).

Ancient Egyptian cosmology takes a decidedly anthropocentric turn, as the solitary *Ra* in an act of spitting or masturbating creates two of the basic principles of the universe. These two principles, no longer solitary, create, in an act of copulation, two other basic principles. The four principles collectively are analogous to the familiar material principles of earth, air, fire, and water (as we experience it, rather than as a primordial chaotic water or *Nun*). The second set of material principles creates the anthropomorphic Egyptian gods such as Osiris, Isis, Set, Horus, and Nephtys. These gods in turn create humans and the world as we know it (Hornung 1982/1971).

Oromo and ancient Egyptian cosmology diverge sharply here, as the Oromo do not express their views in an anthropomorphic way. As instruments of creation, the *ayyaana* of the Oromo are abstract principles rather than personifications of forces. What is impor-

tant for the purposes of my comparison is the underlying assumption of the oneness of the creator and what is created. Both philosophies are holistic or monistic in the sense that they affirm only one principle of reality. The universe as we know it is an expression of that principle. The scope of this paper permits no investigation of the legitimacy of this principle. However, both philosophies capture perfectly the unifying spirit of human thought (Assman 1998).

All philosophies and religions that bind the universe together under a single unifying principle are expressions of the mind at work. Holistic philosophies push that principle to the limit by collapsing the creator and the creation into a single existent. Ancient Egyptian philosophy is more extreme on this point than Oromo philosophy under Megerssa's interpretation. The *Nun*, the primordial chaotic water of the Egyptians, has no originating principle other than itself. Like the hydrogen atoms comprising the "Big Bang" of contemporary cosmology, the *Nun* transforms itself into a highly organized universe organized around the sun. However, the universe collapses back into the *Nun* to start the cycle all over again, as the *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* states in Spell 175. While life shall continue for "millions on millions of years, a life-time of millions of years," in the end the *Nun* "will destroy all that I have made; the earth shall return to the Abyss, to the surging flood, as in its original state" (Faulkner 2005:201). The Egyptian model follows the same dynamic as a contemporary cosmological model that collapses the universe back into itself to start another Big Bang by reason of gravitational force (Hornung 2001/1999). The Oromo model as interpreted by

Megerssa postulates a creative force outside of *Wal-laabu*, the primordial water. Megerssa insists on the unknowable and irreducible nature of the creator of the universe in the Oromo tradition.

Nonetheless, these distinctions between Oromo and ancient Egyptian philosophy are vanishingly small in the face of their distance from dualist or pluralist philosophies. Scholars like Martin Bernal (1989) who trace the origins of ancient Greek philosophy to ancient Egypt pass over the radical division between the two schools of thought. Against Egyptian holism, Plato postulates an ontology of irreducible principles: at one extreme, the forms as perfect, non-physical patterns, and at the other a chaotic physical universe. A divine craftsman organizes the universe as we know it out of chaos using the forms as a divine “blueprint.”

To look beyond the Mediterranean basin, Hindu philosophy espouses a nominal holism in claiming that all reality reduces to a single principle, *Brahman*. The manifest plurality of the universe as we experience it is explained away as an illusion, *maya*. Hinduism achieves its holism only at the cost of denying the reality of our manifest experience. However, Taoism in East Asia and Spinoza in Europe show that a holistic philosophy is not unique to Africa (Rhadakrishnan and Moore, 1967 and Chan, 1969). An investigation into Oromo and ancient Egyptian ethics can suggest that the ontological similarities of these philosophies may not be accidental.

OROMO ETHICS

Megerssa defines *Waaqa* as the “Totality of Nature” (1993:139). Every philosophy that conflates the creator

and the created faces the problem of explaining evil in the universe (Verharen 1998). Evil can take two forms—natural disasters that cause human suffering and suffering that humans inflict on themselves. Megerssa claims that the Oromo explain the first kind of evil as intrinsic to nature. As expressions of the Totality of Nature, such disasters are manifestations of God's best efforts to keep the universe together. Hence the Oromo "accept the conditions imposed on them by *Waaqa*"; they regard natural disasters as "events which occur for the good of the whole" (ibid.). The point of nature is the "harmony of the whole" which "transcends the parts" (ibid.). Whatever happens is an expression of the Totality of Nature, Universal Nature, and "must therefore be right" (ibid.).

Evil caused by humans in the universe arises from human incapacity to act "in harmony with the cosmic whole," inasmuch as "it is only man who fails to act in accordance with the natural laws set down by *Waaqa*" (ibid., 140). Humans can choose between good and evil since they have a natural capacity to tell the two apart. *Waaqa* in the form of "Universal Nature" has made humans into "moral agent[s]" as "conscious participant[s] in the natural process of the Universe" (ibid.).

Morality flows out of the nature of the universe, the totality of which is God himself. Ontology, the study of what exists, and axiology, the study of what is valuable, are inseparable for the Oromo. Human laws must be derived from natural laws. In Megerssa's words, the "laws made by man thus act as a social control, preventing evil deeds from overwhelming the harmony of the cosmic whole" (ibid.). The Oromo characterize the

totality of nature in an anthropomorphic way. Human sins against nature's harmony "release the anger of the Totality of Nature" (ibid.).

The concept of harmony is key to understanding Oromo ethics. It is also the foundation of ancient Egyptian ethics in the principle of *maat*, as I shall discuss more fully at the conclusion of this section on ethics. The Oromo parallel to *maat* is found in the concept of *nagaa* or peace and harmony. *Nagaa* is achieved by following *saffu* or the moral code. The moral code dictates the proper order for biological and societal development, which is termed *finna*. The concept of *finna* or *fidnaa* is given a biological exposition in Megerssa's interview of Dabassa Guyyo, an Oromo oral historian and philosopher.

Oromo ethics are grounded in the biological concept of growth or *guddina*. The metaphor of growth extends to the development of social groups. The general path of biological development and human growth follows an order called *finna*. That order may be good or bad.

Guddina literally means "an increase in what is given," as in the growth of hair or a tree. Growth following the harmony or order of the Totality of Nature leads to well-being or *gabbina*. The root meaning of *gabbina* is "growing fat." This is an apt metaphor for groups whose food supplies are dependent on the weather's vagaries. The more general sense of the word indicates biological growth or human development in accord with greatest potential. An organism, including human organisms, in a state of well-being grows naturally to express its nature. This natural growth is called *ballina*. The organism growing in accord with

its environment is said to be in a state of harmony or *baddaada*. *Baddaada* is defined as a state having *gabbina*, *guddina*, and *ballina* “favored by conditions such as peace...and all other conditions necessary for the well being of life” (Megerssa, 1987). *Baddaada* includes both individual organisms and societies whose people, property, custom and law are so complete that they increase themselves (ibid.).

Organisms in harmony with their environments naturally reproduce themselves through acts of replication called *hormaata*. Such organisms grow through a repetition of rounds, called *dagaaga*, that change the state of the organism or society while still preserving its identity. *Dagaaga* literally means a “ram’s horn.” The metaphor of the spiral growth of the horn captures its identity in difference. Organisms or societies that successfully pass through the six stages have the power to transmit themselves into new territories in a process called *daga-horaa* (Megerssa 1993:121).

What is true for organisms is also true for human societies. Groups that find exemplary means for living in harmony with the Totality of Nature become such powerful examples of the will of *Waaqa* that other groups rush to imitate them. The laws, *seera*, and customs, *aadaa*, of such groups flow directly from the harmony of nature (ibid. 122).

The totality of the seven steps is called *finna* in the Oromo language. The word may derive from the root *fin* which means *embryo* in the Arsi dialect of Oromo (Megerssa, personal communication, June 14, 2007). *Finna* may be both good and bad. Expressions of the seven steps of growth which are out of harmony with the Totality of Nature are in an evil state of *finna*.

Megerssa's informant, Dabassa Guyyo, insists that contemporary Oromo peoples exist in an evil (*hamtuu* in Oromo) state of *finna* because of their economic, political, and cultural subjection to the Amhara minorities of Ethiopia (ibid., 127).

That Oromo concept of *saffu* determines whether a *finna* is good or evil. *Finna* specifies the concept of order or development, and *saffu* dictates the quality of that order. In Megerssa's words, "*saffu* provides the moral and ethical code according to which events, whether at a personal, social or cosmic level take place" (Megerssa 1993, 138). *Waaqa* generates the ethical code and propagates it through the *ayyaana*. Living according to the code of *saffu* is the only means to a "full and happy life" (ibid.).

The measure of an individual or society's ability to live according to the code of *saffu* is found in the Oromo concept of *nagaa*, which is defined literally as "peace" but carries extended meanings such as "harmony," "order," "balance," "justice" (Dewo 2008). Organisms are "at peace" with their environments and one another when they contribute to mutual flourishing. Societies must possess both an internal and external harmony with respect to their environments and their neighbors (Kelbessa 2005). The Oromo *gadaa* system (the traditional socio-political structure of the Oromo based on generation-sets) aims at sustaining peace through its extensive conflict resolution mechanisms such as the *jaarsumma*, a council of elders that focuses on mediation (Dewo 2008, 159-162; Legesse 2001, 1973).

The Oromo use of the concept of *nagaa* or peace to test their adherence to *saffu* or the moral code calls

to mind the ancient Egyptian concept of *maat*, the peace, harmony, order, balance that must characterize our responsibility to the continuance of life. Spell 125, 'The Declaration of Innocence in the *Book of the Dead*, details a moral life: "I have not deprived the orphan of his property...I have not caused pain, I have not made hungry, I have not made to weep, I have not killed, I have not commanded to kill" (Faulkner 2005:134). Morality extends beyond obligations to other humans: "I have not deprived herds of their pastures, I have not trapped the birds from the preserves of the gods, I have not diverted water at its season, I have not built a dam on flowing water." (ibid.). *Maat* is given mythological status as a goddess. The primary responsibility of the pharaoh is to ensure that *maat* is the regulatory principle of his kingdom.

Like the ancient Egyptians, the Oromo share the idea that all humans are subject to a universal principle of harmony and order, *nagaa*—from the elected leaders of the *gada* to the lowliest herdboy. Gender discrimination is an issue in the older Oromo traditions, but the Oromo have the distinction of being much more egalitarian than the Egyptians. The Oromo fostered a tradition of electing leaders, while the Egyptians made a place for a woman to rule—although Hatshepsut, for example, was both an exception to male rule and was accorded the status of honorary male (Roehrig 2005).

A compelling research project would examine how homologous philosophical principles like *nagaa* and *maat* can inform such diverse political and economic systems. Bio-geographical determinists might claim with Marx that agricultural systems with extensive surplus and large populations necessitate hierarchical

societies (Diamond 1997). Pastoralism may be more conducive to a democratic communalism. Hypotheses issuing from a comparative study of ancient Egyptian and Oromo politics and economics would need to be tested against a wide array of African cultures.

CULTURAL BLINDNESS AND RESEARCH PROGRAMS

My preliminary research makes the case that Oromo and ancient Egyptian thought deserves extensive cross-cultural research programs. Is there evidence of a more widespread presence of homologous philosophies in Africa, with holistic ontologies and cosmologies, and ethics of harmony and balance? Research already gathered on Oromo culture should be compared to the research done on other indigenous Ethiopian cultures. Claude Sumner's (1995, 1996a, 1996b; see Kidane 2002) compilations on Oromo "wisdom literature" are a starting point for this research. However, the failure of scholarship to pay attention to analogues to ancient Egyptian philosophy in northern Africa shows how hard it will be to encourage a wider cross-cultural examination of historical philosophy in Africa.

Consider the analogues between ancient Egyptian thought and gnosticism. Gnosticism is generally described as a syncretic religion that began in the centuries before Christ. Its many schools have in common the view that a specialized kind of knowledge is required to understand the nature of life and the universe in order to achieve salvation (King 2003). One of the most important gnostics was Valentinus who was born and educated in Egypt in the second century C.E. Unlike most other gnostic figures, Valen-

tinus subscribed to a monistic philosophy. *The Gospel of Truth*, usually ascribed to Valentinus, pictures God as a *pleroma*, the fullness and unity of true existence, or as a *bythos*, a depth out of which all existence arises. God is shrouded in mystery and can only be known through his creation. God as *pleroma* or *bythos* creates the universe through emanation. Any sense of a separation between God and his creation derives from human ignorance. Salvation is achieved through returning to the one—an act achieved by coming to knowledge of oneself as one with God.

Valentinus left Alexandria in Egypt for Rome where he was said to be a candidate for bishop of Rome. Accounts differ as to whether he refused the position or was not elected. His philosophy is very much at odds with dualistic Christian philosophy. Valentinus' "heresy" faded with the overpowering success of "orthodox" Christianity in the Mediterranean basin, and was completely obliterated with the Muslim conquest of North Africa (Rudolph 1983).

As monistic, Valentinus' version of gnosticism is unique. However, as a holistic philosophy, it is directly analogous to ancient Egyptian philosophy—and by extension to Oromo philosophy as well. However, scholarship on gnosticism in general and Valentinus in particular does not carefully address the hypothesis that Valentinus' beliefs may be grounded in ancient Egyptian philosophy. A recent review of the critical scholarship on gnosticism acknowledges that he was born in Egypt in the second century C.E., but the review makes no effort to connect his thought with ancient Egyptian thought (King 2003). Although older researchers viewed gnosticism as arising as a Christian

heresy, scholarly consensus now indicates that the movement predated Christianity. The most often cited origins are Greek, Jewish, Persian and Indian. Very few scholars cite ancient Egyptian thought as an inspiration for gnosticism. An exception is the 19th century scholar Émile Amélineau (1887) who argues that ancient Egyptian thought is a primary influence not only on gnosticism but also on Plato's *Timaeus*.

Valentinus is not alone in failing to attract comparative research between his philosophy and that of ancient Egypt. A later and more heralded philosopher, Plotinus, also born in Egypt but in the third century C.E., produced a monistic philosophy that has come to be called "neo-Platonic." Certainly Plotinus wrote in Greek, but the basic tenet of his philosophy is monistic, quite unlike that of Plato. While Plato insists upon a rigid demarcation between spirit and matter, Plotinus holds that the universe "emanates" from God in the same fashion as light proceeds from the sun (Gerson 1996). Unlike Plato, Plotinus follows the tradition of the pre-Socratic philosophers who argue for a monistic philosophy that has its origins in water (Thales), fire (Heraclitus), atoms (Democritus), numbers (Pythagoras). Whether the pre-Socratic philosophers were themselves influenced by ancient Egyptian thought is a matter of contention. Citing numerous ancient Greek texts, Martin Bernal (1989) argues that seminal Greek philosophers like Pythagoras and Plato derived key concepts from their studies in Egypt.

What cannot be disputed is that Plotinus follows in the pre-Socratic tradition. However, Plotinus was raised in Egypt, and his philosophy in principle is monistic, like both ancient Egyptian and pre-Socratic philoso-

phy. Scholarship has not seriously considered to date whether or to what degree he may have been influenced by Egyptian philosophy. This lacuna is unremarkable because classical scholars do not traditionally include ancient Egyptian among their research languages.

To speak more generally, instead of looking for analogues between ancient Egypt, the most technically productive of the ancient Mediterranean cultures, and other philosophies and religions, comparative scholarship has to a great extent ignored ancient Egypt as if it could not have influenced in significant ways other cultures within the basin. Martin Bernal has made a case for diffusion between ancient Egypt and ancient Greece, but we need a much more ampliative posture. Gnosticism is an obvious candidate for comparison. Unlike Bernal, I do not suspect that a conspiracy of silence has blocked possible research avenues. Rather I think general ignorance of the details of ancient Egyptian philosophy and religion has created a failure of imagination that hides these avenues.

On the other hand, I do not want to go too far. Gnostic philosophy is clearly in Hans Jonas' words "pathomorphic," or grounded in the idea of a fall from grace or a moral blindness that can be healed by the sacred gnosis (King 2003:121 citing Jonas 1966). Ancient Egyptian philosophy, on the other hand, is to coin a phrase "eumorphic," centered in a conviction that the universe as we find it is good. The evils of natural catastrophes, the wickedness of human deeds, are aberrations from the harmony of *maat*. It is our ethical task to restore what is disordered to its naturally perfect state. There can be no "fall from grace" in the ancient Egyptian system, except through deliberate

choice. As in the Oromo philosophy, chaos can erupt without warning, but chaos is limited to its seasons. Both Oromo and ancient Egyptian philosophy agree that life is good in itself and not for the sake of something else. Chaos erupts into life through natural or human causes, but it is manageable. Ethics in both philosophies demands the restoration of order and harmony, *nagaa* and *maat*.

CONCLUSION

What might be the practical consequences of this proposed research program? Its primary theoretical objective is to contribute to mapping the flow of philosophy in Africa. If research shows that the analogues between ancient Egyptian and Oromo philosophy are the likely result of diffusion rather than coincidence, then this research program would make a strong case for further comparative work in East and West Africa.

The practical objective of this research program is to discover a philosophy that can help rescue Africa and the world from imminent catastrophe. We now confront the “bankruptcy” (Amiri Baraka’s term) of world philosophies that can no longer serve as inspirations for how we should live as a global community, intent on passing life on to our children’s children. The global threats to life we now face result in part from the failures of world-historical philosophies and religions to find the meaning of life in life itself. Powerful, contemporary versions of the religions of “The Book”—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—present life as a test rather than an end in itself, but space does not allow careful consideration of whether these contemporary versions are faithful to their progenitors.

Hinduism regards life an illusion. Buddhism advocates transcending desire—a defining characteristic of life—to stop suffering.

In the spirit of looking for Messay Kebede's inspiring myth out of Africa, let us consider for the future the common message from both the ancient Egyptians and the Oromo (Verharen 2008). Both advocate a philosophy of holism, the conflation of ontology and axiology. That holism underpins the famous democracy of the Oromo *gadaa* system as well as the Oromo respect for the environment and its inhabitants. Workneh Kelbessa's (2005) research on the rehabilitation of indigenous environmental ethics in Africa demonstrates the practical consequences of Oromo holism. Maulana Karenga's (2003) research on Maatian ethical responsibilities to strangers, women, and eco-systems illustrates the revolutionary character of ancient Egyptian thought—for its time and for our own. The philosophical principles of *maat* and *nagaa* have demonstrated their practical force over long periods of time. *Maat* was the controlling element of ancient Egyptian philosophy for three thousand years. *Nagaa's* longevity is a matter for further research, but its force is as old as Oromia. Whether it may equal *maat's* longevity is a key question for this research program. What is beyond dispute is that together the philosophies of *maat* and *nagaa* promise an African model for passing life on to future generations in these perilous times.

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THE EGYPTIAN OCCUPATION OF HARER AND ITS IMPACT ON THE OROMO OF HARERGE

Mohammed Hassen

Even though the Oromo of Shawa had been subjected to Shawan Amhara attacks since the 1830s and 1840s, the Oromo of Harerge were the first to fall under foreign colonial domination. In 1875, Egyptian forces captured the walled city of Harer and occupied it for the next decade. Their advent brought them into conflict with the Oromo of Harerge, who resisted their initial advances toward the city and the occupation that followed. Though the Egyptian occupation lasted only ten years, it was long enough to cause tremendous destruction to the Oromo democratic heritage and way of life. This article¹ exam-

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ines the impacts of the Egyptian occupation on Oromo society in Harerge. It begins with a brief discussion of Oromo democracy in Harerge, examines the policies and practices on the Oromo of the Egyptian administration, and ends with an assessment of the prevailing condition of the Oromo in Harerge at the time of the Egyptian departure.

Prior to the occupation, the Oromo lived for centuries as a powerful, independent, and respected people in the vast region of Harerge. Their strength emanated from their unity as a cultural group, their democratic *gadaa* system that was capable of mobilizing their material and spiritual resources, their military prowess derived from their formidable cavalry, effective war strategy, and the firm determination to defend their independence.² At the end of the nineteenth century, two developments—one internal and the other external—turned the tide against the Oromo.³ The Egyptian conquest and occupation of the Harerge Oromo occurred at the time when the Oromo society was undergoing profound internal transformation. During the eighteenth century and definitely during the nineteenth century, the Oromo of Harerge were involved in an exchange relationship with the residents of the walled city of Harer. The need to produce commodities for the city market gradually resulted in the expansion of an agricultural economy into the pastoral Oromo society. The cumulative effect of those changes led to fundamental social differentiation that weakened Oromo unity and undermined the effectiveness of their war strategy. Externally, the Oromo lacked access to modern firearms. European weapons of destruction (guns and cannons) arrived in Harerge

and fundamentally altered the balance of power in favor of the foreign invaders and rendered the Oromo vulnerable. Many changes occurred within a short time in the late nineteenth century. The Egyptian occupation of 1875 was followed by Menelik's conquest of the Oromo of Harerge in 1887. Although each Oromo group fought bravely against the Egyptian forces, their failure to form a united front against the foreign invaders made them easy victims. The same pattern of disunity allowed King Menelik of Shawa to conquer and subdue the rest of Oromia. The changes that were occurring within Oromo society during the nineteenth century were dramatic, but this paper focuses only on the Egyptian conquest.

HARERGE BEFORE THE EGYPTIAN OCCUPATION

The Oromo of Harerge are comprised of three groups, the Ittu, Afran Qallo, and Anniya. For centuries before the advent of the Egyptians, they lived under their democratic *gadaa* system. The three groups had a common *caffee* (Oromo parliament) at Oda Bultum, located in Ittu land. The Oromo regarded Oda Bultum as a sacred ground, where all ritual activities were performed, laws made, conflicts settled, and governments changed peacefully every eight years. Oda Bultum served as the seat of a democratically elected government of all Oromo groups in Harerge. Overtime, the importance and influence of the regional assembly representing the three individual Oromo groups increased at the expense of the central assembly, and the political and ritual aspects of the *gadaa* culture eventually separated the groups from each other. The three separate

central assemblies were established at three centers. The Ittu had their regional *caffee* or assembly at Kaara Qurqura,⁴ the Anniya at Burqa Tirtira, and the Afran Qallo at Watar in the Gaara Mulata region. Despite the establishment of three separate assemblies, the Oromo of Harerge were governed by a single *gadaa* confederacy until it was destroyed in the nineteenth century first by the Egyptian and later by Shawan Amhara colonial forces.

Among the Oromo in Harerge, the *gadaa* government was essentially the government of the *caffee* (meadow) assembly. There were local, regional, and central *caffee* assemblies. The local assembly dealt with local matters such as settling intra-clan conflicts while regional assembly dealt with regional matters such as settling inter-clan conflicts. The central *caffee* assembly dealt with national issues such as declaration of war, conclusion of peace, making of laws, settlement of inter-confederacy conflicts, and hearing of cases that were brought from local and regional courts.⁵

The composition of *gadaa* government in Harerge, while varying from region to region, conformed to general common pattern. Officers of the *gadaa* government were elected after an election "campaign." According to de Salviac, three qualities-oratory, knowledge of history and tradition, and past military achievements-were expected of candidates for office.⁶ The people elected the leaders of their government every eight years, including the president of the *caffee* assembly. During the eight year tenure, the president served as a central authority, a single political head, and the spokesman for the confederacy of the regional assemblies. His residence was the seat of government and the

capital of the confederacy for eight years. The president of the *caffee* assembly was known by various names such as *abba fugug* (“father of *fugug*”, i.e., the sacred land), *bombas*, or commonly as *abba bokkunu* (“father of the wooden scepter”). The assembly, chaired by the president, was held in the *caffee*, under the shade of the *odaa* tree, (“the holy sycamore tree”). According to de Salviac, when the government met under the *odaa*, the president sat on the right and the other officials on the left. The “deputies” sat in order of seniority of the clan and the age of the participants.⁷ Debates on legislation or other issues proceeded in order of seniority. When the *abba bokkunu* presided over an assembly:

Eight guards surround him, four in front and four behind, armed with a staff whose length is graded according to their dignity, of the sort that the first guard holds the longest and the last the shortest. The Dori sits to his right and the Raba to his left. The premier magistrate never stops holding the scepter [the wooden *bokkunu*]. The guards make up the police of the assembly and if they notice that someone has a very intrepid or irreverent behavior, they apprehend him and administer to him the blows of their rod.⁸

Other offices included those of the *abba duula* (“father of war”), who marched at the head of the warriors and recited war poems that fired up the fighters, and excited the coward; the *abba seera* (“father of laws”), an expert in traditional law whose duty was to memorize the results of the assembly’s deliberations and furnish them when needed; and the *abba alanga* (“father of the whip”), who was responsible for

keeping during order at the *caffee* assembly and executing the decision of the assembly. There were the *lemmis* (“messengers”), the ambassadors of the president, who resolved conflicts and settled disputes among the clans and preserved peace and stability within the confederacy. It was an inviolable law among the Oromo in Harerge, just like that of the *jila* (the pilgrims who went to the spiritual leader) that the *lemmis* were not hurt by anyone. To hurt them was considered an insult to the whole clan or confederacy and the cause for war.⁹

At the end of the term of office, power was officially transferred to the incoming elected officials during the *jarra* ceremony. The term *jarra* comes from the verb *jarru*, “to build, to start something new.” It is used in the sense of building a new house, making new laws, contracting new agreements, and new relations. In this sense, the *jarra* ceremony was the event that marked the end of the outgoing and the start of the incoming *gadaa* government. It was the beginning of the new period, the building of a new future, which de Salviac, who observed the occasion in Harerge, compared with the Greek Olympiad.¹⁰ The transfer of power took place at the beginning of the Oromo New Year at which parties in conflict resolved internal disputes peacefully and both sides, the winners and losers, jointly reinstated the moral order of the nation. The transfer of power ceremony was a time when the well-spring of the Oromo yearning for spiritual satisfaction, for peace and reconciliation were overflowed with prayers for peace, prosperity, and harmony.¹¹

After the transfer of power ceremony, the outgoing president handed over the *bokkum*, the insignia of national authority and a symbol of the unwritten

Oromo constitution, to the incoming president. The *bokkum* or the wooden scepter was kept by the president in his belt during all the meetings of the *caffee* assembly. As the insignia of authority, the *bokkum* represented the independence of a confederacy, and it served as a symbol of unity, common law, and government. Antoine d'Abbadie, who in 1843 observed the Gudru Oromo *caffee* assembly in western Oromia, compares the *bokkum* "to the mace of the English parliament"¹² and the *gadaa* government to the parliamentary systems of government in the Western World.¹³ As the keeper of the *bokkum* itself, the president of the *caffee* assembly was known as *abba bokkum*. The climax of the transfer of power ceremony at Watar among the Afran Qallo Oromo came with the planting of a tree called dhaallaa, which is said to have flourished only for eight years. With the planting of dhaallaa and transfer of the *bokkum*, the change of the government was completed. Then the *caffee* assembly is formally seated for the task of making laws for the next eight years.

Before the *caffee* assembly started debating a piece of legislation, the new *abba bokkum* slaughtered an animal and dipped a branch of green tree into the blood of the sacrificed animal and planted it in the assembly grounds. The sacrificial blood symbolized the unity of the Oromo, as one people descending from a common founder; while the branch of a green tree represented peace, plenty, and fertility for the Oromo people.¹⁴ Then a speaker mounts his horse with spear in hand, according to Atsma Giyorgis, "...raises his voice and says, my brothers, fathers and friends, listen to me. When he starts to address them, all the others keep silent. A bird could pick up [something] from their midst and

fly away with it.”¹⁵ Once the debate on the law started, the deputies spoke according to their seniority. Every important point raised by the speakers was accentuated and recorded by the sounding of a wachafa (sling) by the person who was assigned to this specific duty. The sounding of the wachafa was used for applauding the speaker and for counting his impressive points.

The public debate on the law served as a “practical school” for the young to learn proverbs, genealogy and local history. It was a forum for the future ambitious men to establish their reputation and a platform for the old to articulate their wisdom. After the speaker finished, the assembly remained silent for a long while to allow him to gather his thoughts in case he recalled an omitted argument. As such, the assembly is characterized by a certain dignity and decorum that, according to d’Abbadie, “make look terribly uncivil the turbulent chambers of Europe where the wisest have sometimes regretted untimely vivacity.”¹⁶ D’Abbadie compares the final product itself, the law, with English common law and the laws of his own people, the Basque people.¹⁷ Even someone like d’Abbadie, who is familiar with Europe’s long tradition of the law and law-making, could not help but admire the richness of the Oromo law and the respect the people had for the rule of law.¹⁸

In the Oromo language, there are two terms that express the concept of law. The first is *adaa* “custom, habit, tradition, way of life,” etc., and the second is *seera* (or *heera*) the law, in the real sense of the term.

Sera is though not the whole of the law, the core and in a sense the symbol of it. Ada, custom, or a way of life, is however impor-

tant and constantly present in people's awareness too diffuse a thing for the value which is attached to it to lie ritually expressed in a direct way. Sera- a more or less short list of important maxim in a memorable form, can be the object of such expression and thus act as a permanent symbol of law in the wider sense. Among these communities which lack kings, the law, like his insignia, is handed on from one Gada chief [president] to the next, it reigns permanently, while its representatives come and go.¹⁹

After the *caffee* assembly completed making law, the *abba bokkūu* led the assembly and the people in prayer, on behalf of the nation. Here politics and ritual intersect and overlap, one influencing and the other determining the duty of the *abba bokkūu*'s office. De Salviac, who witnessed such a prayer among the Oromo of Harerge, states that "the *abba bokkūu* falls on his knees and, raising in his hands the scepter [*bokkūu*] toward the sky, he exclaims, with a majestic and soft voice:

Ya Waaq[a], be on my side,
Ya Waaq[a] of the Oromo, be on my side.
Angels of the Lord, be on my side.
Angels of the earth, be on my side.
Angels of the sea, be on my side.
Angels of our frontiers, be on my side.
Be my vanguard and my rearguard.
Be my way and my path.
Keep the stone of obstacle farther away from me.
Make me triumphant over the horn of the enemy.
Make me rule over the Dori.
Make me reign over the Qallu.
Make me form the morals of the youth.²⁰

Through his sacrifice and prayer the *abba bokknu* puts Waaqa, the Oromo God on his side. The next step is for him to win the wholehearted support of the people for the new law. How did he do it? According to de Salviac, after the debate on the law was completed and before the new law was proclaimed:

The *Abba bokknu* climbs on a large stone, from the height of which he jumps down solemnly, in shouting this cry: *Seri bu'e*, 'THE LAW HAS FALLEN'. From that instant, in effect, all law is suspended, all penalty is abolished, and, if a crime is now committed, deemed to be ignorant of the Code. Also the Assembly gets confused. They seem to invoke in spirit the sinister vision of a society without law, where an anarchy tattered and reddened with blood is stirred, dressed up in skins of the pillage; the delirious uproar of all unbridled passions; the unheard lamentations of the honest people stamped on without hope. In their infatuation, they reclaim the Law by shouting clamors:

'THE LAW! THE LAW! WE WANT THE LAW!'

The magistrate does not take long to pray. He climbs up on the rock again, and, responding to the swelling assembly, he exclaims: '*Seri ba'e*, 'THE LAW IS RAISED'. Now an outburst of joy from all parts and the crowd is appeased.²¹

After the prayer, the *abba bokknu* alone, declared the law from a platform of piled stones. From the stage the president announced orally each article, and the assembly repeated after him in chorus, which symbol-

ized signature. The elevated platform represented the supremacy of the new law. Once proclaimed, it was not changed for the next eight years. From then on, the main duty of the *abba bokkum* and his government was to guard and administer it.

De Salviac states that the Oromo “do not know bowing and prostration; this free people do not bend in front of anyone.”²² Instead they bowed to the supremacy of the law, which shows the profound respect the people had for the rule of law. Unlike the laws of their neighbors, which were issued by a king or a single leader, the Oromo law was the product of collective deliberation. Among the Oromo no single individual was the source of the law. And no one was above the law. The primary goal of Oromo law was to maintain stability, to restore peace, and to reach a compromise acceptable to disputants on both sides. This was facilitated by the fact that the *caffee* assembly functioned based on meetings among people during which differences were resolved and disputes settled after an open discussion. Among the Oromo, the law embodied the spirit of unity, common government, common interest, and it was based on the principle of internal peace. In this context, the law, the national authority, and the president of the assembly were inter-connected by the *bokkum*.

In the interpretation of the law, the president of the *caffee* assembly was assisted by legal experts known as hayyuus. This underlined the importance and continuity in the law, which was issued out of and evolved with Oromo democracy. The one blended and harmonized with the other so much so that the history of the law is as much the history of Oromo democracy. The hayyuu always sat under the dhadacha tree (symbol of

the judiciary) while the *caffee* held theirs under the *odaa* tree (symbol of the legislative and executive) during their deliberations. The Egyptian army officer, Colonel Muhammad Moktar, who was responsible for the first phase destruction of the Oromo political institution, (which will be shown below) describes Oromo government as “the system of democracy in all its... purity.”²³

The Oromo *gadaa* government did not remain unchanged everywhere in Harerge. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, wealth among the Oromo in Harerge was measured mainly in terms of cattle owned. However, owing to the transformation of the Oromo mode of production from pastoralism to sedentary agriculture, land also became a measure of wealth. As a result by the nineteenth century there were rising landowning classes known as *abba burqaa* (“father of spring”) among the Ittu and *abba lafa* (“father of land”) among Afran Qallo. This development undermined the effectiveness of the *gadaa* system from within. This was the result of the rise of an influential wealthy aristocracy among the Oromo in Harerge, which assumed control of political and military power. Thus a new type of leadership, whose power was based on wealth and personal power, was replacing the traditional *gadaa* leadership among the Ittu and Afran Qallo. Instead of the collective power exercised by the *gadaa* leadership, which wielded power for eight years and rallied all able-bodied men for the defense of common Oromo interest, hereditary wealthy land and cattle owners fought for their narrow group interests.²⁴

The focus on narrow clan interest prevented the formation of a united front against a common enemy,

thus rendering the task of foreign invaders much easier. What is not in doubt is that, instead of able leaders elected for their leadership qualities, the top offices were filled by the landowning class. The best example for this was the election of 1872. Ironically that was the last democratically elected *gadaa* government of the Afran Qallo Oromo in Harerge. In that election, Orfo Jilo was elected as *abba bokkum*, Balla Bubba as *abba duula*, and Chamma Nur as *abba seera*. Interestingly, these three leaders were owners of extensive land, cattle, and other property. These three leaders were famous for their wealth, as they were the cream of the newly emerging class of property owners among the Oromo in Harerge. On the eve of the Egyptian invasion, the last democratically elected Oromo government was in its third year of office and its effectiveness in meeting the challenge of Egyptian colonial aggression will be seen on the battlefield.²⁵

THE EGYPTIAN OCCUPATION OF HARER (1875-1885)

Since the sixteenth century, the Oromo were closely tied to the economy of the city of Harer through trade, Islam, and intermarriage. The city supplied the surrounding Oromo with the essential locally manufactured and imported goods in exchange for grains, coffee, cattle, honey, ostrich feathers, butter, and ivory. This free exchange of commodities brought together the Harari or Adare, (as the inhabitants of the city of Harer were known), and the surrounding Oromo. Richard Burton, the first European visitor to the city in 1855, suggests that the Oromo spared the city for their own benefit. He wrote that, “Up to the gates the

country is peopled with the [Oromo]. This unruly race requires to be propitiated by presents of cloth; as many as 600 tobes are annually distributed amongst them by the Amir. ...They might easily capture the place, but they preserve it for their own convenience.”²⁶

In the nineteenth century, Harer was coveted by European and other imperial powers and local potentates because it was a major commercial center in the region. Turkey, Egypt, France, Italy and, to some extent, Great Britain, competed for influence or control of the city with Christian Abyssinian kings, Yohannes of Tigray and Menelik of Shawa. In particular, Menelik “had always coveted (Harer) because its control would provide Shoa [Shawa] with the best route to the coast and its lucrative trade and revenues”.²⁷ Eventually, the Egyptians first captured the city and colonized the surrounding Oromo. Why they were able to preempt their rivals has everything to do with local politics.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the city of Harer was ruled by its own Harari (Adare) dynasty. This tradition was broken when Emir Muhammad, a man of Oromo origin who was born and brought up in the city of Harer, became the emir in 1856 and established Oromo political supremacy within the city itself. . He distinguished himself as a prominent man noted for his religious education. He married Khadija, the daughter of Emir Abdal-Karim (1825-34), thus becoming a claimant to the throne. He rebelled against Emir Ahmad (1852-56) and seized power in 1856 with the support of the Oromo. Emir Muhammad who followed a pro-Oromo policy wanted to integrate his Hareri, Oromo, and Somali subjects through trade, Islam, and intermarriage. His policy was popular

among the Oromo but it was resented by the Hareri who felt that the Oromo had oppressed them.²⁸

The Harari, overwhelmed by the Oromo demand for hospitality and angered by Emir Muhammad's despotic rule, secretly wrote a letter to Khedive Ismail (1863-79) of Egypt asking him to liberate them from Oromo domination.²⁹ Ismail, who had his own ambition to create an Egyptian empire in the Horn of Africa, responded positively to their request. In July 1875, an Egyptian force landed on the Northern Somali coast and captured the two ports of Zeila and Berbera without any resistance. Delighted by his success in capturing the two ports and excited by the Harari's invitation to liberate them, Rauf Pasha, the Egyptian army commander, left Zeila on 18 September and arrived in the city of Harer in October 1875. On his arrival in the Oromo territory, the Egyptian officer was welcomed by a delegation from Emir Muhammad with a letter of submission. This was soon followed by another delegation composed of elders and Harari notables, including Haji Yusuf, son of the Emir and the qadi.³⁰ The Emir, deeply resented by the Harari because of his pro-Oromo policy, appeared to have realized the futility of fighting. When he saw the well-armed Egyptian army, he accepted the imposition of Egyptian protectorate without any resistance, and thus surrendered the independence of his own city and that of his Oromo supporters. For the Egyptians it was an easy political victory. The Harari, instead of the liberation they sought, witnessed the end of their independence.

The Oromo did not want to surrender their freedom. They defied Emir Muhammad's order to submit peacefully, and hastily organized a resistance force. The Nole

Oromo confronted the Egyptian invaders at a Goffola, “a name given to the place after the Oromo had killed many of the enemy soldiers. Goffola “literally means corpse.”³¹ Next the Oromo fought against the Egyptians at Goba, where the invaders’ artillery caused heavy casualty among the Oromo.³² Undeterred by the formidable Egyptian firepower, the Nole Oromo warriors met the Egyptian force at a place called Eguu, about thirty miles outside the city of Harer. The battle lasted for about seven hours. “The dramatic event at this battle is still jokingly remembered that the gallant Oromo warriors attempted to stuff the mouth of one of the cannon while it was firing.”³³ The Egyptians defeated the Nole Oromo, thus clearing the way to the city. After this victory, the Egyptians entered the city of Harer without any resistance. Colonel Muhammad Moktar, an Egyptian army officer, describes the Oromo soldiers’ determination to resist the invaders in the following glowing terms.

They always advance in a great line often on a dozen ranks deep so that the first who fall are immediately replaced by other fighters who continue to advance without being in the least demoralized by the fall of their comrades.... They are hardy and brave, taking death with the greatest boldness, their attack is terrible...It is necessary for troops to have presence of mind and coolness in order not to be frightened at the first approach and to resist afterwards.³⁴

Colonel Moktar observed that the Oromo warriors’ military instinct was one of daring and their movements organized and orderly. In any offensive the Oromo undertook, older warriors formed the frontal

line of attack, the juniors formed the rear lines, while the young warriors played an auxiliary role. In terms of courage, the Oromo might well have been the equals of the Egyptian invaders. Colonel Muhammad Moktar himself admitted that the Oromo warriors were brave men who faced “death with the greatest boldness.”³⁵ The Oromo soldiers outnumbered the Egyptians and their knowledge and skillful use of the terrain was certainly superior to the Egyptians.

But they lacked firearms. The total monopoly of modern firearms and artillery gave the Egyptians a decisive advantage over the Oromo. The Oromo also suffered from another weakness. Each clan fought against the Egyptians in defense of its land and freedom. They neglected the formation of a united front against the common enemy. For instance, the leaders of the Afran Qallo government did not mobilize their forces fast enough to come to the assistance of the Nole Oromo, who engaged the Egyptians first. Neither did the leaders of them rally all able-bodied men in defense of a common interest nor adopted guerrilla tactics, which could have minimized the carnage of Egyptian firepower. The Oromo went on fighting a conventional warfare, which exposed them to the deadly Egyptian firepower. For their failure to adapt their war strategy to the new dynamic of the battlefield, the Oromo paid in blood and loss of freedom.

A few days after his arrival in Harer, Rauf Pasha executed Emir Muhammad³⁶ and established direct Egyptian colonial administration in the city. The news of the execution of the emir angered the Oromo. Soon they surrounded the city on all sides. Besieged within the wall of Harer, Rauf Pasha requested urgent rein-

forcement from Egypt. Meanwhile, he invited Oromo leaders who lived within thirty-kilometer radius of the city of Harer to come into the city for “peaceful negotiations” and “rich reward.”³⁷ Unsuspecting of Rauf Pasha’s trap, several Oromo leaders from around the city entered Harer through the gate, but they never had a chance to walk through again. They were quickly disarmed and imprisoned. Rauf Pasha demanded of his Oromo prisoners to accept Islam, submit to Egyptian administration, and become agents of Egyptian rule. Though prisoners, the Oromo leaders flatly rejected Egyptian colonial administration. The prisoners chose to face death rather than compromise the freedom of their people. Consequently, they were all executed by Rauf Pasha. By choosing to face the firing squad rather than surrender, they left a rich legacy of resistance against foreign rule.³⁸

Encouraged by the trick with which he was able to lure the elected Oromo leaders and liquidate the threat they posed, and buttressed with the reinforcements that swelled his force by thousands of men, Rauf Pasha set out to on the pacify the surrounding Oromo. In 1876 alone the Egyptians fought three major battles against the Oromo. The first battle was fought in the Nole country at a place called Dire Gofile (the field of the skull) where the Egyptians inflicted heavy losses on the Oromo. The second battle was fought in the region of Mount Qundudo, the Oromo were again defeated. The third and the most decisive battle was fought at Chircha, in the region of Gaara Mulata. The battle was a real disaster for the Oromo. Orfo Jilo, the president of the Afran Qallo *caffee* assembly, was taken prisoner while Balla Bubba, the *abba duula* (“father of war”) and

Chamma Nur, the *abba seera* (“father of law”), together with several other leaders were killed in this battle. In short, the leadership of the Afran Qallo government was decimated at the battle of Chircha in 1876. After the liquidation of the democratically elected government, the Egyptians rapidly proceeded with the destruction of the *gadaa* system itself and the Oromo rightly felt that they were “robbed of their birth right”³⁹ to rule themselves.

After their repeated victories, the Egyptians embarked on large scale Islamization of the Oromo. Muslim teachers and preachers were sent into the conquered areas, mosques were built, and the Oromo were forcibly converted to Islam. After converting their famous prisoner, Orfo Jilo, to Islam, the Egyptians gave him the name of Umar and restored him to power in the Gaara Mulata area, located about 60 to 90 kilometers to the southwest of Harer, not as the president of Afran Qallo *caffee* assembly but as an agent of the Egyptian colonial administration. After his conversion, Orfo became the main instrument for the Egyptian proselytization, particularly in the Gaara Mulata area. He punished or confiscated the property of those who did not observe the Muslim prayer. To this day, people say, “Salata Orfo sodaa qotto Allahu Akibar,” literally, ‘Orfo’s prayer for the fear of the axe: Allah is great’.⁴⁰

For the first time in their history, the Oromo of Harerge lost their sovereignty and independence along with control over their land and destiny. Their indigenous system of government, the *gadaa* system, destroyed and their leadership liquidated, or co-opted, they became colonial subjects, who were no longer proud, feared, or respected as a free people. Their territory was occupied,

albeit temporarily, and their traditional religion replaced by Islam, imposed on them by military means.

Their military victories and the imposition of Islam on the Oromo enabled the Egyptians to establish their authority within 70 kilometers radius of the city. That was the furthest limit of Egyptian administration. However, the area under Egyptian administration was extensively surveyed and their ownership registered. The Egyptian administration proclaimed that the “right to the soil was vested in the Khedive” and occupiers could only retain their lands on purchase from the government. After the local people paid the first price, the Egyptian administration issued an edict announcing that all lands were to be considered as divided into two portions, private and government property, and they had to be re-bought by the local population.⁴¹ The process was repeated four times during the ten years of the occupation. Egyptian soldiers were given the best lands, where they introduced new vegetables, fruits, and cereals. It is interesting to note that Zewade Gebra Sellasie rightly states, “the settlement of Egyptians on economically viable plots might be good practice in colonization.”⁴²

For administrative purposes, the Egyptians grouped the Oromo into villages and appointed 11,829 malaq (village chief) and garads (chief of several village chiefs) to administer them. Over these, they appointed about 500 Oromo damin (governor of a whole clan). At the top of this hierarchy were 45 appointed dogin (governor of several clans), who were always Hareri. All of the offices were hereditary. This means that the Egyptian colonial administration dealt a severe blow to the Afan Qallo *gadaa* system, as they replaced elected leaders with hereditary chiefs, who were owners of

property. Essentially the appointed Oromo leaders became the agents of Egyptian colonial administration charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order, and for collecting taxes.

The Egyptians introduced two types of taxation among the Oromo. The first was the zakat (a tenth), collected at harvest time in kind. The second was the land tax, which was determined on the quality of the soil varying from six to eleven piastres (Egyptian currency). The appointed Oromo chiefs with Egyptian military support collected both the zakat and land tax, though the Oromo always resisted paying taxes to the Egyptian colonial administration. In 1884, their resistance was so serious that the over 8,000-man strong Egyptian army was besieged within the city wall itself. Confined in the city, the Egyptians neither maintained law and order in the areas they administered nor collected taxes from the 200,000 Oromo they claimed to have ruled.⁴³ With little local revenue, maintaining the Egyptian contingent in Harer became a serious drain on the Egyptian treasury, amounting to tens of thousands of pounds annually.⁴⁴ The fear of Oromo attacks on the city, coupled with the expenses of maintaining a besieged force in Harer, while dealing with problems in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, forced the Egyptians to withdraw their forces from Harer. The last of the retreating 8,359 Egyptian forces arrived in Zeila on 15 June 1885.⁴⁵

THE AFTERMATH: EMIR ABDULLAHI (1885-1887) AND THE OROMO

Major Hunter, the British officer who organized the Egyptian withdrawal from Harer, arranged for the

restoration of Harari rule in the city. At the same time, beyond the city, the Egyptian withdrawal temporarily restored independence to both the Oromo and the city-state of Harer. Immediately after the Egyptian withdrawal, the Oromo restored their *gadaa* government under the leadership of Orfo Jilo, who had been democratically elected as *abba bokkunu* in 1872. In Harer, with the help of Lieutenant Patton, the British Resident Officer, Abdullahi, the eldest son of Emir Muhammad was proclaimed emir of the Muslim city-state of Harer.⁴⁶ The Egyptians selected Abdullahi at the last minute primarily because of his religious education and his popularity with the Muslim educated class in the city of Harer. Although his father was a famous Oromo leader, Emir Abdullahi began his reign “with a struggle against the Oromo.”⁴⁷

The reason for the conflict lies in the emir’s personality. The new emir was a devout Muslim, who wanted to spread Islam among the Oromo by force. Even the Egyptians who had formidable firepower were not entirely successful in imposing Islam upon the Oromo, except in areas where they were able to use converted Oromo leaders for spreading Islam. Shortly after the Egyptians evacuated, the Oromo in the Babile region, to the east of the city, refused to acknowledge the new emir’s authority. Faced with his first challenge, Abdullahi sent his troops against the Oromo. According to Paulitscke, a German scholar who was in Harer in 1885, Abdullahi’s soldiers were defeated and retreated into the city, leaving behind their horses and their baggage.⁴⁸ Unconvinced by this defeat, Abdullahi personally led another military expedition, but, once again, failed to subdue the Oromo. Emir Abdullahi

lacked both military force and tact in dealing with the Oromo. Because of his religious zeal, Abdullahi issued a decree according to which any woman found unfaithful to her husband was to be sold at a public auction.⁴⁹ Such fanaticism turned even more Muslim Oromo against him.

The new emir faced a serious challenge from Orfo Jilo, who rebelled against Egyptian colonial administration in 1884. Emir Abdullahi led his army against Orfo Jilo, but failed to defeat him. In fact, Abdullahi unsuccessfully appealed to the Harari, Somali, and the Issa to fight against the Oromo.⁵⁰ Emir Abdullahi was forced to make peace with the Oromo. The most important component in the agreement he reached with the Oromo was that the latter will return to their traditional government and that they will not attack the city. This was mainly because the Egyptian withdrawal from Harer coincided with the revival of *gadaa* government among the Oromo.

Orfo Jilo, the former Egyptian appointee who had been elected to his as the *abba bokkum* in 1872 remained a Muslim and supported the idea of a new election for an Afran Qallo government. Because he decided for himself to continue in office beyond his term of eight years, the proposed election nevertheless never took place. The sources are silent as to why the election did not take place. However, careful observation of the situation leads us to conclude four factors may have influenced the course of events. First, the effects of the ten years of Egyptian administration had created a leadership crisis within the *gadaa* system, rendering impossible resumption of the traditional form of government. Second, the spread of Islam in some areas

may have created a new ideological orientation that may have not been conducive for organizing a new election. Third, the large contingent of landowners that the Egyptians created to facilitate their indirect rule probably opposed a new election. Finally, Menelik's invasion of Harer in 1887 effectively sealed off any chance of revival of the Oromo *gadaa* government and independence, thus making a return to an elective government implausible.⁵¹

Perhaps Menelik was aware of the tumultuous situation in Harer and spent little time before he made his move. The fate of Emir Abdullahi, inexperienced in administration and organization, was sealed before he could have mounted a strong resistance. He declared jihad on non-Muslim Oromo, which sapped the resources of the city. His embroilment with the Somali and European merchants, his fear of the British, the French, the Italians and Menelik, caused him to revert to the emirate's old isolationist policy.⁵² Emir Abdullahi's annihilation of the Italian commercial expedition in April 1886, gave King Menelik of Shawa the pretext he had been waiting for to launch his conquest of Harer, which will be the subject of another article in the near future.

NOTES

1. This article is based partly on my paper, Mohammed Hassen, "Menelik's Conquest of Harer, 1887, and its effect on the political organization of the surrounding Oromo up to 1900," in *Working Papers on Society and History in Imperial Ethiopia*, eds., D.L. Donham and Wendy James (Cambridge University, 1980), 227-246. I have also drawn heavily on my senior essay, Moham-

- med Hassen, "The Relations between Harar and Surrounding Oromo between 1800-1887" (BA. thesis, Addis Abeba University, 1973).
2. Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 194.
 3. *Ibid.*, 197-98.
 4. Bairu Tafla, ed. *Asma Giyorgis and His Work History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Sawa* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1987), 135.
 5. Hassen, "Menelik's Conquest of Harer, 1887," 231.
 6. Martial de Salviac, *An Ancient People Great African Nation The Oromo*. Translation from the Original French Edition by Ayalew Kanno (East Lansing: Michigan: self published, 2005), 212.
 7. *Ibid.*
 8. *Ibid.*, 217.
 9. Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia*, 15.
 10. de Salviac, 217.
 11. Mohammed Hassen, "Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution among the Oromo" *The Oromo Commentary* 1:1 (January-April 1991): 19.
 12. Antoine d'Abbadie, "On the Oromo: Great African Nation Often Designated under the Name 'Galla'" Translation from original French by Ayalew Kanno. *Journal of Oromo Studies* 14:1 (February/March 2007): 130.
 13. Mohammed Hassen, "The Significance of Antoine d'Abbadie in Oromo Studies," *Journal of Oromo Studies* 14: 1 (February/March 2007): 153.
 14. Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia*, 15.
 15. Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis and His Work*, 181.
 16. *Ibid.*, 130.
 17. *Ibid.*, 134.

18. Hassen, "The Significance of Antoine d'Abbadie," 153.
19. Virginia Luling, "Government and Social Control among Some Peoples of the Horn of Africa" (MA thesis, University of London, 1966), 87.
20. de Salviac, 213.
21. *Ibid.*, 213-214.
22. *Ibid.*, 217.
23. Muhammad Moktar, "Notes sur le pays de Harer," *Bulletin de la Société Khédiviale de Géographie* (Le Caire, 1877): 382.
24. Among the Afran Qallo group, each Oromo clan resisted Egyptians invaders. When the territory of the Afran Qallo group was occupied, the Ittu and the Anniya group did not rally to the support of the Afran Qallo. In the 1880s when the Amhara forces started invading Ittu land, the Afran Qallo and Anniya did not come to their support. For their failure to unite all Oromo groups paid in blood and loss of independence when Menelik occupied their territory in 1887.
25. Hassen, "Menelik's Conquest of Harer, 1887," 232.
26. Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, Vol. I (London: Every Man's Library, 1910), 221.
27. Harold Marcus, "Motives, Methods and Some Results of the Unification of Ethiopia during the Reign of Menilek II" *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Abeba: 1966), 47.
28. Moktar, 385.
29. Hasssen, "The Relation between Harar and the Surrounding Oromo," 19.
30. Phillipp Paulitschke. "Le Harar sous l'administration Egyptienne, 1875-1885," *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d'Égypte* II, 10(1887): 576.
31. Bedri Kabir Mohammed, "The Afran Qallo Oromo: A History" (BA thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1995), 37.

32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, 38.
34. Moktar, 386-87.
35. *Ibid.*, 387.
36. Richard Caulk, "Harar and its Neighbours in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 18: 3 (1977): 381.
37. According to Oromo tradition, Rauf Pasha, the commander of the Egyptian force promised to give rich gifts to the Oromo leaders as a kind of a tribute with which the Emirs of Harer gained the favor of elected leaders in the past.
38. Hassen, "The Relation between Harar and Surrounding Oromo," 21.
39. Taurin de Cahagne, "In der umgegend von Harar," *Mitteilungen der Geographischen Gesellschaft (Für Thüringen) zu Jena* I (1882): 81-82. Originally appeared as "Autour d'Harar," *Les Missions Catholiques* (1882): 244-6, 261-63, 270-71.
40. Hassen, "The Relation between Harar and the Surrounding Oromo," 28.
41. Hassen, "Menelik's Conquest of Harer, 1887," 233.
42. Zewade Gebra Sellasie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: A Political Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 208.
43. Caulk, "Harar and its Neighbours," 371.
44. Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopia's Independence* (London: Heinemann, 1976), 348.
45. Hassen, "Menelik's Conquest of Harer, 1887," 233.
46. Hassen, "The Relation between Harar and the Surrounding Oromo," 33.
47. *Ibid.*, 35.

48. Philipp Paulitschke, "Note per la Storia dell Harar" *Bollettino della Sezione Fiorentina della Societa Africana d'Italia* (Roma: 1886): 387.
49. *Ibid.*, 391.
50. Hassen "The Relation between Harar and Surrounding Oromo," 35-36.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Hassen, "Menlik's Conquest of Harar," 234.

LANGUAGE CHOICE IN MULTILINGUAL SOCIETIES: AN APPRAISAL OF THE ETHIOPIAN CASE

Aberra Dagafa

“Language plays a central role in life, doing much to contribute to one’s sense of identity and to determine which doors to opportunity will be open and which closed.”¹

In recent years, the number of ethnic and linguistic groups demanding respect for their languages and linguistic identities has been rising. Recognizing that the selection of a national working language that maintains a fair balance between the competing claims of the different linguistic and ethnic groups is vital to political stability. Governments in multilingual societies have adopted constitutional frameworks—though varying in approach depending on the specific realities of a particular country—to accommodate the interests

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of the various linguistic groups. In Ethiopia, the issue of language preference has been a thorny issue due to the existence of diverse linguistic groups. Prior to 1991, Ethiopian rulers responded to the issue by imposing the language of the dominant ethnic group and forcing others to assimilate into the dominant culture. The present government has designed administrative units based on language where local languages are used for administration and instruction and a constitutional framework that makes Amharic the official working language at the federal level.

This article examines the language policy of Ethiopia as reflected in the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), which has favored Amharic despite the fact that there were other languages vying for the same status. It will also show that Amharic was declared the federal working language without any consideration of such criteria as the numerical size and language neutrality that other multilingual countries have used in making their choice of a national language among several competing languages. The article will also evaluate the choice made under the FDRE Constitution in light of widely accepted international standards with the view to pointing out the possible harms the choice may cause to other language groups of Ethiopia. Finally, it will show that the flawed choice, if not rectified, will have harmful effects on the human rights of citizens and the stability of the body politic and then propose some recommendations.

SIGNIFICANCE OF LANGUAGE IN A MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY

As a unique feature of human beings, the question of language is a fundamental political issue in human

societies.² Unlike the differences of race and religion, “it is impossible for a state to remain language neutral in its communication activities or in its contacts with the public.”³ The different state institutions, including the courts and their officials, cannot avoid making use of one of the languages for official purposes. This would automatically mean that the state must select one or two languages, inevitably privileging one language group over another. For a linguistic community, its language is the storehouse of its values, culture, and history that plays a vital role in the life of the speakers in determining “which doors to opportunity will be open and which closed.”⁴ Where proficiency in a given language is a requirement for access to employment in the public sector, the ability or inability to speak or write that particular language could have either beneficial or detrimental consequences. Indeed, in a government agency where a certain level of proficiency in a language is mandatory, those who do not meet the requirement are put at an obvious disadvantage or even discrimination.⁵ Conversely, speakers of the working language enjoy an unfair advantage in employment in national institutions and are more likely to reach higher echelons of the state machinery.⁶

The choice of language is also an issue of human rights. As Fernand de Varennes keenly observes, language “is one of the passions of our time—at once a powerful focus for uniting people who share a common language, and a potential source of fission and discord in the community at large.”⁷ It can serve both as a source of conflict and unity depending on how the language problem in a given country is handled. Besides, in view of the fact that it is only through the skilled and

proficient use of language that one gets access to economic and social opportunities, success or even survival in the modern world has become dependent on language.⁸ Hence, why people strongly fight for their linguistic rights and the negative consequences of disregarding linguistic rights by states have to be correctly viewed to comprehend the advantages attached to the observance of linguistic rights. The fact that a national working language can be a barrier to those who cannot speak it and a bridge for those who speak it has to be honestly acknowledged.

Linguistic groups want to use their languages and reasonably expect public services delivered in their own languages.⁹ From human rights perspective, every linguistic group wants its cultural rights to be respected. In actual fact, no linguistic group wants to voluntarily relinquish its language since language is considered an essential mark of identity and a resource. Deprivation of language rights not only restrains the freedom of expression but it also hinders the freedom of movement for members of linguistic groups. Robert Philipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas strongly insist that:

- *linguistic rights are one type of human right* and as such one intricately interlocking element in a set of inalienable, universal norms for just enjoyment of one's civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights;
- *depriving people of their human rights leads to conflict.* If the rights of minorities are respected, there is less likelihood of conflict. Linguistic diversity is not causally related to conflict, though of course

language is a major mobilizing factor in contexts where an ethnic group feels itself threatened.¹⁰

From a human rights perspective, any attempt to brutally suppress languages through assimilation is an offense to human cultural dignity. Where a person's linguistic human rights are violated, his/her self-respect is damaged. A given language is a storehouse of the history and culture of a particular ethnic group, and as such, an essential mark of the identity of an ethnic group.

Protecting these rights is now a cardinal principle in the world. Article 26 of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law.¹¹ Under Article 25, the ICCPR guarantees every citizen's right to take part in the conduct of public affairs and to have access to public service in his/her country. Furthermore, Article 27 guarantees the rights of persons belonging to an ethnic and linguistic group to enjoy their own culture and to use their own language. If these rights are violated, persons belonging to a given linguistic and cultural groups are denied the opportunity to take part in the conduct of public affairs and have access to public services.

Moreover, the violation of linguistic human rights is a morally unjustifiable and socially humiliating act that is sure to provoke resistance and revolt. The necessity of respecting the inherent dignity, the equal and inalienable rights of all peoples for the realization of freedom, justice, and peace in the world was declared by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948. This Declaration acknowledges the

fact that “disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind.”¹² Linguistic wrongs come about “when languages are marginalized and deprived of resources or recognition, when language shift is imposed on individuals and groups.”¹³

Therefore, the desire to linguistically homogenize populations has to be reasonably evaluated against potential consequences to the different linguistic groups who legitimately seek language equality and to the stability and harmony of the society. In a multilingual society, such harmony can come about only where there are mutual respect and reciprocity and where people learn each other’s language.¹⁴ Ethnic conflicts involving language “occur not where language compromise is made or language rights are recognized, but where they have been avoided, suppressed or ignored.”¹⁵ Recognition and protection of language rights “can serve to unite societies, whereas violations of language rights can trigger and inflame conflict”.¹⁶

CRITERIA FOR LANGUAGE CHOICE IN MULTILINGUAL STATES

General Principles

In multilingual societies, where there are several competing languages, it is not a common practice to arbitrarily pick one language and declare it the working language at the national or regional level. According to Jyotrindra Das Gupta, “when a new state faces the problem of competing languages; one response may be to *suppress this competition and to impose one over the others*”¹⁷ (emphasis add). Such a policy of suppressing competition by imposing one language over others may

succeed only where it faces little or no political challenges. This response rarely succeeds since the speakers of the other competing languages will very likely resist the suppression, leading to the disturbance of peace and harmony in a multilingual society.¹⁸ The process of planning and adopting a language policy, particularly in multilingual states, is fraught with danger. An arbitrary decision often increases the chance of failure. According to Cesar A. Hidalgo, “in a society characterized by cultural pluralism where there are over two hundred ethno linguistic groups... regional recalcitrance towards the national language, and a colonial past that continues to influence language issues, language choice poses all kinds of problems.”¹⁹ In short, in the context of multilingual states, language choice cannot be arbitrary. Hence, the challenge that all multilingual societies face in making a choice of working language is to find a workable balance between the competing claims of the different linguistic groups on the one hand and that of the state, which seeks the expediency of a single, working language in a multilingual society.²⁰

While selecting one or more working languages is a practical necessity, having a single working language in a society composed of different ethnic groups could facilitate inter-ethnic communications and encourage unity. It is equally important to ensure that the rights to language equality of different linguistic groups whose languages have not been chosen were not compromised. It is quite difficult to assess the extent of the inconvenience the choice of one language may cause to those groups of people whose language has not been chosen in so far as “language can affect access to jobs and powers.”²¹ In any case, the act of the state has

to be judged based on how the choice was made, that is, whether or not the process was reasonable and fair or arbitrary.²²

As much as possible, where there is a need to give preference to one language over others, the consequent burdens or problems to the non-speakers of the state-preferred language should be considered. Whatever explanation is offered, when a state selects a single language as a working language for a multilingual society, there is no avoidance of an interpretation that the state is “signaling the dominance of those for whom the official or state-favored language is the mother tongue.”²³ Therefore, in choosing a working language, it is necessary that a fair balance be made between “the general interests of the nation and the protection and respect of the rights of individuals who primarily use a different language”²⁴ than the state-preferred one. In his famous work, *Study on the Rights of Persons belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, Francisco Capotorti has summarized as follows the major factors normally taken into account when language choice is made.

The selection of a language as a national official language is primarily a political decision based on a number of factors, such as the *numerical importance* of the respective linguistic communities, their *political and economic position* within the country concerned, (...) particularly in the developing countries, the stage of the *development of the minority language* as an effective means of wide communication in all fields.²⁵ (Emphasis added)

According to Capotorti, along with the number of speakers of a given language, the other main factors to be taken into account in the choice of a working language are the political and economic positions of

the concerned linguistic community and the development of the language all of which are more or less objective criteria in designating a language as an official language at a national level. Normally, when there are a large number of speakers of a language, they are likely to demand certain types of public services in their language, which the government should make available in the interest of fairness and stability.²⁶

The number of the speakers of a certain language in proportion to the general population of a country (proportionality rule) is one of the indispensable factors that have to be taken into account in selecting a national working language. Acknowledging the importance of numerical size of a given population of users of a language, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages has employed what is called the “*sliding –scale model*” in which, “the bottom end of the scale suggesting the minimum right which members of a smaller, though sufficiently numerous, linguistic minority can expect, whereas the higher end of the scale includes much more generous rights, in recognition of the much larger number of individuals involved.”²⁷ According to this model, in a society where there are diverse linguistic groups a language group is justified in demanding and receiving government services at least in proportion to its size in the country. As rightly stated by Fernand de Varennnes, “a state would normally be unjustified in not granting more services in a given language as the number of beneficiaries increases.”²⁸

In addition to those specified criteria, in countries where two or more languages are competing for the status of a national working language, “a neutral lan-

guage”²⁹ is sometimes given preference as a working language in order to avoid the dominance of one group and the ensuing inconveniences for other language groups. The language has to be equally neutral to all the linguistic groups in the sense that no group is privileged or burdened as a result of the preference.

Constitutional Practices

As stated in the previous part, when making a language choice the competing interests and legitimate claims of the different linguistic groups have to be reasonably addressed to avoid ethnolinguistic rivalries and conflicts. In this regard, the constitutional practices³⁰ of a number of multilingual countries show that the concerned States have tried to resolve the problem of national working language choice in various ways depending on their own particular situations. As will be shown, in one way or another almost all have tried to apply certain rules to justify their preferences. Eventually, lots of multilingual states have managed to resolve ethnolinguistic conflicts by adopting formulas that are mutually acceptable to the competing groups.

In his study, Francisco Capotorti has identified a number of constitutional approaches followed by multilingual states to resolve the problem of choosing a national working language.³¹ The first model is the one adopted by Switzerland, which declared national or official all the languages spoken by the main linguistic groups.³² In Switzerland, the German-speaking group constitutes 75.5 percent, the French 20 percent, the Italian 4 percent, and the Romansh less than 1 percent.³³ Following more or less, the Swiss model, Belgium has given all the three linguistic groups (French, Dutch,

Flemish) the status of official working language at the federal level.³⁴

Outside Europe, Singapore has declared English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil as official languages regardless of the numerical size of the country's linguistic groups under Articles 44(2) and 53 of its Constitution of 16 September 1963. Similarly, in Fiji, English, Fijian, and Hindustani have been given equal status as official languages, without sanctioning that all these languages be used by government offices.³⁵ The Republic of South Africa may also be included into this category. The official languages of the Republic of South Africa are eleven in number, including English.³⁶ In South Africa, the Zulu, the most numerous linguistic group, comprises 23 percent of the national population while Ndebele is spoken by 1.3 percent but the constitution has given recognition to eleven languages regardless of the great numerical gap among the speakers.³⁷ In the Republic of South Africa, all official languages enjoy parity of recognition but here again the government is not obliged to use them in all cases. The recognition has important symbolic value which aims at showing the sincere attempt of the government to ensure that no particular language is dominant in legal terms.

Another approach is the one adopted by Canada, Finland, and New Zealand, where only some minority languages are declared official at the federal level.³⁸ Based on Article 133 of the Constitution Act of 29 March 1867 and Articles 14 and 16 of the modified Constitution Act of 17 April 1982, Canada recognizes English and French as official languages.³⁹ In Finland, Finnish and Swedish are declared national languages,⁴⁰ though Swedish speakers constitute less than 10 percent

of the total population in Finland.⁴¹ In its Constitution adopted on 31 August 1978, Sri Lanka has recognized Sinhala, Tamil, and English as official languages.⁴²

There are some multilingual countries which have opted for English as a neutral language to all linguistic groups. This move has come as a compromise to overcome political difficulties in selecting an indigenous language acceptable to all linguistic groups. Indeed, this group of multilingual countries shares a common experience of colonial rule. Among these countries, some have designated a foreign language, an indigenous or both languages as official at the federal level and limited the use of minority languages to the regional level.⁴³ Included in this category are India,⁴⁴ Nigeria⁴⁵ Malaysia⁴⁶, Pakistan⁴⁷ and the Philippines.⁴⁸ If we take India as an example, Hindi, as the largest language community consisting of 28 percent of the population, according to the census of 1971, had the strongest claim to be the official working language.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, other groups refused to recognize its claim and refused to endorse it as the official language of India.⁵⁰ Eventually, as Vernon van Dyke observed, in the case of India, the difficulties attending the selection of one or a few indigenous languages “worked in favor of English despite sentiment against it.”⁵¹ In India, English has been taken as a link language between the states where different indigenous languages are used as the working language.

In Nigeria, the potential dominance of three major languages favored the adoption of English as the official language. Linguistic minorities objected to the official status of Nigeria’s three major languages, Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo, reckoning that declaring any one or

all of them as official languages would give the three ethnic groups undue advantage over other minorities in the country. As observed by A. N. Aniagolu, "rather than live to see Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo languages used in the National Assembly, they [groups other than the three] would let English language be used as the official language in Nigeria forever, even if that meant the banishment of all Nigerian languages from the Nigerian National Assembly."⁵² From their point of view, the major languages were not politically neutral and English was deemed a logical compromise.

When generally viewed, the constitutional practices in most of the multilingual countries examined so far suggest that the concerned linguistic communities resolved the issue of language choice by adopting mutually acceptable standards and thus succeeded in avoiding serious ethnic tensions and conflicts. In a few of these countries, the major competing languages have all been given equal recognition and status at the national level. In some others, the principle of neutrality has been resorted to as a compromise. The standards laid down by Capotorti have also been employed in the majority of the cases.⁵³ The *sliding-scale model* and the principle of proportionality have been used to determine those languages to be given the status of official language at the national level and limit others to the regional level. In one way or another, each of the countries seems to have recognized the need to balance the states' legitimate interests and goals in choosing certain languages, with the resultant disadvantages this preference may create on those linguistic groups not speaking the preferred languages. Though the outcome is not perfect, all of these countries have, to a significant

extent, have been guided by the principle of fairness in their choice of a national working language.

ETHIOPIAN LANGUAGE CHOICE *VIS-À-VIS* INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

Ethnolinguistic Profile of Ethiopia

In most of the countries where there is language dominance, the “dominance has its origin in conquest, military and political subjugation, and economic exploitation.”⁵⁴ Ethiopia is a multiethnic society brought together and maintained by force of arms. Historically, successive Ethiopian rulers, considering multiculturalism a threat to national unity, have pursued a strategy of assimilation, imposing on others the language of the ruling ethnic group, to forge a linguistically and culturally homogenous Ethiopia out of a heterogeneous society. In this sense, the dominance and expansion of Amharic was attributable to conquest and political subjugation. To strengthen their dominant position and execute their aspiration of creating linguistically homogenous Ethiopia, the rulers have produced laws that legitimized the inherent injustice of the way Amharic was given a dominant position in the country.

In 1944, a decree was issued for the purpose of controlling the activities of missionaries in Ethiopia. Article 13 of the decree declared Amharic as “the general language of instruction throughout Ethiopia...which all missionaries will be expected to learn.”⁵⁵ In an attempt to pursue the policy of assimilation, Emperor Haile Sellassie tried “to erase the identities of non-Amhara nations and nationalities in the name

of Ethiopian unity.”⁵⁶ The hegemony of Amharic was officially established with the promulgation of a constitution in 1955.⁵⁷

The Amharic language was legally imposed on all non-Amharic speaking ethnic and linguistic groups.⁵⁸ As a result, many non-Amharas came to view Amharic as a symbol of repression.⁵⁹ Indeed, Amharic came to attain its present status at the expense of other Ethiopian languages. For instance, during the rule of Menelik and Haile Sellassie “the official use of the Oromo language was prohibited,”⁶⁰ giving rise to such extreme form of language discrimination which Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas refer to as “language murder, since it has frequently been a conscious policy of the dominant group to eliminate minority languages.”⁶¹ Eventually, “Amharic and Amhara culture became the essential attributes of being Ethiopian.”⁶² What is more, “fluent Amharic and an Amhara way of life” became “pre-requisites for entry to government employment” which was and still is “almost the only employer of schooled labour.”⁶³ The net result of this assimilation-oriented policy was the creation of a sense of shame on the non-Amharic speaking linguistic groups of Ethiopia.

This historical injustice was never redressed, even by a government that purports to have made reversing past injustices a priority. The principle of proportionality was never applied at least to grant recognition to language groups. Census of 1994 shows distribution by ethnic groups of the 53 million total population of the country. Based on the 1994 Census, the ethnic and linguistic distribution available to the Constituent Assembly that drafted the present Ethiopian Constitu-

tion, which made Amharic the sole national working language, is shown as follows.⁶⁴

Table 1. Ethnic and Linguistic Distribution of the 1994 Census

	Number	Percentage
Oromo	17, 080.318	32.15
Amhara	16.007.933	30.13
Tigray	3.284.568	6.18
Somali	3.160.540	5.95
Gurage	2.290.274	4.31
Sidama	1.842.314	3.47
Wolaita	1.269.216	2.39

Based on this census, Oromo is the largest linguistic group in Ethiopia, followed by the Amhara.⁶⁵ Numerically the speakers of both languages are considerable even though there has always been suspicion that the censuses have been skewed in favor of the Amhara for political reasons. The estimates of the Oromo population in particular have always been controversial.⁶⁶ In any case, in view of the fact that these two languages have a large number of speakers in the country, there is evidently a compelling reason for the government to reasonably look into the linguistic claims of these linguistic groups.

Despite the fact that they constitute the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, historically the Oromo “had little influence and representation within the Ethiopian/Abyssinian State in proportion to their size and the vast area of Oromia.”⁶⁷ In fact, because of their numerical size and rich resources⁶⁸ the Oromo are considered a threat to the hegemony of the dominant ethnic groups. In connection with this it has been

stated, “if the Oromo people obtain only a portion of the freedom which they seek then the balance of political power in Ethiopia will be completely altered.”⁶⁹

To maintain the status quo, past Ethiopian rulers have been “consistent with the aim of promoting Amharic as the national language of Ethiopia”⁷⁰ They have declared Amharic as an official language of the country by law and given it a legal protection to consolidate and maintain its dominant position.⁷¹ Undoubtedly, the policy of assimilation had resulted in the establishment of unjustified linguistic discrimination. It was primarily this total disregard of the languages of a large portion of the country’s population that led to the nation-wide ethnic conflict that overwhelmed the *derg*⁷² and brought about its downfall.

Based on the proportionality rule and in terms of their geographical position, and Oromia’s natural resources, Oromos are entitled to obtain better treatment than they have received in the past.⁷³ What has the FDRE Constitution done to attenuate the effects of the assimilationist policy of the imperial (to 1974) and *derg* (1974-1991) regimes? Have the different linguistic groups, including the Oromos, obtained what their numerical, economic and political position justifies? An appraisal of the language preference made in the FDRE Constitution is the main concern of the following sub-section.

Evaluation of the F.D.R.E. Language Preference

Justifications for the Preference of Amharic

In its preamble, the new Federal Constitution of Ethiopia declares that the makers of the constitution, the Ethiopian people, were cognizant of the fact that

their, “common destiny can best be served by *rectifying historically unjust relationships* and by further promoting [*their*] shared interests”⁷⁴(*emphasis added*). The constitution has ordained in its preamble the correction of historical wrongs, which includes the elimination of all linguistic wrongs that had given undue benefits and privileges to one linguistic group but burdened the majority with problems. In fact, when adopted, the FDRE Constitution limited the supremacy enjoyed by Amharic at the national level by recognizing the equality of all Ethiopian languages and by accepting the rights of members of the Federation to determine their respective working languages.⁷⁵ In so far as it gave recognition to other languages, at least at the regional level, one can say the FDRE Constitution has broken the continuity of the centuries-old hegemony of Amharic.

Article 5(2) of the FDRE Constitution provides that Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Government. The members of the Constituent Assembly that adopted the constitution offered some general explanations for selecting Amharic.⁷⁶ Most of the speakers at the assembly stated that Amharic has become the most widely spoken language due to historical chance, though they declined to say anything further on how pure chance could be rationalized to justify their decision to perpetuate linguistic injustice.⁷⁷ Some speakers, particularly from the southern parts of the country, have expressed their emotion towards the cruel and repressive method used to expand Amharic and give it dominance.⁷⁸ None of the speakers at the assembly bothered to consider what possible consequences the continuance of Amharic as a federal

working language at the national level may involve. Astonishingly, the assembly disregarded entirely the thought of considering whether or not there were competitors with Amharic for the status of a working language at the national level.

Another important attribute of Amharic discussed at the Constituent Assembly was that it is the most developed language in Ethiopia.⁷⁹ Perhaps it is relatively the most developed language of administration in Ethiopia, but Amharic had limitations as a modern language of technology and science. Besides, the participants of the Assembly failed to evaluate Amharic against the potential of other languages to develop. In the end, they all underlined the fact that a federal working language is compulsory and endorsed Amharic as the only federal working language. In view of the fact that the declaration of Amharic as the only acceptable working language at the national level was made, in spite of the existence of rival languages competing for the status and without regard for established processes from the experiences of other countries, it is necessary to assess whether the action has obviated the possibilities of conflict and social disharmony.

Critical Assessment of the Choice

Our analysis of language policies in many countries has shown that some ethnic groups have been accorded a level of importance quite out of proportion to the number of speakers. In none of the cases nevertheless was an indigenous language arbitrarily declared an official language nor was a majority language group denied official status unless adoption of a neutral language was necessitated by political reality. In contrast to the principles and practices of fair-

ness that several multilingual counties have followed, a majority language group is denied its rightful status in Ethiopia under the present constitutional set up.⁸⁰ Article 5(2) of the FDRE Constitution enables those who have a good knowledge of Amharic to have more access to different opportunities like better jobs with the government. On the other hand anyone who is not proficient in Amharic will seriously be disadvantaged to that extent. In order to correct the linguistic wrongs that have been committed in the past, the supremacy of Amharic language established by historical accident and maintained by force should have been given up to a reasonable extent.

In view of the fact that language preference has always been a chronic problem in Ethiopia, the Constituent Assembly should not have disregarded the tragedy and bitterness that have resulted from language inequality and discrimination. The struggle for language rights has always aimed at “the task of rectifying some linguistic wrongs and granting to less favored languages some of the support that is the rule for dominant languages.”⁸¹ However, the decision of the Constituent Assembly has left intact the privileges Amharic-speakers have always enjoyed at the national level. To the extent that Amharic-speakers have maintained the hegemonic status they have always enjoyed, historical wrongs have not been rectified.

Furthermore, as demonstrated by the constitutional practices of most multilingual states, the status of languages in a given society needs to take into account the number of speakers and the political and economic power of a linguistic group in the society. In the case of Ethiopia, Amharic does meet the numerical

requirement since it has a significant number of speakers.⁸² Obviously, this makes it one of the candidates for preference as an official language at the national level. On this account, the ground for favoring Amharic as the only working language is not explicable.

As stated by Capotorti, another factor taken into account for preferring a certain language is that the preferred language has to be *linguistically related to the various local languages* of the country.⁸³ Amharic belongs to the Semitic language group. If we compare the numerical size of the major Cushitic groups and Semitic groups, they come out as follows:⁸⁴

Table 2. Distribution of Cushitic Languages in Ethiopia

Ethnic Group	Population	Percent
Oromos	17,080,318	32.13
Sidama	1,842,314	3.47
Somali	3,160,540	5.95
Total	22,083,172	41.55

Table 3. Distribution of Semitic Languages in Ethiopia

Ethnic Group	Population	Percent
Amhara	16, 007, 933	30.13
Tigray	3, 284, 568	6.18
Gurage	2, 290, 274	4.31
Total	21,582,775	40.42

It is evident from the given figures that the Cushitic language group by itself constitutes more than 41 percent of the total population of Ethiopia. Together with the Omotic and other non-Semitic lan-

guage groups, they account for about 60 percent of the total population. Both the Cushitic and Omotic language groups are linguistically unrelated to the Semitic language group. Therefore, Amharic would be a difficult language to learn for the majority of the Ethiopian population whose languages are not related with Amharic.

In terms of the *economic and political strength*, Amharic speakers may as well be one of the competing groups for choice but not the only one. The political dominance of Amharic in Ethiopia in the past and at present is obvious. Economically, for example, the Amhara Region is the second largest in terms of national harvest of cereals and pulses in the country next to Oromia.⁸⁵ The *level of development of a particular language to be used as a language of education and literature* may as well be one of the measurements for giving preference to a language. In this respect, Amharic has comparative advantage to other languages. Incidentally, this was one of the justifications brought up by members of the Constituent Assembly for selecting Amharic. But even then, Amharic language has not as yet acquired the status of being a fully developed language of science and technology.

Other than those factors already considered Philipson and Skutnab-Kangas have identified some other factors which may possibly be taken into account in the choice of a working language. In their view,

if one is concerned about the reality or risk of linguistic dominance, it is essential to analyze the academic and political discourse legitimating choice of particular language for internal purposes (e.g. national unity, modernization, technological advance) and for external

purposes (e.g. trade, geopolitical links, continental ‘integration’, ‘international understanding’), and to identify the interests served by particular languages.⁸⁶

From the perspectives of *internal purposes*, such as the role of Amharic for *national unity, modernity and technological advance*, factors cited as way of legitimating the preference, Amharic does not have a stronger claim than other languages. Despite more than a century of a privileged position, Amharic has not forged national unity or achieved modernization or technological advance. The successive Ethiopian rulers have unsuccessfully strived to build the Ethiopian nation for over a century. The experience of other countries has shown that “nation-building through ethnic homogenization has rarely been successful; domination by one ethnic group provides no long-term stability.”⁸⁷ Stability comes only where and when there is harmony in the society and this is based on shared values and reciprocity. In terms of *external purposes*, by way of advancing trade, geopolitical links, continental integration or international understanding, the language does not have much to offer. Since the language is not spoken far and wide outside Ethiopian borders, its potential for promoting trade with neighboring countries, its role in geopolitical links, continental integration, and international understanding is negligible.

Hence, in view of the fact that there are other rival languages in Ethiopia competing for the status of a federal working language and more importantly, in light of the factors stated earlier, the choice of Amharic as the sole federal working language appears to be an unjustifiable decision. The effect of the decision has privileged the speakers of the favored language

and disadvantaged non-speakers. As a consequence, Amharic-speakers will continue to have a privileged access to employment and upward mobility at the federal level.⁸⁸ In the past, as a result of the assimilation-oriented policy, the civil service and the entire state bureaucracy has been dominated by the Amhara. The new constitution, instead of rectifying the past linguistic domination, has endorsed the continuation of an unjustifiable single language domination. On the whole, the drafters of the FDRE Constitution have disregarded the numerical factor or the proportionality approach, which is a well-established part of the principle of '*ethno linguistic democracy*'.⁸⁹

Language preference in a multilingual society will have considerable economic consequences, which makes it a politically sensitive issue. While the dominance of Amharic in the Federal capital and many of the urban areas serves as a bridge even for the uneducated Amharas, it is a barrier for uneducated speakers of other languages, since they cannot easily move out of their areas without having learned Amharic first. It is a vicious cycle that privileges Amharic speakers while it denies non-speakers opportunities outside their own area. In denying a numerically large linguistic group its legitimate entitlements a state would do injustice that could normally incite ethnic tensions and conflicts.

Likewise, in the Ethiopian case, the effect of this unjustified and unfair choice of language would mean that those who have been deprived of their lawful status that their number, economic, and political position warrants could try to claim their rights in other ways if they determine that the constitutional route has failed them. Such recourse would put in jeopardy the

stability and harmony of the society. Hence, the choice has to be assessed in terms of the political dividends gained by way of contributing towards the peace and stability of the country.

Judged in light of all the stated factors and the constitutional practices of most multilingual countries, the arbitrary decision of the Constituent Assembly to declare Amharic as the only working language at the federal level cannot be defended with full confidence. The assembly's decision was made in total disregard of the self-evident numerical status of speakers of other competing languages. More importantly, the assembly ignored the other matrix in language choice so as to correct the linguistic injustices of the past and put the country on a trajectory that can lead to equitable language rights, peace and stability.

VIABLE OPTIONS

In view of the fact that Ethiopia is a multilingual society where in the past one language dominated unjustly, the only way of undoing the injustice of the past is to employ the generally accepted standards used by other multilingual states that had experienced the same problem but succeeded in making a national working language choice that was workable and acceptable to the speakers of various competing languages. When making language choice, the widely accepted standards that have been used by other states, namely, numerical factors, economic and political position of the language groups and, neutrality of the preferred language, should have been considered. These essential criteria have not been taken into account in making the

language choice in Ethiopia. Thus, the outcome is not widely accepted as fair and justified.

Without having to emulate other countries, Ethiopia could choose a strategy that would redress past injustices and address simmering discontent before it boils over into a protest. Accommodating all linguistic groups is obviously impractical. One viable option may be to recognize Afaan Oromo as an additional federal working language based on rule of proportionality since the Oromo language is used by a very high percentage of the population. Moreover, the economic and political strength of Oromia is significant enough to justify taking such a measure. If the principle of economic equity stipulates that a linguistic group should benefit at least in proportion to its contribution to the national wealth, the Oromo language has a justifiable claim to obtain the status of federal working language. Certainly, the choice of Afaan Oromo or any other language as an additional federal working language may not remove the issue of dominance of languages. But in selecting more languages among the remaining indigenous languages, the sliding-scale approach may be appropriate to apply.

Another possible option is to choose a neutral language. The use of a neutral language avoids the domination of Amharic and its speakers as a group over the non-Amharic speaking linguistic groups. In this regard, the non-indigenous English language may be a possible candidate as it tends to minimize linguistic divisiveness to the extent that it does not give any indigenous language an undue advantage. Besides, it is a language that is already widely spoken and used as a working language at various levels of government and the media

of instruction in schools. The choice of English may help to prevent linguistic conflict and rivalries precisely because it does not let any Ethiopian language obtain an unjustified or even perceived advantage over others. This option does not rule out the possibility of using English as one of the federal working languages along with other indigenous languages.⁹⁰

If English is given preference, there may be resistance from the non-speakers of Amharic, Afaan Oromo or any other indigenous language, but it is likely to dissipate in the long run. In other words, if English is opted for as a federal working language, all linguistic groups in Ethiopia will be on the same footing learning a language that is neutral. This is to the advantage of all linguistic groups so long as there is no linguistic group which gets undue advantage over the others. The use of English will help in depoliticizing language problem in Ethiopia at the federal level.

English is an international language, well adapted to modern scientific and technological society. It has become an indispensable language for marketing, trade, advertising and publicity. English has grown to be a gateway to scientific information and a means of receiving advanced knowledge. It has developed to the extent of being the language of choice for many communities in the world. If English is opted for as a federal working language, linguistically speaking it will advance the objective of the integration of Africa, which is the goal of the new African Union headquartered in Addis Ababa. What is more, in neighboring countries like Kenya, Uganda, and to some extent the Sudan, English is spoken as a national language. If English is opted for as a federal working language,

along with other indigenous languages, ethnic tensions ensuing from the imposition of one or two indigenous languages may be avoided. Ethiopia may take advantage of the benefits English learning offers to the people of Ethiopia in the new global setting.

This article has shown that the makers of the FDRE Constitution have been arbitrary in their choice of the federal working language. They have failed to consider some of the important factors which other multilingual countries have taken into account in choosing their working languages. Language discrimination and inequality normally causes tensions and conflicts. In order to avert such possible dangers and create sustainable peace and stability, the current Ethiopian language policy requires revisiting in light of the constitutional practices of other multilingual states and some of the important factors discussed in this article. Each of the options offered in this article has its own merits and demerits. All are nevertheless options available to Ethiopia.

NOTES

1. Vernon Van Dyke, *Human Rights, Ethnicity, and Discrimination* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 32.
2. Fernand de Varennes, *Language, Minorities and Human Rights* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1996), 1.
3. Fernand de Varennes, "Language and Freedom of Expression in International Law," *Human Rights Quarterly*, 16:1 (1994): 164.
4. Van Dyke, 32.
5. *Ibid.*, 55.
6. Mart Rannut, "The Common Language Problem," in *Language: A Right and a Resource*, eds. Miklos Kontra *et al.*

- (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 102.
7. de Varennes, 164.
 8. Rannut, 103.
 9. Miklos Kontra *et al.*, "Conceptualizing and Implementing Linguistic Human Rights," in *Language: A Right and a Resource*, eds. Miklos Kontra *et al.* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 1, 17.
 10. Robert Phillipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, "Linguistic Rights and Wrongs," *Applied Linguistics* 16: 4 (1995): 483.
 11. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR), United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2200 A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entered into force, 23 March 1976, A Compilation of International Instruments, United Nations, Centre for Human Rights, New York, 1988.
 12. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948.
 13. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 484.
 14. Miklos Kontra, "Don't Speak Hungarian in Public!" A Documentation and Analysis of Folk Linguistic Rights", in *Language: A Right and a Resource*, eds. Miklos Kontra *et al.* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 87.
 15. de Varennes, *Language, Minorities and Human Rights*, 123.
 16. Kontra *et al.*, "Conceptualizing and Implementing Linguistic Human Rights", 1.
 17. Jyntrindra Das Gupta, "Language Diversity and National Development", in *Language Problems of Developing Nations*, eds., Joshua A. Fishman *et al.* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968), 23.
 18. *Ibid.*

19. Cesar A. Hidalgo, "Language Choice in a Multilingual Society: The Case of the Philippines" *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 130 (1998): 23.
20. A working language is a language given a special legal status by constitution of a given country. Such a language is used in courts, parliaments and administration.
21. F. Capotorti, *Study on the Rights of Persons belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (New York United Nations, 1991), 75.
22. *Ibid.*
23. de Varennes, "Language, Minorities and Human Rights," 123.
24. *Ibid.*, 90.
25. Capotorti, 76.
26. Fernand de Varennes, "Language Rights as an Integral Part of Human Rights", 3 MOST: *Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 3:1(2001). <http://www.unesco.org/most/v13n1var.htm>. Accessed 30 July 2003.
27. de Varennes, "Language, Minorities and Human Rights," 100.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Robert Phillipson, "International Languages and International Human Rights," in *Language: A Right and a Resource*, eds. Miklos Kontra *et al.* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 32.
30. The examined constitutional practices are based on the constitutional provisions of the given countries.
31. Capotorti, 76.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. See Articles 2 and 4 of *The Belgian Constitution of 7 February 1831, as revised on 17 February 1994*. Certainly, recognition here does not necessarily mean that the

- governments are obliged to provide service in all the recognized languages.
35. See Section 4 (1) of *The Fijian Constitution* as adopted on 25 July 1997.
 36. Section 6(1) of *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* as adopted on 8 May 1996 and amended on 11 October 1996 by the Constitutional Assembly or Act 108 of 1996.
 37. Kristin Henrard, "Language Rights and Minorities in South Africa," *MOST: Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 3:2 (2001). <http://unesco.org/most/v13n2henrard.htm>. Accessed 30 July 2003. In actual fact, in South Africa, the dominance of English is pronounced in the sense that it serves as lingua franca in the public domain. *Ibid.*
 38. Capotorti, 76.
 39. In Canada, the English speakers constitute 59.7 percent of the population while French speakers account for 23.2 percent of the total population. The Acts of Parliament of Canada and of the Legislature of Quebec shall be printed and published in English and French. There are other languages like Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun, Cree and others which have been recognized as regional languages.
 40. *Finland Constitution* as adopted on 17 July 1919.
 41. Capotorti, 76
 42. See Article 18 of *The Sri Lanka Constitution* as adopted on 31 August 1978.
 43. Capotorti, 76.
 44. Article 343 (1) and (2) of *The Indian constitution* of 26 November 1949 as updated in 1996.
 45. See Articles 53 and 95 of *The Nigerian Constitution* as adopted on 1 October 1979.
 46. See Article 152(1) (2) of *The Constitution of Malaysia* as adopted on 31 August 1957.

47. Article 251 (1) and (2) of *The Constitution of Pakistan* as adopted on 10 April 1973.
48. Article 14 (6) and (7) of *The Philippines Constitution* as adopted on 2 February 1987.
49. Van Dyke, 33.
50. *Ibid.*, 34.
51. *Ibid.*
52. A. N. Aniagolu, *The Making of the 1989 Constitution of Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1993), 160.
53. See Article 95 of *The Nigerian Constitution*, Article 251(3) of *The Pakistani Constitution*, Article 14(7) of *The Philippines Constitution*
54. Phillipson, 26.
55. See Regulations for the Establishment of Missions, 27th August, *Negarit Gazeta* 1944.
56. Minority Rights Group (MRG), ed. *World Directory of Minorities* (London: Minority Groups International, 1997), 413.
57. See *The 1955 Revised Constitution of Ethiopia*, Article 125.
58. See Alessandro Triulzi, "Competing Views of National Identity in Ethiopia", in *Nationalism & Self Determination in the Horn of Africa*, ed. I M Lewis (London: Ithaca Press, 1983), 120.
59. Gideon P E Cohen, "Identity and Opportunity: The Implications of Using Local Languages in the Primary Education System of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), Ethiopia," (PhD Dissertation), School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), 2000, University of London, London, 2000, 87.
60. Bereket Habte Selassie, "Self-Determination in Principle and Practice: The Ethiopian-Eritrean Experience," *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 29 (Fall 1997): 11.
61. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 484.

62. Minority Rights Group, MRG, *World Directory of Minorities*, 413
63. Paul Baxter, "The Problem of the Oromo or the Problem for the Oromo," in *Nationalism & Self Determination in the Horn of Africa*, ed. I M Lewis (London: Ithaca Press, 1983), 136.
64. *The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia*, Office of Population and Housing Census Commission, Central Statistical Authority, Addis Ababa, November 1998. See also *The 2007 World Almanac and Book of Facts*, (AWRC Media Company, New York, 2007:771) which gives 74,777,981 as the total population of Ethiopia.
65. According to *The 2007 World Almanac and Book of Facts*, the Oromo constitute 40% (29,911,192) while the Amharas and the Tigreans together constitute 32% (23,928,953).
66. Baxter, 135.
67. Kjetil Tronvoll, *Ethiopia: A New Start?* Minority Rights Group International Report (April 2000), 8.
68. Oromia is the largest agricultural region of Ethiopia which accounts for 42% of the total area planted with cereals and pulses accounting for 47% of the total production. <http://www.addismillennium.com/oromia.htm> Accessed 27 May 2008.
69. Baxter, 129.
70. Robert L. Cooper, "Government Language Policy" in *Language in Ethiopia*, eds. M. L. Bender *et al.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 190.
71. See Article 125 of *The Revised Constitution of Ethiopia*. (Proclamation 149 of 1955, *Negarit Gazeta*, 15, 2,1955)
72. The *Derg* is an Amharic term used to refer the Military Council of Ethiopia that deposed Emperor Haile Selassie from power in 1974.
73. *Ibid.*, 147.

74. *The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, (Hereafter the FDRE Constitution), *Negarit Gazeta*, 55th year, no. 1, 1995.
75. *The FDRE Constitution*, Article 5(1) and (3), Article 46(5) and Article, 39 (2).
76. *Minutes of the Ethiopian Constituent Assembly*, (Hereafter *Minutes of the Constituent Assembly*) Vol. 2, Minute No.11, (Addis Ababa *Tikimt* 30 to *Hidar* 7/1987), 000010-000026.
77. *Minutes of the Constituent Assembly*, 000018.
78. *Ibid*, 000019.
79. *Ibid*, 000020.
80. One can compare the respective size and share of the Oromos on the one hand, and Tigreans and Harari on the other.
81. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 483.
82. The Oromo constitute 32.15 percent of the total population; the Amhara constitute 30.13 percent of the total population.
83. Capotorti, 39.
84. See Office of Population and Housing Census Commission, Central Statistical Authority, *The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, November 1998).
85. FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to Ethiopia, 21 December 1998. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/x0770ee/x0770e00.htm>. Accessed 27 May 2008.
86. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 488.
87. Berma Klein Goldewijk and Bas de Gaay Foertman, *Where Needs Meet Rights* (Geneva WCC Publications, 1999), 75.
88. The same dominance of Amharas is reflected even today. See Personnel Statistics, 1998 Ethiopian Fiscal

Year, Federal Civil Service Agency, (June 2006),40. According to the statistics, the percentage of federal civil servants for the Amharas is 46.85% while that of the Oromos and Tigrays constitute 17.42 and 6.69, respectively.

89. J. A. Fishman, "On the Limits of Ethnolinguistic Democracy", in *Linguistic Human Rights: Overcoming Linguistic Discrimination*, eds. T. Skutnabb-Kangas & T. Cummin, (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), 60. The assembly has ignored the sliding-scale model which is based on numerical factor.
90. One also needs to note that English is *de facto* working language in Ethiopia. It is used as a medium of instruction in high schools and universities of Ethiopia. In addition, the laws of the country are published in English on the Federal *Negarit Gazeta*. Some important organizations in Ethiopia, like banks, insurances, and telecommunications use English.

THE EXPANSION OF ADDIS ABABA AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SURROUNDING AREAS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF THE NEFAS SILK LAFTO DISTRICT

Kenate Worku

In the last fifty years, Ethiopia has experienced a high rate of population growth, which has spurred a rapid pace of urbanization (Yishak 2000:33). Although the proportion of the urban population in Ethiopia is still low, the rate of urban population growth is among the highest in the developing countries. The country's urban population, which was only about 9 percent in 1970, increased to 13 percent in 1993 and to 15 percent in 1998. During these years, urban population growth rate ranged between 4 and 7 percent per annum. This has been reflected in the growth of the physical size of towns through the conversion of prime agricultural land into urban areas. The twin processes of urban population growth and

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the physical expansion of the city into the surrounding areas have made Addis Ababa the largest city in the country (Solomon, 1985).

The rate of population growth has consistently outpaced the ability of the city government to provide essential services. For instance, urban housing construction has not kept pace with population growth. The difference between the number of available houses and households needing a dwelling has widened over the last three decades. According to the 1984 census data, the number of households in that year was 270,000 and the number of housing units was 238,000, a difference of 32,000 units, accounting for a nearly 12 percent gap. The figures for 1994 were 480,000 households and 375,000 units, showing construction backlog of 105,000 or 9.8 percent in 10 years. In 2000, the number of households had increased to 499,800 and a backlog to 200,000 houses. The reason for the sharp increase is the growth of the urban population through natural growth and an increased rate of migration. The housing disparity has been met by the building of illegal houses and squatter shacks (OPHCC 1999; Addis Ababa City Land Administration 2003). According to Office of the Revised Addis Ababa Master Plan [ORAAMP] (2000), illegal housing units were estimated to be 60,000 units or 16.2 percent of the total housing stock of the city and housed a population of 300,000.

The rapidly growing population and associated expansion of economic and social activities have increased the demand for urban space around Addis Ababa, leading to a rapid conversion of agricultural land to urban use. According to Birke (1997), nearly 75 percent of the buildings or houses in Addis Ababa

are stretched horizontally on the ground, consuming over 200 hectares of agricultural and forestland every year.¹ The 1986 Master Plan had identified expansion areas from the surrounding agricultural lands that were thought to accommodate larger population settlements. The city's expansion followed the plan, however, the mismatch between housing demand and supply in the city, compounded by the land policies of previous governments, gave way to an unstructured, fragmented, and uncontrolled horizontal expansion of informal settlements that stretched onto rural farmlands on the outskirts of Addis Ababa (Yishak, 2000; Shimelis, 2004). Between 1984 and 1994, illegal settlements grew at a rate of 16 percent per annum and rose to 30 percent by 2000 (CSA 1994; ORAAMP 2000).

Informal and squatter settlements, in claiming larger areas of land on the city's periphery, are major contributors to the unplanned horizontal expansion of Addis Ababa. This is primarily facilitated by the availability of land on the periphery for continued housing development. A survey conducted in the Kotebe area (Yishak, 2000), for instance, shows an average household plot size of 350 square meters. The land itself is obtained through an informal land market in which the surrounding farm communities illegally sell part of their farmland to the squatter population. In this way, a significant amount of agricultural land has been converted to urban use. The horizontal expansion in turn has intensified urban-rural conflict and created administrative problems in the peripheral zones (Yimer, 1999).

The problem has been exacerbated by the introduction of the lease policy that came into effect after the change of government in 1991. This policy has

been detrimental to the interest of the farm households since city officials and planners tend to focus on solving the housing shortage in the city rather than the wellbeing of farm households. Real estate projects have emerged as a major beneficiary of the new policy and are another factor causing severe problems for the farm communities that were recently brought within the municipal boundary.

The major effect of the city's expansion has been the dislocation of farm families and the depriving of the agricultural population of its source of livelihood. The combined effect of these factors has been devastating socio-economic problems, including reduction in farm and grazing land, inadequate residential houses, disappearance of farming as a major economic activity, social disarticulation, food insecurity, and increased joblessness in the communities along the line of the city's expansion. As a result, the affected groups have attempted to look for alternative livelihood strategies in nonfarm economic activities such as brokering, casual labor, operation of small businesses, and security services. Women in particular turn to beverage retail. These activities are not sustainable because most of the jobs are ephemeral. An organized government response is necessary in order to alleviate the adverse effects of the inevitable spatial growth of Addis Ababa and the consequent displacement and impoverishment of one group for the benefit of another segment of the population.

So far, the Addis Ababa city administration has promoted the option of cash compensation for the displaced people. The compensation is inadequate to support a household for a long time and most

displaced or dispossessed families can expect further social and economic dislocation. It is from this background and based on these assumptions that I selected this research topic. The overall aim of this article is to assess the expansion of Addis Ababa onto the surrounding farmlands and its impact on farm households. Specifically, the study aims to identify the factors responsible for the expansion onto the farmlands, and to assess the major effects of the expansion on the study *kebele* or city precinct and the displaced farmers. This involves comparing and contrasting the past and present livelihood status of the farmers in light of the nature of compensation payments and the search for alternative livelihood strategies sought by the farmers. Finally, the study evaluates some policy issues that the Addis Ababa City Administration has prepared to deal with future urban expansion onto the surrounding rural agricultural lands and suggests some options for the future of this issue.

THE CONCEPT OF URBAN SPRAWL

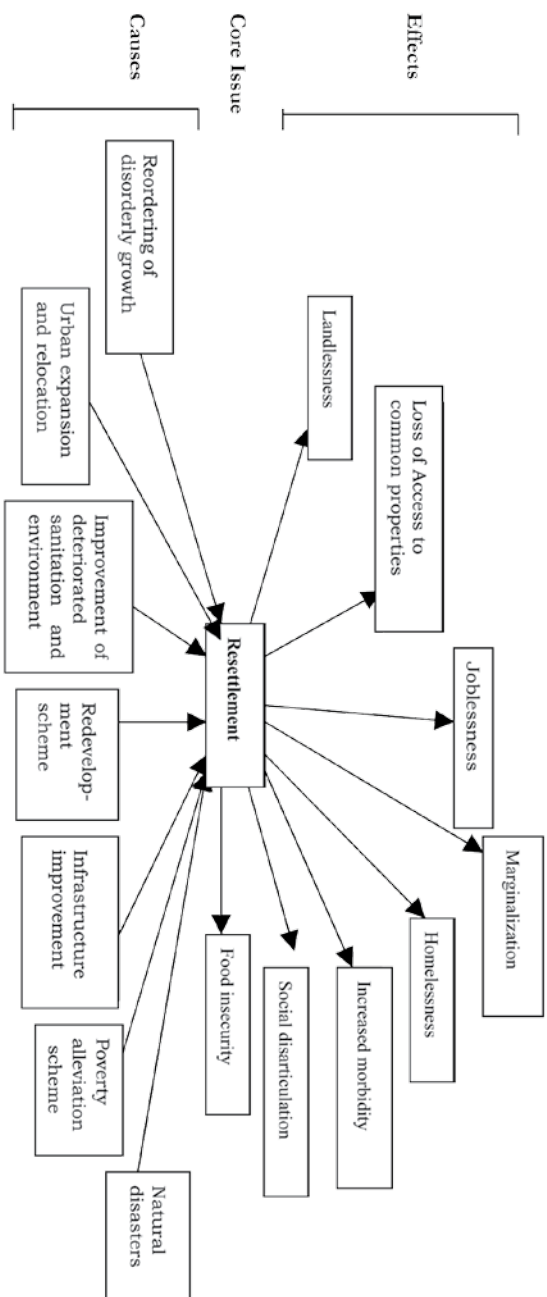
There is no consensus definition of the term sprawl. In simple terms, it is the spreading out of a city and its suburbs over more and more rural lands on the periphery of an urban area. In reality, it is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that means different things in different contexts (Haregewoin, 2005). Even though in a broader sense sprawl is a pattern of land use in an urbanized area, it has taken varying characteristics or dimensions in different contexts. In general, sprawl is connected with development in urban areas.

Development-induced displacement and resettlement in urban areas differ from the other areas in a

number of ways, but the increased risk of impoverishment for those affected by the processes is the same. According to Mejia (1999), since land in urban areas is scarce and highly priced, it is increasingly difficult to find affordable land for resettlement. This condition often results in resettlement in peripheral zones, creating high socio-cultural costs and socioeconomic disruptions. The relocation and re-housing of the population involves incorporation of rural land into the urban center, extension of access to public services, and the creation of new economic opportunities for commercial business. Urban projects usually result in changing land use, building codes, public services, and so forth. These issues not only complicate decision-making, planning, and implementation of the resettlement of the displaced, but also increase land value, thus pricing low-income families out of the new urban spaces. The displaced and the relocated consequently resort to houses that have no “legal” land title, as many displaced slum dwellers and squatters of low-income groups do in many developing countries (UNCHS, 1991).

Various studies on development-induced displacement schemes indicate that urban expansion programs cause a profound and sudden shock both among the displaced people and on the existing social organizations. Development that displaces people involuntarily gives rise to severe economic, social, and environmental problems (Cernea, 1989a). Agricultural production systems are dismantled as people are relocated to environs where their productive skills may be less useful and the compensation for lost properties is too meager to facilitate their successful transition to new economic ventures. Productive assets and income security are

Figure 1: A Conceptual Framework of Dislocation and Resettlement



Source: Adapted from Abebe, 2001

lost while important social assets such as kin groups and community associations are dispersed which in the final analysis tear apart the social relations.

Based on his studies on development-induced displacement, Cernea has identified a multifaceted process of impoverishment during displacement and/or dispossession divided them into a number of components. According to him, there are about eight (8) sub-processes through which impoverishment is manifested. These are landlessness, food insecurity, joblessness, increased morbidity, homelessness, loss of access to common property, marginalization, and social (community) disarticulation.

The southern peri-urban areas of Nefas-Silk-Lafto (NSL) sub-city, especially the Makannisa, Lafto, Labu and Dhertu areas are sites where the Addis Ababa expansion program is actively operating and farm households have been dispossessed from their land. According to the socio-economic and physical planning adopted in 1996 for the city expansion scheme known as the Makannisa-III project, the former independent Peasant Associations (PA) of Labu, Dhertu and Kotari, were reorganized into *Kebele* 01 of the NSL sub-city. The new *kebele* is bounded in the east by the Akaki-Kaliti sub-city, in the north and northwest by Harbu River and *Kebele* 02 of the sub-city, and in the northeast by the Lafto residential quarters of *Kebele* 15.

The *kebele* is located approximately between 983,608m and 991,626m North and 464807m and 472544m East UTM. The elevation of the area ranges from 2213 meters to 2335 meters above sea level. Within this scale, it experiences temperature levels similar to the city average of 17⁰c. In warmer seasons,

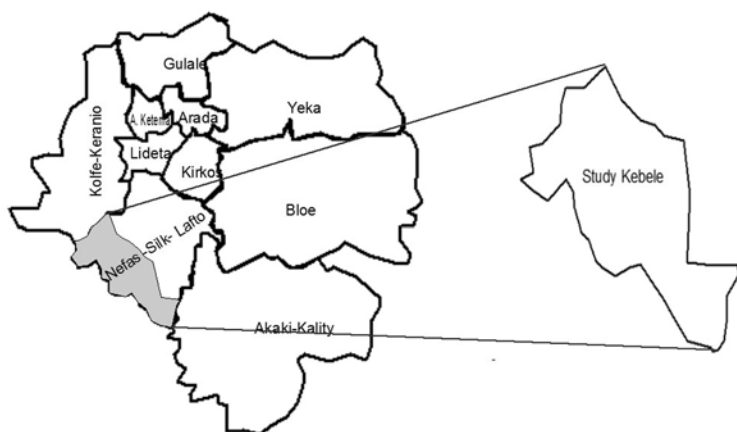


Figure 2: Location Map of the Study Area in Addis Ababa

the temperature reaches 27⁰c. This moderately high temperature level has enabled the farm households to harvest varied cereal crops (*teff*, wheat), legumes (lentils) and vegetables of different types. When we look at the slope (gradient) of the area, it ranges from 2 to 4 percent except for the Labu and Hanna hills that have a gradient of more than 15 percent (CGAA, 1996).

Regarding the soil types in the study area, generally there are about four (4) major types of soils, of which the dominant one is the black colored clay loam, sticky and heavy soil. The other dominant soil types include vertisols and luvisols associated with earth construction materials like sand, clay, basalt, ignimbrite, gypsum and pumice.

SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENT HOUSEHOLDS

The article is largely based on a survey (the survey hereafter) conducted from mid-February to the end of

March 2006. At the time, the total number of households affected by the expansion in the study *kebele* was 325, according to a list prepared by the *kebele* officials. Of these, 25 households were not included in the survey, because their status was not clearly identified. The information was collected from 300 households for an in depth study of the impact of city expansion on household material possession, utilization of compensation money, and effects of displacement or dispossession

All the 300 farm households filled out a questionnaire. Of the total number of respondents, 92.7 percent were male headed, over half were between 41 to 60 years old, 77 percent, were married. Approximately 5.3 percent were single but possessed farmlands and housing of their own. About 57 percent of the sample respondents had family sizes of 6 to 10 members and 9.3 percent greater than 10, indicating the members' rural background and lack of planning awareness. The majority (62 percent) of the households belongs to the Oromo ethnic group while Siltie and Wolaita constitute 1.3 and 0.3 percent, respectively. Regarding educational background, the illiteracy rate is very high in the study *kebele* at 33.4 percent of the respondent households being illiterate. Remoteness of schools from the area, lack of capacity and help for families in domestic work were some of the reasons for lack of access to education. Concerning household income status, the result shows a decline in monthly and annual income of the farm households owing to the dispossession of their major source of income and livelihoods.

**Table 1: Change in Income Status of Displaced/
Dispossessed Farmer Households**

Income Category per Month (birr)	Income before Dispossession		Income after Dispossession	
	No. of Households	%	No. of Households	%
< 50	32	10.7	76	25.4
51-100	50	16.6	68	22.7
101-200	40	13.4	70	23.3
201-400	79	26.3	52	17.3
401-600	32	10.7	24	8.0
601-1000	38	12.7	8	2.7
> 1000	29	9.7	2	0.6
Total	300	100.0	300	100.0

Source: *Field Survey*, March 2006

**Table 2 : Farmland Sizes of Respondents before
Dispossession**

Size of farmland Possession (in sq. m.)	No. of Households	%
1-10000	82	27.3
10001-30000	72	24.0
30001-50000	138	46.0
50001 and above	8	2.7
Total	300	100.0

Source: *Field Survey*, March 2006

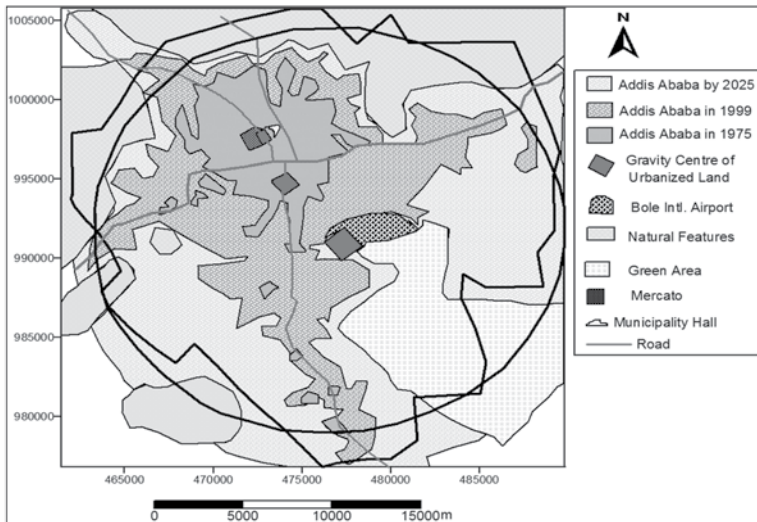


Figure 3: Land Use Characteristics of the Study Kebele

THE IMPACT OF URBAN SPRAWL ON FARMING HOUSEHOLDS

Historically, scattered and fragmented developments dominate the general structure of Addis Ababa. Formal and informal settlements stretch out horizontally from the center. Land is ineffectively used and new developments, such as the real estates, are taking place on the fertile agricultural land on the periphery of the city. But the pattern of development and expansion shows fluctuations.

The study *kebele*, located on the outskirts of the southwestern portion of NSL sub-city and the city at large, was one of the PAs that were recently incorporated into the Addis Ababa city administration. The *kebele* is an area where urban settlement and industrial expansion is intensively being pursued. Thus, the *kebele*

is undergoing land use/cover change as urban expansion project is consuming what was previously agricultural land, open spaces, and forestland.

Table 3: The Proportion of Each Land Use/Cover Areas (1984, 1994, and 2002)

Land Use/ Cover Unit	Area in Hectares					
	1984	%	1994	%	2002	%
Forest/ Vegetation cover	988.32	38.2	742.35	28.7	495.67	19.1
Cropland	910.8	35.2	515.14	19.9	1123.1	43.5
Open space	689.0	26.6	1331.43	51.4	198.00	7.6
Built up area	-	-	-	-	772.25	29.8
Total	2588.92	100.0	2588.92	100.0	2588.92	100.0

Source: *Field Survey*, March 2006

Detection of changes in land use/land cover involves the use of at least two period data sets (Jenson, 1986 in Srivastava and Gupta, 2001). Accordingly, analysis of high-resolution aerial photographs taken in 1984, 1994, and 2002 shows significant changes in land use/cover due to natural and human activities. In 1984, 38.2 percent of the land in the study *kebele* was covered by vegetation. The 1994 data depicts that 51.4 percent of the land cover was occupied by open spaces/grasslands. While cropland became the dominant land cover at 43.5 percent in 2002, 29.8 percent of the land cover was new under construction area mainly in the northern and northwestern part of the *kebele*. This shows steadily expanding construction area into the study *kebele*. Since the 1996 onset of the implementation of the urban expansion projects, the construction of the

Ring Road that passes through the *kebele* accounted for significant land use/cover patterns and changes. Until 1999, more than 32 percent of the land within the municipal boundary was covered by farmlands, followed by residential areas (ORAAMP 2000). After this time, the percentage share of residential areas, including those under construction, has been increasing at the expense of the farmlands and forestlands.

The 1986 Addis Ababa Master Plan proposed a compact urban expansion in three major directions to the east (Kotebe), to the south (Akaki and Makannisa) and to the west (Keraniyo). According to ORAAMP, these areas were wider spatial units lying between the regional outlets to the east, south, southwest, and west. Development on both sides of the road, linear development, is widely observed along the regional outlets in all directions. This kind of development, due to the demand for cheaper land supply, is observed against the concept of “compact urban development,” which in the final analysis leads to scattered developments.

For those who would be displaced by the expanding city boundary, the City Government of Addis Ababa (CGAA) promised monetary compensation. The compensation payment guideline of 1996 covers all the properties of the peri-urban farm households of Addis Ababa. Farmlands, grazing lands, croplands, housing, different trees and plants produced by the farmer and animals and their products all had their payment calculations in the guideline. The implementation of this guideline started soon after it was prepared. The first implementation of the scheme started in 1997 during which farm households of Bole Bulbula, Keraniyo, Kotebe and Makannisa received compensation. In the study area,

some residents of Labu received compensation during this period. After that year, the activity continued and was in effect at the time of my research in 2006.

The amount of compensation property owners obtained varied based on the amount (quantity) of resources each farmer-owner possessed. The majority of the respondents reported that they did not know how the calculation was done or the parameters used by the compensation committee at the sub-city. This happened as a result of the fact that the farmers did not participate in the decision process concerning the amount of compensation paid for each property they lost. Of the total 300 respondents, 286 or 95.3 percent believe that the cash compensation was determined by a committee independently of the farm households. Some 14 (4.7 percent) individuals replied that they discussed informally with the assessment committee the amount of cash compensation to be paid to them. Nevertheless, they did not participate in the calculations of the compensation nor did they have the necessary information to verify whether or not the compensation was fair.

The compensation was paid out in a lump sum or in installments. An assessment of the payment pattern in Labu and Dhertu shows that the farmers received compensation in one lump sum, or in two, three and four installments. The survey result shows that about 164 respondents or 54.7 percent reported that they received the compensation in three installments. This group of farmers is primarily those who received the compensation in the year 2004/05. Those who received a one time pay off constituted 96 farm households representing 32 percent of the total respondents and those who were displaced or dispossessed of

their farmlands in 1996/97. On the other hand, 12.6 percent of the respondents are found to be the farm households to whom the compensation money was paid in two installments. An insignificant percentage (0.3 percent) of the farmers received their compensation in four installments. Thus, it can be concluded that those who received the compensation at once have the opportunity to invest in worthwhile investments.

As observed from the compensation guidelines, especially at the very beginning of this urban expansion projects, city officials explained that adult children aged 18 and above were entitled to land as an independent household and or some compensations. As soon as the implementation of the project and compensation payments started, another criterion was set and the compensation claims of the adult children of the farmers were overlooked. Similar to the experience of farm households displaced from Yeka-Tafo for the Ayat Real Estate project in eastern Addis Ababa and the case of Bole Bulbula in the south, the farmers in NSL area sought the help of their adult children to augment the amount of cash compensation for farmland or grazing land, without success. This led the majority of the households (64.6 percent) to believe that richer farmers benefited more from the compensation scheme because of the large number of hectares of land they owned before dispossession.

Some respondents posit that, regardless of the amount of compensation offered, it could not make up for the benefits they used to get from their properties. There were even instances where no one in a farm household received any compensation because of bureaucratic inefficiency. On the other hand, the

farmers argue that, even though they have received cash compensation, it is hard to expect long-term benefit unless the money is invested in productive ventures. However, given the farmers' lack of knowledge of the productive economic sectors, access to the credit service and savings facilities, and training on how to lead an urban life, the farmers are at a severe risk of impoverishment. The argument that can be drawn from the response of the farm households is that even if there were farmers who received large sums of cash compensation it has no permanent value unless invested in other business ventures.

A significant member of farmers, 18 households or 6.0 percent maintain that the compensation benefited farmers of all income groups regardless of wealth status. In fact, the rich are likely to benefit the most from the large sum of money they received because they could use the money to engage in alternative investment ventures. The poor, who had little/no land, were laborers who worked land owned by rich owners and did not obtain any compensation. Even those who received compensation spent their money and the majority became day laborers in the enterprises generated by the expansion project.

In general, nearly three quarters of the households (224 respondents or 74.2 percent) report that the compensation given to them for various kinds of properties had not improved their housing and others housing related issues. A majority, numbering 288 or 96.0 percent, believe that the compensation money is so inadequate that it has diminished the farm households' livelihood. Only a small portion of the respondents, 12 persons or 4.0 percent, maintain that it is satisfac-

tory and fair. Because it is inadequate and the project involuntarily changed their mode of life, most of the farmers argue that the compensation paid to them has negatively affected the lives of their families.

FARMERS' PERCEPTION OF THE EXPANSION PROJECT

As stipulated in the 1986 Addis Ababa Master Plan, the expansion towards the study *kebele* was planned to host residential wards, factories, Labu Real Estate, and public service facilities. At the initial stage of the project, urban planners and surveyors participated in the site preparation and architects prepared the local development plan for the area on which the future urban activities were going to be established. Sub-city and *kebele* officials report that farmers were informed ahead of time that their farmland properties would be taken over by the government for urban development purposes. According to an interview made with one of the chief officials of the study *kebele*, the procedures the officials followed were to inform the farmers, convince them, and reach an agreement to transfer ownership rights. The official claims that the farmers refused to listen to the officials while “we tried to discuss with them on the issue of how it is going to be undertaken. They never thought that this proposal would be implemented” (Biruk, interviewed 15 March 2006). The farmers did not readily accept the plan because the issue relates to losing their basic asset, which supports their livelihood. Instead, they protested, which nevertheless did not change the implementation of the government’s directives.

In this regard, the survey reveals that nearly 75 percent of the dispossessed/displaced understood that the area is needed for urban development projects, establishment of industries, etc. However, 80 percent of the respondents replied that they had no understanding of the reasons why their area was selected for such a purpose. The farmers insist that the city government should have discussed the matter with them before the implementation task force arrived for site preparation and the displacement and dispossession of the households.

Even though the farmers were not persuaded that the project was for the greater good of the society, 25 percent of the households were willing to receive cash compensation for the inevitable loss of land, house, and other properties. However, 35.7 percent of the respondents were not willing to give up their land for compensation. The survey found that 34 percent of the farmers preferred to be incorporated in other development projects if loss of their land was an unavoidable reality. Apparently, this group of farmers was ready to receive the compensation money, abandon farming, and move on to other occupations. The survey also found that 5 percent of the households preferred to launch their own private business using compensation money.

Overall, the survey indicates the need for officials to understand that the participation of the farmers in the development activities would make for a smooth implementation of the project and mitigate adverse impacts of the expansion. However, even the participatory approach would not obviate some of the major socio-economic impacts brought about by the expansion of the city to the farm households in the *kebele* through the auspices of urban expansion project of the

city. The following section discusses the multifaceted impact of development-induced displacement/dispossession on the study *kebele*.

A. Experiencing Land Dispossession and Relocation

Cernea (1999:14) cited in Feleke (1999:61) explained that the confiscation or expropriation of land removes the main foundation upon which farmers' productive systems, commercial activities, and livestock are built. A significant section of the farmers of Labu and Dhertu areas of NSL sub-city experienced land dispossession and relocation, which they feel has seriously affected their livelihood. Nevertheless, since the majority was relocated not far from where they were dislocated, the risks of impoverishment were not as high as for those people affected by larger resettlement programs elsewhere in the country where the resettled were located in new areas.

Based on the type of their lost property, farm households were categorized as those who lost all the properties (farmyards, grazing lands and dwelling house), those who lost only farmland, and those who lost only grazing land. The size of all these farm households' assets varies from farmer to farmer.

Table 4: Types of Farmers' Property Lost to the Project

Type of Property	Households	%
Farmland only	80	26.7
Grazing land only	2	0.6
Dwelling house only	10	3.3
Only farmland and housing	40	13.4
Only farmland and grazing land	72	24.0
All the three	90	32.0
Total	300	100.0

Source: *Field Survey*, March 2006

Table 4 above shows that 32 percent of the farming households that participated in the survey were totally displaced and resettled elsewhere, 26.7 percent lost only farmland, and 24 percent lost both farmland and grazing land. Because of this project, farmers have become landless, and a significant proportion of them have lost their homestead and their assets.

B. The Loss of Dwelling House/Homelessness

The loss of housing and shelter, Law and Altman (1992) explain, results in a severe drop in living standards. The loss of shelter may be only temporary for many displaced people, but for some, homelessness remains a lingering condition. In this context, although the intensity of the risk and the way it happens vary from empirical studies conducted in different countries, the displaced of the study *kebele* not only lost their houses but also the capacity immediately to rebuild residential houses at their new location. Although not all of the displaced faced homelessness, the risk was very high, especially for those who had no legal deeds for their homes. Households that built illegally were forced to leave the area without any compensation in cash or in kind (i.e. a replacement plot for building a house). According to the survey results, out of 146 displaced households observed in the field, only 74 (50.7 percent) of them reported that they arrived in their newly built homes immediately after displacement. On the other hand, a significant proportion 58 (39.7 percent) were compelled to move into temporary shelters made of scrapped corrugated iron sheets and plastic tents. The rest were likely to have faced the risk of homelessness. Another issue associated to the risk of homelessness and lack of capacity to build a dwell-

ing house is the length of time given for the displaced to vacate and clear their former homestead. In this case, as found during field survey, the majority (83.7 percent) responded that they were not given enough time for preparation and construction of new house at their destination.

C. Food Insecurity

Household food insecurity, according to Feleke (1999), can be a function of productivity, assets, and entitlement to obtain sufficient food throughout the year. Concerning the productivity of the people of Labu and Dhertu areas, they used to produce cereal crops like *teff*, wheat, beans and peas, and chickpeas for both consumption and market. The soil in the area is highly productive and some farmers occasionally produced up to 100 quintals of *teff* in a single harvest season.

The survey conducted after the implementation of the project found that 89.4 percent of the farm households reported that they experienced food insecurity after the project started dispossessing them of their farmland. The majority of this group of farm households likely includes those who were displaced/dispossessed between 1997 and 2000. The remaining 10.6 percent of the households are found to be those who had not experienced food insecurity by the time of the survey. These households could be those who were using the compensation money to purchase food.

In general, an assessment of the risk of food insecurity through different mechanisms, such as the assessment of the amount of cereals produced at the pre and post dispossession time, showed that the vulnerability to food insecurity is presently very high and

likely to be severe in the future. This is because of the fact that the compensation money the farmers are currently using to purchase food and cereals would run out in the coming months and years.

D. Unemployment/Joblessness

In this context, unemployment or joblessness refers to the loss of the regular activities of farming households. In a broader sense, it refers to several categories of people whose livelihood used to depend on farming activities those who, because of the loss of land, had become day laborers or insufficiently employed. Job loss due to displacement and/or dispossession causes lasting economic and psychological damage. According to the survey, more than 146 households (49 percent) have lost their self-employment in agricultural production. The farmers maintain that the city government had promised to create new job opportunities in these areas. For unexplained reasons, nothing has been done so far. In the study area, even though it is difficult to give actual figures of the unemployment rate before and after the implementation of the project, it is clear that a significant number of farmers currently are engaged in casual work or have become day laborers in non-agricultural sectors.

The displaced farmers naturally try to seek another source of income and employment opportunity. However, the employment opportunity in the area is not more than day labor or employment as private security for individuals. Some farmers relate that, because of the disruption of farming activity, there are instances of an entire household not working who use only the compensation money to get by. Some family members (especially adults) spend their time in alcohol joints,

thus exposed to more intractable social problems. The same situation applies to both male and female household heads. This kind of joblessness and exposure to alcohol abuse is clearly observed in the Hanna Mariam area, located south of Lafto and north of Labu settlements, in NSL sub-city. Therefore, all those activities are clear manifestations of unemployment problems in the *kebele*. Despite the evidence of risks and vulnerability, the survey shows no type of counseling or training given to the displaced to help them adapt to alternative employment opportunities. Those who are by chance engaged in construction works in the area are found to be farmers who had prior skills. Such loss of an alternative employment sector could also result from the lack of opportunity for a substantial amount of investment. In addition, farmers have little knowledge of how to make worthy investment using their cash compensation. Thus, such risks may in the end lead to worsened joblessness and may lead the people to commit crimes.

E. Loosened Community Ties/Social Disarticulation

The loss of social organizations, interpersonal ties, and kinship linkages often occur following development induced-displacement activities and the consequent transplantation of people from one area to another. Downing (1996) explains that poverty not only comes through loss of land, shelter, or food, but also through disarticulation of communities who work together for development. In the Ethiopian context, the most common community organization is the self-help association known as *mabbers*, *iqqub* and *iddir*. These organizations play a pivotal role in rendering mutual support

and social cohesion. Farmers, for instance, use their association as a forum to discuss their socio-economic issues. Such institutions/associations also make major contributions in poverty reduction.

In the study *kebele*, the surrounding community was one major '*mabber*' called "*Balewold*." A relatively old organization, it had 243 member households who met every month to pay their dues and on occasions of death and marriage in a member household. During the meetings, socio-economic issues were discussed. Member households used to meet annually to discuss the reports presented by the leaders. One informant explained that due to the displacement of some of the farm households, the *mabber* was depleted of members and the displaced households were forced to consider withdrawing their membership. Informants doubt that the association will survive in the future.

At the village level, farmers used to operate small-scale *iqqubs*. The *iqqubs* were not as strong as the *mabbers*, but they played a vital role in poverty alleviation, providing credit and insurance services to dues paying members. The 1996/97 displaced farmers from the Labu area explained that there were *iqqub* members who withdrew because of the relocation that relocated farmers from Labu to Lafto and Kotari areas. This relocation of members paralyzed the power or the function of the *iqqub*, eroded the relationships among members, and decreased participation in group activities. From this information, it can be judged that, to keep the social relationships safe, it is better to relocate farm households in sites not far from their previous residential areas.

F. Loss of Access to Common Property Resources and Services

According to observations made in the study area, common property resources are rare, except for grazing land and forested lands. In the Labu and Dhertu areas, there was a vast marshy area of land used for animal grazing which is now being lost to housing and other construction undertaken by a Chinese construction company and other domestic companies, such as Varnero, PLC. Because of the acquisition of these lands for urban development (either for real estates or factories), the dispossessed or displaced people have lost precious land. The communities could not get a replacement or any compensation whatsoever for such commonly held lands since there was no record of title to the land.

Common spaces and landfills that had been used by the people in the village before displacement were converted to protected areas. In some pocket areas, existing quarries, where individual farmers mined construction stones and sold them in markets, became scenes of conflict over resources. The other most important common property resource lost to Addis Ababa's expansion is the forest and natural vegetation found in the peri-urban area. The study area has been one of the established eucalyptus tree sites around Addis Ababa and a major supply center of firewood for the city. Due to unsustainable firewood harvest and illegal exploitation from plantations and farmyards, the tree resource has declined precipitously over the last two decades. Currently the remaining forest patches are being cleared to make way for the urban expansion project.

Overall, the urban expansion project, in the city at large and the study *kebele* in particular, has adversely affected the farm households. The survey results show that the inadequacy of compensation is a major problem that the households in the study *kebele* face. Loss of farmland, grazing land, housing problems, income decline, food insecurity, lack of credit, and ability to manage personal finances are shown to be among the major problems identified.

For all the problems that were engendered in the study area as a result of the expansion project, people blame the city government for not facilitating the successful adjustment of the affected families and for the failure to keep the promises it made before the implementation phase of the project started. Regarding the future of the already affected and the would-be affected persons and families, the city government needs to develop a clear policy that includes the effective implementation of urban development strategies for the newly incorporated rural households taking into account the issue of risk reduction for the relocated population to minimize the chances of their impoverishment. One of the ways in which the government can minimize the risks of dislocation is to build on some positive contributions that the expansion of the city has brought to the study *kebele*.

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE EXPANSION OF ADDIS ABABA

The residents reported that delivery of social services has improved in the area since the implementation of the project. Above all, the residents pointed out that the construction of roads facilitated the easy

movement of agricultural products to the city and increased availability of various commodities in their neighborhood markets. Most of the residents, with the exception of those still in the extreme periphery, now use electricity for the first time, despite the fact that high power lines had traversed their *kebele* for years. Other respondents also explained that the growth of the settlements in Lafto and Hanna Mariam areas had helped them positively in bringing grain mills to their vicinity. Even though they hope to get access to more services in their village in the future, the respondents are quick to point out that these services were established not to benefit them but primarily to benefit the investors or private developers.

Despite reservations, the residents show overall satisfaction with the changes the expansion of the city had brought into their village. In response to the survey questionnaire about the major contributions of urban expansion to the study area, 42 percent stressed the extension of social services and facilities. About 23.9 percent of them cited the extension of transport facility to their *kebele* as a positive contribution. About 11.1 percent reported that the expansion of the projects had helped them adapt to the urban life style. In contrast to the ideas forwarded by the above respondents, nearly 17 percent of respondents replied that the urban settlement expansion project to their area had not brought any positive contributions. Some 6.2 percent identified as positive the jobs their children obtained from working in construction and other related occupations. Urban expansion and the extension of the infrastructure of social services to the formerly inaccessible rural areas helps to the income

gap between the producers of agricultural raw materials and the producers of commodities while strengthening interaction between the two groups.

THE SEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

Prior to the expansion of the urban area, with the exception of a few who in lean seasons engage in small business operations, the farm households were totally dependent on farming before their lands were gobbled up by urban sprawl. Today nearly all households seek to diversify their occupations or even abandon farming altogether. With regard to the nature of changing occupations and diversification of occupation, the survey we conducted in the area revealed that 48.6 percent of the respondents changed occupation from farming to day laborer in the construction activities of the project. About 22.2 percent reported using the compensation money to make a transition to small business operations, such as bull fattening, taverns and restaurants, and grain trade. Some 8 individuals are employed by the sub-city government. About 12 households (8.4 percent) were engaged in quarrying while 15.2 percent were engaged in a variety of activities such as guarding and pottery making (especially women).

The cash compensation extended to the farmers was meant to be used for making a transition to new occupations. Accordingly, an assessment of the type of investment made by the households found that the majority of the respondents (48.0 percent) reported using their compensation money to build a new residence or to improve existing houses (of those who were not displaced, but lost part of their properties).

Home improvement included changing thatched roofs to corrugated iron sheets, buying or purchasing more household furniture, and so forth. About 22 of the respondents replied that they deposited some of the money in the bank. Some farm households (8.0 percent of the total respondent farmers) attempted illegally to buy additional farmland from the adjacent rural areas. On the other hand, 13.3 percent of the respondents reported that, because they did not know how to utilize the cash given to them, they inappropriately spent or underinvested it. This group of respondents is very likely to fall into real poverty. In addition, 3.3 percent of the households, those who had prior experience in commodity trade, started businesses with the compensation money. Two households invested in transport business. About 4.7 percent of the respondents reported that, apart from the above investment areas, they purchased of food items, clothing, children's schooling, etc.

In general, the affected farmers and farming communities criticize the government for not offering them alternative livelihood diversification mechanisms even though officials had told them not to continue with farming. Access to credits and savings opportunities is still unavailable. The displaced have not been given training on how to use the cash compensation for investing in non-agricultural activities. The households are trying to change their occupation from farming to other activities on their own initiative.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

This paper has attempted to assess the major impacts of the expansion of Addis Ababa on the surrounding

farmlands in light of the compensation payments paid to the displaced and based on survey data from *kebele* 01 of NSL sub-city, one of the areas identified as a suitable direction for city expansion. Expansion of the urban space is inevitable and expected to increase in the future. The areas of expansion designated by the Master Plan do not seem to be large enough to accommodate the growing population. In the future, the settlement area undoubtedly will move beyond the municipal boundary, further displacing farm households from their main source of livelihood, land. For the farming households presently living in the expansion areas, the city government has not put forth a policy framework either to integrate them into the urban economy and society or to relocate them in other farming communities where land is available. What is currently taken as a solution is the dislocation of farming households with cash compensation for some of the properties without the city government having to take any measure to assist the dislocated in their relocation so that they can successfully adjust to their new life.

Planning alternatives courses is necessary to reduce the vagaries of displacement. Cash is a liquid asset that can be diverted into unplanned use by the recipients because they (farmers in this case) have no skill or knowledge in how to invest in worthwhile business ventures. According to the survey, most of the farmers were on the verge of exhausting the cash given to them. The knowledge and experiences of farm households that would enable them to engage in non-farm activities is very limited. Because agricultural opportunities are diminishing rapidly, farmers need to look for alternative employment opportunities. In fact, the

survey results on this issue have shown that some farm households have moved to non-farm occupations, but a significant portion of the displaced households is simply living off the cash compensation. If this group continues to spend on consumption, there is little doubt that they will face imminent impoverishment within a short period of time. Giving net cash to the farm households by itself is not an adequate option; rather it should be accompanied by trainings on how to use the cash (the liquid asset) for other business ventures. In this regard, the government can be blamed because it has done little (only cash compensation) to support the affected households.

To minimize the risks of impoverishment in such development-induced displacement, a baseline survey needs to be conducted to identify the types and amounts of properties and the actual needs of the people to be affected before decisions are made to dislocate people from their homes and livelihood. The farm households should fully participate in the decision-making process concerning, for instance, the amount of compensation payments for their properties. Regarding the decision on the amount of compensation, the exact value of the properties of the farm households should be determined by a third party that is capable of making an independent decision. The city government should consider providing help in developing alternative peri-urban employment opportunities such as dairy and poultry industries to aid the farm households make the transition to non-farm income generating activities. The farming households could also be encouraged to make this transition by extending opportunities of credits and saving. In the end, the city needs to come

to the understanding that the strategy of horizontal expansion is unsustainable. To the extent possible, vertical instead of horizontal expansion needs to be encouraged, for instance, through housing densification by emphasizing the building of condominiums and high-rise buildings.

NOTE

1. Studies conducted in different parts of the world have clearly indicated that rapid population growth and the demand for housing often leads to the expansion of cities at the cost of peripheral agricultural lands (Fazal 2000; Joshi *et al* 2002; Morello 2000).

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FOUNDATIONS OF A STATE IN OROMIA: APPLYING GADAA PRINCIPLES IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

Asafa Jalata

In its long struggle to decolonize Oromia and construct a sovereign state, the Oromo national movement has played a leading role in developing *Oromummaa* or Oromoness² and in revitalizing Oromo culture, history, and language. Institutionalizing these achievements requires tackling the challenges of state building in Oromia, empowering the Oromo people, and fostering peace with other peoples in the Horn

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of Africa. To that end, Oromo political organizations need to engage in a truly democratic dialogue to confront and overcome exclusivist and anarchist political tendencies³ within the Oromo national movement and address some major structural factors that impinge on the progress of the Oromo national movement.⁴

The challenges that the Oromo national struggle faces are rooted in the process of the development of the Oromo national movement and are a structural element of current Oromo politics rather than the result of the problems created by individuals. The development of this national movement occurred after a long period of resistance. The Oromo resisted slavery and colonization and fought the status of colonial subject and second-class citizen to which they were relegated by the Ethiopian state. Various Oromo groups organized numerous local uprisings in different parts of Oromia aimed at regaining their freedom and independence. The Oromo's search for freedom and decolonization was clearly manifested in 1936 when thirty-three Oromo chiefs held a meeting and decided to establish the Western Oromo Confederacy. The document they signed to establish this confederacy expressed the desire of the people of Western Oromia to become a League of Nations protectorate with the help of the British government until the Oromo could achieve self-government. Scattered Oromo resistance and struggle continued until the 1960s, when the Oromo national movement emerged.⁵

All these forms of resistance took place without a central national organization. The brutality and depredation of colonial rule did not crush the Oromo human spirit, erase their cultural memory, or dampen

their commitment to individual and collective resistance to colonial or racial/ethno-national domination. Furthermore, changes in social structures resulting from economic and political transformations, urbanization and community formation, the development of institutions, the emergence of an educated class, politicized collective grievances, and the dissemination of social scientific and political knowledge through global and local networks, have interplayed and helped the development of Oromo nationalism.⁶ Some elements of the Oromo educated class clearly understood the complex problems of Oromo society by familiarizing themselves with Oromo history, culture, values, and various forms of the Oromo resistance to Ethiopian colonialism. These elements facilitated the emergence of the Oromo national movement by developing Oromo nationalism and its national organizational forms (Jalata, 1995). The emergence of the Macca Tuulama Self-Help Association (MTSA) in the early 1960s and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in the early 1970s marked the development of Oromo nationalism with its national organizational structures.

To prevent further development of Oromo nationalism, the Ethiopian government targeted for destruction Oromo nationalist intellectuals who broke out of the Ethiopian colonial system. When they took up arms in resistance in eastern Oromia, the Somali government that opposed Oromo emancipation persecuted them. Attacked from all sides, the founding leadership of MTSA and OLF was decimated. Further, complex political problems and confusion emerged within the Oromo nationalist camp beginning in the 1970s, largely because of the low level and uneven development of

Oromummaa, lack of experience, and political opportunism. Religious or regional identities corrupted the movement and undermined the development of the Oromo national struggle. Unfortunately, beginning in the late 1970s, Oromo nationalists were subsequently divided into different camps that started to fight one another while fighting against Ethiopian and Somali forces.

Despite political fragmentation, ideological confusion, and a multiplicity of enemies, Oromo nationalists who survived the onslaught from all directions managed to maintain the integrity of the OLF and to continue the Oromo liberation struggle. The lack of support from important countries hampered the development of the OLF. However, the political integrity and determination of its leaders and members allowed the OLF to spread the concept of Oromo nationalism among the Oromo people. In 1991, the OLF reluctantly joined the Transitional Government of Ethiopia with other Oromo organizations. In less than a year, it had mobilized the entire Oromo population around its political objectives. The specter of OLF dominance caused the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government of Meles Zenawi to turn against the Oromo people and their national movement. The Meles government has targeted the Oromos for destruction because of the political challenge that the Oromo national struggle, led by the OLF, presents to its hold on power. Recognizing that Oromia is the richest and most populous state, the Tigrayan elite has been using all forms of violence to dominate and control Oromia, which is the key to controlling the Ethiopian political economy.

The leadership of the Oromo national movement and the Oromo people were not prepared to face

this political challenge. The widely held view of why the failure occurred is that individuals sabotaged the Oromo struggle for personal reasons. In reality, the Oromo movement lacks a coherent leadership because of the untimely death of some of its founding leaders.⁷ Despite the fact that there are well-educated Oromo political leaders, the movement still faces daunting challenges. Its leadership has not yet developed the organizational norms and culture of teamwork needed to envision the theoretical, ideological, and organizational concepts necessary to address the problems of Oromo leadership. It must be kept in mind that human society is dynamic and all visions and strategies must be reevaluated and reinvented from time to time in order to enable the Oromo leadership to be able to effectively respond to emerging conditions and opportunities. Furthermore, the Oromo political leadership has yet to convince some countries to support the Oromo national struggle for self-determination, social justice, and democracy.

The lack of coherent political leadership, both in the diaspora and in Oromia, has denied the Oromo national movement the possibilities of developing the organizational (formal) and social (informal) networks that can effectively help in developing *Oromummaa* and in taking collective political actions at the individual, relational, and collective levels. The Oromo political leadership has not been able to develop the organizational capacity needed to engage in political dialogue and activity both in formal and informal settings. It is impossible to build an effective institutional order or organizational structure without integrating formal and informal rules for members. Because Oromo

traditions lack bureaucratic codes and procedures, Oromo political leaders and the Oromo community at-large lack culturally ingrained rules to guide their actions. The lack of coherence among the leadership of a broad range of Oromo organizations in turn has created suspicious conditions that have prevented open and honest dialogue among leaders and between leaders and followers.

In the absence of a coherent organization, critical and open dialogue within the movement has not been possible. The Oromo national movement must develop *Oromummaa* as a collective identity that can be instrumental for collective action. As Colin Barker, Alan Johnson and Michael Lavallette (2001: 4-5) assert, “movements are arenas of discussion and argument, out of which there can emerge, at best, unstable and provisional forms of collective understanding, identity and action.” Serious Oromo nationalist leaders and activists need to engage in an honest and serious dialogue through a common platform for the further development of an Oromo collective identity based on the principles of *Oromummaa* and for the attainment of a form of collective understanding of Oromo national interests. This common platform can then serve as a launching pad for well-planned collective actions as a nation. Oromo leaders and organizations should avoid the empty rhetoric of claiming adherence to *gadaa* principles and practicing Oromo values. Solving the political leadership problem and strengthening an Oromo organizational capacity require adopting relevant *gadaa* principles that can blend in well with current organizational and management principles.

This article first explores the process of state formation in historic Oromia to identify the essence and characteristics of *gadaa* (Oromo democracy) and the *moottii* (kingdom) systems.⁸ Second, it focuses on explaining the impacts of global imperialism, Ethiopian colonialism, and the role of the Oromo clientele class on the process of state formation in Oromia. Third, the article demonstrates the immediate challenges to the recreation of an Oromo state whose sovereignty is either exclusive or shared with other peoples that accept the principles of national self-determination, the rule of law, and multinational democracy. Fourth, it demonstrates why, in Oromia and beyond, the refining and adapting of certain *gadaa* principles to the processes of state formation and building is necessary for the construction of a democratic government. Finally, the article illustrates the urgency of developing an Oromo national assembly, a national *Gumii Oromiyaa*, patterned after the *Gumii Gayyo* in southern Oromia so as to transform the unwritten Oromo constitutional order into a written one. The purpose is to revitalize the Oromo national movement with the goals of defeating Ethiopian colonialism and the Oromo clientele class and forming the democratic state to achieve national sovereignty, security, and sustainable socio-economic development.

THE GADAA REPUBLIC OF HISTORIC OROMIA

Between the sixteenth and the mid-seventieth century, all Oromos lived under one *gadaa* administration (Baissa, 2004: 101; Jalata, 2005a: 20). In the *gadaa* republic, the Oromo people were organized around

political, economic, social, cultural, and religious institutions. According to Lemmu Baissa (2004: 101),

Gadaa government comprised a hierarchy of triple levels of government: the national, the regional and the local. At the pan-Oromo level, the national government was led by an elected *luba* council [*gadaa* class] formed from representatives of the major Oromo moieties, clan families and clans, under the presidency of the *abba gadaa* and his two deputies, collectively known as the *warana sadden*. The national leadership was responsible for such important matters as legislation and enforcement of general laws, handling issues of war and peace and coordinating the nation's defense, management of intra-Oromo clan conflicts and dealing with non-Oromo people.

Between 1522-1618, with their increased population and extended territories, different Oromo groups started to form autonomous *gadaa* governments (Baissa, 2004; Jalata, 2005a). While establishing autonomous local governments, the Oromo formed alliances, federations, and confederations to maintain their political and cultural solidarity and to defend their security and interest from their common enemies (Bulcha, 1996: 50; Etefa, 2008). The case of the Tuulama Oromo demonstrates that “autonomous local governments were answerable to the overall *gadaa* of the main branch” (Etefa, 2008: 21).

The *gadaa* system has the principles of checks and balances (such as periodic transfer of power every eight years and division of power among executive, legislative, and judiciary branches), balanced opposition (among five *gadaa* grades⁹), and power sharing between higher

and lower administrative organs to prevent power from falling into the hands of despots. Other principles of the system have included balanced representation of all clans, lineages, regions and confederacies; accountability of leaders; the settlement of disputes through reconciliation; and the respect for basic rights and liberties. There are five *gadaa* grades, which have different names in different parts of Oromia as the result of the expansion of Oromos and their establishment of different autonomous administrative systems. The rule of law is the key element of the *gadaa* system; those leaders who have violated the law of the land or whose families could not maintain the required standard of the system were recalled before the end of their tenure in the office. *Gadaa* leaders implemented the laws that were made by the representatives of the people. Oromo democracy allowed the Oromo people to make, change or amend laws and rules every eight years. The *gadaa* system accepted Oromo people as the ultimate source of authority and nobody was above the law.

Gadaa officials were elected by established criteria from the *qondala* grade and received rigorous training in *gadaa* philosophy and governance for eight years before they enter into the *luba* grade (administrative grade); the main criteria for election or selection to office included bravery, knowledge, honesty, demonstrated ability to govern, etc. *Gadaa* as an integrative social system combined political and civil culture in Oromo society. As a political system, it organized male Oromos according to *hirya* (age-sets) and *luba* (generation-sets) for social, political, and economic purposes. Therefore, it was difficult to draw a clear boundary between civil and political culture during the *gadaa* era. During this period,

Oromo women had the *siqqee* institution, a parallel institution to the *gadaa* system that “functioned hand in hand with *gadaa* system as one of its built-in mechanisms of checks and balances” (Kumsa, 1997: 119). If the balance between men and women was broken, a *siqqee* rebellion was initiated to restore the law of God and the moral and ethical order of society. The *gadaa* and *siqqee*¹⁰ institutions greatly influenced the Oromo value system in pre-colonial (pre 1880s) Oromo society. These two institutions helped maintain *saffu* (Oromo moral codes) in Oromo society by enabling Oromo women to have control over resources and private spaces, social status and respect, and sisterhood and solidarity by deterring men from infringing upon their individual and collective rights.

Some aspects of *gadaa* still survive in some Oromo regions. In the Boorana Oromo community, for example, the *Gumii Gayyo* (the assembly of multitudes) brings together almost every important leaders, such as living *abba gaddas* (the president of the assembly), the *qaallus* (spiritual leaders), age-set councilors, clan leaders, *gadaa* councilors, and other concerned individuals to make, amend, or change laws and rules every eight years. The 37th *Gumii Gayyo* Assembly of the Boorana was held in the August of 1996 to make, amend, or change the three categories of their laws, known as the cardinal, customary, and supplementary laws (Huqqa, 1998). The *Gumii Gayyo* assembly has a higher degree of ritual and political authority than the *gadaa* class and other assemblies because it “assembles representative of the entire society in conjunction with any individual who has the initiative to the ceremonial

grounds,” and “what *Gumii* decides cannot be reversed by any other assembly” (Legesse, 1973: 93).

The development of class within Oromo society in some areas and external factors—such as Turko-Egyptian colonialism in eastern Oromia between 1875 and 1885, European and Ethiopian colonialism, the emergence of an Oromo collaborative class, and the spread of Islam and Christianity—undermined the political, military, and ritual/spiritual roles of the *gadaa* system in some parts of Oromia. Though the institutions were weakened, some elements of Oromo democratic values still exist in areas where the *gadaa* system was suppressed. In its modified form, the system is still practiced among the Boorana, Guji, and Tuulama, helping in maintaining peace, exchanging knowledge of society, and practicing rituals among some moieties and groups (Dewo, 2008; Aguilar, 2008).

CLASS FORMATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE *MOOTTII* SYSTEM

Both internal socio-economic transformation and external interaction with neighboring peoples slowly facilitated the emergence of class and the *moottii* system in some Oromo areas. As some Oromo clans moved to far-flung regions and interacted with Omotic kingdoms and Nilo-Saharan societies and as they settled and engaged in farming and trade, they developed class differentiation that gradually led to the transformation of the *gadaa* system into the *moottii* system. With the development of class in northern and western Oromia, this egalitarian democratic system was challenged and replaced by the *moottii* (kingdom) system (Jalata, 2005a: 36-38). Constant wars led to the evolution of the *abba*

dulas (military leaders) to hereditary *moottiis* (leaders) in northern and western Oromia. In the eighteenth century, the Wallo Oromo had replaced the *gadaa* administration with that of kingdom¹¹ (Prouty and Rosenfeld, 1981:181). In the Gibe region, the *moottii* system developed through confiscation of land, collection of booty, tribute and market dues, and through the establishment of hereditary rights to ownership of property and political office in the nineteenth century (Luling, 1965:166-168).

The emergence of powerful autocratic leaders and their private armies led to the control of marketplaces, trade routes and land, and the development of an agricultural economy that led to class differentiation and state formation (Lewis, 1964:142; Triulzi, 1975; Bartles, 1970). The egalitarian and democratic *gadaa* system was incompatible with the new *moottii* system due to the fundamental changes in the landholding system (Ta'a, 1984). In other words, the emergence of class differentiation and the rise of the Oromo kingdoms suppressed the *gadaa* system in some parts of Oromia. In the Gibe region, five Oromo Gibe states—Limmu-Ennarya, Guma, Jimma, Gera and Goma—emerged between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries¹² (Lewis, 1965:47-121). Here in the seventeenth century, the differentiation of wealth went beyond the wealth of cattle when the *sorressa* (the wealthy merchant and landlord class) emerged (Hassen, 1990: 89-187). With the emergence of this wealthy class, the principle of adopting the conquered populations as 'equal' through the *mogassa* process ended; the institutions of slavery and *qubisisa* (tenancy) emerged (Hassen 1990: 121-124).

The emergence of a hierarchical structure reduced the egalitarian aspects of the *gadaa* to religious rituals. The *moottii* (king) continuously accumulated wealth with incomes he extracted from tribute on the land and its products, and from commerce (Abir, 1965). This produce extraction enabled the *moottii* to create and maintain regulatory institutions like a military, bodyguards, and courts (Lewis, 1965:93). The emergence of *moottii* systems in Leqa-Naqamte and Leqa-Qellem, western Oromia, was actually based on the initiation of warfare and appropriation of rights to land and labor, control of trade and market places¹³ (Bartles, 1970: 15). Externally, the *gadaa* system was attacked and weakened in eastern Oromia by the Turko-Egyptian and Harari conspiracy. The interethnic alliance and interdependence between the Harari, residents of the walled city of Harar, and the eastern Oromo was shattered when a faction of the former invited the Turko-Egyptian power to colonize the Hararge region in 1875 (Hassen, 1973: 6-18).

Between 1875 and 1885, the Harari retained their position and accumulated wealth at the cost of the majority Oromo under the Turko-Egyptian rule.¹⁴ Similarly, in the regions presently called Sidamo, Arssi, Bale, Illubabor, and Gamu Gofa and in some parts of Shawa, the *gadaa* system was destroyed or suppressed by global imperialism and Ethiopian colonialism. The capitalist penetration of the last decades of nineteenth century laid the economic foundation of the modern Horn states, followed by the occupation of strategic positions by European powers along the Red Sea littoral (Thompson and Adloff, 1968: 5). Generally speaking, the partition of the Horn of Africa in the last decades of the

nineteenth-century, the alliance between European imperialists—namely France, England, and Italy—and Ethiopian warlords, the creation of the Ethiopian Empire, and the colonization of Oromia ended Oromo statehood and sovereignty,¹⁵ which the Oromo national movement is currently struggling to restore.

THE END OF OROMO STATEHOOD AND SOVEREIGNTY

The colonization of Oromia by the joint forces of European imperialism and Ethiopian colonialism ended the sovereign existence of the Oromo people who were administered by *gadaa* officials and the independent *mootii* states. These forces arrested and retarded the historical evolution of a state in Oromia. As an egalitarian system, *gadaa* did not compete well with hierarchical social systems that engaged in the extraction of economic surplus and political oppression by building a permanent professional bureaucracy, expanding formal education, and developing technological capabilities. The intervention of the Ethiopian and European powers through military, mercantile, colonial and neo-colonial forces in Oromo society demonstrated the challenge the Oromo political leadership was facing because of an externally imposed exploitative and oppressive social system. Because of the external influence and the internal weakness of the *gadaa* system after its decentralization, autocratic and hereditary chiefs emerged by overthrowing democratically elected leadership in some parts of Oromia.

The beginning of imperialist occupation of the Horn of Africa necessitated seeking alliances with local rulers. France sent two scientific expeditions to

the Amhara Kingdom of Manz in 1839 and 1842-43 and started trade with this kingdom in 1857. After the occupation of Obock in 1862, an important commercial center on the Red Sea and the Gulf of Tajura, France established businesses and created an intermediated class that would collaborate in its colonizing ventures as a counterweight to Britain's dominant position on both sides of the Red Sea in Aden and in the Somaliland coast. Italy began to play an important role after 1879 both on the Red Sea coast and the Indian Ocean basin and gradually carved out Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. Weakened by these activities, Egyptian colonialists were forced to withdraw from Harar in 1885. On 20 March 1897, the French commandant, Lagarde, signed treaties with Menelik (King of Shawa) and defined the boundary between the French and the Abyssinian colony of Somaliland. France allowed Abyssinia to use Djibouti as its official port for commerce; and later a railway was constructed between Djibouti and Finfinnee (Addis Ababa).

A blockade of arms trade in East Africa in the late nineteenth century made Djibouti an active center of the underground arms trade. While Africans were denied the right to buy firearms on the suspicion that they would use them against Europeans, Abyssinian/Ethiopian rulers were allowed to buy firearms and participate in the scramble for Africa because of their collaboration with the European imperialists. Consequently, Ethiopia colonized various independent peoples including the Oromo with the help of the weapons, mercenaries, and advisors from Great Britain, France, and Italy. During the scramble, the Oromo nation was partitioned between Britain and

Abyssinia. In the imperial conquest, the Ethiopians liquidated half the Oromo population and their leadership. According to Alexander Bulatovich (2000: 68-69), “The dreadful annihilation of more than half of the population during the conquest took away from the Gallas [Oromos] all possibilities of thinking about any sort of uprising...Without a doubt, the Galla [Oromo], with their...five million population, occupying the best land, all speaking one language, could represent a tremendous force if united.” In their colonial venture, European imperialists and Ethiopian colonialists were looking to obtain commodities such as gold, ivory, coffee, musk, hides and skins, slaves, and a variety of agricultural products that were valued in international markets (Jalata, 2005a).

The Ethiopian state controlled the Oromo nation by establishing the local colonial administration in garrison towns that were built in various strategic places. The garrisons gradually developed into urban areas where *Habashas* (mainly Amharas and Tigrayans) used Oromo, Sidama, Afar, Somali and others labor and resources to build offices, prisons, churches, and later schools. These regulatory and service institutions were established to assure the continuation of Ethiopian colonial dominance and the extraction of produce. The colonialists created the *nafxanya-gabbar* system (semi-slavery), the collaborative class, the colonial landholding system, and intensified slavery (Jalata, 2005a: 103-124). The colonized farmers and nomads who lost control on their lives, children and resources were forced to work for their colonial masters, intermediaries, and the state for a certain number of days each week. Until colonial capitalism emerged in the 1930s during the

Italian colonial occupation, the *naftanya-gabbar* system and slavery existed as the two main coercive labor recruitment systems.¹⁶ The intermarriage of Ethiopian colonialism and global hegemonism later facilitated the development of agricultural capitalism, sharecropping, and tenancy that gradually replaced slavery and the *naftanya-gabbar* system. Oromos were colonized directly by the Ethiopian (Amhara-Tigray) minority settlers who attempted to destroy Oromo peoplehood through different contradictory mechanisms that included partial genocide and selective assimilation.

Through its educational system, the Ethiopian political system was designed to produce a small number of Ethiopianized Oromo leaders who would function as intermediaries between the Ethiopian ruling class and the Oromo people. It intentionally limited the number of Oromo collaborative leaders by denying education to the overwhelming majority of Oromos. Furthermore, through various political and cultural mechanisms, including assimilation, political marriage, religion, and divide-and-conquer policies, the Ethiopian government disconnected the few educated Oromo vassals from their cultural and historical roots, continuously forcing them to show fealty to their suzerain. The stationed settlers and the Oromo collaborating class protected Ethiopian power and played an important role in transferring the resources of the Oromo nation to the Ethiopian occupiers.

Even though the Oromo resisted Ethiopian colonialism since its imposition, a liberation movement to restore Oromo statehood, sovereignty, and democracy did not emerge until in the 1960s and 1970s. The Ethiopian colonial state and its institutions prevented

the emergence of Oromo leadership by co-opting the submissive elements and liquidating the nationalist ones, by suppressing Oromo autonomous institutions, and by erasing Oromo history, culture, and language. According to Mohammed Hassen (1998: 194),

From the 1880s to the...1960s, the Oromo suffered a great deal from the lack of central leadership. It should be remembered that in the 1880s during the conquest and colonization of Oromo territory, a large number of the Oromo people, together with their leaders, were decimated.... Other Oromo leaders were co-opted into the Ethiopian political process. The basis for independent Oromo leadership was destroyed.

Despite the fact that Oromo individuals and various Oromo groups resisted and fought against the combined forces of Ethiopian settler colonialism and global imperialism, only in the early 1960s did a few Oromo elite in urban areas start to develop and manifest the Oromo collective consciousness and nationalism that were necessary for building a centralized national movement.

This was in spite of the fact that the Oromo lacked many formally trained and culturally minded intellectuals due to the meagerness of a modern educational establishment to which Oromo had access. To deny Oromos education, the Ethiopian colonial government and the Orthodox Church suppressed the efforts of Oromo pioneer scholars such as the Christianized Oromo former slave scholar, Onesimos Nasib, who was trained in Europe, and the Muslim religious scholar, Sheik Bakri Sapalo (Bulcha 1994; Hassen

1993). Despite the fact that Oromos provided most of the resources necessary to build Ethiopian infrastructures and institutions, they were denied access to social amenities. Reflecting on this reality, in May 1966, the leadership of the MTSA at its Itaya, Arsi, meeting expressed that:

(1) Less than one percent of Oromo school age children ever get the opportunity to go to school; (2)...less than one percent of the Oromo population get adequate medical services; (3)...less than fifty percent of the Oromo population own land; (4)...a very small percentage of the Oromo population have access to [modem] communication services. [And yet] the Oromo paid more than eighty percent of the taxes for education, health, and communication” (quoted in Hassen, 1998: 205-206).

When the Ethiopian government and Ethiopian elite continued to mistreat these Oromo elite and conspired to deny Oromos educational and professional opportunities and even attempted to destroy the leadership of the association, the association, under its charismatic leader, Brigadier General Taddasa Biru, unsuccessfully attempted in 1966 to take over the control of the Ethiopian state (Zoga, 1993: 118-133). The Oromo nationalist elements of the 1960s recognized what C. Geertz (1994: 30) notes: “The one aim is to be noticed; it is a search for identity, and a demand that identity be publicly acknowledged.... The other aim is practical: it is a demand for progress for a rising standard of living, more effective political order, great social justice, and beyond that of ‘playing a part in the larger arena of world politics’, of exercising influ-

ence among the nations.” Prevented from organizing themselves politically and culturally, and denied opportunities necessary for developing their own regional and national institutions and the Oromo system of knowledge that would facilitate the transmission of accumulated cultural experiences from generation to generation, Oromo culture and tradition survived only on the family and local levels.

The Oromo have been ruled by successive authoritarian-terrorist regimes, which exploited and impoverished them by expropriating their resources.¹⁷ Global imperialism has sustained the Ethiopian colonial state through financial and military assistance and global diplomacy (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990; Jalata, 2001, 2005a), exposing the Oromo to political slavery, state terrorism, massive human rights violations (Jalata, 2005a, 2005b), and abject poverty. Because the magnitude of the Oromo problem, it is impossible to provide a numerical face to the devastating effects of stated terrorism and other forms of violence, poverty, hunger, malnutrition, suffering, disease, ignorance, alienation, and hopelessness. The Ethiopian colonial system has taken away the sovereignty of the Oromo people and the needs that Ron Shiffman (1995) calls subsistence, protection or security, affection, and understanding.¹⁸

The Oromo have been denied their inalienable rights to self-determination, democracy, and the opportunity to build their social, economic, political, cultural, and organizational infrastructure.¹⁹ Currently, the TPLF-led minority Ethiopian government is attempting to find a workable solution for the political problem that has existed for several centuries—the relationship between the Oromos and their Amhara-

Tigrayan colonizers. In the process, it is trying to establish a Tigrayan minority hegemonic state in both Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Despite the numerous challenges the Oromo national struggle faces from its external and internal enemies and other problems, it is progressing towards determining the political destiny of the Oromo nation.

THE IMMEDIATE CHALLENGE TO OROMO STATEHOOD AND SOVEREIGNTY

Since 1992, the Meles government has focused on attacking the Oromo national movement led by the OLF and transferring the economic resources of Oromia to the Tigrayan elite and the Tigrayan region. The regime started by denying political space to the Oromo people when it “closed more than 200 OLF campaign offices and imprisoned and killed hundreds of OLF cadres and supporters ahead of the elections scheduled to take place on 21 June 1992” (Hassen, 2002: 28). To achieve its political and economic objectives, the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) regime primarily uses its puppet organization known as the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO), led by Tigrayan cadres, elements of Oromo speaking colonial settlers, and opportunistic Oromos who do anything in exchange for luxurious lifestyles. Using the OPDO, the Meles government has attempted to construct a political façade for supposed self-rule and to give an Oromo face to its terrorist and genocidal policy in Oromia.

While terrorizing millions of Oromos in Oromia, the Meles regime has established a political marriage of convenience with the governments of Kenya, Dji-

bouti, Sudan, and some Somali warlords in order to deny support and sanctuary to the Oromo national movement and to extend its terrorist activities in the Horn of Africa. Western powers, particularly the United States and China, have supported the political and economic policies of the Meles regime. This terrorist regime maintains political repression, tight control of foreign aid and domestic financial resources, and direct ownership and control of all aspects of the militarized colonial state, including the security and military institutions, the judiciary, and other public bodies. Emboldened by the external support it receives, the current authoritarian-terrorist regime of Ethiopia is using terror to govern the colonized regions, such as Oromia, Ogadenia, Sidama, Gambella, as well as conducting recurrent wars on its neighbors, such as Eritrea and Somalia.

The Meles regime uses the media to attack the OLF and all self-aware Oromos in order to destroy an independent Oromo national leadership and to deny the Oromo nation political voice on many levels. Furthermore, the Meles regime focuses on developing Tigray and its human potential primarily at the cost of Oromia and its population (Adunga, 2006). In 1992, the Meles regime claimed it was imprisoning 22,000 OLF members, supporters, and sympathizers in concentration camps at Didheesa in Wallaga, Agarfa in Bale, Blate in Sidamo, and Hurso in Hararge (Hassen, 2002, 32). Credible sources estimated that between 45,000 and 50,000 Oromos were imprisoned in these concentration camps from 1992 to 1994 and 3000 of them died from torture, malnutrition, diarrhea, malaria, and other diseases (Pollack, 1996: 12). Hassan Ali, appointed by

Meles as the first president of Oromia between 1992 and 1995, exposed the contradiction between what the regime claims by its democratic discourse and what it practices by its army, the police, and security networks as follows:

The TPLF soldiers and its members are a law unto themselves. Only what they say and what they want is implemented in Oromia to the general exclusion of Oromo interests or wishes..... Although Oromia is autonomous in name, the government soldiers and secret service agents have total power to do whatever they want in Oromia. They imprison, torture, or kill anyone, including OPDO members and our government employees without any due process of law. They have established several secret detention centers, where thousands of innocent people are kept for years without trial or charge. Federal government soldiers, more appropriately the TPLF soldiers, are in practice above the rule of law in Oromia (quoted in Hassen, 2002. 33).

Since 1992, this regime has banned independent Oromo organizations, including the OLF, and declared war on the Oromo people. It even outlawed Oromo journalists and other writers and closed down Oromo newspapers. As Mohammed Hassen (2002: 31) asserts, “The attack on the free press has literally killed the few publications in the Oromo language in the Latin alphabet [and stopped] the flowering of Oromo literature and the standardization of the Oromo language itself. The Oromo magazines that have disappeared include *Gada*, *Biftu*, *Madda Walaabuu*, *Odaa*, and the *Urjii* magazine.” Almost all Oromo journalists and other writers

are either in prisons, killed or in exile. The regime also later banned Oromo musical groups and all professional associations.

From March to May 2002, several thousands of Oromo high school, college and university students demonstrated across Oromia, demanding self-determination for the Oromo people and an end to the brutalities of the Ethiopian army and police against civilians, opposing the settling of armed colonial settlers in Oromia and rejecting the new educational policy that limited the education of Oromo children to 10th grade. They protested the policies and actions that were undermining the development of Oromo language and culture under the pretext of a lack of budget, books, and teachers. They also criticized the imposition of high taxes and high fertilizer costs. The demonstrators exposed the existence of a terrorist group called “*Galla Gaday?*” (Oromo killer) that killed Oromo children and other Oromos, opposed the human rights abuses of Oromo nationalists, particularly artists and journalists, and demanded the restoration of private Oromo newspapers. Ignoring these peaceful and democratic demands, the government detained, interrogated, and tortured hundreds of Oromo business people, students, teachers, and members of the MTSA by branding them supporters of the OLF.

From January to May 2004, the Oromo students across Oromia from secondary schools to colleges protested against the dismissal of about 380 Oromo students from Finfinnee (Addis Ababa) University and the relocation of Oromia capital from Finfinnee to Adama (Nazareth). Government forces killed at least 11 students, arrested more than 7,000 students and teach-

ers disrupting both secondary and higher education in Oromia (Oromia Support Group, 2004: 2). Saman Zia-Zarifi (2004: 1), Academic Freedom Director for Human Rights Watch, says, “Shooting at unarmed students is a shameful misuse of government power.” Detained “students were forced to run barefooted and crawl on their knees on coarse gravel spending the night on bare concrete floors” (Zia-Zarifi, 2004:12). Several Oromo students died in prisons due to torture and lack of medical treatment and adequate food.

In the same period, the Meles regime also targeted officials and members of the MTSA accusing them of links with the OLF and the protesting Oromo students. Government security men closed the office of this association in Finfinnee, confiscated documents and properties, and imprisoned the chairperson, Diribi Demissie, vice-chairman, Gamachu Fayera, and other officers on 18 May 2004. According to *Human Rights Watch* (2005b: 1-2):

In July 2004, the Ethiopian government revoked the license of the venerable Oromo self-help association Macca Tuulama for allegedly carrying out ‘political activities’ in violations of its charter. The police subsequently arrested four of the organization’s leaders on charges of ‘terrorism’ and providing support to the OLF. The four were released on bail in August but were arbitrarily arrested a week later.

Furthermore, regional authorities consolidated quasi-government institutions known as *gott* and *garee* from a pre-existing system of local government to maintain tight political control in Oromia; they

imposed these new structures on...communities and that the *garee* regularly require them to perform forced labor on projects they have no hand in designing. More disturbing, regional authorities are using the *gott* and *garee* to monitor the speech and personal lives of the rural population, to restrict and control the movements of residents, and to enforce farmers' attendance at 'meetings' that are thinly disguised OPDO political rallies (Human Rights Watch, 2005a: 2).

The Meles government has continued to eliminate or imprison politically conscious and self-respecting Oromos. Today about 40,000 Oromos are in official and secret prisons because of their political views and their resistance to injustice. After being jailed and released from prison after six years, Seye Abraha,²⁰ the former Defence Minister of the regime who participated in massacring and imprisoning thousands of Oromos, testified on 5 January 2008 to an audience in Virginia, the U.S., that “*esir betu Oromigna yinageral*” (“the prison speaks Oromiffa”) and noted that “about 99% of the prisoners in Qaliti are Oromos.”²¹ According to Human Rights Watch (2005a: 1-2),

since 1992, security forces have imprisoned thousands of Oromo on charges of plotting armed insurrection on behalf of the OLF. Such accusations have regularly been used as a transparent pretext to imprison individuals who publicly question government policies or actions. Security forces have tortured many detainees and subjected them to continuing harassment and abuse for years after their release. That harassment, in turn has often

destroyed victims' ability to earn a livelihood and isolated them from their communities.

The imprisoned Oromos and others are subjected to different forms of torture. Former prisoners testified that their arms and legs were tied tightly together on their backs and their naked bodies were whipped. There were prisoners who were locked up in empty steel barrels and tormented with heat in the tropical sun during the day and with cold at night. There were also prisoners who were forced into pits so that fire could be made on top of them (Bruna Fossati, Lydia Namarra and Peter Niggli, 1996).

Tactics amounting to state terrorism are employed to discourage Oromos from participating in their national movement. The Tigrayan state elite seems to believe that Oromo intellectuals, businessmen and women, conscious Oromo farmers, students, and community and religious leaders are the enemy of the Tigrayan interest and must be eliminated (Jalata, 2005b). State terrorism is associated with the issues of control of territory and resources and the construction of political and ideological domination. It manifests itself in the Ethiopian Empire in different forms. Its obvious manifestation is violence in the form of war, assassination, murder, castration, burying alive, throwing off cliffs, hanging, torture, rape, poisoning, confiscation of properties by the police and the army, forcing people to submission by intimidation, beating, and disarming citizens. The methods of killing also include burning, bombing, cutting throats or arteries in the neck, strangulation, shooting, and burying people up to their necks in the ground.

State sanctioned rape is a form of terrorism. The use of sexual violence is a tactic of genocide that a dominant ethnonational group practices in destroying the subordinate ethnonational group. To demoralize, destroy, and to show that Tigrayans are a powerful group that can do any thing to the Oromos, Tigrayan cadres, soldiers, and officials have frequently raped Oromo girls and women. As Bruna Fossati, Lydia Namarra and Peter Niggli (1996: 10) report, “in prison women are often humiliated and mistreated in the most brutal fashion. Torturers ram poles or bottles into their vaginas, connect electrodes to the lips of their vulva, or the victims are dragged into the forest and gang-raped by interrogation officers.” The soldiers have collected young Oromo girls and women into concentration camps and gang raped them in front of their relatives, fathers, brothers, and husbands to humiliate them and the Oromo people (Jalata, 2005b). In addition to the effects of mental and bodily tortures, through raping women and girls, the TPLF soldiers and officers have been spreading diseases, such as syphilis, gonorrhea, and HIV/AIDS in Oromo society.²²

Most Oromos who were murdered by the agents of the Ethiopian government were denied burial and eaten by hyenas. In 2007, the Meles militia killed twenty Oromos and left their corpses on the Mountain of Suufi in Eastern Oromia. A seventy years old farmer, Ahmed Mohamed Kuree was one of these Oromos. On 21 February 2007, his widow expressed on the Voice of America, *Afaan Oromo* Program:²³

We found his prayer beads, his cloth and a single piece of his bone, which the hyenas left behind after devouring the rest of his body,

and we took those items home. What is more, after we got home, they [government agents] condemned us for going to Gaara Suufii and for mourning. For fear of repercussions, we have not offered the customary prayer for the dead...husband by reading from the Qur'an. Justice has not been served. That is where we are today.

Another Oromo, Ayisha Ali, a fourteen years old teenager, was also killed and eaten by a hyena. Her mother also said on the same radio the following: "After we heard the rumor about the old man [Ahmed Mohamed Kuree] I followed his family to Gaara Suufii [in search of my daughter]. There we found her skirt, sweater, under wears and her hair, braided.... That was all we found of my daughter remains." Ayisha was probably raped and killed.

The Meles regime has targeted all sectors of Oromo society. Oromo communities are not able to do business as usual when their national movement and their nation face these kinds of violent destruction. According to Mohammed Hassen (2002: 37-38),

Oromo men, women, children, animals, and even the Oromo environment are all targets of the TPLF's tyranny. In cases where Oromo pastoralists were suspected of harboring OLF guerrilla fighters, TPLF soldiers punished them by destroying or confiscating their cattle or by poisoning the wells from which the cattle drank. On many occasions Oromo farmers, suspected of feeding OLF fighters, saw their farms burned to the ground and the defenseless members of their households brutally murdered. In 2000, when the TPLF government suspected OLF

guerrillas of hiding in the forests of Oromia, its agents set fires that caused catastrophic environmental destruction in Oromia and other states in southern Ethiopia.

Furthermore, the Meles regime has mobilized ethnonational minority groups such as Somalis, Afars, Konsos, and Gumuz by agitating, training, and arming them to kill and terrorize the Oromos and to loot their resources and expropriate their lands. In the last week of May, the Gumuz militia terrorized Oromos by murdering women, children and other Oromos in the administrative region of Wallaga (Voice of America, the Afaan Oromo Program, May 25, 26, 27, 2008).

The regime conducted fake elections in 1992, 1994, 1995, 2000, 2005, and achieved recognition from an international community that has ignored the principles of democracy and human rights. After the May 2005 elections, the Meles regime killed more than 193 demonstrators and imprisoned thousands of them in Finfinnee and other cities because they peacefully opposed the vote rigging by the regime. Nobody knows how many people the regime killed or imprisoned in rural areas because the regime has not allowed the reporting of such information. *Human Rights Watch* (2005a: 1) notes that in “Oromia, the largest and most populous state in Ethiopia, systematic political repression and pervasive human rights violations have denied citizens the freedom to associate and to freely form and express their political ideas.”

Against the backdrop of such incessant crimes against humanity, the only choice the Oromo people have is to intensify their national struggle in order to recreate the Oromo statehood and sovereignty that they

enjoyed under the *gadaa* republic. The Oromo national movement has intensified the Oromo national struggle as an ideological and political movement to enable the Oromo people to determine their destiny and to create Oromo statehood and sovereignty. The ultimate objective of the struggle is to overthrow of Ethiopian settler colonialism and its institutions that have denied Oromo autonomous cultural, political and economic development through state terrorism and massive human rights violations. The survival of the Oromo people requires consolidating the Oromo national movement and mobilizing the entire Oromo nation to dismantle the TPLF-government and to recreate a sovereign Oromian state that can be independent or a part of a multinational democratic state in which they share sovereignty. The Oromo national struggle must refine and adapt central aspects of the Oromo democratic heritage to facilitate a fundamental transformation of Oromo society. Without rebuilding the Oromo national movement for mobilizing the entire Oromo nation through retrieving the best elements of Oromo democratic tradition and politico-military organization, it is difficult to overcome the current political challenge they face from the TPLF-government that is hindering the emergence of Oromo statehood, sovereignty, and democracy.

RECREATING GADAA PRINCIPLES FOR ESTABLISHING A DEMOCRATIC STATE

For many centuries, the Oromo people organized themselves politically and culturally using the social institution of *gadaa* to maintain their independence before its decentralization and weakening in some

parts of Oromia and challenges from societies with a more developed bureaucracy. The design of *gadaa* as a social and political institution worked to prevent exploitation and political domination. Consequently, under the *gadaa* system Oromo society enjoyed peace, stability, prosperity, and political sovereignty.

Internally, the *moottii* political system with its rudimentary bureaucracy facilitated the development of an Oromo collaborative class that willingly or by force joined the Ethiopian political system. Evidently, the negative legacy associated with a collaborative and subservient leadership emerged in Oromo society because of external and internal factors. The aggregate impact of the alliance between European imperialism and Ethiopian colonialism and collaboration of some Oromo elite with the imperial/colonial enterprise has weakened Oromo human agency. The Ethiopian political structure annihilated the existing and potential Oromo political leadership and curtailed the ongoing development of autonomous leadership. All in all, these forces stunted the development of *Oromumma*, the natural evolution Oromo institutions, and Oromo nationalism. For three-quarters of a century, the Oromo resistance failed to assertively express the salient characteristics of a full-fledged national movement until an independent Oromo political leadership emerged in the form of a self-help association, the MTSA, in the early 1960s and a liberation front, the OLF, in the early 1970s.

The formation of the MTSA and the emergence of the OLF marked the beginning of a new Oromo political leadership whose goal was Oromo self-determination and national sovereignty. In the years after the early 1970s, the OLF played a central role in raising Oromo

political consciousness and in the development of *Oromummaa*. At the present, the forced substitution of alien cultures and ideologies for Oromo traditions and values and the absence of a democratic platform for national conversation have created an ideological void among Oromo elite, leaving them without the crucial resource they need to develop a strong Oromo national political leadership. The question now is how to build this strong independent leadership on the principles of the positive elements of the *gadaa* system and by overcoming its negative elements to defeat both the Ethiopian colonial system and its Oromo collaborative class.

The Oromo national leadership should be pressured to speak with the Oromo people and to listen as well, allowing the Oromo community at-large to engage in the process of self-emancipation by participating in and owning their national movement. This political leadership must also be challenged to move from an initial reliance on a narrow political circle and borrowed political ideologies and practices, and to embrace Oromo-centric democratic values using them to organize different forms of leadership in Oromo society and establish dynamic connections with the Oromo people. All Oromo nationalists should participate in revitalizing the Oromo national movement through the application of elements of *gadaa* principles by aiming to establish a future Oromia state and shared sovereignty with others, by implementing internal peace within the Oromo national movement and Oromo society, and by promoting peace (*nagaa* Oromoo) with Oromo neighbors. The refining and adapting of the best elements of the *gadaa* system are necessary to strengthen and consolidate the Oromo national struggle.

The Oromo national movement needs to retrieve, refine, adapt, and practice the principles of *gadaa*. The idea of building a national *Gumii Oromiyaa* must be given top priority by all Oromos in order to revitalize, centralize, and coordinate the Oromo national movement. All Oromos should be invited to participate and own their national movement. All Oromo nationalist leaders should start to search for ways of enabling Oromos to participate in the Oromo national movement by providing ideas, resources, expertise, and their labor. Although the fire of Oromo nationalism was lit by a few, determined revolutionary elements (Jalata 1995), the Oromo national struggle has now reached the level where it requires mass mobilization and participation. In this mobilization, the Oromo national movement should use the ideology and principles of *gadaa* democracy which must be enshrined in *Oromum-maa* in order to mobilize the entire nation spiritually, financially, militarily, and organizationally to take coordinated political and military action.

APPLYING GADAA PRINCIPLES²⁴ FOR CONSTRUCTING A STATE IN OROMIA AND BEYOND

In order to obtain political legitimacy from Oromo society even the enemy of the Oromo people uses the discourse of *gadaa* without believing in it and practicing its principles. The Oromo collaborators of the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government use names or concepts such as *abba dula*, *caffee* (Oromo assembly), etc. while engaging in political repression, state terrorism, and ‘genocide’ in Oromia (Jalata, 2005b). Similarly, most Oromo nationalists and organizations give lip

service to Oromo democracy. Despite the fact that the contemporary organizations of the Oromo national movement use *gadaa* names or concepts, they rarely apply the principles of the system to regulate their own political behavior and practices. It is contrary to the principles of *gadaa* to try to stay in political leadership permanently or to create other organizations when removed from leadership positions. Since the unity and the centrality of the Oromo people were sacrosanct in Oromo society during the *gadaa* republic and after, as manifested in formation of alliances, federations, and confederations, to build organizations on religious or regional identities without building the Oromo national capacity are also contrary to the principles of *gadaa*.

There is no question that the multiplicity of Oromo political organizations without clear ideological and logical differences manifests the immaturity of the Oromo political elite and the attempt to subordinate the Oromo national interest to personal and group interest in Oromo society. Although most Oromos know that which organizations are trying to fulfill their national obligations, they do not have a mechanism to make the leadership of all Oromo organizations accountable to Oromo society. During the *gadaa* era, the principle of accountability took

the form of a requirement that the *luba* [the ruling *gadaa* class in power] should appear before the *Gumii* [the national assembly] and let the people judge how well they have conducted themselves as leaders. If their leadership was inadequate, the national assembly will remove them from office or penalize them in other ways, such as barring them and all their descendants from holding the same office (Legesse, 2006: 201-202).

The decentralization of the *gadaa* system in the seventeenth century and its transformation, in some parts of Oromia, to the *mootii* system in the first half of the nineteenth century weakened the centralized Oromo leadership. Consequently, the Oromo people were ill equipped to defend themselves effectively from the Ethiopian colonial system.

To overcome such weaknesses and political fragmentation, Oromo political organizations must use Oromo political wisdom and experience in order to build organizational capacity and mobilize the entire Oromo nation for challenging and throwing off the bonds of the Ethiopian colonial state and its Oromo clientele. Historically, liberation movements have been led by an exclusivist leadership in which one person or a small group has played a central role. In this kind of leadership followers are “expected to accept core groups’ decisions and to play more passive support roles as providers of material resources and/or admiration. Such groups seek to lead by indirect method of heroic example rather than by the interactivity of persuasion” (Barker, Johnson and Lavalette, 2001: 21). To date, the Oromo movement has tried to create this kind of leadership, but it fails to fit Oromo-centric democratic values. While Oromos respect their heroes and heroines, they expect open dialogue and interaction consistent with their democratic political tradition.

Oromos dislike exclusivist leaders who equate their personal interests with those of the organizations and separate themselves from the regular members. Colin Barker (2001: 26) argues that exclusivist leaders “regard their offices as private property, resisting removal or control. To maintain their positions, they develop

various means of control.... The overall result is that the mechanism of organization becomes an end in itself." Practically speaking, the Oromo political culture is not exclusivist. However, there is no question that the leadership of various Oromo national movement organizations manifests some exclusivist characteristics. Since the rule of law stands above all members of Oromo society, according to one aspect of *gadaa* principles, Oromos should not endorse exclusivist and anarchist behavior and practices. It is very clear that "the Oromo idea of the rule of law is reflected in the notion that those who govern the people must also be judged by the same laws they are empowered to enforce. In other words, there are no leaders whose position is so exalted that they stand above the law" (Legesse, 2006: 200). Although the Oromo political leadership is not presently governing Oromo society, Oromos consider members of the leadership as one among equals who have the moral obligation to respect and practice Oromo democratic traditions.

Just as the Oromo political leadership lacks ideological coherence, some Oromos lack organizational discipline and engage in political anarchism or passivism. Without challenging anarchism and passivism among the Oromo populace and the exclusivist political tendency of the leadership, the Oromo nationalist movement cannot develop and implement "combinations of forms of organization and leadership which are practically compatible with larger struggles for popular self-emancipation" (Barker, 2001: 43). Oromo nationalists need to speak up and struggle to develop leadership for self-emancipation through facilitating the integration of the "leading" and "led" selves of

the Oromo political leadership and to challenge political anarchism and passivism in some Oromo sectors. Anarchist Oromos discourage the emergence of strong leadership by focusing on trivial issues, such as superficial clan, religious, or regional politics, and by attacking prominent Oromo leaders and organizations. While demanding accountability from the leadership, Oromos must fight publicly against an anti-leadership ideology. Oromos need to acknowledge, value, encourage, and support an emerging democratic Oromo political leadership since strengthening the leadership of the Oromo movement is necessary to defeat dangerous enemies. Since an amorphous and less structured leadership is ineffective, the Oromo national struggle must have a more structured leadership that can provide organizational capacity to eventually take state power. The political behavior and practices of anarchism, passivism, and anti-leadership are anti-*gadaa* principles.

Oromo nationalists cannot build a more structured leadership without clearly understanding the processes of leadership and followership as well as Oromo democratic traditions and politico-military organization. According to Robert G. Lord and Douglas J. Brown (2004: 3), “leaders may indeed be people who can be understood in terms of traits and behavioral styles, but leadership is a social process that involves both a leader and a follower.” Just as Oromo leaders do not adequately understand the essence and characteristics of their followers, the followers lack information about their leaders and leadership because they do not practice *gadaa* principles, such as knowing and practicing ones rights and obligations. While Oromo political

leaders like to lecture their followers and sympathizers, they themselves are less interested in establishing formal and informal relationships with their followers and sympathizers or engaging them in dialogical conversation in accordance with Oromo political traditions. According to Oromo political traditions, rules and laws are made through serious debates, and once decisions have been made by the general assembly both leaders and citizens are obligated to implement them. Since some current Oromo political leaders care less about the opinions and experiences of their followers, they do not ask for the input of their followers. Leaders cannot be effective without establishing “a stronger social bond among their direct and indirect followers, thus improving the direct and indirect followers’ performance” (Lord and Brown, 2004:5).

Leadership is a process of influencing followers and others by changing their perceptions through closely relating and communicating with them. Similarly, some Oromos have yet to develop mechanisms by which they can influence political leaders. As a result, they prefer to attack and discredit these leaders without considering the consequences of their actions. It is difficult to identify the weaknesses of the leadership without identifying those of the followership. Learning from the *gadaa* system can help since the roles of leaders and followers were clearly defined. We recognize that the role played by the Oromo national political leadership is risky, complex, and difficult. This leadership has been attacked politically, ideologically, and militarily both internally and externally. To date the movement has been able to survive by developing shared meaning, purpose, language, and symbols. But as the complex-

ity of the Oromo movement increases, the leadership cannot improve its organizational capacity without developing internal cohesion, expertise, support, and coalition. Without changing the past habits, ideologies, and approaches, and without fully mobilizing Oromo human and economic resources by building internal cohesion through the development of *Oromummaa* on the individual, relational and collective levels, the Oromo political leadership will continue to face more crises and may eventually become a political liability.

Although it is challenging and difficult to implement all relevant *gadaa* principles while engaging in the liberation struggle, Oromo organizations of the Oromo political movement must agree on certain principles and initiate pragmatic policies that embody Oromo democracy if they want to restore Oromo statehood, sovereignty, and democracy. By mobilizing *gadaa* experts and Oromo intellectuals who are familiar with the Oromo democratic traditions, the Oromo national movement should start to formulate procedures, strategies, and tactics for the building of the supreme authority of a national assembly called *Gumii Oromiyaa*. At this national *Gumii*, all serious and independent Oromo liberation fronts and organizations that can carry out their national obligations, all representatives of Oromo civil and religious organizations, and representatives of all Oromo sectors must be included. This national *Gumii* can be modeled after the *Gumii Gayyo*:

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 hereditary rights, nor the age-sets and age-regiments who furnish the military force, nor the *abba dula* who lead their people in battle. It resides, instead, in the open national assembly, at which all *gadaa* councils and assemblies... active and retired are represented, and warra Qallu, the electors, participate as observers.

The meetings that take place every eight years review the conduct of the ruling *gadaa* council, punish any violators of law, and remove any or all of them from office, should that become necessary. In such sessions, a retired *abba gadaa* presides. The primary purpose of the meetings of the national assembly, however, it is to re-examine the laws of the land, to reiterate them in public, to make new laws if necessary, and to settle disputes that were not resolved by lower levels in their judicial organization (Legesse, 2006: 211)

The *Gumii Gayyo* is an expression of the exemplar model of the unwritten Oromo constitution. Reframing the unwritten Oromo constitution and transforming it into a new national constitution based on Oromo democratic principles require absolute commitment from Oromo nationalists and their organizations rather than giving lip service to this idea. As Asmarom Legesse (2006: 255) asserts, “Oromo democracy is not perfect: if it were, it would not be democratic. Like all democratic institutions, it is the product of changing human thought that must always be re-examined in relation to changing historic circumstances.” By establishing the National Assembly of *Gumii Oromiyaa*, Oromo nationalists and organizations of the Oromo national movement would initiate the process of framing a written Oromo constitution by adapting our received tradition

to new circumstances while learning from other democratic traditions. If Oromo nationalists and organizations are truly concerned about their people and if they want to win their national struggle, they need to show respect for their democratic traditions and practice civility in their political and ideological deliberations. Such responsible and courageous actions require taking accountability seriously and using a single standard for evaluating behavior and measuring performance in relation to the Oromo national struggle.

PRACTICAL STEPS

To build a democratic state in Oromia and shared sovereignty with other peoples, the Oromo national movement needs to address five major issues. The first issue is to develop *Oromummaa* to its full capacity by overcoming its unevenness and deficiencies in order to strengthen the Oromo national organizational capacity. Between the time Oromos were colonized and Oromo nationalism emerged, Oromoness was primarily understood at the personal and the interpersonal levels because Oromos were denied the opportunities to form national institutions. Oromoness was targeted for destruction and the colonial administrative regions that were established to suppress the Oromo people and exploit their resources were glorified and institutionalized. As a result, Oromo relational identities have been localized, and not strongly connected to the collective identity of *Oromummaa*.

Separated from one another, Oromos have been prevented from exchanging goods and information for more than a century. They have been exposed to different cultures (i.e., languages, customs, values, etc.)

and religions and have adopted some elements of these cultures and religions. Consequently, today there are Oromo elite who have internalized these externally imposed regional or religious identities as a result of their low level of political consciousness or political opportunism, as well as the lack of a clear understanding of *Oromummaa*. Lacking a national political consciousness and unaware of the consequences of their actions, these elites tend to confuse clan, regional or religious politics with the Oromo national politics.

We have learned from history that the Oromo political weakness emerged as Oromos moved away from one *gadaa* republic and started to form autonomous *gadaa* governments in different parts of Oromia. Hence, we can see that the building of the Oromo national organizational capacity is possible only when *Oromummaa* is fully developed and can be packaged into a generally accepted vision that energizes the entire Oromo nation so that it can undertake well-organized and coordinated collective action at the personal, interpersonal, and national levels. As an element of culture, nationalism, and vision, *Oromummaa* has the power to serve as a manifestation of the collective identity of the Oromo national movement. The basis of *Oromummaa* must be built on overarching principles that are embedded within Oromo traditions and culture and, at the same time, have universal relevance for all oppressed peoples.

The main foundations of *Oromummaa* are individual and collective freedom, justice, popular democracy, and human liberation, all of which are built on the concept of *saffu* (Oromo moral and ethical order) and are enshrined in *gadaa* principles. As the ideology of

the Oromo national movement, *Oromummaa* enables Oromos to retrieve their cultural memories, assess the consequences of Ethiopian colonialism, and give voice to their collective grievances. As such, *Oromummaa* can mobilize diverse cultural resources, interlink Oromo personal, interpersonal and collective (national) relationships, and assists in the development of Oromo-centric political strategies and tactics that can mobilize the nation for collective action and empower the people for liberation. As the shared ideology of the Oromo national movement, *Oromummaa* requires that the movement be inclusive of all persons operating in a democratic fashion. *Oromummaa* enables the Oromo people to form alliances with all political forces and social movements that accept the principles of national self-determination and multinational democracy in the promotion of a global humanity that is free of all forms oppression and exploitation.

Moreover, the full development of *Oromummaa* facilitates the total mobilization of the nation for the Oromo national struggle. Only when the entire nation is mobilized can Oromo individuals and diverse groups overcome political confusion and take the concrete cultural and political steps that are essential to liberate themselves from psychological dehumanization and colonial oppression. According to Alan Johnson (2001: 96), "Self-emancipation is a political process in which the oppressed author their own liberation through popular struggles, which are educational, producing a cognitive liberation... [facilitating] the defeat of their oppressors." The process of self-emancipation is only possible by building *Oromummaa* as a means of mobiliz-

ing all Oromos to establish self-confidence, consciousness, self-organization, and self-emancipation.

Ultimately, the restoration of an Oromia state and creating a shared sovereignty requires the building of a strong national movement. Oromo organizations must be committed to refine and apply some elements of *gadaa* principles and to create and build a *Gumii Oromiyaa*. This is the second issue. The starting point to initiate the formation of the new national *Gumii Oromiyaa* can be the rebuilding of the United Liberation Forces of Oromia (ULFO) or Oromo nationalists can fashion a new approach to build this national assembly. Furthermore, Oromo civic, cultural, and religious associations and other Oromo sectors should be partners in creating and building this Oromo national assembly. Oromos do not need to wait until liberation to form the national *Gumii Oromiyaa*. *Gumii Oromiyaa* as a political and cultural platform can provide an essential mechanism for establishing a common understanding and consensus among the fragmented Oromo political forces provided that it will be wisely and carefully handled. The current political fragmentation demonstrates the low level of the development of *Oromummaa* and Oromo nationalism. Oromo nationalists should be clear that the Oromo national movement is not struggling to reinvent the *moottii* system or Oromo chiefdoms based on clans or regions.

In some parts of Oromo society, the emergence of the *moottii* system undermined the *gadaa* system and later facilitated the formation of those Oromo forces that collaborated with the Ethiopian colonial system. As with other nationalisms, Oromo nationalism has two edges, the one edge cutting backward, and the

other forward. The Oromo national movement should reconsider Oromo culture and history, recognizing the negative elements and avoiding them. As the formation of different autonomous *gadaa* governments and the emergence of the *moottii* system contributed to the defeat of the Oromo people in the second half of the nineteenth century, so the political fragmentation of Oromo society will perpetuate the defeat of the Oromo nation in the twenty first century. Without the coordination and consolidation of the Oromo national movement, Oromos cannot effectively confront and defeat the Ethiopian colonial system.

Oromo liberation organizations have a historic responsibility to cooperate with one another and participate in the Oromo national movement in order to reach larger audiences, share resources as well as experiences, and gain political legitimacy. It is essential that they end their internecine squabbles and negative political propaganda against one another. This does not mean that Oromo organizations should not be scrutinized and evaluated in relationship to their objectives, ideologies, and performance. In fact, organizations that serve the interest of the enemy and those nominal organizations that exist to seek rent from the Oromos should be challenged and exposed. Such organizations do not defend the Oromo national interest and they confuse their own group or individual interest with that of the Oromo nation. To defend such organizations is tantamount to fighting against the liberation of the Oromo nation.

Third, while consolidating the Oromo national movement, it is necessary to build political alliances with peoples who are interested in the principles of

national self-determination and multinational democracy. Although the priority of the Oromo national movement is to liberate Oromia and its people, the movement has both moral and political obligations to promote social justice and democracy for the various peoples who have suffered under the successive authoritarian-terrorist governments of the Ethiopia Empire. Therefore, the Oromo movement led by the OLF needs to build a political alliance with other national groups that endorse the principles of national self-determination and multinational democracy. A democratic Oromia could play a central role in a multinational democratic state because of its democratic tradition, the size of its population, geopolitics, and abundant economic resources.

Oromos must have their own state that can protect Oromo sovereignty while implementing the principles of self-determination and multinational democracy. How can they accomplish these objectives? This brings us to the fourth issue: that is the obligation of every Oromo to help in restoring Oromian sovereignty and statehood, within a multinational context. The Oromo national struggle manifests the aspiration of all Oromos. Therefore, every Oromo has the moral, political and national obligation to actively participate in the Oromo national struggle to enable the Oromo nation to achieve its political, social, and economic objectives. Particularly, Oromo intellectuals have great responsibility to mobilize Oromos and others on basis of the principles of self-determination, social justice, and democracy, by expanding the leadership capacity of the Oromo national movement.

Expanding the leadership capacity of this movement is the final issue; this requires the active participation of Oromo women and youth who are more than the two-third of the Oromo population. These two important sectors of Oromo society must actively participate in the Oromo national movement and in the formation of the National Assembly of *Gumii Oromiyaa*. The expansion of the leadership capacity also requires the total mobilization of Oromo intellectuals. The responsibilities of Oromo intellectuals include developing pragmatic policies that will lay the foundation of both an Oromian democratic state and a multinational state, establishing special relationship with the colonized nations in the Ethiopian Empire, expanding public diplomacy by consolidating the support of the Oromo diaspora, and influencing world powers by using the principles of global *Oromummaa* to support the just cause of the Oromo for social justice, liberation, and democracy.

NOTES

1. This paper was originally presented at the 2007 Oromo Studies Association Annual Conference held at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, on August 1 and 2. I thank Drs. Ezekiel Gebissa, Lemmu Baissa, and Rev. Harwood Schaffer who substantively commented on this paper.
2. For a comprehensive analysis, see Asafa Jalata. *Oromummaa: Oromoo Culture, Identity, and Nationalism*, (Atlanta: Oromia Publishing, LLC, 2007).
3. When the exclusivist tendency empowers certain individuals who claim that they can lead the Oromo movement without seeking ideas from their supporters

and the populace, the anarchist tendency encourages the proliferation of nominal organizations in Oromo society rather than strengthening the Oromo. In order to achieve its goals, the Oromo movement needs to overcome these two negative political tendencies.

4. These problems include the uneven development of Oromo nationalism, organizational deficits, ideological and leadership incoherence, political pacifism of the populace, and the problem of Oromo clientele. I have dealt with this elsewhere. For detailed discussion, see Asafa Jalata and Harwood Schaffer, "Oromo National Political Leadership: Assessing the Past and Mapping the Future," *Journal of Oromo Studies*, 14:1 (February/March 2007): 79-116.
5. For instance, the Raya Azabo Oromo continued their rebellion to the 1940s, and the Oromo in Harerge took up arms against the Ethiopian state in 1943 and 1948. The Bale Oromo also fought against Ethiopian colonialism between 1963 and 1970.
6. For detailed discussion, see Asafa Jalata, *Fighting Against the Injustice of the State and Globalization: Comparing the African American and Oromo Movements*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
7. These leaders included Haile Mariam Gamada, Mamo Mazamir, Taddasa Biru, Baro Tumsa, Elemo Qilixu, Magarasa Bari, Ahmed Buna, Demisie Techane, Aboma Mitiku, and Muhee Abdo.
8. The Oromia that was ruled under one *Gadaa* republic was historic Oromia. See Lemmu Baissa (2004).
9. For example, these five grades are called *itimako*, *daballe*, *folle*, *doroma/qondala*, and *luba* in central Oromia.
10. *Siigqee* was a woman institution, which functioned parallel to the *gadaa* system to protect the rights of Oromo women in pre-colonial Oromia.

11. A serious study is needed to understand how an Oromo kingdom in Wallo replaced the *gadaa* system.
12. For the emergence of a hierarchy of the social pyramid in the Gibe region, see Abir, 1965: 175-
177. Herbert Lewis (1965: 68-121) specifically studied the Jimma *moottii* system and explained how its powerful organization with its monopoly of power and economic forces destroyed the *gadaa* system. For discussion of the emergence of an Oromo merchant class known as *Afkala*, see Hassen, 1990: 89-164. For the role of trade, in the Jimma economy and social differentiation see Lewis, 1965:57 and Landor, 1907:120.
13. The rights to land, coupled with the development of agriculture and trade, facilitated the emergence and consolidation of the *moottii* system in Leqa-Naqamte and Leqa-Qellem. The most successful pioneers' descendants, such as the leaders of Leqa-Qellem and Leqa-Naqamte, gradually transformed the *gadaa* fighting forces, *qondala*, into their own personal army (Ta'a, 1980: 44). These leaders also created effective administration and better military organizations to control trade routes and marketplaces in order to collect tribute; they also accumulated wealth by collecting regular tributes in heads of cattle, ivory, gold, cotton and other commodities (Ta'a, 1980: 53).
14. The Harari emirs (kings) had certain influence on a few Oromo groups before this period and bestowed the ranks of *malaq*, *garad* and *damir* on their elected officials. The *emir* dealt with these officials through the Harari *dogign* (Hassen, 1973:23-24). The leaders of the Oromo who settled around the city of Harar were gradually incorporated into the administration of the *emirs*, abandoned the Oromo political system, received these titles and became hereditary chiefs. The remaining eastern Oromo had the *gadaa* government until the Egyptians destroyed it.

15. For detailed discussion, see Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-2004*, second edition, (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press).
16. The Abyssinians also enslaved indigenous peoples; for instance, Menelik and his wife had 70,000 slaves at one time. Furthermore, the Ethiopian state expropriated all the lands of the colonized populations and provided portions for its officials, collaborators and mercenaries in lieu of salary.
17. For further discussion, see Asafa Jalata, "Poverty, Powerlessness and the Imperial Interstate System in the Horn of Africa," *Disaster and Development in the Horn of Africa*, ed. John Sorenson, (New York: St. Martin Press, 1995), 31-48.
18. Ron Shiffman, "Urban Poverty - The Global Phenomenon of Poverty and Social Marginalization in Our Cities: Facts and Strategies, 1995, <http://www.picced.org/advocacy/poverty.htm>, 1995, 6-8. Accessed, 20 May 2008.
19. For further discussion, see Asafa Jalata, "Poverty, Powerlessness and the Imperial Interstate System in the Horn of Africa," in *Disaster and Development in the Horn of Africa*, ed. John Sorenson, (New York: St. Martin Press, 1995), 31-48.
20. Seye Abraha was a founder and former political bureau member of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front. He was a chauvinist Tigrayan who did not hide his negative attitudes about the Oromos and the OLF, when he was the Defense Minister of Ethiopia.
21. See "The Prison Speaks Oromiffa," *Ethiopian Review*, January 17, 2008. Seye was jailed in Qaliti prison.
22. What Catherine MacKinnon (1994, 11-12) says about ethnic cleansing in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina applies to the sexual abuse of Oromo women: "It is also rape unto death, rape as massacre, rape to kill and

to make the victims wish they were dead. It is rape as an instrument of forced exile, rape to make you leave your home and never want to go back. It is rape to be seen and heard and watched and told to others: rape as spectacle. It is rape to drive a wedge through a community, to shatter a society, to destroy a people. It is rape as genocide.” See for example, For details, see Ludmila N. Bakhireva, Yegeyem Abebe, Stephanie K. Bordine, et al, “Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome Knowledge and Risk in Ethiopian Military Personnel,’ *Military Medicine*, 169, 3: 221-226, 2004.

23. The translation into English was made by <http://Oromoaffairs.blogspot.com/> (Accessed 20 May 2008).
24. For principles of gadaa or Oromo democracy, see Asmarom Leegesse, *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System*, (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2006), 195-245.

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THE PROBLEM OF *FIN DE REGIME* IN ETHIOPIA: ASSESSING THE DEBATE WITHIN THE OROMO NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Ezekiel Gebissa

Since 1991, Ethiopia has purportedly engaged in an ambitious program of democratic transition after centuries of autocratic rule. Nearly two decades into the democratization process, a peaceful transfer of power, the currently accepted test of a successful democracy, has yet to occur. The glimmer of hope for a peaceful transition that existed at the beginning of the process, despite Ethiopia's political culture of violent transitions, was recently dealt a severe blow by the Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. In a forthcoming monograph, he asserts that the goal of Ethiopia's democratization is to pursue a so-called

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‘dominant party democracy’ in which political competition would be allowed to take place, but only to confirm the ruling party in power. The rationale for this is the notion that sustainable economic growth can take place only in a stable political environment, which would not be realized if governments were frequently changed through elections. Stated plainly, democratization would mean a dominant party winning elections indefinitely to ensure progress along the path of economic development. In the Ethiopian case, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRDF), ostensibly a coalition of several ethnic-based parties, would remain in power until Ethiopia had achieved sustainable economic growth/development and emerged out of poverty. That is the whole notion of the ‘democratic developmentalist state,’ which the prime minister prescribed as a panacea for the malaise of political economy in the whole of Africa.¹

The political theory behind ‘dominant party democracy’ maintains that order itself is an important goal of developing societies, irrespective of whether that order was democratic, authoritarian, socialist, or free-market.² In practice, it denies opposition groups the political space they need to participate in the political process. In this context, it is not difficult to comprehend why the national elections of 2005 resulted in a ruthless crackdown and the local government elections of 2008 produced results that can be achieved only under totalitarian regimes.³ Oromo nationalist leaders and organizations, whose activities constitute the focus of this article, have concluded that the regime has established complete domination over the instruments of power in the

country and that armed struggle is an essential means to ensure the Oromo people's right to self-determination.⁴

In a political culture like Ethiopia, where a violent takeover has been the normative mechanism of political transition and in a contemporary political environment where the coercive apparatus of the state has penetrated the private spheres of individuals, a strong case can be made to justify taking up arms to confront tyranny. Previous transitions in Ethiopia have been effected through force, but the only beneficiaries of such events have always been those who won the trophy of power. The violence of each transition has nurtured an insatiable craving for revenge and fostered a vicious cycle of political instability. The destruction of the old system that occurs during a transition leaves little intact, forcing the inchoate order to start rebuilding the infrastructure of politics, economy, and society from scratch. Thus, the justification of rebellion against tyranny should not be readily interpreted as the promotion of violence. History shows that successful leaders have not been those who readily resort to the warrior impulse in human nature but those who see the world as it really is.⁵

In this paper, I review past violent political transitions in Ethiopia to explore whether they have advanced or hindered the cause of Oromo nationalism. Then I will investigate the world of Ethiopian political forces and alignments as they exist today, examining whether the Ethiopian government's apparent control of the state apparatus and civil institutions has created adequate domination to create a pliant and quiescent Oromo populace. Finally, within this context, I will identify the central issues which must be clarified by the leaders and key actors in each of the groups that

comprise the Oromo movement in order to advance the debate about the direction of Oromo nationalism. These key issues requiring articulation in the current political context are the *means* (armed struggle vs. the political option) and the *process* (democratization vs. decolonization) by which the Oromo movement hopes to gain its ultimate *goal* of self-determination for the Oromo people (through national liberation within an existing state vs. independent statehood).

Some caveats should be made at the outset. First, the article's purpose is to present ideas to advance the debate rather than to presume to prescribe the means, process, and goals of the Oromo struggle. Second, it identifies issues that have divided the Oromo national movement, without necessarily attributing specific positions on the issues to particular political organizations. Third, I refer to the Oromo national movement as a phenomenon encompassing political bodies that are committed to the Oromo struggle for self-determination, not a specific political organization, since the intention of the article is not to initiate dialogue within a single group. I urge readers to take the opportunity the article offers to engage in a national dialogue that seems to have stalled for some time now. In a way, I am only reiterating what is in the public arena, and I am not at all the first to raise the issues.⁶ My role here is to be an interlocutor whose interest is to place the issues that divide the movement in an academic context so that they have a wider audience.

THE HIGH COST OF *COUPS D'ÉTAT*

Violent takeover of power has been the dominant feature of political transitions in Ethiopia since

the creation of the empire in the nineteenth century. Earlier in the twentieth century, the long good-bye of Menelik II, the empire's founder, made for a protracted and tumultuous transition of the throne to the young Iyasu, his grandson. Power was transferred from Iyasu to Haile Sellassie by a palace coup d'état, to Mengistu Haile Mariam by a popular uprising, and to Meles Zenawi through a triumph of guerilla forces.⁷ Each of these transitions was preceded by political tremors such as purges, place putsches, attempted assassinations, and mutinies.⁸ Although these events portended political decay and imminent collapse,⁹ the incumbent regimes nevertheless tended to ignore them, often overestimating their capacity to stem the rising tide of opposition and challenges. They maintained their grip on power long after their authority had been spent, by appearing to respond to popular demands and instituting marginal reforms.¹⁰ Their refusal to step aside, far from saving the regime that introduced them, actually deepened popular discontent and increased the potential for yet another violent transition. In each case, the Oromo cause suffered a set back.

1916: The Palace Putsch

In the early twentieth century, a historic opportunity arose to put the newly created Ethiopian Empire on a trajectory that could have led to the creation of a viable multinational polity in which people of various ethnic and religious loyalties could live in harmony and citizens could enjoy economic equality, social justice, and cultural autonomy. This historic moment came in 1909 when Menelik named his grandson, Iyasu II, as his successor. Upon assuming power, Iyasu set out to implement a policy aimed at forging a nation out

of the heterogeneous empire he had inherited. With European imperialists ready to partition the Christian empire, the prince understood that his urgent priority was to appease and incorporate the neglected lowland populations in the empire, mostly Muslims, lest they collaborate with the outsiders. Therefore, first, he went on a tour of the empire, spending most of his time interacting with people on the cultural and geographic periphery. He then consummated several dynastic marriages, marrying into the ruling houses of the old Abyssinian realms and of the newly annexed nations.¹¹ He married the daughters of Abba Jiffar of Jimma, Jote Tullu of Leeqaa Qellem, Abdullah of lowland Harer, and Aboker of Afar hoping to integrate the Muslim Oromo, Afar, and Somali into Ethiopian national political life by creating a “national” monarchy in which the royal houses of the many nations in the empire would have a stake. Historians may continue to debate Iyasu’s intentions, arguing that the goal of the grand tour was simply an athletic adventure for a restless young lad and his prolific dynastic marriages escapes to satiate his legendary sexual appetite. Within the context of the time, however, dynastic marriages were political devices commonly employed by ruling classes to advance political objectives.

In addition to ensuring the unity of the heterogeneous empire he had inherited, Iyasu was determined to overcome the legacies of repression, exploitation, and religious conflict created by Ethiopia’s nineteenth-century southward expansion. He launched a campaign against corruption and abuses of power and carried out important reforms, including attempts to abolish the *neftegna-gabbar* system, establish a secular system

of education, institute a system of audit and inspection in government, and reform the judicial system. The Abyssinian political establishment deemed these reforms perilous not just to their position and power, but to the very survival of Menelik's state. After all, in the eyes of the Abyssinians, Iyasu was a scion of a Muslim Oromo from Wollo and therefore unfit to rule the Semitic-Christian Empire.¹² The Shewan elite, the dominant group of the empire's rulers, removed Iyasu from power by a palace coup, squelched his reform experiments, and "protected" the monarchy's Amhara-Christian identity. From their perspective, a person of Muslim Oromo background was not seen fit to rule Christian Abyssinia. Iyasu was a visionary leader whose efforts were thwarted by the violent political culture of the Abyssinian highland state elite and the cynical and European imperialist interests of the times. The potential for a multinational polity in which Oromos and Muslims would be treated as equals was ruthlessly destroyed.¹³

With the success of the palace putsch the repression of Oromos increased. One of the conspirators who brought Iyasu down, Tafari Makonnen (later Haile Sellassie) seized the opportunity of Iyasu's ouster to inaugurate an absolutist regime in which ultimate power was concentrated in his hands. To that end, Haile Sellassie designed, constructed, and extended the ideology and infrastructure of colonial domination to the regions conquered by Menelik in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ More land was confiscated from the Oromo through several privatization schemes, the Amharic language was declared the official medium of local administration and instruction, and the Orthodox Church was made

officially the guardian and enforcer of Ethiopia's Christian identity, despite the fact that Muslims comprised a plurality of the empire's population. In effect, Haile Sellassie institutionalized Menelik's imperialist ideas and firmly planted Abyssinian power in Oromoland.¹⁵

Haile Sellassie's centralization and concentration of power provoked intense resistance from the non-Semitic people in the empire. The Oromo tradition of resistance that started with Menelik's conquest continued with greater ferocity against an increasingly autocratic rule as demonstrated by many revolts such as the Raya-Azebo Resistance Uprisings of 1928-30, the Western Oromo Independence Movement of 1936, and the Bale Resistance Movement of 1964-70. These examples of continuing resistance and other expressions of discontent among other ethnic groups signaled in the 1950s that Haile Sellassie's government did not have the capacity to contain the rising nationalism of the colonized people. It was feared that, after Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser's takeover of power in Egypt in 1952, the popular Oromo general, Mulugeta Buli, might stage a coup d'état against the regime.¹⁶ Had Mulugeta seriously wanted to overthrow the Emperor, he probably could have executed a successful coup d'état. The mere possibility that an Oromo might be capable of mounting such a challenge made it clear to the Shawans, represented by the Moja and Addisge families, and their cohorts that Haile Sellassie's regime was too frail to withstand either a popular Oromo uprising or an Oromo-led violent takeover of power.¹⁷

1960, The Abortive Coup d'état

In 1960, unable to persuade Haile Sellassie to enhance the capacity of the state, the Neway Brothers,

Mengistu and Germame, attempted to overthrow his government through a coup d'état. This coup d'état was a violent expression of a contradiction within the ruling class, stemming from a political tension between young aristocrats who feared their position was potentially vulnerable, and an old guard that believed the existing structure was strong enough to withstand any nationalistic onslaught.¹⁸ Even a victory of the coup-makers would not have resulted in the dissolution of the imperialist propensities of the state. From the vantage point of the colonized people, specifically the Oromo, the coup d'état can only be described as a failed effort to strengthen the grips of a faltering regime on them, not as a social revolution meant to end their oppression.¹⁹

Though the coup d'état failed, it made the regime increasingly suspicious of the Oromo and heightened the repression. Once the situation was stabilized, Haile Sellassie made it clear that he "would not cause the slightest deviation from the path of progress [he] had initiated for his country.... there will be no change in the system of Government or in the Government's programs."²⁰ In the subsequent years, the regime aggressively went after dissent and established Amhara rule on a firmer ground by suppressing the use of *Afaan Oromo*.²¹ Oromo officers in the army and air force helped foil the coup d'état and members of the rebel imperial bodyguard still remember this with grudges. In the subsequent period, Oromo officers saw their career stalled in the military. The regime concluded that that Oromo officers would have supported the coup d'état had it been led by Mulugeta Buli. To promote them to higher military ranks was viewed as inviting potential trouble.²² The clearest indication that

the regime became even more adamant in its opposition to nationalist aspirations was its annexation of the federated province of Eritrea and suppression of its more democratic system. Anxious about an upsurge of nationalist sentiments, the regime chose to emphasize Amhara cultural values, expunge Oromo cultural expression, and reduce local autonomy. As Edmond Keller observed, "The destruction of Oromo culture [under Haile Sellassie] ... was systematic ... The majority of the Oromo were viewed as mere subjects."²³ On balance, the Oromo and other nationalists came out on the losing end of the attempted transition of 1960 and the reaction of the regime to its failure.

In the period following the attempted coup d'état, the regime extended its life, thanks to cold war super-power patronage and continental norms that favored stability and state sovereignty over freedom and democracy.²⁴ By the early 1970s, however, the political and economic structures that sustained it had entered an advanced stage of decomposition. Haile Sellassie regime began losing its ability to satisfy various demand-bearing groups in society as the resources at its disposal started to dry up. As the nationalist groups in Eritrea, Bale, and Ogaden intensified their resistance, the regime increasingly deployed the coercive apparatus of the state to maintain order.²⁵ In the end, the military entered the political arena to arrest the deterioration of the existing state, replacing the imperial regime that laid down the colonial infrastructure after Iyasu's experiment was overthrown.

1974, A Popular Revolution

During the initial stage of the revolution, it appeared that the colonial relationship that had devel-

oped between dominant and subjugated groups since Menelik's conquests would be radically transformed. Indeed, the revolution dealt a mortal blow to the economic base of the colonial infrastructure. The Land Reform Act of 1975, written essentially by Oromo intellectuals, in effect, "liberated" Oromo tenants from the oppressive grip of settler-landlords and accelerated the destruction of the colonial order. Furthermore, Muslim holidays were established as national holidays on par with Christian ones, and the use of *Afaan Oromo* in government-run radio and print media was permitted. In the eyes of the Amhara elite, these changes came to symbolize an "Oromo revolution." In many parts of the core highland parts of the empire, landlords were able to mobilize tenants and small farmers for brigandage, convincing them that the land reform was a Muslim-Oromo plot, which aimed at destroying the Amhara-Christian Ethiopian Empire.²⁶

At the political center, the concern was the possibility that Eritrean and Oromo nationalists would take advantage of the crisis to advance their cause. The Amhara machine had to strike back. One of its members, a social misfit from the Third Military Command in Harer named Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, came to dominate the *derg*, the autonym of the military coordinating committee. On 23 November 1978, he engineered a murderous attack on the Oromo General Taffari Banti and others, continuing the blood letting that began with the killing of the Eritrean General Amman Michael Andom and, according to Paul Henze, "never ceased to flow for the next 17 years."²⁷ The effort to cast the changes that followed the 1974 uprising as an "Oromo revolution" and the

apparent destruction of the colonial economic order eventually caused a backlash against Oromo gains. After 1978 the policies implemented by the military junta effectively reversed those of the previous years. The government instituted a policy measure, billed by many as “the second land reform,” with the aim of extracting surplus from the Oromo countryside through producer’s cooperatives, villagization schemes, and resettlement projects that brought Amharas and Tigreans to Oromia in massive numbers.²⁸ The bureaucracy was purged of its limited Oromo personnel and a campaign was launched to destroy organizations that appeared to represent Oromo interest. Following the Somali invasion of 1977, the *derg* embraced the Orthodox Church as the sole Ethiopian Christian church, launching a campaign against “foreign” or “imported” religions. The political cadres of the Worker’s Party of Ethiopia (WPE) embarked on a crusade against protestant converts in Oromia in the name of a “cultural revolution.”²⁹ A brutal campaign against Oromo Muslims was carried out in Harer, Bale, Jimma, and other areas. By 1980, the Amhara elite had reclaimed political and cultural power, not quite with a new Marxist ideology and party, but with an appropriated Amhara-Orthodox Christian theology and an invigorated infrastructure of domination. After this, the entire apparatus of the government was reorganized to combat Oromo nationalism, beginning with villegization in Harege, resettlement of northern in Western Oromia, collectivization of farmers all over Oromia, imprisonment and persecution in urban and rural Oromia, and military combat wherever Oromo guerillas operated. The promise of the revolution turned out to be a nightmare.

1991, Triumph of Rebels

The precipitous decline of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s deprived the *derg* of a major force that had sustained it in power as a “dependent colonial regime,” a constant feature of the state since its creation in the early twentieth century³⁰. The era of the *derg* ended rather uneventfully when the guerilla forces of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took control of Addis Ababa on 28 May 1991. The collapse of the *derg* regime coincided with the coming of age of the Oromo national struggle. The Oromo question, long disparaged as an inconsequential and meaningless cause in an unimportant corner of the world, burst into the international arena. The representatives of Oromo organizations fought for and literally put Oromia on the map, liberated the Oromo language from the shackles of the Geez alphabet, and elevated the issue of self-determination to such prominence that its rejection as a constitutional provision was not an option.

Though various economic and geopolitical reasons could be cited as factors that caused the fall of the *derg*, at the basic structural level, the demise of the *derg* resulted from its inability to resolve the national question. The guerilla forces that defeated it, the EPLF, TPLF and OLF, all represented nations and peoples that felt oppressed by Amhara cultural and political dominance. From the Oromo struggle’s standpoint, the 1991 revolution is an achievement of tremendous import. First, in their attempt to establish themselves as the senior partner in the Amhara-Tigrayan diarchy, the new leaders dismantled the deeply entrenched military, bureaucracy, and security institutions of the impe-

rial regime. The powerful Amhara elite of the imperial regime were effectively removed from power and privilege. Second, as the official language, instructional media, and the *lingua franca*, the Amharic language had accorded previous regimes the cultural hegemony needed to maintain their power without having frequently to resort to the coercive apparatus of the state. Under the TPLF, Amharic was allowed to 'wither on the vine' while other languages took its place at the regional level. That the TPLF rule in Oromia could not be maintained without the Oromo-speaking OPDO is a powerful testament to the progress Oromo nationalism has made. It also is an indication that TPLF rule is devoid of any ability to elicit the consent of the Oromo for its own rule. What is most important, out of miscalculation or by design, the TPLF allowed the creation of a national entity and national institutions bearing the name Oromia.

Once again, the Oromo were excluded from sharing power, as had been the case during the first three transitions that we have examined. Despite the enormous progress the Oromo national movement has made in terms of political consciousness, cultural awakening, identity construction, and institution building, political persecution against Oromo nationalists has continued unabated and in more subtle forms than under any regime in the past. This should not be surprising since, as noted earlier, the EPRDF's claim to power rests on "legitimacy" emanating from the right of conquest and maintained through brute force. Moreover, in a country where politics is organized based on ethnic or linguistic affiliation, a government that springs from a minority group can only expect to "win" competitive elections

through manipulation, coercion and intimidation. This is a fact that even the prime minister has recognized, albeit under the shroud of a dominant party democracy.

Though the revolutions of 1974 and 1991 have made significant changes to the economic and political structures of colonial domination, the Oromo and other subject peoples of the empire are not yet in charge of their destiny. One thing that is clear is that while Oromo nationalism has become a recognized force within Ethiopia, violent transitions in the past have not ensured the Oromo people's right to self-determination. Why? Is it because the Ethiopian (Amhara-Tigrean) regime has achieved effectively controlled the political space and thus has established political domination that has made the Oromo politically quiescent?

DOMINATION *DÉJÀ VU* ?

In studies of domination, the main issue that often provokes controversies has been the apparent inaction or quiescence of subordinate groups in the face of exploitation that borders on plunder and blatant social inequality.³¹ In the case of the Oromo, the issue has not been whether or not the level of political and economic repression has been severe enough to provoke a widespread social protest demanding complete freedom.³² Rather, it is whether the Ethiopian ruling elite has established such a tight control over the instruments of coercion and the mode of production that they have rendered the population too docile to mount a protest. While it is true that the ruling elite has zealously guarded their power with the coercive apparatus of the state, it is also possible that they have

managed to retain power without having to use force by maintaining control over the instruments of ideas such as the media, the schools, and even religion. Only when the ruling elite succeed in achieving control over the institutions of the political and civil societies could they be able to achieve effective domination.³³

Contrary to the hegemonic image it projected, the Ethiopian state has in fact always maintained only tenuous control over both the political and civil institutions. The prevalence of coups d'état, regional rebellions, political assassinations, court intrigues has shown the fragile nature of the political system. In the recent past, events have periodically revealed that the system did not have the capacity to deal with challenging issues much less able to survive them. Over the last half century, a series of regimes have fallen unable to deal with economic crises epitomized by famine. The near successful coup d'état of 1960 was preceded by a famine in 1959. The 1974 fall of Haile Sellassie was precipitated by dire economic times that resulted from the global energy crisis of 1973 and by the Wollo famine of the same year. The collapse of the *derg* regime was occasioned by a persistent negative economic growth, the impact of which was compounded by the famine of 1984-85, which affected 8 million people and killed about one million. The *derg* economy never recovered from the crisis caused by famine due to the government's penchant for a command economy, which stifled private initiative and wasted resources on expensive projects like the resettlement scheme, villagization, and collectivization.³⁴

These signs of *fin de regime* have recurred with almost rhythmic regularity. A regime that appears to be

in charge, suddenly faces mounting challenges. When confronted with apparently insurmountable crises, the incumbent regime becomes less arrogant and more responsive to public concerns. In 1973, the imperial regime was still in a celebratory mood marking the 80th birthday of the monarch when severe economic conditions fueled popular unrest, demonstrations by students and teachers, strikes by cabbies, and a sense of chaos in the capital.³⁵ The Haile Sellassie government responded by reducing gasoline prices, dropping price controls on basic essentials, and raising military pay. When these actions did not stop the rising tide of popular discontent, the cabinet of Prime Minister Aklilu Habtewold took the unprecedented step of resigning.³⁶ The public was unimpressed. The new cabinet of Endalkachew Mekonnen promised broad reform measures: tax and land tenure reforms, accelerating the pace of development, narrowing income disparities, and ending press censorship. The effort yielded a breathing space for the ailing regime, but did not stop the slide into oblivion.³⁷ Soldiers stepped into the political vacuum and formed a government.

In the late 1980s, the drama that had characterized the imperial regime's final days began to be replayed. In 1988, the celebration of the establishment of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia a year earlier had barely ended when signs of *fin de regime* began appearing. By 1989, the *derg* regime was in tatters after a long period of a stagnant economy and a series of major military defeats.³⁸ Seeking a way out of the crisis, the regime tried to extract victory from the jaws of defeat by introducing reforms. Mengistu announced the end of socialism in Ethiopia, the replacement of

the exclusive Worker's Party of Ethiopia with the more inclusive Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party, and the opening of the private sector for individual entrepreneurs to complement the ailing socialist economy. Political prisoners were released. Some individuals felt courageous enough publicly to criticize Mengistu Hailemariam and his policies, including one that demanded the president's resignation. The reforms had obvious effects in rural areas where the peasant dismantled their government-sanctioned villages and redistributed land to private holds. The emboldened public disobeyed the orders of party cadres and defied government functionaries everywhere. Mengistu continued tinkering with his ideology and government, for example, replacing hardliners with liberal officials. No amount of reform was sufficient to save the regime from being toppled by the rebel forces in May 1991.³⁹

The EPDRF government, which replaced the *derg*, did not have much time to bask in the glory of the adoption of the new constitution it had drafted in 1994 and EPRDF's preordained 'landslide' victory at the polls a year later. In the late 1990s, the three conditions that preceded the downfall of a regime in Ethiopia, political discontent and instability, economic crisis epitomized by famine, and a government that is suddenly responsive to public needs, appeared to be converging on the Ethiopian political scene and the clouds of *fin de regime* started to gather. The border war with Eritrea (1998-2000) deprived the TPLF of an important ally that had operated its military and security apparatus, revealed the deep dissensions within the ruling party, and exposed the reality that the regime's hold on power was tenuous. This was followed by a

series of defections of high-ranking party and government officials, several rounds of purge of the party structure, and rising discontent among the surrogate party organizations within EPRDF.⁴⁰ The cumulative effect of all of these setbacks severely weakened the TPLF-led regime politically.

At the same time, the economy appeared to be sliding into a depression, owing to a wrong-headed national economic policy that had not changed since 1991. Officially, a free-market economy, the state's role was supposed to be limited to economic areas not subject to market forces, such as defense and energy, public utilities and communications, and building an infrastructure with sufficient services and facilities to attract investment. In fact, unswervingly committed to a command economy, the state owned all land, controlled the lion's share of the available credit and access to capital, and employed more than 80 percent of the employable population. Small-scale businesses were trying to eke out a precarious existence in an uneven playing field where virtually all large-scale enterprises were in the hands of a carefully chosen oligarchy of family members, party loyalists, and political cronies. The "government" intervened in the economy at will, raising prices of fuel, ordering rationing of consumer essentials, and directing capital investments to favored areas. Direct foreign investment dried up because investors left the country in droves, discouraged by unfavorable legal and poor infrastructural conditions in the country. Conditions that investors look for, such as legal guarantees for property, sufficient and reliable energy, and adequate manpower, banking facilities, and modern communications were lacking completely.

Domestic capital was nonexistent to make the necessary investment in the private sector.⁴¹ As late as 2001, the Ethiopian government's development policy and official statistics seemed to confirm the public's suspicion that Tigray was benefiting at the expense of the rest of the country. Regions other than Tigray, Oromia in particular, appeared virtually abandoned and were an enormous drag on the national economy.⁴²

The effect on human life of an economy bereft of investment, new ideas, and freedom from political pressure, was staggering. It has given rise to unprecedented levels of corruption and unemployment, ubiquitous unofficial economic activity, and a deteriorating base of human resources. Most areas of the countryside have become scenes of environmental damage resulting from overuse by a population with no other recourse than to deplete the natural resources of their lands. Towns and cities along the major highways have a bustling appearance, but they lack sustainability, given the declining per capita income of the large majority of the population. Poverty was pervasive and had a pulverizing character. By 2001, Ethiopia had become a country where socio-economic tension teetered dangerously.⁴³

The war with Eritrea was followed by the third condition that often preceded state collapse. When the conflict started, the conditions that often led to famine in Ethiopia were in place. There was chronic food insecurity caused by natural and policy-driven factors. The rural economy was already under increasing stress because of the failure of the government to continue providing a minimum level of agricultural input. The failure of the rains in the spring of 1998 triggered a food crisis, which developed into a famine in south-

east Ethiopia. The EPRDF regime seemed in its last throes.⁴⁴

A combination of these three variables (economic crisis, famine, and responsive government) has always set in motion a dynamic chain reaction that culminates in fall of government in Ethiopia.⁴⁵ There has always been doubt that the TPLF, already a minority government, would ever be able to remain in power if it continued to exclude the Oromo and Amhara from power. The war with Eritrea set off new contests over leadership, organization, and political agendas within the TPLF, leading to the party splitting into two factions and gravely undermining Meles. The war exposed that the economy was in a precarious state without a continuous infusion of direct foreign assistance. It also peeled away the mirage of cohesion and revealed the deep division within the ruling party. Beset by a series of defections of high-ranking party and government officials and growing discontent among the surrogate party organizations within EPRDF, the TPLF-led regime nearly imploded in 2001.⁴⁶

Faced with an impending crisis, the EPDRF government changed course and returned to the role it had carved out for the state in 1991, when the Transitional Charter was drafted and a Transitional Government was created. Suddenly it became responsive to public concerns. The regime embarked on a policy of reform. Roads were built with astonishing rapidity and lasting quality. High profile attempts to crack down on corruption and overtures to former foes for reconciliation were made. An obvious campaign of beautification and cleaning of the capital got underway. Construction of the so-called ring road around the capital moved on with renewed

intensity and new and brighter streetlights gave the city an aura of being alive. Traffic signals began to function properly and police officers started to enforce traffic rules vigorously. New buildings went up everywhere and there seemed to be an appearance of a bustling business. It was clear that the government had launched a concerted effort to appear to be doing something.⁴⁷

The reform efforts did not arrest the downward spiral to anarchy and collapse, for none of the cosmetic changes addressed the structural political problems of the country. But they enabled the TPLF to buy time and make political adjustments. By 2002, Eritrea had been defeated, the challenge to Meles Zenawi's power from within the TPLF had been rolled back, and the Ethiopian prime minister had improved his political image internationally by agreeing to accept a peaceful settlement of the border issue with Eritrea. Internally, however, his hold on power was still highly dubious.⁴⁸ A careful assessment of the basis of the regime's power shows that the process, which started with an implosion of the ruling party might culminate in the disintegration of the empire that started with Menelik, unless decisions were made soon to prevent that eventuality. Given the division and the resultant political weakening, it was simply a political imperative for the winning faction of the political struggle within the TPLF to try to broaden its power base by abandoning its "Tigray First" doctrine. Sometime in 2002, Meles Zenawi appeared to be making overtures to one of the two major players in Ethiopian politics: the Amhara and the Oromo.⁴⁹ The Oromo were the preferred candidate for some kind of political alliance.⁵⁰

At the time of the overture, however, Oromo organizations were preoccupied with their own internal problems. The OLF was not in a position to accept or reject a power sharing arrangement even if it were to be offered formally. The organization had been enmeshed in an internal political struggle since it left the Transitional Government in 1992.⁵¹ The struggle was between two camps, which did not agree on political goals, and the strategy of achieving them, yet both claimed the name "OLF." One of the factions in its public pronouncements seemed averse to negotiations, describing it as "surrendering to the enemy."⁵² For the Meles faction, this group was not considered the right candidate to be approached with an offer for a negotiated settlement of the Oromo issue. The other faction was amenable to negotiations and the Meles government seemed interested in engaging this group. In either case, the fact that the organization was locked in internal struggle made negotiations an impossible undertaking.⁵³ In a more practical sense, the timing was extremely awkward for the government to deal with an Oromo organization based in Asmara, soon after the Eritrean war that had claimed the lives of thousands sent to defend Ethiopia.⁵⁴

The EPRDF understood before the collapse of the *derg* that its rule would not last if it did not address the Oromo question in some fashion. Its initial approach to the Oromo problem was to establish the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) by recruiting war captives from the defeated *derg* army, who, as descendants of Amhara settlers in Oromo areas, knew the Oromo language but did not represent and were not accountable to the Oromo cause. These were

perceived by the Oromo as *non-Oromo infiltrators*. After more than a decade, the OPDO was unable to deliver on its promise to reach out to the Oromo people on behalf of the EPRDF.⁵⁵ The party proved unable to overcome the popular image that it was a party created by the TPLF during its final offensive against the *derg* as it moved into Oromo areas.⁵⁶ By 2003, the OPDO had become a fractured group composed of three mutually suspicious groups: the previously mentioned *non-Oromo infiltrators*, the *Oromo opportunists*, made up of the bureaucrats and technical functionaries from the *derg* era, who joined the incoming rebel groups in order to gain clemency for the crimes they had committed as members of the *derg* era institutions, and what can be called the *Oromo do-gooders*, those Oromos who joined the OPDO in the absence of independent Oromo groups to work within the system to improve the lives of the Oromo people.⁵⁷ In all, the nebulousness of the OPDO convinced the Meles faction that this was not an organization to be counted on as a dependable ally.⁵⁸

With possibilities of a rapprochement with the Oromo out of the question, the next group Meles had to approach to broaden his support base, naturally, was the Amhara. The weakening of TPLF power and the near disappearance of a genuine Oromo organization provided an opening for the Amhara elite, now appropriately renamed the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), to engineer a comeback. The Amhara jumped at the opportunity and readily provided the support Meles was looking for. The Amhara constituted a new power base and set the agenda of the nation.⁵⁹ For a while, Meles seemed to be only an occu-

pant of the office of prime minister in Addis Ababa who wielded limited power in fact. The rebel chief, who once dismissed the Ethiopian flag as a piece of cloth, suddenly became a champion of the greatness of the nation. The political leader who defended the Oromo people's special rights over Addis Ababa turned a passive spectator when the OPDO was unceremoniously removed from Finfinne and forced to relocate Oromia's capital to Adama. The diplomat who signed the Algiers agreement and pledged to honor the ruling of the international community on the Ethio-Eritrean border case was forced to shamelessly reverse himself and protest the decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration. One needs to notice that none these issues were causes championed by the Tigrayans. These were issues, which united the Amhara political elite. By 2002 and 2003, the Tigrayan who had cleansed the state bureaucracy of its entrenched Amhara stalwarts had effectively ceded control to the very people he ousted a decade ago.⁶⁰

Once the Amhara took the bureaucracy, they quickly embarked on a "genocidal" policy against people they deemed would be an impediment to their return to power. The evidence of this policy became evident in May 2002 in Looqe and in December 2003 in Gambella in the infamous Hawassa and Gambella massacres.⁶¹ That the Oromo were on the firing line of this particular onslaught became apparent when 328 Oromo university students were expelled, the Macca-Tuulama Association's office was closed, and its leaders imprisoned in 2004. In that year, the Amhara group was doing everything to pit the Oromo against the Tigreans. When a bomb that exploded on the university campus

killed a Tigrean student, the mass media has already declared that the culprits were members of the OLF even while concomitantly announcing that they were not apprehended. The TPLF was being goaded to turn against the Oromo with vengeance.

If the TPLF did not do their bidding, the Amhara were ready to implement their elimination program against the Oromo once they completed their inexorable return to power. The 2005 elections were designed to be the final blow to the Meles faction. None of the Amhara political groups with their vision of restoring the old regime were so naïve as to expect that the elections would be free and fair and that they could win in the regional states of Oromia, Afar, Somali, SNNPR, Gambella, and Benishangul. Even though, as the results later showed, their best chances were in Addis Ababa and the Amhara Region, the group was keenly aware that the electoral map did not favor them in winning a nationwide election to take over power. The conduct of the election was essentially seen as a vehicle to mount a protest after the polls were closed, claiming that the elections were rigged and manipulated, regardless of whether their coalition won or lost. For this, they formed a group named the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and took part in the elections.

The CUD scheme did not succeed. Whatever the government-appointed electoral commission did to ensure an EPDRF victory, the CUD political program was not going to receive the support of the majority of the regional states because it was out of step with the contemporary historical forces. There were new realities in Ethiopia, which did not permit the plan to materialize. For example, the Oromo nation was

struggling in a crucible of suffering to give birth to a popular democratic state called Oromia which aspired to self-rule for Oromos and the right to use the Oromo language in official speech and writing. The new generation of Oromos was too politically savvy, conscious of its identity, and sure of its objectives to accept the CUD's lead. The Amhara dream of returning to the old political domination of the Amhara group over all other Ethiopians was not going to be realized. By voting for neither the EPRDF nor the CUD, and by refusing to participate in the duel between the two antagonists, and casting their vote for any non-CUD and non-EPRDF Oromo candidate, the Oromo people foiled the Amhara scheme to take over power.⁶²

In the final analysis, the election fractured the Amhara-Tigrean political alignment. The CUD, initially evolved to an apparently cohesive party, the CUDP, then disintegrated into its constituent parts. The ruling party, despite an appearance of strength, was revealed to be an extremely brittle party with no claims to a strong and reliable constituency. In fact, some have suggested that the country itself is held together by party machinery that extends down into the village level.⁶³ As Walter Adamson observed, a government that resorts to brute force has not achieved legitimacy and is therefore always vulnerable to rebellion.⁶⁴

The Oromo resistance, was active enough to frustrate the well-planned Amhara takeover of power. Yet the efficacy of the Oromo struggle within the country is not well understood. Any explanation that focuses on the structure of domination misses the subtlety of resistance and, by so doing, fails to give credit to the people who face the brunt of the state's oppression. Accord-

ing to James Scott, some social scientists have tended to focus on dramatic actions, such as rebellion and revolutions, which are rapidly put down by elites rather than focus on the seemingly isolated and individualized acts of resistance that happen every day. These instances add up to have a major impact on the direction of a nation's history without the benefit of a formal organization and all the risk and loss involved in the kind of direct confrontation used in revolutionary activities.⁶⁵

Activists and scholars, like all social scientists, have wrongly focused on the formal or public relationship between the powerful and the weak. The Oromo, like other powerless groups, have been prone to adopt a defensive posture of subservience, deference, and humility in the presence of the militarily powerful state. In this context it is necessary to develop ways in which we might more successfully read and interpret the often fugitive and unseen political conduct of subordinate groups in order better to understand Oromo resistance to Ethiopian domination. The ubiquitous dissembling of the weak in the face of power is not an example of the absence of resistance. It is the inability of scholars to focus on what oppressed groups do to get their messages across while managing to stay within the boundaries of what is lawfully possible.⁶⁶ In order skillfully to decipher the dynamics of power relationships, following Scott, we might learn more if we listen to the 'the voice under domination' and observe rituals of insubordination.⁶⁷

The forgoing narrative has attempted to show that Ethiopia has not had a government strong or stable enough to establish an effective structure of domination. In fact, the Ethiopian state exhibits all the char-

acteristics of a “weak” state that has failed to establish social control over society made up of communities whose loyalty lies elsewhere than to the state.⁶⁸ Thus, it is not the strength of the EPRDF government, but the weakness of the potential replacement that maintains it in power.⁶⁹ If such is the prevailing political context, Oromo nationalists face the challenge of preparing the ground for a new and orderly transition, which would indeed be consistent with Oromo political culture, rather than the tumultuous and violent transfer of power that characterizes Ethiopian political culture.

QUO VADIS OROMO NATIONALISM?

Socio-political interpretation of possible scenarios of contemporary Ethiopian politics is bi-polar. One group focuses on the inevitability of a social revolution or systemic disintegration of the state. This position rests on the conviction that the current Ethiopian state is such an extreme case of injustice based on ethnic favoritism and exploitation that the violent overthrow of the entire system is the only available option. The other position maintains a belief in the structural ability of the sociopolitical order—regardless of its origins—to adjust itself in time to prevent a cataclysmic breakdown, unlike the previous regimes that remained in power long after signs of *fin de regime* had become all-to-evident. This latter position is based on the assumption that the system has the capacity to undermine resistance by taking advantage of the inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic divisions among the opponents of the regime. These are issues that need to be worked out in a debate about the means, the ends and the process by which the Oromo movement

could achieve its objectives. One could argue that both positions are deficient, i.e., that the Ethiopian system is oppressive, but not overtly totalitarian, that it is not flexible enough to adjust to changing circumstances, and that its retention of power is based in its ability to exploit differences among the opponents. One could argue that a systemic disintegration of the state would be catastrophic and should be prevented. One could argue that this can be achieved by the coming to power through constitutional means of a legitimate representative of the Oromo people at least in the Oromia region.⁷⁰ To make and defend this argument, its proponents must address the rationale and the basis for accepting the Ethiopian constitution.

Before such a transition can take place, the leaders and activists in the Oromo nationalist groups which constitute the Oromo movement must resolve key issues in the ongoing debate about the Oromo future. Over the course of the EPRDF tenure, the Oromo struggle has moved from one for visibility to the struggle for effectiveness. The three major issues to be sorted out and articulated in order to implement this transition are the *means* (armed struggle vs. political diplomacy) the *process* (democratization vs. decolonization) and the *ends* (autonomy within a larger entity vs. independent statehood) of the Oromo national movement. The debate needs resolution so that the Oromo nation can advance toward the exercise of its right of self-determination.

The Means: Armed Struggle vis-à-vis the Political Option

In the history of national liberation struggles confirmation of the effectiveness of armed struggle, both as a norm and as a model, comes from the experience

of postcolonial national liberation movements. In all of the cases that were successful, only those groups that engaged in guerrilla warfare were able to compete with rival claimants to command a mass following, and only those individuals who actively espoused its tenets joined the ranks of the new “political class” that was formed at the end of the conflict and colonial rule. Success in this case is relative. According to Gérard Chaliand, an expert in armed conflicts and international strategic relations, military victory has always been out of reach for the liberation movements.⁷¹ What they achieved was primarily a political victory. The nationalist guerilla groups fought with determination and tenacity, but they could not have done so without the material aid they received from the Soviet Union and its satellite states who viewed their cause as part of their own anti-imperialist struggle.⁷² In addition, the damages of protracted guerilla tactics, the high cost of war, and the impossibility of a military solution led to war weariness in the colonial metropolis, forcing the colonial governments to negotiate. Armed national liberation, according to Gérard Chaliand, “reached their zenith during the 1950s and 1960s. With the collapse of Portuguese colonialism in 1974, an era came to an end.”⁷³

Used against local dictatorial regimes, these tactics proved ineffective because such regimes, unconcerned about domestic public opinion, were always ready to use all the means at their disposal to crush opposition. “To this day,” writes Chaliand “there is practically no example of a struggle waged against this sort of regime that has achieved even a few of its aims without first securing a complete military victory,”⁷⁴ which was not achieved unless the unconventional progressed to con-

ventional war. His analysis concludes that there is an insurmountable difficulty in waging a protracted war against a dictatorial regime that has no inclination to negotiate in a post Cold War era. Wars exact a tremendous economic, political, and social price. The armed struggle course inevitably entails certain destruction of productive forces and damage to the human factor, the consequences of which linger on long after the conflict is over. Why is it, then, that most Oromo groups advocating liberation—such as the OLF, the Oromia Liberation Council (OLC), the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO), the Oromia Popular Liberation Front (OPLF), Tokichuma—always insist on retaining or at least advocating the armed struggle route? Oromo groups need to address the appropriateness and expectation of armed struggle in achieving the ends of national liberation in a globalized world.

It is interesting to observe in this regard that, in the Oromo struggle, armed conflict rose to preeminence largely as the result Ethiopian government's unwillingness to recognize the very existence of the political cause of the Oromo. Even in hindsight, it is difficult to conceive that the Oromo national movement could have adopted any form or means other than armed struggle. In the process, armed conflict has shaped the Oromo national movement in building a secure constituency, acquiring material resources, and eliciting legitimacy. It also defined the rules and norms, organizational structure, and balance of power within the Oromo nationalist camp. Those organizations that did not subscribe to armed struggle stood little chance of gaining acceptance among the Oromo.

It is important to consider that armed struggle was adopted for its legitimating function rather than because of an ends-related calculation of its effectiveness. This was evident in its role in the rise of the political capital of the OLF. Unable to break free from the political restrictions imposed by host governments (the Sudan, Somalia, and Kenya) on its political and military activity, the original OLF leadership struggled to keep the aspiration of the Oromo people alive by projecting military strength often in terms not matched by reality. In the end, its success in rallying the Oromo public arguably resulted more from its work of raising the political consciousness of the Oromo people than from concrete military achievements. Conversely, the current leadership has seen its credibility diminish both by its association with the organization's declining role since 1992 and because of its own inability to resume an effective armed struggle within Ethiopia.⁷⁵

The legitimacy conferred on the founders of the resistance by their initiation of the armed struggle was one factor, an advantage they translated, almost without exception, into permanent tenure as leaders. For instance, nearly forty years after its founding, the leadership of the OLF and other Oromo organizations has not been replaced by a cohesive new generation of leaders. This might seem paradoxical, given the inability of any of these groups to achieve their stated national objective and their increasingly questionable record in military achievements, but can be explained in part by their ability to perceive or create a situation of perpetual crisis and external threat. Nonetheless, the absence of marked progress since 1992 has caused serious internal splits and a perceptible contraction of

support for armed struggle, but it may have enabled the entrenched leadership to discourage dissent or the development of viable alternative organizations. The leadership's public rhetoric about its commitment to armed struggle was apparently a means to restore its internal credibility and distract the regular members or supporters from pressing questions of accountability for its prolonged ineffectiveness.⁷⁶

In the present state of affairs, commitment to armed struggle also performs significant political functions, external as well as internal to the Oromo population, as military operations are conducted in a highly instrumental form geared toward specific policy objectives. In this instrumental approach, very limited military operations obfuscate the organizations' strategic dilemmas.⁷⁷ Similar effects obtained internally, for example, assert the OLF's nationalist credentials and lend weight to its political positions for and against the evolution of diplomacy. Military action also attracts substantial financial assistance and generates strategic rent from the diaspora backers of a particular organization. The question to ask here is whether armed struggle, in its instrumental sense, should continue to be the cornerstone of the Oromo national movement today and the new political system of tomorrow even as it produces no measurable progress toward the ultimate aim of self-determination. This matter needs to be addressed systematically within the movement.

Even when deemed a necessary component of struggle, the kind of legitimacy derived from the armed struggle is not sufficient to facilitate the emergence of rules and norms appropriate to peacetime situations or to provide durability to the nascent post-conflict

political system. In a more practical sense, armed struggle as an instrument of political objective appears to have lost its currency since the dissolution of the bi-polar world in the late 1980s. This is worth careful consideration—do the values that guide war and the systems that obtain military victory work well in building peace?

In the 1990s, for example, various liberation movements around the world adopted different methods to achieve the same goal of liberation. These efforts deserve some attention from the Oromo. In the late 1980s/early 1990s, the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa decided to wage a long-term campaign of attrition, with strikes, sabotage, economic sanctions, and international pressure. Through diplomacy in action, the liberation movement was able to translate international opposition to apartheid into support for the ANC as the sole legitimate representative of South Africa's oppressed people.⁷⁸ In April 1998, the Good Friday accord signatories, including the Irish Republican Army (IRA), renounced violence, established a new Northern Ireland legislative body, increased cross-border ties, and freed prisoners. In October 2001, the IRA began "decommissioning" its arsenal—in effect disarming—an action the unionists have long demanded as proof of the IRA's commitment to peace and to pursuing a purely political strategy. In 2004, West Papuan leaders, including several from the Free Papua Movement (OPM), decided to end armed conflict with the Indonesian army after forty-two years and pursue self-determination in relation to Indonesia through peaceful means. Their aim was to establish an East Timor-style campaign for independence. In May

2005, inspired by the ‘unarmed insurrections’ against unpopular governments in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004-05), and Lebanon (2005), thousands of ethnic Saharawis from the Western Sahara took to the streets en masse, demanding the withdrawal of Moroccan troops and independence for one of Africa’s last remaining colonies. The pro-independence Sahrawi liberation movement’s strategy was subsequently transformed from one based on armed struggle and diplomacy conducted by the Polisario, to a nonviolent resistance led by Sahrawis living inside the occupied territory and in southern Morocco.⁷⁹

Given its long struggle, the Oromo movement should be at the stage of institutionalization of its victories and reorientation of its method. Armed struggle may be good for liberation organizations, for the reasons stated above, but the nation almost certainly would have to bear the direct and indirect ravages of an armed conflict. A militarized culture does not move away from a marked tendency to authoritarian control and greater intolerance of dissent toward openness and participatory politics. The Oromo nation has not yet acted to invest in civil resistance to TPLF domination through non-violent tactics. Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela figured out the power of ideas in civil resistance; they utilized the moral power of justice for the oppressed to erode the dominance of the oppressor. Unarmed insurrections and peaceful protests proved more effective than exploding a bomb in a restaurant. Civil resistance over time reduces the exaggerated fears that the oppressor has toward the oppressed.⁸⁰ The notion that the same organization can conduct both armed struggle and civil resistance is oxymoronic. The

world might well be ready to support the Oromo if they change the formula of their struggle.

The Process: Democratization *vis-à-vis* Decolonization

Thus far, Oromo nationalists have put forward two broad interpretations of the road to the ultimate objectives of the Oromo national movement. The first of these may be described as the 'decolonization route' (described by opponents as the secessionist route) and the second as the democratization route (described by opponents as 'capitulationist' or 'Ethiopianist').⁸¹ Both positions have been hijacked by rhetoricians who view the concepts as slogans around which to rally rather than as complex processes that require intellectually sound analysis leading to pragmatic application. In the case of the Oromo national movement, the debate over democratization and decolonization as two alternatives in the process of self-determination presents a false dichotomy since they are dialectically related. In Africa, though democratization was the force that precipitated the process of decolonization, the latter has not necessarily led to a genuine democracy, peace, and stability. Decolonization without democratization has usually resulted in disappointment for many nations.

To avoid the hollowness of political decolonization, the Oromo nation needs internal political stability. Some experts have argued that democratization can bring about instability, offering a powerful critique about the limits of the linkage between democracy and peace. This is the basis of Meles Zenawi's conceptually fallacious 'democratic developmental state.'⁸² In truth, democratizing polities are substantially less conflict-prone than authoritarian ones. The volumi-

nous research on democratization has shown that, as contemporary polities become more democratic, they reduce their overall chances of being involved in internal conflict. Reversals of democratizing processes have a tendency to increase the risk of being involved in warfare. History also shows that as societies undergo democratic change, the risks of civil conflict are reduced by democratization and exacerbated by reversals of democratization.

Moreover, a decolonized Oromo nation needs peace with its neighbors. To begin with, it may seem odd for Oromos who pride themselves in a democratic heritage to spurn the democratization of Ethiopia or for that matter any polity in the Horn of Africa. Given the richness, complexity, and sophistication of the Oromo heritage of democratic political culture shared by Oromos in every walk of life, the democratization of all peoples in the Horn of Africa should be a goal Oromo leaders should promote. If one looks at the linguistic map of the region, it is evident that the Oromo are not only the largest of the Cushitic speaking peoples, but are also situated at the center of these. The Oromo are surrounded clockwise by the Afar, Somali, Sidama, Beja and Bilen. The choice of the Cushitic peoples surrounding the Oromo, not to mention the non-Cushitic peoples, depends on the message that Oromo leaders telegraph to them. Showing concern for people who share their values and goals is an important sign of maturity for Oromo political leaders and organizations.

While critics have doubted the existence of a positive correlation between democratization and political stability, many theorists of international politics posit that democracies do not seem to fight each other and

that the process of democratization invariably exerts positive effects on interstate security. This view is not just a political science theory but also a policy prescription followed by many nations. Thus, for example, in his 1994 State of the Union address President Clinton declared that, 'the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere'. Similarly, Shimon Peres, when Israeli Foreign Minister, announced that Israel should 'encourage' democratization among its neighbors in order to strengthen the process of peace settlement in the Middle East. Once the Oromo nationalist groups clearly demonstrate the nature of Oromo democracy, and how it will contribute to peace within the nation of Oromia and in the region, the debate can advance regarding the Oromo contribution in the Horn region and beyond.

The Ends: Autonomy within a Larger State *vis-à-vis* Independent Statehood

The notion of the sovereign state, that an inhabited territory in all parts of the world must be allocated to people managed by a government whose authority is recognized by others, is a concept that spread to the entire world only with the advent of global capitalism. In Africa, according to Christopher Clapham, it was "largely a product of European colonialism and turned into a global norm by decolonization."⁸³ In time, the state took on a distinctive cultural character, the nation-state, which distinguished one state territory and population from those of its neighbors.⁸⁴ Interestingly, the sovereign state was not an instrument that people around the world demanded as a matter of right, but an apparatus conferred on rulers who were expected

to “act as effective regulators of [their people] on behalf of a global political community.”⁸⁵ In practice, the doctrine of sovereignty, while it protected the state from external threats and served as an instrument of a stable international order, it has been used by rulers as a license to repress the domestic population. The sovereign state rarely served the interest of the people within its territory in the post-colonial era.

In the post-Cold War world, when the forces of global capitalism have spread to all corners of the globe, the state has come under tremendous strain, hemmed in by the dynamics of the global system, which find sovereignty restrictive, and by a crisis of legitimacy in areas where the idea of the state has never found a foothold. In general, the forces that led to the formation of states in the first place, such as trade, arms, and technology, are now working to undermine it.⁸⁶ More specifically, many keen and competent observers now believe that the nation-state, the most successful variant of the state, is now in a state of decline. In 1995, Kenich Ohmae observed that the nation state was rendered largely unnecessary by investment, industry, information technology, and individual consumers that are not hindered by political boundaries. That is, nation states no longer have to play a market-making role and have become unnatural units. Their eclipse, Ohmae argued, has been accelerated by the rising influence of global corporations and the ascendancy of global logic in international affairs. Indeed, the demise of the Soviet Union and the abatement of the Cold War have reinforced the impression that the world is moving into an era where business cooperation and economic integration, rather than ideological

commitments and militaristic competition are governing relations among nations and in world affairs.⁸⁷ The period since Omhae predicted this have only proved that a process of deepening global connectivity and interdependence has shifted some of the sovereign rights of states to transitional structures or lost them to subnational groups.⁸⁸ In Africa, the notion of the state, specifically the nation state, has always been an aberrant formation.⁸⁹

Even though the future of the nation state is hard to forecast with certitude, the broad outlines are clear. Global trade expansion and liberalization are certain to lead to a world that is economically integrated. Trade and economic engagement are believed to stimulate productive involvement and inclusiveness, and strengthen mutual understanding. This logically minimizes the threat of war and the possibility of ideological conflicts. Jeffrey Sachs was optimistic when he wrote that for the “first time in history, almost all of the world’s people are bound together in a global capitalist system Long cherished hopes for convergence between rich and poor regions of the world may at last be about to be realized.”⁹⁰ Sachs’ sunny optimism aside, the fact that the architecture of international relations which has thus far rested on the notion of the sovereignty of the nation-state is, to say least, in a state of flux.

That the state is a ‘necessary evil’ has long been evident. Today, the question is whether it is necessary at all. Christopher Clapham actually raises an important issue of whether the high cost of maintaining states is matched by its benefits. States in Africa have proven unable to provide public goods to populations and have degenerated into a form of a social organization

for oppression and extortion. Because the universal belief in the importance of the state no one had ever bothered to raise “the question of whether the whole world could *afford* states has been ignored.”⁹¹ The Oromo demand for a state of their own was articulated in an era when the importance of the state was not in question. It falls to Oromo nationalists, scholars, and citizens to determine whether the state as a goal is still relevant or a new kind of forward-looking political arrangement in the Horn of Africa is something worth contemplating.⁹²

CONCLUSION

Leading Oromo nationalist organizations have concluded that the only way that a political transition can be effected in Ethiopia is through the tried-and-true method of violent removal of an intransigent regime. I have argued in this paper that a violent transition is destructive, wasteful and, frankly, imprudent for any political group to pursue it as a viable strategy. I have also shown that unconventional war never succeeds against dictators, unless it merges with conventional warfare. In the Ethiopian context, it is possible to envision that self-determination could be achieved through a process of constant evolution of viable institutions and abandonment of practices that have proved to be functionally obsolete. The success of either the decolonization of Oromia or the democratization of Ethiopia is entirely dependent on breaking the vicious cycle of violent transition, not on perpetuating it. Those who come to power through war are likely to claim a right of conquest. This is not a unique disease of the Tigreans and Eritreans to which the Oromo have some

kind of immunity. Oromo citizens should be wary of a state that had been won through war.⁹³

The focus of the Oromo nation should turn away from formal relations between the EPRDF government and the Oromo. The tendency to simplify complex processes should give way to appreciating the intricate texture of the political edifice in order to be able to take advantage of a political opening. The narrative above has shown that there is more to the system than the simply dichotomy of ‘TPLF’ versus ‘OLF’. In other words, most Oromos tend to vilify everything that does not seem to agree with their views, for instance, often fusing the TPLF and the OPDO together or viewing the OPDO as a monolithic political entity. The leading Oromo organizations, those mainly in the diaspora, are consumed by a discourse, which has resulted in the deconstructing of the Oromo nation rather than convergence.

Within Oromia, though, even within the limited space allowed by one-party domination of the Ethiopian political scene over most of the last two decades, the Oromo people have been able to retain the foundations of Oromo identity, unity, and self-determination. Through media and cultural productions,⁹⁴ diligence in learning the *qubbee*, religious sermons delivered in militant lexicons, and even expression of popular aspirations in music, Oromos are continuing the national struggle in defense of their moral, human, and even legal rights, despite constant harassment by state authorities. The students and women who visit the imprisoned, the truck drivers who relay information, the nationalists working in various governmental and private settings, have kept the nation together and the

national aspiration alive. Even though in the politically restricted spaces of Haile Sellassie's Ethiopia political undercurrent were hard to conceal, the Macca-Tuulama Self-help Association (MTSA), which many credit as the initial organization of the modern Oromo nationalism, was not a political organization whose declared goal was to start a revolution. Still, MTSA leaders were always keen to make sure that overt political acts were avoided and instead emphasized that the purpose of the association was to provide a space for Oromos of all class and regions to come together.⁹⁵

Oromo nationalists are in the position now to determine whether they will wait for the regime to collapse through some means which will enable them to rebuild everything from scratch. Or they can develop the Oromia national state and its governing institutions such as the *caffee Oromiya*, and the *qubbee* constituencies which constitute important gains to be protected and preserved as the basis for a free Oromia. As part of this process, it can be argued that even the constitution of Ethiopia, which was drafted with the full participation of several Oromo liberation fronts and still bears signs of their input can be used to contribute to Oromo long term objectives if the above issues are addressed, rather than be dismissed as a 'Wayne constitution.'⁹⁶ This position asserts that the problem lies not in the design of the constitution *per se*, but in the refusal of the regime fully to implement its provisions. This paper calls for a deepening of the debate among Oromo nationalists over what constitutes national objectives, what are appropriate means to reach these goals, what is acceptable process to achieve a decolonization and/or democratization, and how can

national liberation be achieved and self-determination implemented—through autonomy within a larger state structure or through independent statehood. As this national debate progresses, the Oromo will choose whether it is necessary to clamor for the right to destroy the current Ethiopian state and rebuild-anew or to work to rebuild the state from within, preserving their own gains and building on them. The way in which this struggle unfolds in the largest nation of people in the region will have an enormous impact on the future of Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and the continent.

Notes

- * I thank Bonnie Holcomb, Daniel Ayana, Asafa Jalata, Fikru Kebede, Tesema Ta'a, and Gemetchu Megerssa for their comments on this paper.
- 1. Meles Zenawi, *African Development: Dead Ends and New Beginnings*, <http://www0.gsb.columbia.edu/ipd/pub/Meles-Extracts2-AfTF2.pdf>, chapter 7. Accessed, 14 May 2008.
- 2. See Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, (New Haven. Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968); Huntington prescribed this model for Ethiopia when he served as the consultant of the Ethiopian government in 1993. See Samuel Huntington, "Political Development in Ethiopia A Peasant-based Dominant Party Democracy?, Report to US AID/Ethiopia on Consultation with the Constitutional Commission, May 1993.
- 3. In fact, Ethiopia is a "hybrid regime," according to the democracy index of *The Economist*, situated between a "flawed democracy" and an "authoritarian regime." It ranks 106 out of 167 countries, less democratic than Cambodia (at 105) and more democratic than Burundi (at 107), Gambia, Haiti, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Iraq,

in order of the democracy index. Laza Kekic, *The Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy*, 2006.

4. In August 2006, Brigadier General Kemal Gelchu, now an OLF military commander, defected along with some one hundred troops to join the OLF in Eritrea. In an interview, he stated that the only language the EPRDF understood “is force and we’re going to challenge them by force.” Tsegaye Tadesse, “Ethiopia Says Killed 13 Rebels Crossing from Somalia,” Reuters, August 11, 2006.
5. Even though Thomas Hobbes was of the view that human action results from the fear of death, he was not in favor of popular uprising to change government. Other political theorists, such as John Locke and the Scottish Calvinist theologian, John Knox argued that sovereignty always belonged to the people and when rulers usurp that right, popular rebellion is justified. Carl J. Richard *American Mind: A Brief History of a Nation's Thought* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).
6. Leenco Lata has written extensively on these issues as an individual, but a healthy public debate or written exchange among the political groups leading to charting a common course has yet to occur.
7. For description of transitions and attempted overthrow of a government, see Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 2; Robert Hess, “Ethiopia,” in *National Unity and Regionalism, in Eight African States*, ed. Gwendolyn M. Carter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 506.
8. For examples of purges and liquidations, consider Aman Andom in 1974, Tafari Benti in 1976, Atnafu Abate in 1977; for examples of attempted coup d'état, consider 1960 and 1989; for examples assassinations, consider the attempt on Haile Sellassie by Takkele Wolde Hawariat in 1942, by Negash Bezabih in 1951, 1946 and 1969;

on Mengistu in 1975 and many more times after that incident; for examples of place putsches, consider Abba Wucaw's revolt against Ras Taffari in 1928, Gugsu Wole against Taffari in 1930, Belay Zelaka against Haile Selassie in 1943; for mutinies, consider Negale 1973, and in Nacfa 1988.

9. This is not a unique Ethiopian phenomenon. For the phenomenon of state collapse, see William Reno, "The Politics of Insurgency in Collapsing States," *Development and Change* 33:5 (2002): 837-858.
10. The cabinet reforms of Haile Sellassie after the 1960s coup d'état, the resignation of Aklilu Habte Wold's cabinet after the February uprising in 1974 revolution and Mengistu's Haile Mariam's repudiation socialism in the wake of the 1989 officers' revolt are cases in point.
11. Tibebe Eshete, "Reassessment of Lij Iyasu's Political Career, with Particular Emphasis upon his Fall," in *Personality and Political Culture in Modern Africa : Studies Presented to Professor Harold G. Marcus*, eds. Melvin E. Page *et al* (Boston, MA : African Studies Center, Boston University, 1998).
12. Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: James Currey, Athens OH., Ohio University Press, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002), 120-128. Gebre- Igziabiher Elyas, *Prowess, Piety, and Politics: The Chronicle of Abeto Iyasu and Empress Zewditu of Ethiopia (1909-1930)*, ed., Reidulf K. Molvaer (Studien Zur Kulturkunde 104. Koln: Koppe, 1994).
13. In a review of Gebre- Igziabiher Elyas', *Prowess, Piety, and Politics*, Tashale Tibebe writes: "It may not be idle speculation to argue that had Iyasu stayed in power longer, Ethiopia might have moved in a more tolerant-of differences direction, that Iyasu's multiculturalism was what Ethiopian needed most, that Ethiopia might have avoided the traumatic ordeals of the last three

- decades. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 30:1 (1997), 228-229.
14. Bahru Zewde, "The Economic Origins of the Absolutist State in Ethiopia, 1916-1935," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 17 (1984): 1-29; Tsegaye Tegenu, *The Evolution of Ethiopian Absolutism: The Genesis and the Making of the Fiscal Military State, 1696-1913*. Studia Historica Uppsaliensia 180 (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1996).
 15. Donald Levine, "Ethiopia: Identity, Authority, and Realism," in *Political Culture and political Development*, eds. L. Pye and S. Verba (Princeton, 1965), 243-253; Edmond Keller, "Ethiopia: Revolution, Class, and the National Question," *African Affairs*, 80: 321 (1981): 524.
 16. Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 207.
 17. Christopher Clapham makes this point when he writes that coup d'état's "are a recognized way of disposing of Emperors who are either too weak to be effective, or who do not abide by essential conventions of the Ethiopian state system. Although such plots fail far more often than they succeed, it is hardly too much to say that an Ethiopian Emperor is subject to the rule of the survival of the fittest." Christopher Clapham, "The Ethiopian Coup d'état of December 1960s," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 6 (1968): 495-507.
 18. Harold Marcus, "1960, The Year the Sky Began Falling on Haile Sellassie," *Northeast African Studies* 6:3 (1999): 22.
 19. Interview: Atsedie Habtemariam (wife of Gen. Mulugeta Buli), Addis Ababa, 21 January 1988.
 20. Jay Walz, "The 'Conquering Lion' Still Reigns," *New York Times Magazine*, 15 January 1961, 9; *idem* "Sellassie Pledges Unchanged Rule," *New York Times*, 21 December 1960.
 21. Paul Baxter, "The Creation and Constitution of Oromo Nationality," in *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa*,

- eds., Katsuyoshi Fukui and John Markakis (Oxford: James Currey, 1994), 178.
22. Interview: Brigadier General Desta Gemedo and Brigadier General Yohannes Wolde Mariam, Addis Ababa, 14 February 2004.
 23. Edmond Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1988), 160-161.
 24. Jay Walz, "Selassie Sets Out To Bolster Regime Shaken by Rebels; Selassie Sets Out to Remake Regime Shaken by Rebel Plot," *The New York Times*. December 25, 1960, Page 1.
 25. Keller, "Ethiopia: Revolution, Class, and the National Question," 540-544.
 26. Marina and David Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution* (New York: Africana, 1978),
 27. Paul B. Henze, *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 289.
 28. Dessalegn Rahmato, "Agrarian Change and Agrarian Crisis: State and Peasantry in Post-Revolution Ethiopia," *Africa* 63:1(1993): 36-55.
 29. Oyvind M. Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia: The Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974-85* (Oxford, Athens, OH., Addis Ababa, 2000). Eide provides a detailed study of the persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church for its alleged links with the Oromo Liberation Front.
 30. Bonnie K. Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in North-east Africa* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1990).
 31. An influential study of this issue is James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
 32. On human rights violations see, Mohammed Hassen "Conquest, Tyranny, and Ethnocide against the Oromo:

- A Historical Assessment of Human Rights Conditions in Ethiopia, ca. 1880s–2002,” *Northeast African Studies* 9: 3 (2007): 15-49. On political exclusion, see Asafa Jalata, Asafa Jalata. *Fighting Against the Injustice of the State and Globalization: Comparing the African American and Oromo Movements* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 55-88.
33. According to the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, once states achieve control over the political and civil societies, the ruling class is able to establish a hegemony, in addition to the control of state apparatus of coercion. That is complete domination. Perry Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci,” *New Left Review* 100 (1976-7): 20; Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought* (London, 1982), 21.
 34. Sandra Fullerton Joirman, “Opposition Politics and Ethnicity in Ethiopia: We Will All Go Down Together,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 35:3 (1997): 391.
 35. Marakakis and Ayele, 1986; Donald Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic Account of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California), 1999.
 36. For an insider's view of how the resignation was tendered and effected, see Emmanuel Abraham *Reminiscences of My Life* (Oslo, Norway: Lunde Forlag, 1994), 127-128.
 37. Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
 38. Paul Henze, *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 322.
 39. Harold Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 214-215.
 40. “A War Unwon,” *Africa Confidential* 43:11 (31 May 2002), 6-7.
 41. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 236-237.
 42. The public sentiment that the government favored Tigray over other provinces is summed up in an

- Amharic saying, which is supposedly a slogan by which the TPLF was guided: "Until Tigray has fully developed, May the rest [of the country] hemorrhage until it is in blood enveloped." For analysis see, Abebe Adugna, "A Comparative Welfare Analysis of Ethiopian Regions: the Case of Oromia," *Journal of Oromo Studies* 13:1&2 (July 2006), 1-18.
43. Teferi Abebe, "Impacts of the Recent Border Conflict on the Performance of the Ethiopian Economy," *Working Paper of the Ethiopian Economic Association/Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute (EEA/EEPRI)*. <http://www.eaecon.org/eepr-workingpapers/WP3-2002.htm>. Accessed 23 May 2008.
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 45. There is no overarching theory that explains state collapse. In various regions, states have collapsed following their own unique set of factors and trajectories. See Martin Doornbos, "State Collapse and Fresh Starts: Some Critical Reflections," *Development and Change* 35:5 (2003): 797-815
 46. "A War Unwon," *Africa Confidential* 43:11 (31 May 2002), 6-7
 47. Personal observation, Summer 2002.
 48. "Meles wins out over dissident threat," *IRIN Weekly Reports*, 24-30 March 2001; "A War Unwon," 7
 49. Terrence Lyons, *Avoiding Conflict in the Horn of Africa: U.S. Policy Toward Ethiopia and Eritrea* CSR NO. 21, (Washington DC: Council on Foreign Relations, December 2006), 15.
 50. Martin Plaut, 'Ethiopia's Oromo Liberation Front,' *Review of African Political Economy* 33:109 (September 2006): 587-93.

51. Oromo rebel group denies ideological split,” *IRIN Weekly Reports*, 30 August 2001.
52. See Tumsa note 5.
53. Abiyu Geleta, “OLF and TPLF: Major Issues and Outcomes of a Decade of Negotiations since 1991,” *Paper Delivered at the 2002 Annual Conference Oromo Studies Association Conference*, Washington, DC. 27-28 July 2002, Howard University.
54. John Abbink, “Ethiopia—Eritrea: proxy wars and prospects of peace in the Horn of Africa,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 21: 3 (September 2003): 414.
55. Lyons, *Avoiding Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, 15.
56. “Meles wins out over dissident threat,” 2001.
57. Asafa Jalata, “The Impact of State Terrorism and Globalization on the Oromo National Movement,” *Journal of Oromo Studies* 13: 1&2 (2006), 25.
58. “A War Unwon, 2002,” 7.
59. Medhane Tadesse & John Young, “TPLF: Reform or Decline? *Review of African Political Economy* 97 (2003): 390-393.
60. For instance, when the President of Addis Ababa University, Andreas Eshete, and his Executive Assistant, Samuel Asefa, dismissed 328 Oromo students, Oromo elders went up the chain of the education bureaucracy to appeal for the students’ release. They received the same response at every level. The two university officials, the Vice Minister of Education for Higher Education, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Capacity Building, and the Deputy Prime Minister, were all members of the ANDM.
61. Seyoum Hameso, *The Politics of Genocide: The Case of Sidama*,” *Paper Delivered at the 2002 Annual Conference Oromo Studies Association Conference*, Washington, DC. 27-28 July 2002, Howard University; Human Rights Watch, “Targeting the Anuak: Human Rights Violations

- and Crimes against Humanity in Ethiopia's Gambella Region," *Human Rights Watch Report* 17:3 (March 2005): (A); Genocide Watch and Survivors' Rights International, "Today is the Day of Killing Anuaks: Crimes Against Humanity, Acts of Genocide and Ongoing Atrocities Against the Anuak People of Southwestern Ethiopia," *A Genocide Watch and Survivors' Rights International Field Report* (25 February 2004), 1-26.
62. Human Rights Watch, "Suppressing Dissent Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region," *Human Rights Watch Report*, May 2005 Vol. 17, No. 7 (A), 11-12.
63. Asefa Fisseha, "Theory and Practice in the Implementation of Ethiopia's Ethnic Federalism," in *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, ed. David Turton. (Oxford: James Currey Publishers; Athens, OH.: Ohio University Press, 2006). 131-159.
64. Walter Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 170-174.
65. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1985).
66. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 137 .
67. *Ibid.*
68. Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988). Lyons, *Avoiding Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, 16.
69. Marina Ottaway made this observation as early as 1995. It is still the case. Marina Ottaway, "Democratization or New Authoritarianism? *Northeast African Studies* 2:3 (1995): 73.
70. Even the most ardent supporters of the government believe that the coming to power of an Oromo orga-

nization is inevitable. Since the government wants an abstract enemy to mobilize its forces and to justify clamping down on dissidents, the determination of the OLF to remain 'illegal' serves the purpose of the government. Alemseged Abbay, "Diversity and state-building in Ethiopia," *African Affairs* 103: 413 (2004), 593-614; See also Tesfaye Gebre-Ab, *Ya Boorka Zimita [Burka's Silence]* (Addis Ababa, 1992.Eth.C), for an interesting reflection of the Tigrayans' thinking of the Oromo people and their struggles in relation to their tenuous hold on power in Ethiopia. The author is a Tigrayan with close connection with the Tigray People's Liberation Front's (TPLF) leadership.

71. Gérard Chaliand, *Guerrilla Strategies: An Historical Anthology from the Long March to Afghanistan* (Berkeley: University of California, 1982), 7. Even at the height of the guerrilla movement, military victory wasn't envisioned to be the ultimate objective liberation movements. The success of the guerilla movement, which was invariably viewed as the nucleus of a political party in the post-conflict period, depended "on the progressive destruction of the enemy's military potential." In other words, armed liberation movement is about wearing out the state's army. The objective is, in Régis Debray's words, "to seek for ways to attack the enemy is to put him on the permanent defensive to exhaust him and prevent him from expanding his activities, to wrest the initiative from him, and to impede his search operations." Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1967)
72. Chaliand, 9.
73. *Ibid.* 8-9. See Chaliand's explanation of why the national liberation movements in Africa succeeded in achieving political victory.
74. *Ibid.*

75. "Low-level operations" is the consensus term used by military analysts. For example, see, "Ethiopia," 2007 *Center for Defense Information*; John Young, "Armed Groups along Sudan's Eastern Frontier: An Overview and Analysis," *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City*, (Geneva: Graduate Institute of International Studies, 2007): 36-37. Paul B. Henze, "A Political Success Story," *Journal of Democracy* 9:4 (October 1998): 40-54.
76. Lyons, *Avoiding Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, 15.
77. Ottaway, "Ethiopian Transition," 71-74.
78. Robert M. Price, *The Apartheid State in Crisis: Political Transformation in South Africa, 1975-1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
79. Maria J. Stephan and Jacob Mundy, "A Battlefield Transformed: From Guerilla Resistance to Mass Nonviolent Struggle in the Western Sahara," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, 8: 3. (2006).
80. Stephen Zunes, "Unarmed Insurrections against Authoritarian Governments in the Third World: A New Kind of Revolution," *Third World Quarterly* 15: 3, (1994): 403-426.
81. For detailed discussion of these positions, see note 6 above. For a critique of democratization, see Mekonnen Gelan, Review of Leenco Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization & Democratization or Disintegration?* (Lawrenceville, NJ, 1999). In *Journal of Oromo Studies* 8:1 (2001): 173-179.
82. For a critique of the concept, see Leenco Lata, "Extracting PM Meles Zenawi's Extracts," <http://www.oromonet.org/Lenco%20Lata%20on%20Meles.htm>. Accessed 20 May 2008.
83. Christopher Clapham, "The Challenge to the State in a Globalized World," *Development and Change* 35:5 (2002): 775.

84. Martin van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 126-188; 263-334.
85. Clapham, "The Challenge to the State," 794.
86. Jennifer Milliken and Keith Krause, "State Failure, State Collapse, and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons and Strategies," *Development and Change* 35:5 (2002): 753-774.
87. Kenichi Ohmae, *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies* (New York: Free Press, 1995).
88. Jean-Marie Guéhenno, (translated by Victoria Elliot). *The End of the Nation-State*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 1995), 12; van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline*, 336-414.
89. Lencoo Lata, *The Horn of Africa as Common Homeland: The State and Self-Determination in the Era of Heightened Globalization* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004).
90. Jeffery Sachs, *The Economist*, June, 1997.
91. Clapham, "The Challenge to the State," 778.
92. Lata, *The Horn of Africa as Common Homeland*, 280-282.
93. Debessay Hedru "Eritrea: Transition to Dictatorship, 1991-2003," *Review of African Political Economy* 97(2003): 435-436.
94. Greg Gow, "Translocations of Affirmation Mediascapes and Cultural Flows among the Stateless Oromo," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 7:3 (2004): 301-319.
95. Marina and David Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution*, 82-98.
96. This is the same position advocated by Dawd Ibsa of the OLF. Responding to a question about the right of self-determination being a principle enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution, the OLF Chairman said: "Yes Yes, the right to self-determination is in the Ethiopian Constitution. We want that right to be meaningful. ...

The Problem of *Fin de Regime* in Ethiopia

'The Constitution is partly the product of the Charter and we are co-owners of the Charter that formed the transitional government of Ethiopia in 1991. We are the ones who drafted it. And so, we have no fundamental problem with it.' *Les Nouvelles d'Addis*.. 'Interview with Dawd Ibsa Ayana, Chairman of the Oromo Liberation Front.' 29 March 2006.

BOOK REVIEW

Getahun Benti, *Addis Ababa: Migration and the Making of A Multi-Ethnic Metropolis, 1941-1974*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2007. Pp. xviii, 279, pb \$29:95.

This book is a very informative and well written book on Addis Ababa, a major metropolis located in the heart of Oromia. A revised Ph.D. dissertation which the author submitted to Michigan State University in 2000, *Addis Ababa: Migration and the Making of a Multi-Ethnic Metropolis 1941-1974* is based on extensive field data gathered over a two year period. Of the many works I have read on the city of Addis Ababa, Getahun Benti's book is the best in terms of the breadth and depth of the data, originality of interpretation, sophistication in argument, clarity of concepts, and lucidity in presentation. The book deals with several factors that triggered migration mainly from the northern historic Abyssinian provinces to Addis Ababa from the restoration of Emperor Haile Selassie to the throne 1941 to his fall from power in 1974.

The book is divided into three parts with ten chapters. Part One, The Setting, has three chapters dealing with literature on urbanization, foundation of Addis Ababa, and its growth into a major metropolis. The city was founded in 1887 on the site of the Oromo village of Finfinnee as a bridgehead for the Shawan Amhara colonial expansion into the southern parts of the country. Benti argues that Addis Ababa enabled its Amhara founders “to maintain Shoan hegemony over the rest of Ethiopia and to facilitate the economic exploitation of the newly conquered territories” (p. 32). According to the author, the growth of Addis Ababa was qualitatively different from all other *katamas* (military garrisons in conquered territories) established during the reign of Emperor Menelik. The growth of Addis Ababa was facilitated by, among other factors, its emergence as the empire’s political nerve center; its location as the commercial and economic hub of the country, and the terminus of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa Railway. Additional spur came during the occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941) by the Italians who introduced wage labor and established four factories around Addis Ababa. The city developed much more rapidly during the 1950s and 1960s, after it became the headquarters for the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and the Organization of African Unity. Despite its growth, the city was never able to provide adequate social services for its ever-increasing population. This was mainly the result of bureaucratic inefficiencies such as the lack of continuity with changes in mayoral administrations.

Part Two of the book has five chapters dealing with factors that initiated migration to Addis Ababa such as

economic development, job opportunities, educational facilities, and concentration of social services all of which attracted job-hunters and education-seekers to Addis Ababa. Two important themes emerge from these chapters: first, the largest number of migrants to Addis Ababa came from the northern six provinces of Gojjam, Begamedir, Wallo, Tigray, Eritrea and northern Shawa; and Addis Ababa (Eritrea and Harerge provinces) had the bulk of the medical and educational facilities of the empire. For instance:

In 1967/8 there was one hospital for about every 40,000 people in Addis Ababa, while in the countryside one hospital attended 340,000 people. Moreover, the capital enjoyed one doctor for roughly 3,500 of its inhabitants, while the ratio was one doctor for every 128,000 rural residents. The ratio of nurses for Addis Ababa and the rest of the country was one to 2,100 and one to 123,000 respectively. Bale and Arsi had only one hospital each while Bale and Gamo Gofa had only one nurse each. All specialized health centers were overwhelmingly located in Addis Ababa.

Similarly, there was a huge disparity in school enrollment between the northern provinces of the Abyssinian heartland and the southern conquered provinces. According to Getahun Benti, in 1967, the northern provinces and "Addis Ababa had 86 percents of total enrollment in the empire and the southern provinces shared 14 percent" (p.131). In 1968, 55.5 and 23.5 percent of university freshmen were Amhara and Tigrean, respectively. "The Oromo, the largest

ethnic group in the empire, took only 10.4 percent of the entire freshman population” (p. 132).

An interesting topic that is discussed in chapter seven is the migration of women to and the expansion of prostitution in Addis Ababa. Men and women from the northern provinces migrated to Addis Ababa in large numbers. Women migrated primarily because of the high incidence of divorce in the northern provinces, which was much more “tolerated among the Amhara” (p. 151) than among the other ethnic groups. According to Getahun Benti, “By migrating to Addis Ababa Amhara women ‘liberated’ themselves from oppressive sociocultural traditions” (p. 158). Once in the city, joblessness and the need for survival forced a large number of migrant women into prostitution. By the early 1960s, Benti observes, prostitution had become the largest industry that provided employment for about 60,000 (compared to 36,000 factory jobs in 1974) women in Addis Ababa. The author makes an interesting point when he cites that 76.9 percent of all prostitutes in Addis Ababa originated from the northern Amhara provinces, “where early and easily dissolvable marriage and divorce were prevalent” (p. 156). The cultural stricture against the dissolution of marriage among the Oromo and attitude that regards “prostitution a most despicable practice” (p. 157) discouraged the migration of Oromo women to the city and into prostitution.

In Chapter 8, Benti discusses the population of Addis Ababa. Beginning with the time when the small Oromo village of Finfinne was renamed Addis Ababa, the Amhara rulers of the city evicted the indigenous Oromo from their land and reduced them into minor-

ity residents of the major metropolis in the heart of Oromia. How did the Oromo become a minority in a city located in the region where they constitute an overwhelming majority? The author answers as follows.

The Oromo, who were natives to the entire region, were forcibly evicted to areas as distant as the province of Arsi. Those who survived the eviction were permanently assigned to the periphery of the city and had continuously to move farther and further away as the city expanded. They were marginalized and turned into laborers and providers (carriers, fetchers) of firewood and agricultural products to the city (p. 178).

The above description reflects the sad situation of the Oromo in and around Addis Ababa. What is tragic about it is that during the imperial (to 1974) and the military periods (1974-1991), the Oromo were evicted from their land to make room for the expansion of Addis Ababa, while today the Oromo who live within 100-kilometer radius of Addis Ababa are being evicted from their land in the name of economic development. In this way, the Amhara rulers have shaped and reshaped the city for the flowering of their language, political power, and cultural institutions. At the same time, the city served as the ideological fountainhead, from where unmitigated multidimensional attacks on the Oromo language, traditional religion, culture, were directed with the single purpose of obliterating Oromo national identity. As such, it is no exaggeration to state that Addis Ababa has been the political, cultural, and economic powerhouse for the Amhara, and the graveyard for Oromo culture.

The book has a number of minor errors. Here, I will mention just two. First, Getahun Benti has not fully highlighted the importance of 1887, the year in which Addis Ababa was founded. It was in January 1887 that King Menelik of Shawa (1865-1889) conquered the Oromo and other people of Hararge, captured the Muslim city state of Harar, and became the master of a vast and rich province, which brought closer to the sea, from where he imported huge European weapons. It was with those weapons that Menelik completed the creation of his empire and made himself Emperor of Ethiopia (1889-1913). No wonder then that the village of Finfinnee was renamed Addis Ababa shortly after Menelik captured Harar in January 1887. Second, the author of the book under review claims that “an oligarchy composed of members of the royal family, the nobility, and the upper clergy jointly controlled 90 percent of the private land” (p 72). This cannot be accurate even for southern Ethiopia, where Emperor Menelik took two-thirds of the land of the Oromo and other conquered people and distributed it among the armed settlers, the church, and the state. In northern Ethiopia, more than eighty percent of Amhara and Tigray peasants owned land. Despite these errors, *Addis Ababa: Migration and the Making of A Multiethnic Metropolis 1941-1974* is a well written book that would serve as a model to study migration patterns to other urban centers in Ethiopia. It is a welcome addition to the literature on urban studies and the field of Oromo studies.

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BOOK REVIEW

Asafa Jalata. *Oromummaa: Oromo Culture, Identity and Nationalism*. (Atlanta: Oromia Publishing Company, 2007). 291pp. \$30.00 pb.

This book grew out of nineteen speeches the author delivered between 2000 and 2007 at several Oromo community organizations and scholarly conferences held in North America. The first of the nineteen chapters, tackles “the concept of *Oromummaa* and identity formations in contemporary Oromo society, while the final chapter discusses lessons for the new Oromo diaspora from the ‘old’ African Diaspora in the United States. Of the remaining seventeen chapters, five deal with different aspects of *Oromummaa*, while the rest deal with Oromo national liberation struggle, the low level of Oromo national consciousness, and “the lack of political cohesiveness in contemporary Oromo society”(p. 2). The author argues that the enemies of the Oromo possess organizational strength, which has enabled them to mobilize Oromo resources for the purpose of suppressing and denying the Oromo people’s right to self-determination

(p. 218). In contrast, the leaders of the various Oromo organizations have failed to mobilize Oromo resources for their own freedom. Instead, these leaders waste their time, limited resources and energy on attacking each other, neglecting their historic responsibility of saving the Oromo people from destruction, and their resources from plunder.

Asafa Jalata is a particularly erudite scholar-activist who expresses his ideas with eloquence and courage. He is one of the most productive Oromo scholars at the forefront of creating an Oromo-centered knowledge. Jalata has been very consistent in exposing the Ethiopian political tyranny that has imposed abject poverty, degrading human condition, and serious human right violations bordering on genocide on the Oromo and other oppressed people. Jalata proposes that *Oromummaa* is the key to Oromo liberation from these conditions.

For the author of this informative book, *Oromummaa* is a broad concept, which has national and universal reach, an ideology of liberation, a road map to freedom, a weapon against oppression and exploitation, and a foundation for multinational democracy. *Oromummaa*, as discussed extensively in this interesting book, has clear educational value for those who are willing to learn from past mistakes and make necessary correction in the future. A shift in ideological orientation is required for leaders of Oromo political organizations, their followers and the educated class. Jalata argues that “activist political leaders must be teachers and effective communicators imbued with an egalitarian spirit. In addition, they must be effective listeners and students” (p. 9). For the author, Oromo leaders are

not proactive and they lack the “theoretical, ideological and organizing vision [necessary] to identify and solve political and social problems” (p. 9). This goes to the heart of the weakness of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) leadership. From my own experience of over three decades, I do not remember any time when OLF leaders solved organizational problems in a timely manner.

In his book, Asafa Jalata aims to impress upon the Oromo diaspora, including political leaders and the educated elements, two interrelated messages. First, the author wants every Oromo to recognize that he/she has a responsibility and an obligation to make a difference in the Oromo national struggle. Throughout the book, the author appeals to readers “to connect with their inner potential and believe in themselves” to be a voice for the Oromo wherever they live. Second, the author emphasizes the importance of mobilizing the human, spiritual and material resources of the Oromo people for their own liberation, freedom, human dignity, economic development, and democratic governance. Whether or not Oromo leaders digest the main message of this book and improve their performance, *Oromummaa* is presented as a strong case for changing course. As Jalata says: “since the ideological and organizational tools that Oromo elites have borrowed from other cultures have reached their maximum limit of capacities and cannot move the Oromo movement forward in the quest for achieving self-determination and human liberation, Oromo nationalists must develop their approaches based on *Oromummaa* and *gada* democratic heritage” (p. 14).

According to Jalata, the main weakness of Oromo liberation organizations is the lack of effective leadership caused by leaders who “preferred to compete among one another and subordinated the Oromo national interest to their respective political interests” (p. 141). These leaders, according to the author, “often confuse their political ambitions with the Oromo cause.” Such leaders “have failed to understand that they cannot have real political power before the development of Oromo national power” (p. 142). In particular, Jalata is critical of the situation of the Oromo elite in the diaspora, whom he indicts for their reluctance to hold leadership positions, failure to view themselves as agents who can change the unfortunate condition of the Oromo, and rush to judge harshly those who try to advance the cause of their nation.

In a way, according to Jalata, the problem with the Oromo movement is as much the failure of followership as it is of leadership. As such, he chastises Oromo elites for endlessly complaining about what went wrong with the Oromo struggle without contributing anything to the national cause. Yet, the main focus of the book is the leadership of Oromo political organizations, who, in his view, have thus far failed to recognize the “need to plan and develop new strategies and approaches that will unleash the potential of an Oromo society based on *Oromummaa*” (p. 17).

Asafa Jalata is a perceptive scholar who understands that the modern Ethiopian Empire was established with the destruction of Oromo power. In the world of *real politick*, where might makes right and the weak are victimized, the Oromo lack political power and their own state. According to the author, the world does not

protect the weak. Only those who are organized can effectively defend and protect themselves. At present, the Oromo cannot protect themselves because they lack organizational acumen. According to Jalata, more than three decades after the formation of the OLF, it still suffers from “lack of coherent and organic leadership [and] ...the failure to mobilize Oromo human and material resources effectively” (p. 95). The author repeatedly urges the leaders of Oromo political organizations to see beyond their political ambitions and narrow vision and work together for the self-determination of the Oromo people.

While fully supporting the OLF, the author does not hesitate identifying the major weaknesses of the OLF leaders. He admonishes and advises them to overcome their debilitating shortcomings which so far have made the vanguard liberation front an ineffective organization that has failed to mobilize Oromo human, material, and spiritual resources for the liberation of Oromia. To achieve this, the author contends, the OLF leadership must work for unifying the nation by reaching out to their political opponents and communicating better with OLF’s members, supporters, and sympathizers. It must also shed its old ways of doing business and transform itself into a dynamic organization by adopting *gadaa* principles.

Though this book is admirable in many ways, it suffers from several weaknesses. Let me mention just five. First, it appears to me that the book was rushed for publication without weeding out so many repetitions that are irritating to a reader. Second, the author is not using phrases and words carefully. For instance, he uses the phrase “Ethiopian political slavery” so many times.

While the message is clear to the Oromo reader, it could be confusing for the non-Oromo reader. Slavery is a powerful concept that evokes different emotions in different parts of the world. ‘Ethiopian political domination’ would have served the same purpose without confusing a readers. Third, the author also uses the term genocide repeatedly. This is a very technical term reserved for a specific crime against humanity. He should have used it advisedly to avoid potential criticisms for exaggerating his claim. If a reader suspects aggrandizement or exaggeration, it makes it very difficult to take his work seriously. Other descriptive terms of mass killings could have conveyed the message the author wants to communicate in terms of massive human rights violations committed in Oromia and other parts of Ethiopia. Fourth, the author claims that the “Turks, Arabs, Habashas and the Europeans imposed both Islam and Christianity on Oromos while at the same time suppressing indigenous Oromo religion in order to psychologically control and dominate them”(p.5). This is based on incorrect assumptions and flawed historical accounts that it was the Turks and the Arabs that spread Islam among the Oromo. This simply is not the case. Indeed Islam spread among the Oromo around the city of Harer during the Egyptian occupation (1875-85). Even then, it was not the Egyptians themselves, but Afaan Oromo speaking Harari religious leaders, who were instrumental in the spreading of Islam among the Oromo. What is more, the agents of Islam among the Oromo in most parts of Oromia were mainly Muslim Oromo scholars from Wollo. Neither did Europeans impose Christianity on the Oromo. In reality the Christian proselytizers of

the Oromo were mainly Christian Oromo scholars themselves. Fifth, the author appears to suggest that Christianity and Islam, for the Oromo, are borrowed identities. In a sense, Christians and Muslims around the world are borrowed identities. However, both Christianity and Islam are no longer borrowed identities for the Oromo. They are integral part of their cultural heritage, the essential parts of their religious universe. In fact, the author is accurate in stating that “Our people are religiously, culturally, regionally and professionally diverse, and we must be sensitive to this diversity” (p. 252).

Despite these weakness, *Oromummaa: Oromo Culture, Identity, and Nationalism* is a refreshing book that shows Asafa Jalata’s intellectual maturity and his profound commitment to the cause of the Oromo and other oppressed people in Ethiopia. His emphasis on linking Oromo people’s struggle for freedom and democracy with that of other oppressed people in Ethiopia is admirable. His discussion of the weaknesses of Oromo organizations, low level political consciousness, regional and religious feelings and his suggestions for overcoming these weaknesses through the deployment of the powerful ideology of *Oromummaa*, with clarity and forcefulness, makes this book an invaluable addition to Oromo studies.

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