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SPECIAL FEATURE

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FROM GEOGRAPHIC SKIRT TO GEOGRAPHIC DRIFT: THE OROMO POPULATION MOVEMENT OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Daniel Ayana¹

The sixteenth century is unlike any of the preceding centuries in the history of the Horn of Africa. Following the 1529 crushing defeat in the wars of Imam Ahmed ibn Ibrahim (Ahmed Grañ), members of the Beta-Amhara (Solomonic) dynasty fled from one mountain fastness to another. The arrival of Portuguese musketeers to aid the Christians abruptly ended the Imam's victory in 1543. Although Grañ's successors regrouped, reengaged, and eventually killed the Christian Emperor Galawdewos, the victorious Muslim army was eventually wiped out in its encounter with the Oromo population. The Christian rulers escaped to the regions north of the Blue Nile.² The pastoralist Oromo effectively ended the centuries-long cycle of religion-

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fueled violence between the Christian and Muslim armies and laid the demographic foundation of what later became the Ethiopian Empire.

Until the late 1980s, the sixteenth century Oromo predominance was generally viewed as a sudden event studied only in terms of its impact on the Ethiopian polity. A shift in perspective came in the early 1990s with the publication of Mohammed Hassen's *The Oromo of Ethiopia*, which analyzed the politico-military facets that established the current population geography of Ethiopia.³ In a subsequent work, Hassen showed the presence of sedentary Oromo groups in the medieval Abyssinian provinces of Ifat, Dawaro, Waj, and Bali long before the sixteenth century, thus refuting the notion of a sudden Oromo emergence on the Ethiopian scene.⁴

There remained however a lacuna in the literature of just how the pastoral Oromo evolved into a viable group that overwhelmed the contemporary Christian and Muslim states. Some scholars have suggested that a massive human and cattle population growth preceded the pastoral Oromo movement without explaining why demographic factors favored the Oromo among the many contemporary pastoralist groups.⁵ No study has attempted to explain the possible factors that contributed to the population growth that occasioned the movement. The standard interpretation remained that the wars of Ahmed Grañ weakened both the Christian and Muslim states and communities and precipitated the Oromo population movement. As it were, this was only half of the story.

The purpose of this article is to provide the other half. My analysis goes behind the epochal dramatic historical scenes and uncovers the factors that initiated and sus-

tained the great human drama of the Oromo population movement. Specifically I argue that the frontier-type geographical location of the pastoral Oromo habitat enjoyed a unique rainfall zone, relative safety from macro-parasitism, and a gradient of autonomy from micro-parasitism.⁶ These advantages catapulted the pastoral Oromo to demographic viability and launched their movements from the early sixteenth century onwards.⁷

The article takes an environmental perspective and analyzes the population growth spurred by a unique rainfall advantage and a change in rainfall regime. It traces the geographic drift,⁸ which extended over to the macro-region or the “roof,”⁹ back to the geographic skirt¹⁰ or the geographically unique homeland of the pastoral Oromo. I will first discuss the geography, the rainfall pattern, and human adaptation to the environment followed by relative safety from macro and micro-parasitism.

GEOGRAPHY AND DYNAMICS OF ADAPTATION

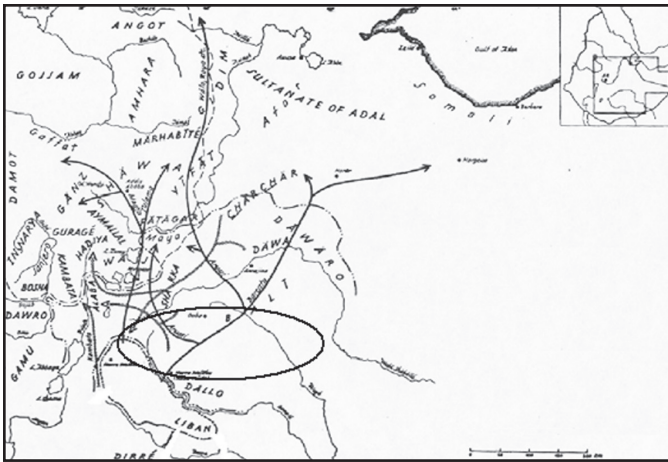
Mohammed Hassen’s study locates the ancestral homeland of the Oromo in the “highlands of middle south” of historic Bali.¹¹ He identifies the huge grazing land in the lower areas of Bali, such as Dallo, Fasil, and Qaqma near or on the banks of the Ganale River.¹² Set between the highland plateau to the north and the arid lowland and desert landscape to the southeast, this region was a frontier area located at a distance from the radius of the dominant contemporary state institutions. Usually, this homeland extended to Lake Abaya in the west, to the lower escarpments of historic Bali in the southeast, and the Golboo in the south, because of the expansive grazing areas required for pastoral communi-

ties. In their transhumance the ancestors of the pastoral Gabra Oromo probably had reached Lake Turkana, which they called Galana Boi.¹³ This general area is the southeastern quadrangle of the roof which exhibited a rhombus contour and was a frontier in both a geographic and cultural sense.

Geographic Skirt

In this frontier area the pastoral Oromo partly faced a geographic skirt in their settlement from around the second century BC up to the sixteenth century. In the southeast an extension of the Sahara desert geographically skirted this region. A local desert and arid lowland area, so desolate and inhospitable that some observers compared with the lunar landscape,¹⁴ bounded it from the south and southwest.¹⁵ To the south and southwest, the regional Chalbi desert of today's northern Kenya places a natural limit to cattle pastoralism. In the west, a vast arid lowland formed a tight skirt to the macro-region.¹⁶

Pollen analysis on Bale mountains shows increases in volume and the rise of vegetation similar to the present day, starting between 2,500 BP and 2,000 BP.¹⁷ Regional climatic history indicates dry and wet phases alternating between 12,500 BP and 5,000 BP. The same study emphasizes severe dry phases from 11,000-10,000, 8,500-6500, and 6,200-5,800 BP.¹⁸ Between 5,000 and 2,000 BP decades and sometimes centuries-long humid and dry periods alternated.¹⁹ This succession of climatic change, reflected in lake-levels and pollen analysis, corroborates a resumption of a moist phase from around 2,500 BP. The rise of some vegetation in the Arsii-Bale highlands is dated to this period,²⁰ suggesting a limitation on human habitation prior to 2,500 BP.



Map 1.1: The Pastoral Oromo Homeland in the Macro-region

Altitude and the availability of water shaped the ecology of this region which in turn facilitated adaptations to the local environment and the division of the inhabitants into settled agriculturalist and pastoralist groups. In the north and northeast the mountains south of the Rift Valley walls influenced the drainage system. The Wabi Shebelle rises from this general area east of Lake Awasa. It flows eastwards and then meanders in a southerly direction toward the Indian Ocean. Just south of the Rift Valley the Burji-Amaro Mountains reach over 4,000 meters above sea level. South of these mountains stand the Guji highlands, whence the Dawa River rises, flowing eastwards before turning south to the Indian Ocean. From the Arsii-Bali massif in the east, the Ganale and over forty other rivers form the Juba River system or join the Wabi Shebelle River below the highland. These river systems follow the elevation contours to descend towards the Indian Ocean.²¹

The regional altitude ranges from above 4,000 meters in today's Arsi-Bali massif to as low as 300 meters at the confluence of Dawa and Ganale Rivers. On the lower altitude and to the east, the escarpment wall breaks with intersecting hills and water sites sloping to the Dawa River and stretching to its confluence with the Ganale to form the Juba River. Access to water is available in wells or from these rivers at lower altitudes as they flow closer to the banks with crossing and watering-points. It is not clear which other groups had inhabited these areas before the sixteenth century along with the Oromo. From nineteenth century descriptions one learns that mixed agriculturalists lived on the uplands while only pastoralists lived in the lowland ecology unsuitable to farming.²² The availability of water at various points on the highlands, the lowland aridity and the prevalence of cattle pathogens dictated the pastoralists' circular transhumance over the middle and lower altitudes, shunning localities below Golboo.²³ Thus the ecological dimension suggests millennia-long adaptation to this restrictive region.

A recent study on African genetics classifies the Boorana among the ancient inhabitants of this region.²⁴ The ancestors of the Oromo were among the few Africans sharing Y-chromosome with the San, who had populated the world from eastern Africa some 40,000 years ago.²⁵ Archeo-astronomy has dated the Boorana calendar to at least the second century BP.²⁶ The calendar and the genetic information suggests that the ancestors of the Oromo were one of the earliest inhabitants of the area. This general area had formed a tight geographic skirt in most directions around the pastoral Oromo for millennia. The environmental depredation of this geographic frontier bounded with the hot dry lowland is partly tempered by

the middle and higher altitudes of the highland. Here the complex strategies embedded in the *gadaa* system helped them manage the environmental stress with resiliency.²⁷

Overlapping Rainfall Zone

The overlapping rainfall regime of the macro-region is an important factor in the emergence of the pastoral Oromo from among their numerous medieval neighbors as critical players in the human drama. The historic pastoral Oromo land lies at the intersection of the summer rains of the north and northeast, the spring rains of the south and southwest, and the autumn rains of the southeast. Kebede Tato demarcated this area “as a transition zone without characteristics of its own.” He then added that this area shared its rain with the Arsii-Bali-Harer and the southwestern rainfall regions.²⁸ Italians also had long understood a special regional climatic feature and identified this rainfall zone as the Omo-Ganale-Doria sector.²⁹ In a broader context, this transition zone reflected its location between the Gulf of Aden in the east, the east African highlands in the south, and the southwestern section of the roof. As an in-between zone, the region experienced a confluence of three rainfall seasons. To the north and west major rains fall between June and September in today’s Ethiopia and Eritrea. Southwesterly winds from the Gulf of Guinea bring moist air that sheds rain over the macro-region. A recent study on rainfall shows that the regions east of Negelle in Boorana do not receive summer rains.³⁰ Evidently written to fill a knowledge gap about rainy seasons, this study also missed the distinctive nature of the region’s rainfall pattern.

In effect, the region under consideration received rain all year round due to its location. About half of the rains come during March to May, extending the rainy

season from winter through the spring. This rain is an extension of the east African long rain on which Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and parts of Somalia depend for their farming seasons. It overlaps with the spring or March to April rain in the macro-region. Meteorology experts in Ethiopia and Eritrea call this “the small rain.” The second season provides about 40 per cent of the annual rain between October and November. The availability of this spring rain depends on tropical cyclones over the Southwest Indian Ocean (SWIO). Historically low cyclone frequency in SWIO correlated with abundant spring rains in the macro-region. During such seasons the pastoral Oromo homeland sometimes received rain as early as January or February. High cyclone frequency of SWIO coincided with drought years in the roof.³¹ About 10 per cent of the rain falls year round in cloud bursts.³² Just as the two rainfall seasons, the rains that come in-between the seasons have distinct Boorana technical names, indicating their importance in the regional environment.³³

The third rain occurring from October to January is a spillover from the Gulf of Aden. It is part of the dry season for the macro-region that depends on summer rains. This rain overlaps partly with the small rains from October to November coming from east Africa. The major beneficiaries of the October-January rain are inhabitants of the Horn of Africa, facing the wider Gulf of Aden. This rain forms over the Arabian Sea tropical storm and then showers the Horn.³⁴ Depending on distance, the rain from this direction reaches the pastoral Oromo area with reduced intensity.³⁵ The pastoral Oromo homeland enjoyed three rainfall seasons because of its proximity

to the Gulf of Aden, the east African highlands, and the macro-region's southwestern highland.

The impact of this overlapping rainfall zones have rarely been considered historically. This becomes relevant in cases of rainfall regimes, the regularity or irregularity of rainfall patterns over a long period.³⁶ Regularity in seasonal rainfall depended on many factors.³⁷ The possibility that abundant rainfall could occur simultaneously in all the rainfall zones is remote. It is even less likely that rains could occur for consecutive seasons over a long duration. Obviously, it is the frequent occurrence of disasters caused by the absence of rains that attracted historians' and meteorologists' attention.

Today meteorologists recognize this region for its low rainfall and high annual variability.³⁸ During concurrent calamities the region faced successive drought years. This can be gleaned from studies on global rainfall patterns indicating centuries of rainfall regimes.³⁹ According to Paleo-climatic studies, adaptations to rainfall regimes started around 5,000 years BP.⁴⁰ These studies shed light on regional environmental histories. For instance, in 1899 the Boorana and the surrounding region alone experienced a severe drought along with the east African highlands, while the macro-region escaped this calamity.⁴¹ This occurred following the 1888-1889 drought, famine, epizootic, and epidemic shocks that swept from Massawa to East Africa and beyond.⁴² Such periods of concomitant calamities have left behind traumatic memories. But the decades or centuries of concurrent abundant rainfall regimes can only be reconstructed from proxy evidence in population and livestock growth or hidden indicators such as lake levels. I now turn to the

proxy evidence and hidden indicators to show successive periods of abundant rainfall regime.

Most historians of this period missed the dynamics of population growth resulting from abundant rainfall because of their focus on contemporary conflicts from a purely religious perspective. Albert Kemmerer first suggested that the Afar and the Adal clans had threatened Christian Abyssinia as early as the Zagwe period (1137-1270).⁴³ James Bruce depicted the conflict as an alliance of pastoralists and sedentary Muslims against Christian Abyssinia.⁴⁴ Enrico Cerulli suggested that the growth of Islam generated a retaliatory response from the Christian state.⁴⁵ J. S. Trimingham attributed the conflict to the lowland Afar and Somali westward transhumance threatening highland Christians.⁴⁶ Only Merid Wolde Aregay suspected that a possible climatic factor contributed to population and livestock growth, fueling the conflicts. He cited one source that dated the initial pastoralist restiveness to the twelfth century.⁴⁷ A recent empirical study shows that pastoralists are prone to engage in conflicts during rainy seasons rather than in dry seasons.⁴⁸ Although thinking along this line, Merid did not specify the changes in rainfall regime.

Changing Rainfall Regime

From the twelfth century onwards the rainfall regime in the macro-region tended to show seasonal regularity until sometime after the sixteenth century. This was a reverse trend from the decline in the rainfall regime from the middle of the seventh century onwards. The noted geo-archeologist, K.W. Butzer used erosion sediments, construction debris, and Nile flood levels as proxy evidence to show a long term truncated rainfall regime between the seventh and the ninth centuries.⁴⁹ In Cairo

the Nile flood fell below plenitude (the annually expected Nile flood for a bounty harvest) levels between 730 and 805 C.E. Between 622 and 999 C.E, weak Nile River flood occurred consecutively six times for four or more years. Low Nile flood record in Cairo indicated little or absent rainfall in Abyssinia and the adjacent southwestern highlands. Butzer interpreted the fluctuating Nile flood to mean absent spring rains reducing harvests in the Axum region. Without specifying the southern limits of the receding spring rains, Butzer concluded that the central regions of today's Ethiopia enjoyed a relative advantage of regular spring or small rains.⁵⁰

Furthermore, Butzer showed periods of heavy rains that fed bumper grain harvests and facilitated the rise of Axum.⁵¹ This is proven from the now-dry lake basin in the Afar region. Lake Gamara was fifty meters deep around 25 BCE, indicating the volume of first millennium rains. The Nile flood level also rose over a long period during the early Christian era. The proxy records show that the rise and decline of Axum track periods of high and low rainfall years. The southern regions, including the pastoral Oromo homeland, enjoyed a relative advantage in long spring rains and perhaps centuries of abundant rains during the southward receding rainfall regime. Erosion sediment and construction debris once again show a period of significant rain around Axum only at the beginning of the sixteenth century.⁵² Thus, the declining rainfall regime reversed its trend toward an increased seasonal regularity over a wider geographic area from the twelfth century onward.

Closer to the micro-region, the variability in the levels of Lake Turkana provides an index for regional climatic change, specifically changing rainfall regime.⁵³

Increased rainfall began sometime during the twelfth century based on levels of Lake Turkana. Expert evidence suggested that the lake rose from undetermined lowest baseline. Between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries the lake level soared between 20 and 35 meters above the lakebed. Between the mid-fourteenth and mid-sixteenth century, for a period of between 150 and 200 years, the lake level dropped but remained mostly over 8 meters high above the lakebed. From the mid sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century it rose between 10 and 15 meters high from the lake bottom.⁵⁴ Though the Lake Turkana area has its own localized rainfall season, eighty to ninety percent of the water volume for the lake derives from the Gibe-Gojab-Omo River system.⁵⁵ These major rivers flow within the summer and spring rainfall regions, indicating that the pastoral Oromo land received rain that contributed to the rise of Lake Turkana. Higher levels of Lake Turkana also overlapped with the rise in the Nile flood leading to the sixteenth century. It is then plausible to argue that change in rainfall regime began in the twelfth century. The changes in precipitation ushered in decades or even centuries of consecutive abundant rainfall in the pastoral Oromo homeland region. This change in rainfall regime from the twelfth century on created an optimum condition that spurred population growth.⁵⁶

Written historical records supplement the changed patterns of regional rainfall regime. Writing in the mid-fifteenth century, al-Maqrizi noted abundant rain and two annual harvests in the macro-region, and that the heavy rains caused turbulent storms frequently.⁵⁷ Traveling in northern Abyssinia in the 1520s, the Jesuit Francisco Alvarez observed "... in all the world there is not so

populous a country, and so abundant in corn, and herds of innumerable cattle.”⁵⁸ From Alvarez’s description one can conclude that the rainfall regime had changed from the previous centuries, with dependable spring rains in the Abyssinian provinces. During the preceding periods spring rains were limited only to central and southern sections of the roof.

Ludovico di Varthema’s travel reports suggested abundant winter rain coming from the Arabian Sea via the Gulf of Aden. Di Varthema traveled in the Red Sea littoral, from 1503 to 1508, and wrote of the abundant grain growing around Zayla. He witnessed the plentiful farm products in the port city.⁵⁹ Di Varthema’s reference to abundant grains growing locally is starkly different from earlier reports. For instance, Ibn Batuta observed in 1331 only sheep and camels as the local livestock resource from the arid Berbera and Zayla physical environments. There was no report on farm products from the maritime zone for this period.⁶⁰ During the second half of the nineteenth century, a British colonial officer, reported in his northern Somalia’s geographical descriptions gum, date palm, and arid area tree products as the major regional trade items.⁶¹ Without excluding the possibility of an earlier wet phase, one can reasonably infer that the north-easterly winds from the Arabian Sea brought rain regularly to Zayla allowing for good grain harvests during Di Varthema’s early sixteenth century visit.

It is difficult to know exactly when this rainfall regularity began for this sector. It may have been during the second half of the fifteenth century. Yet other sources suggest the presence of an early wet period. Enrico Cerulli’s translation of a rare Arabic document indicates the Sultanate of Shawa suffering incursions from the

Afar lowlands as early as the twelfth century.⁶² Merid Wold Aregay's study illustrates the Afar and other north-eastern lowland pastoralists experiencing an increase in livestock and population before and during the sixteenth century. He also demonstrates these pastoralists' initiating conflicts during most of the previous centuries.⁶³ This substantial growth in cattle and human population likely came from a change in rainfall regime in the Afar lowland, which gets winter rain from winds originating on the Arabian Sea.⁶⁴ As discussed above, in wet years or decades these northeasterly winds brought winter rains to the pastoral Oromo lands. By the sixteenth century, the impact of the change in rainfall regime had produced increases in human and cattle populations.

It appears clear that the spring rains only extended to Axum at the beginning of the sixteenth century. This implies that the central and southern sections of the roof enjoyed relatively long spring rains and regular summer rains. While the Oromo areas experienced these two rainy seasons, it also had Arabian Sea winter rain. Change in rainfall regime after the twelfth century created an optimal condition for population growth in the general area. But the overlapping rainfall seasons provided an added comparative advantage. For instance, anthropological studies have shown that a "new water resource" among pastoralists in arid lands dramatically changes the population dynamics.⁶⁵ The post twelfth century regularity in rainfall regime and the overlapping rainy seasons created a comparative advantage for livestock and population growth in the pastoral Oromo areas.

Geographic Drift

Africanist historians suggest that "population pressure should be invoked very sparingly" to explain his-

torical change.⁶⁶ In this regard, Asmarom's view about possible Boorana population explosion during the fifteenth century was in the minority.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, earlier anthropologists' perspective about pastoralists' low population growth relative to settled agriculturalists that was dominant in the past has now been disproven. Research has clearly shown pastoral population growth to be within the globally known range of growth among settled groups.⁶⁸ That abundant rainfall may well have supported population growth is also consistent with demographic theories.⁶⁹

The *gadaa* system could have responded to the demographic increase with its function as "a ... mechanism of population control."⁷⁰ Initially around the twelfth century or after, the system may have checked population growth and thus helped adaptation to the ecosystem.⁷¹ At this early stage, it is fortuitous that the *gadaa* system checked the growth rate of the pastoral Oromo clans. But the favorable environment and its predictable regularity may have loosened the *gadaa* system's "demographic control mechanism."⁷² Until the fourteenth century, the contemporary pastoralists, including the Warjeh, the Gabal, the Afar, and the Somali were involved in conflicts over resources with each other, and also with the Muslim sultanates and the Christian state.⁷³ The *gadaa* system regulated the rate of pastoral Oromo population and saved them from engagement in most of the contemporary attrition conflicts. By the middle of the fifteenth century, however, population growth had reached a critical mass that for the first time reports reached Europe about alleged Oromo threats to the Christian state.⁷⁴

The abundant rain may have also contributed to an increase in the cattle population. Recent research on

Boorana pastoralism indicates that 60 per cent of the calves were born during the April and May rains. These calves weighed on average up to 23 kilograms more than calves born in other seasons. The same study shows a 25 per cent calf mortality rate during normal seasons. High mortality rates are attributed to grazing shortages. In these constraints, cattle mature slowly and heifers calve later than the normal four years. Overall herd mortality rate is about 13 per cent annually and this decreased in times of abundant grass. The general area is relatively cattle disease-free. Cattle mortality is mainly due to erratic rains and reduced grazing.⁷⁵

For this research one can imagine a lower percentage of calves born all year round. Coupled with the reduced mortality rates, this could have generated multiplier effects on cattle reproduction rates. This in turn must have necessitated additional human power as herders, and a pressure for new grazing areas. Asmarom's *opus* demonstrates three responses to such developments: expansion into the adjacent lands, intensification of the available ecological resources, and reinstitution of demographic control mechanisms.⁷⁶ The abundant rains prevented reimposing birth rate control as an option. Thus, the rainfall advantage and the consequent population growth may have pushed for the first option: moving to the neighboring areas or the beginning of a geographic drift. I now turn to the probable health and nutritional status of the pastoral Oromo based on later studies that provide us a window to imagine the past.

MACRO AND MICRO PARASITISM AND COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

The communities in the states adjacent to the Oromo homeland had been victims of macro-parasitism at least since the thirteenth century. According to al-Maqrizi, the first of these kingdoms was Ifat, which had well populated cities and abundant agricultural crops marketed at affordable prices. Next to Ifat was the smaller Kingdom of Dawaro and bordering Dawaro was the Kingdom of Arbabani. Situated to the southwest and south of Ifat were the Kingdom of Hadiya and the Kingdom of Sharka respectively. The Kingdom of Bali extended over an area about a little more than a third of Ifat while the Kingdom of Darah was analogous with that of Dawaro. These states used a single currency for trade. The inhabitants of Bali bartered goods for livestock. This kingdom is said to be the most fertile, having a large number of cattle and sheep. The Kingdom of Darah was reportedly the least fertile of all. Maqrizi identified them all as Zayla's provinces and under the Abyssinian king, as the overall ruler.⁷⁷

In addition to Maqrizi's account, Ethiopian historiography lists most of these states as tributary to the medieval Christian kingdom with whom they were engaged in frequent violent conflicts. This means that at least since the thirteenth century they were victims of macro-parasitism. Chronicles provide varying details about these communities and their connection to the Zayla trade route. Location along the Zayla trade route was a comparative advantage to most of them. This comparative gain might have contributed to their initial rise and relative regional prominence. However, both Muslim and Christian chroniclers concur on one theme: the major regional conflict from the thirteenth through

the sixteenth century was over controlling these trade routes. When the Christian army was strong, it raided the suspected rebels and heavily taxed the loyal ones. When the sultans of Ifat, and later of Adal were strong, the raid and taxation followed similar pattern in reverse. For instance, Maqrizi wrote of twenty battles fought between the Christian King Sayfa –Ar’ad (1344-1371) and the rulers of Ifat in a nine-year span.⁷⁸

In peace times the Christian and the Muslim states directed slave and cattle raiding against both the non-believers and co-religionists. Maqrizi recorded one such event when Sultan Hakkadin of Ifat attacked a group of pastoralists and raided 40,000 cows.⁷⁹ Maqrizi’s informant identified a Hadya town that castrated those enslaved. Taddesse Tamrat’s analyses about the economic motives for the Amde Seyon’s thirteenth century wars clearly show macro-parasitism at work.⁸⁰ Merid recorded how Mahfuz, a known *jihad* leader from the Adal sultanate, devastated Dawaro, Fatagar, and Waj for twenty-four years until his demise in 1516.⁸¹ Similar violent expeditions continued until the beginning of sixteenth century, when they evolved into a generalized war from 1529-1543. One can infer how taxation, slave raids, and regional wars as macro-parasitism adversely affected the population. It is also palpable that the comparative advantage in location along the trade routes exposed these communities to centuries of macro-parasitism.

For the pastoral Oromo the comparative disadvantage of living in a distant frontier location eventually evolved into an inimitable advantage which allowed them to emerge as a cultural group distinct from both the Muslim and the Christian communities. Distance must have provided relative safety from macro-parasit-

ism. For instance, the Gabal and the Warjeh inhabited the contested centers between the sources of the Wabi Shebelle and the Awash Rivers.⁸² The deep hinterland habitat of the pastoral Oromo before the sixteenth century was located in a far-flung environment not always in the line of attack by the Christian and Muslim contestants.⁸³ From modern ethnographic comparisons, one can project back the pastoral Oromo clans' need for transhumance. Dispersed clans and sub-clans drove and isolated their cattle to relatively remote sites. The lower slopes of historic Bali, the Ganale and Dawa Rivers, and the outlying regions were quite difficult to access. These same areas were also easy to defend so that the pastoral Oromo could not have always been the primary cattle raiding targets.⁸⁴ Tax collectors could have arrived annually, but the mobile pastoralists were generally more difficult to prey on than the sedentary communities. Because of their location, thus, the pastoral Oromo clans enjoyed relative safety from macro-parasitism.

The historic Sultanate of Bali, adjacent to the pastoral Oromo homeland, was often beset by an intra-ruling elite conflict. Compared to the other provinces, Bali occupied the farthest distance from the center of power. Brought under Amde-Seyon's rule in the 1330s and consolidated under Zara-Yaqob a century later, Bali was generally less involved in rebellions against the Christian kingdom. There was an instance when an entire contingent of Christian garrison in Bali revolted against their king.⁸⁵ Maqrizi reported on campaigns from the Sultanate of Ifat directed against the Amhara in Bali which resulted in plundering property, enslaving captives or in defeat.⁸⁶ A plot by Hadya elites to plunder Bali was foiled during the reign of Zara-Yaqob. Compared to the other

regional conflicts these expeditions were brief, sporadic, and less destructive. Bali was rich in rare resources such as gold, jewels, and pearls and served as a commercial entrepôt on which trade routes converged.⁸⁷ Control of these resources and the commercial hub could have contributed to the division in the local ruling elite. But the Christian rulers maintained relative peace in Bali by appointing Muslim converts to Christianity as governors of sub provinces,⁸⁸ thus reducing the adverse impact of macro-parasitism.

The pastoral Oromo clans enjoyed not only relative safety from macro-parasitism, but also a gradient of autonomy from micro-parasitism.⁸⁹ Researches on infectious diseases show that “populations-in-transition” are vulnerable to one or two diseases that cause the “bulk of their morbidity and mortality.”⁹⁰ Other studies show a correlation between sedentary farming and a decline in general health.⁹¹ The underlying argument is that sedentism when combined with a relative population density exposes farmers to more microbial infections and a greater morbidity than the mobile pastoralists.⁹² For instance, in northern Kenya sedentarization impacted Rendille children’s health negatively in comparison with the health, growth, and diet of their pastoral relations.⁹³ Closer to the study area, scholars have indicated that the settled Turkana population experienced more infectious diseases than their pastoral kin.⁹⁴ A study comparing blood pressure cases between urbanized Oromo and semi-nomadic groups found the latter to be relatively free of the disease.⁹⁵ In a nutshell this means not the absence of diseases but “a state of benign chronicity and endemicity,” and survival “at bearable levels.”⁹⁶ Hence I use the gradient of autonomy concept to capture this

relatively better health status and extend the perspective to the pre-sixteenth century period.

By far the largest health benefit for pastoralists is their mobility which provides them safety from “the burden of crowd diseases” that plagues farmers’ settlements.⁹⁷ Medical research published since the 1940s, has identified major diseases causing morbidity and mortality in Ethiopia.⁹⁸ Later studies revealed other previously unrecognized diseases.⁹⁹ It is safe to assume that the disease list applies to the rural pastoralists. Neither James Bruce in 1790 nor A. Courbon in 1861 identified tuberculosis among the prevailing diseases in Ethiopia.¹⁰⁰ Additional descriptions in 1840, 1843, and 1869 in the macro-region are too vague to conclude its presence. Though Menelik’s physician in the 1910s described pulmonary tuberculosis as a disease affecting few individuals annually in Addis Ababa, by the 1930 the disease had caught researchers’ attention.¹⁰¹ The Italian occupation is suspected to have facilitated the spread of pulmonary tuberculosis far and wide.¹⁰²

European traveler accounts claim the absence of venereal diseases among the Oromo until the nineteenth century.¹⁰³ In Somalia, to the south and east of the pastoral Oromo, sexually transmitted diseases are considered colonial era diseases.¹⁰⁴ Leprosy is an old disease in Abyssinia, where victims and carriers resided near religious institutions and in urban centers.¹⁰⁵ Among helminthes diseases, tape worm infection was considered prevalent in the 1940s.¹⁰⁶ But there is written evidence on the absence of tape worm infection among the sixteenth century Oromo.¹⁰⁷ A recent study revealed that hepatitis B is hyper endemic in Arsi region with up to 80 per cent infection among the young.¹⁰⁸ One is not sure

if this hepatitis endemicity is a relic from centuries past or a recent phenomenon. Yet hepatitis B infection was also found to lie dormant in “population in transitions” without arresting their demographic strength.¹⁰⁹

Experts have also identified introduced infectious diseases with a potential for devastating epidemic. These were plague, smallpox, and cholera for which the pastoral Oromo had a gradient of autonomy. Smallpox was suspected to have been in the macro-region area at least since 370 C.E.¹¹⁰ One can presume periodic outbreaks but smallpox survivors develop immunity. Beyond this, epidemiological studies confirm that pastoralists’ proximity to cattle does expose them to “cowpox which in turn provided immunity to smallpox.”¹¹¹ The earliest recorded cholera outbreak was 1830-31, with high mortality rate.¹¹² But cholera is a crowd disease, with frequent visitations on settled communities, indicating epidemiological leeway for pastoralists.

As early as the fifteenth century, Maqrizi had reported on a plague outbreak depopulating the macro-region. This epidemic’s origins, trajectories, and impacts need further investigation. This plague occurred almost a century after the medieval pandemic that devastated central Asia, Europe, Egypt, and Mecca where it was reported in 1347/48.¹¹³ These infectious diseases cause high mortality in virgin populations previously unexposed to them. In subsequent outbreaks the die-off rates decreased. Considering that plague is a crowd disease, it is plausible to expect a gradient of autonomy for the transhumant pastoral population. But two points are relevant for this research. First, these introduced diseases affect virgin populations equally. Second, depopulation leads to a period of population recovery and “epidemiological

adjustment.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, possible smallpox and plague epidemics could not have changed the existing population dynamics, since the surviving pastoral Oromo could have regained their gradient of autonomy.

Malaria is an ancient disease in the macro-region. The Dawa River valley and the Rift Valley adjacent areas is infested with malaria pathogen. Two factors could have provided relative lee-way for pastoral Oromo against malaria. First, their regular mobility for transhumance might have included avoiding low-lying areas infested with *trypanosomiasis* pathogen inimical to their cattle.¹¹⁵ Second and probably more effective was *zoo prophylaxis*, the death of malaria parasite in animal blood stream. One can presume that the large cattle herds combined with regular mobility for pasture offered an epidemiological shield against malaria.¹¹⁶ Thus, the vast cattle population during the sixteenth century could have deflected mosquito bites from the human population. These perspectives help us to imagine the gradient of autonomy from the malaria pathogen.

Dispersed settlement of clans and sub-clans and the generally warm weather likely provided a gradient of autonomy from typhoid and relapsing fever. The known pre-sixteenth century pastoral Oromo areas were generally warm at lower altitudes. Studies show that typhus outbreaks are concentrated in cold and wet months. The disease may have affected the sedentary Oromo who lived on cold high altitude landscapes and in congregated villages. Ticks caused relapsing fever. Studies indicate how Boorana pastoralists changed residential sites when they observe tick infestations.¹¹⁷ Without excluding the eruption of these diseases, it is appropriate to stress the pastoralists’ advantage in mobility once they observed

the disease. Dispersed spatial settlements also provided a gradient of autonomy from frequent outbreaks of typhoid and relapsing fever.

Regarding nutrition, sources document that the pastoral Oromo nutrition derived from meat and milk is rich in protein. It is reasonable to expect that the pastoralists obtained carbohydrate-rich cereals and other grains such as barley from nearby farmers. A recent empirical study comparing protein intake and the risk of infection among children of Boorana pastoralists' and the neighboring farming communities found the former to be in a relatively better health than the latter.¹¹⁸ By inference, one can conclude that the sixteenth century Oromo had access to adequate nutrition.

MIGRATION TO POPULATION MOVEMENT

By the beginning of the fifteenth century, this relative safety from macro-parasites and gradient of autonomy from micro-parasites had contributed to the demographic growth of the pastoral Oromo clans. The *gadaa* system may have regulated the demographic increase over the century prior to the sixteenth through various mechanisms. The geographic skirt described at the beginning of this article hemmed in the pastoral Oromo to their homeland. By the end of the fifteenth century the pastoral Oromo had evolved to constitute a formidable group capable of challenging the Christian and Muslim states that heretofore had dominated the roof. And by the beginning of the sixteenth century outward expansion into the adjacent territories became an exit option for each of the pastoral clans and sub-clans from the effects of population growth and the limitations of the physical environment. Limited space or the tighten-

ing geographic skirt pushed the pastoral Oromo into a geographic drift towards the roof's environmentally-endowed areas, occasioning the historical drama known as the Oromo population movement, the story of which had been competently described elsewhere.¹¹⁹

I use the notion of population movement to capture the pastoral Oromo's encounter with the contemporary state institutions and cultural groups. I have eschewed the notion of migration referring to the sixteenth century Oromo population movement due to the point of origin, the distance covered, and the population groups encountered. Although other scholars have used "population movement" in the same context, they did not explicitly reject the notion of migration. Historically the classic Germanic, and Huns or Xiongnu, and sometimes Bantu population dispersals have been characterized as migrations. These treks covered vast geographical distances and varied ecological milieus. The peoples encountered and the states or empires confronted in these migration processes were as numerous and varied as the geographical distances covered.¹²⁰ The Oromo population movement originated from the frontier areas of the macro-region dominated by contemporary Muslim and Christian states and was limited to the contiguous geographical plateau. The interactions and encounters of the Oromo were with peoples belonging to similar or related language families who had adapted to the roof's familiar ecological zones for millennia. This is a classic internal African frontier change in the making of traditional societies. Hence the notion of migration as it relates to the sixteenth century Oromo is a mischaracterization of a historical event that was a population movement.

The notion of geographic drift captures aspects of this population movement. As a subsidiary concept it identifies the sectional dispersal of an ethno-linguistic group into geographically favorable territories. The drift was not an aimless move but an organized search for geographic advantage by a culturally cohesive group. This geographic drift enabled each section to thrive culturally and demographically as they moved apart from each other. The rainfall seasons on the roof must have provided the directions for the geographic drift. To the east the Charchar and Harer highlands were areas of shared rainfall season. To the north, center and west were all sections of the roof with summer and spring rainfall seasons. These constituted as much an environmental pull as a geographic drift from a previously constricting geographic skirt. Over the roof, the pastoral Oromo spread to convenient elevations they had adapted to for millennia. Influenced by their early adaptations, the drift included avoiding *trypanosomiasis*-infested geographic areas.

The geographic drift also brought the pastoral Oromo groups into the sixteenth century regional political equation in the macro-region, maintaining a dispersed historic affinity for each other. Each section encountered the organized violence of contemporary state institutions. While the geographic drift strengthened sectional demographic size, the *gadaa* system entrenched group cohesion with new territoriality. A dynamically complex relationship evolved between group cohesion and territoriality vis-à-vis the character of whole population. However, the macro-region's geographic articulation facilitated long distance intercommunication among the various clans.

Notes

1. The author thanks Professor Karl W. Butzer, whose work inspired this article, for his generous comments and suggestions.
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4. Mohammed Hassen, "The Pre-Sixteenth Century Oromo Presence within the Medieval Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia," In *A River of Blessings: Essays in Honor of Paul Baxter*, ed. D. Brokensha (New York: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1994), 43-66.
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6. Micro and macro-parasitism are metaphors isolating factors detrimental to population health, survival, and growth. See A. P. Dobson and E. R. Carper, "Infectious Diseases and Human Population History," *Disease Ecology* (February 1996): 115; R. M. Anderson and R.M. May, "Population Biology of Infectious Diseases: Part I," *Nature* 280 (1979): 361-367; *Idem*, "Population Biology of Infectious Diseases: Part II," *Nature* 280 (1979): 455-461. Ruling elites, conquering armies, tax collectors, and raiders are also considered as macro-par-

- asites. See R. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), 23-32, 72-92.
7. The sedentary Oromo, exhausted by the contemporary wars between the Christian Abyssinia and Muslim armies, are not the subject of this article.
8. Geographic drift conceptualizes the pattern of pastoral Oromo population movements.
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10. The concept of geographic skirt is used in two senses; a geographic “apron,” or a semi-arid or arid environmental cover, and the region’s proximity to an extension of the Sahara desert.
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URBAN CENTERS IN OROMIA: CONSEQUENCES OF SPATIAL CONCENTRATION OF POWER IN MULTINATIONAL ETHIOPIA

Asafa Jalata

This paper examines the essence and characteristics of cities and urban centers in Oromia (see maps 1 and 2) and the main consequences of the centralization and spatial concentration of Habasha (Amhara-Tigray) political power in multinational Ethiopia. It specifically demonstrates how the integration of indigenous Oromo towns into the Ethiopian colonial structure and the formation of garrison and non-garrison

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cities and towns in Oromia consolidated Habasha political domination over the Oromo people. The Ethiopian colonial structure has limited the access of Oromo urban residents, who are a minority in their own cities and towns, to institutions and opportunities, such as employment, education, health, mass media and other public services. In addition to exclusion, the Oromos have been prevented from developing autonomous institutions, organizations, culture, and language, and have been subordinated to the institutions and organizations of the Habasha colonial settlers in their own cities, towns, and homeland.

The issues of the Oromo urbanites cannot be sufficiently explained without locating them within the larger problems of the colonization of Oromia by the alliance of Ethiopian settler colonialism and global imperialism. This paper explores four interrelated issues. First, it outlines methodological and theoretical narratives. Second, the paper specifically explains the evolution of indigenous Oromo urban centers and their integration into the Ethiopian colonial structure and the development of garrison and non-garrison cities and towns in Oromia. Third, it identifies and examines the major consequences of the spatial concentration of Amhara-Tigray political power in the Oromo and Habasha urban communities in Oromia. Finally, the paper explains the features of Oromian urban communities, the process of urban underdevelopment, and the effects of political repression and state terrorism on the Oromos.

METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL NARRATIVES

Addressing the major consequences of the spatial concentration of Habasha political power in the heart

of Oromian cities and urban centers is a difficult and complex task because of the paucity of adequate data¹ and the methodological and theoretical challenges one faces due to the problem of dealing with the two contradictory worlds of the Oromos and Habashas that are interconnected and geographically located in the hearts of Oromia. Historical and comparative methods are used to address the root problems and the contradictions between the Oromo and Habasha communities in Oromian cities and urban centers by locating them in the regional and global political economy. These methods assist us to explore the historical origins and development of pre-colonial and colonial towns in Oromia, and historically to situate, compare, and contrast the quality of life for Oromo and Amhara-Tigray communities in Oromian cities and urban centers.

This study uses critical, re-interpretative, comparative, and integrative modes of analyses. By using an integrative and critical theoretical framework, this research interconnects structural, cultural and behavioral approaches to explain the processes of policy formation and political action in order to determine why there are differential qualities of life and public services in the colonized and colonizing urban communities. Primarily structural approaches are rooted in Marxian and Weberian modes of analyses that focus on the impact of socio-economic relations in shaping political structures and policies (see DiGaetano and Storm 2003, Skocpol 1973). Structural analysts are concerned with “historically rooted and materially based processes of distribution, conflict, power, and domination, thought to drive social order and social change” (Lichbach 1997, 248). The political economy approach, as one aspect of struc-

tural modes of analyses, helps in identifying and explaining chains of factors that facilitate large-scale and long-term social, cultural, political, and economic changes. Analysts who adopt the political economy approach assume that “the most significant processes shaping human identities, interests, and interaction are such large-scale features of modernity as capitalist development, market rationality, state-building, secularization, political and scientific revolution, and the acceleration of instruments for the communication and diffusions of ideas” (Katznelson 1997, 83).

The structural or political economy approach does not adequately explain the behavioral and institutional forms of the Ethiopian colonial elites and state structures. Cultural analysis of political systems however can be used to explain the behavioral and institutional forms of the colonizing structure. This analytic approach provides assistance in understanding the basic values, symbols and belief systems that provide “a system of meaning that people use to manage their daily worlds, large and small; . . . culture is the basis and political identity that affects how people line up and how they act on wide range of matters” (Ross 1997, 42). According to Alan DiGaetano and Elizabeth Strom (2003, 360), “culture is linked to governance by ideological constructions through which participants in the political process interpret local events. Such ideological orientations also provide the core values upon which policy decisions are made.” C. Stone (1989, 6) notes that governments are based on “the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions.”

Through integrating the structural context, political culture, and political behavior in complex sets of relations and networks that DiGaetano and Strom (2003, 263) call “the institutional milieu,” we can explore the impact of the Ethiopian colonial institutions in general and garrison cities and towns in particular on the Oromo urbanites. According to DiGaetano and Strom (2003, 263),

Institutional milieu are the complexes of formal and informal political and governmental arrangements that mediate interactions among the structural contexts, political culture, and political actors. Formal institutional arrangements . . . include the governmental bodies . . . and partnerships that give visible form to urban governance through rules and organization. *Modes of governance* [emphasis in original] are the informal arrangements that define the governing relationships among and within formal institutions implicated in urban politics.

The integration of structural, cultural, and behavioral theoretical approaches is necessary to examine critically the situations of Oromo and Habasha communities in Oromian cities and urban centers.

PRE-COLONIAL URBAN CENTERS IN OROMIA

This section explains the evolution of indigenous Oromo urban centers, and how these centers became the centers of Ethiopian colonial institutions and were used to dominate, control and exploit the Oromo people. Urban centers developed in pre-colonial Oromia because of the development of the division of labor and the emergence

of internal contradictions in Oromo society. Pre-colonial Oromia had a small number of urban centers because of the egalitarian political economy of Oromo society which was similar to what Karl Polanyi (1944, 47-48) calls “reciprocity and redistribution.” Urban centers and cities emerged in class-based societies: “Without a central power and a mechanism to generate a surplus over consumption and to concentrate it into urban areas, cities cannot grow” (Gilbert and Gugler 1995, 14). Historian Tesema Ta’a (1994, 678) asserts that in Western Oromia, the major factors for the development of towns in the first half of the nineteenth century were “further consolidation and centralization of the administration, extension of resource base, increase in agricultural production and the flourishing of trade.” The development of settled agriculture and the production of surplus food and other materials and trade networks “release a portion of the people from tasks of providing the elemental necessities of life” (see Johnson 1972, 1-2).

The transformation of pastoral modes of life into mixed and settled agriculture, the availability of surplus food and wealth, the processes of class differentiation and status group formation, the emergence of hereditary leaders by replacing democratic leaders, and the development of marketplaces with networks of local and long distance trade gradually led to the emergence of indigenous towns in Western Oromia (Ta’a 1994; Gemedā 1987; Tadasse 1983). The hereditary Leeqaa kingdoms “developed and consolidated their political power using better military organization, forging effective alliances, controlling local economic resources and dominating the long-distance trade as well as the main market villages” (Ta’a 1994, 676). The town of Naqamte² emerged



Map 1: Oromia in the 1850s

Source: Mitchell, S. Augustus *A System of Modern Geography* (Philadelphia: J.H. Butler and Company, 1875).

in this process. Before the emergence of Naqamte, the *gadaa* government was centered in Komtoo. At that time Naqamte was a *qabiyyee* of the Kolobo clan. Bakare acquired Handaq when he was elected as the *abba duulaa* of the Mananya'a and moved his residence to Waacha, close to his new estate after dislodging Fido Bokisa. Naqamte grew around this locale.

Naqamte gradually developed into a central market-place where the people would exchange their products. Long distance caravan merchants frequently traveled to Naqamte in search of gold and ivory. The first monarchical leader of the Leeqaa Naqamte, Bakare Godana established a hereditary local Oromo kingdom of Leeqaa, ruling approximately between 1841 and 1868,

by destroying the Oromo democratic system of administration. He developed Naqamte into a permanent place and town. As soon as Bakare Godana “was elected as the *abba duulaa* [war leader] of the Na’a lineage group, [he] immediately started to ignore the basic tenets of the customary *gadaa* rules and regulations and [undermined] the superior powers of the *abba boku* [the main leader]. He gathered many followers and organized them into an effective [strike] force and entered into repeated conflicts with Fido Bokkisa, the contemporary *abba boku*” (Ta’a 1994, 677).

Bakare forced Fido Bokkisa to flee, controlling areas around Naqamte, such as Waacha.³ Bakare established this settlement and consolidated his political and social organization by recruiting permanent body guards and soldiers. When he died in 1868, about 2000 people lived around Naqamte (Ta’a 1994, 678). The development and enlargement of Naqamte continued under the administration of his successors Moroda Bakare (r. 1868-1889) and Kumsa Moroda (1889-1923). It was during Kumsa’s administration that European travelers, merchants, and a few Ethiopians visited Naqamate and provided eyewitness accounts on the town. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, Weld Blundel (1900, 13), a British traveler, noted that “Nakamte is a large scattered town of some 40,000 inhabitants, situated on an undulating ground, with all the evidence of prosperity. All kinds of produce corn and honey being principal and large quantities of cotton . . . iron and copper metal from the west are to be seen in the market.”

Another traveler, Hugues Le Roux (1902, 310-311), a French traveler, was amazed by the buildings in Naqamte and their various shapes and sizes. He witnessed

that “a high density of population living in compact villages in and around” the city (quoted in Ta’a 1994, 680). C.W. Major Gwynn (1937) admired how Naqamte was flourishing. Further, E.J. Bartleet (1934, 65) described how this city had commercial networks with Gojjam, Shawa, Bella Shangul, the Sudan, and Dembi Dollo, and had developed into an important and prosperous city. Adrien Zervos (1936, 397-399) explained that, because Naqamte was a very significant commercial center, about seventy foreign merchants established import-export agencies in the city. The foreign merchants included Indians, Greeks, Lebanese, Armenians, Americans, and Arabs. The Swedish Evangelical Mission also opened a church, a hospital, and an elementary school in the city. There were indigenous settlements and towns similar to Naqamte in other parts of Oromia. Towns like Saqa, Jimma, Billo, Assandabo, Dappo, and Dembi Dollo developed during the nineteenth century.

South of Naqamte, Saqa emerged as the seat of the ruler of Limmu and as a local market in the early nineteenth century. As a center of commerce, Saqa was connected to Kafa and other Oromo kingdoms, Gojjam, and Gondar (Gemeda 1987, 30). The population of this city was estimated between ten and twelve thousand. Saqa declined in the late nineteenth century because of the weakening of the kingdom of Limmu and the emergence of other settlements and towns like Jimma and Billo (Gemeda 1987, 30). During the second half of the nineteenth century, Billo emerged as a main marketplace between the Gibe region and Gojjam. Several caravan merchants visited Billo and passed through it. Another important city was Jimma, the city that evolved from Hirmata and Jiren (see Map 2) settlements in the middle

of the nineteenth century as the commercial and administrative center of the Oromo kingdom of Jimma (Gemed 1987, 32). Abba Jifar I (c. 1830-1854) selected Jiren as the political capital of his kingdom and his main *mesera* (residence), and Hirmata as the main market (*Gaba Gifti*) of his kingdom. While merchants lived in Hirmata, the *mootti* (King), his family, and followers lived in Jiren.

European travelers, such as Soleillet, Jules Borelli, Leopoldo Traversi, and Alexander Bulatovich (2000) stayed in Jiren at the court of the King. Later, Mendera emerged as the main residential area of the merchants and their agents; the merchants and their agents who were living in Mendera in 1911 included Dubail, a Swiss; Guingnions, a French; and Ydlibi, a Syrian (Gemed 1987, 33). Further, Indian, Arab, and American merchants opened shops for their agents in the 1920s in Mendera.

Another urban center that emerged in the late nineteenth century was Dembi Dollo; this town also evolved from a marketplace. After struggling with his competitors, such as Abba Ghimbi, Abba Dassa and Burayu, Jote Tulu of Gidami brought Dembi Dollo under his administration (Tadasse 1983). After the death of Jote in 1918, Leeqaa Qellem and Sayyoo fell under the direct control of the Abyssinian colonial administration, and Habasha settlers began to arrive and establish the *nafxayna-gabbar* system. The expropriation of Oromo lands by Ethiopian colonial settlers, and the intensification of taxation, and the inability of Oromos to pay heavy taxes forced many of them to migrate to Dembi Dollo in search of jobs, such as portage (Tadasse 1983, 26). The Greeks introduced new ways of constructing houses; sawmills; the knowledge of making blocks of sandstone; production of various fruits and crops, such as rice, mangoes, bananas, oranges, apri-

cots, etc.; sewing and sewing machines; bakeries; hotels; cheese making; and so forth. There were also other Europeans and Americans who introduced some innovations to the city of Dembi Dollo. There was an Italian sawmill in 1919 near Dembi Dollo. The Italian Catholic mission built sawmills in Sakko to the west of Dembi Dollo. The American mission was established in 1919 and built a school, a hospital, and churches. Both the American and Catholic Italian missions introduced a modern education, health care, and Christianity to Dembi Dollo.

Land alienation and heavy land taxes forced Oromos to seek employment with Greek merchants, and poor Oromos became porters to transport goods between Dembi Dollo and Gambella. The first missionaries were medical doctors who combined religious gospel and medicine; they trained Oromo teachers and preachers to spread the Christian gospel among the Oromo community of the region. There are other pre-conquest Oromian cities that are not included in this paper due to lack of data. After Oromia was effectively colonized by the Habasha, indigenous Oromo urban centers were converted into garrison towns and became the center of the Ethiopian colonial administration. In these processes Oromos became a numerical and political minority in their own urban centers and culturally and economically subordinated to Habasha communities as we will see below.

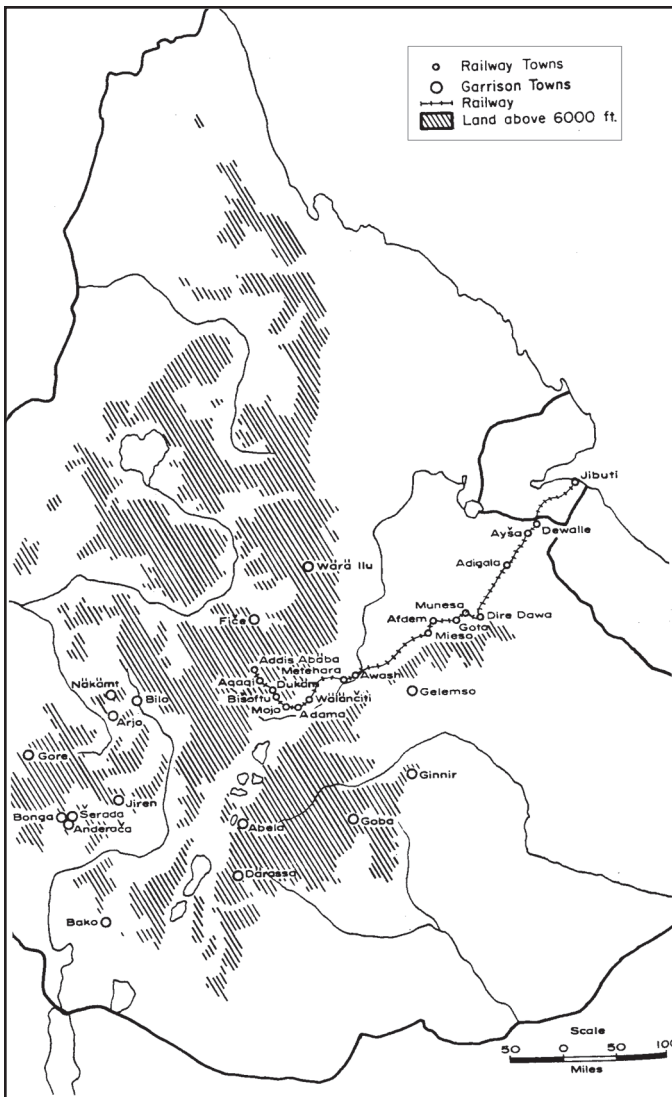
THE DEVELOPMENT OF GARRISON AND NON-GARRISON TOWNS

The chains of factors that facilitated the development of both garrison and non-garrison cities and towns (see Map 2) included capitalist penetration; Abyssinian colonial expansion, including the need to control strate-

gic centers and the caravan trade as well as natural and human resources; the introduction of innovations, such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway line (see Map 2); and modern transportation and communication systems (see Benti 1988, 2000; Jalata 1993; Koehn and Koehn 1979). Alan Gilbert and Josef Gugler (1995, 16) note that “without the intrusion of industrial capitalism and imperialism some Third World societies would still lack major cities. In major parts of America and Africa urban development was superimposed by capitalism on essentially rural areas.” Just as European colonialists founded cities that reflected their power structures and protected their interests in their colonies, the Ethiopian colonialists created or developed urban centers and cities that they used for colonial domination and surplus extraction from Oromia. Gilbert and Gugler (1995, 18) correctly characterize such cities and urban centers as an “instrument of conquest.”

The Ethiopian colonial settlers created garrison towns and cities known as *katamas* in strategically and politically secured regions and brought the existing Oromo urban centers under their control. John Murray (1922, 35) points that “Convinced that much more was to be made out of the helpless Galla [Oromo] by their permanent exploitation, he [Menelik] began . . . to occupy the districts that he overran with permanent garrisons of his troops, providing at the same time for their administration under a hierarchy of his own officials.” Initially, Menelik, the founder of the Ethiopian Empire, developed garrison towns, such as Ankobar, Dabra Berhan, and Angolala in the mid-nineteenth century; the last was burned by the Oromo in 1868, but recovered by Menelik. He also developed Leche,

Urban Centers in Oromia



Map 2: Railway Towns and Garrison Towns

Source: Akalou Wolde-Michael, "Urban Development in Ethiopia, (1889-1925) Early Phase," *The Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. Xi, no., 1 (1973), p. 1.

Feqre Gimb, Enaware, Tamo, and Warra Illu. Similarly, Yohannes founded Dase in northern Oromia in 1883. Menelik consolidated his garrison town of Warra Illu (see Map 2) in Wallo, northern Oromia, in 1870 and installed 40,000 soldiers there (Pankhurst 1985, 226); in the same year, the Wallo Oromo attacked and destroyed it. There were several Europeans at the re-created Warra Illu garrison town in 1879. The Wallo Oromo set fire to this town again and destroyed it in the same year.

Northern Oromia (north of Addis Ababa, see Map 3) gradually fell into Ethiopian hands. After bringing this strategically and politically significant region under his control, Menelik turned his attention to the Tulama Oromo who were residents of Finfinnee (currently Addis Ababa, see maps 1 and 2) and its surroundings (see Map 1). With the further colonization of the Oromo, the building of more *katamas* became essential. Richard Pankhurst (1977, 231) comments that “the desire to exercise more effective control over the Oromo . . . led Menilek [sic] in the latter part of 1878 to move further to the mountain of Wacaca where he dug the foundations for a new town.” He named this garrison town Entoto (later called Old Entoto). In 1882, Menelik transferred his settlement to a strategically and politically important place called Dildila and later named New Entoto. These settlements were created by evacuating or enslaving the Oromo living there (Pankhurst 1977, 232). After strengthening his army and accumulating massive firearms, Menelik built Addis Ababa, on the place known by the Oromo name Finfinnee, between 1886 and 1887 without primary consideration of strategy. Addis Ababa emerged as the capital city of the Ethiopian Empire in the heart of Oromia.

The major portion of Oromo land on which this capital city was founded was owned by thirty-one Ethiopian officials (Pankhurst 1985, 204). The army commanders were given a large plots of lands on which they established their respective camps for their relatives, followers, and war captives (Benti 2000, 64). While most Oromos were evicted and forced to migrate to far places, others were permanently marginalized and turned into servants and laborers (Benti 2000, 278). Some Europeans and others had obtained Oromo lands from Menelik before the merchandization of land by giving him gifts. However, by the proclamation of October 27, 1907, Oromo land became a commodity to be sold and bought. This proclamation “gave Ethiopian and foreign [European] landlords a great deal more security of tenure” (Garretson 1974, 116). Some of these Europeans bought tracts of land and built their houses, shops, and offices. Making Addis Ababa the center of commerce, bureaucracy, and employment, the Ethiopian government attracted people from different parts of the world and Abyssinia proper to this city while the Oromo people were marginalized, segregated, and dehumanized in rural and urban areas alike. The people in the city mainly obtained their food and income from the surrounding Oromos; military commanders, soldiers, followers depended on the tribute and tax mainly collected from the Oromo people (Benti 2000, 54).

Gradually, Addis Abba gained regional and international importance. Several continental and international organizations made this capital city their center without recognizing the existence and suffering of the Oromo people. Most countries opened their embassies and *non-governmental* agencies in Addis Ababa without consider-

ing the interest of the Oromo people. International merchants from Europe, Asia, and Arabia migrated to and dominated commercial activities in Addis Ababa and major towns. In 1899, there were three important shops in Addis Ababa; these were owned and operated by three French merchants (Pankhurst 1967, 53). Indian, Greek, Arab, and Armenian merchants became dominant in trade. These merchants expanded their operations to provincial towns. These non-African merchants “combined import-export businesses which were very profitable” (Pankhurst 1968, 399). Legesse Lemma (1979, 106) asserts that “West Europeans, mainly French and British, were engaged in high finance and international trade, while Arabs, Armenians, Indians and Greeks participated in relatively small-scale commerce.”

Addis Ababa was established at the crossroads of important trade routes from south to north and from east to west. It became the hub of the trade routes to Assab, Djibouti, Zeila, and Berbera, the Sudan through Wallaga, Gojjam, Ankobar, and Gondar, to Wallo and Massawa, and to Gambella. These routes connected the Ethiopian Empire with the British, Italian, and French colonies that completely surrounded it. With the centralization of Ethiopian power and the control of the market system, the colonialists benefitted from trade at community, regional, and central levels and strictly administered marketplaces to collect taxes and customs duties. While Ethiopians, Europeans, and others had representatives in Addis Ababa city affairs and “shared certain privileges of accessibility to and protection of the Emperor,” the Oromos were placed under direct Ethiopian military rule (Garretson, 1974, 168-183). By granting concessions to European capitalists, the state

introduced modern innovations, such as a railway, a few roads, a telephone and telegraph system, a postal system, a bank, the first modern school, and the first hospital.

By establishing his court in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa), Menelik “directed the administration . . . and governed the newly conquered Galla country [Oromia] and his acquisitions through the military officers in charge of the garrisons of his own troops, whom he could appoint and dismiss at his pleasure” (Murray 1922, 41). About Oromia and other colonized regions, Harold Marcus (1971, 165) says this: “Not only were these territories effectively occupied and policed, but they were also being economically and politically integrated into . . . Ethiopia.” The colonization of Oromia, the development of the transportation and communication systems, and the establishment of Addis Ababa and garrison towns facilitated the development of the Ethiopian institutional milieu and created “the integrating nucleus of the colonial economic system” (Althabe 1964, 1-3) in Oromia with the collusion of the capitalist world economy. Commodities and food products produced by Oromo labor flowed to and were concentrated in Addis Ababa and other urban centers for local consumption and international markets. According to Gilbert and Gugler (1995, 15), “the development of the world economy . . . created an interlinked economic system [in which] different cities perform the roles allocated to them within that system.”

The Abyssinian colonial settlers also built garrison towns like Gore, Jijiga, Asaba Teferi, Assala, Goba, and others in Oromia (see map, p. 3). These fortified settlements had strong connections among themselves and with Addis Ababa in order to assist one another during

emergencies. Although these towns were very backward compared to the European towns built in other parts of Africa during the colonial period, “the colonial structure . . . created a very special type of town: the centre of trade in goods and of colonial power, the town is the reflection, both economic and sociological, of colonial domination” (Althabe 1964, 3). Since there was no color line between the colonizer and the colonized peoples, as between Europeans and Africans, many scholars have failed to understand this colonial situation. The garrison towns gradually evolved into the major geopolitical centers for practicing political domination, wealth and capital accumulation, and religious and cultural dissemination. Akalou Wolde-Michael (1973, 10) describes that with Ethiopia’s colonial expansion “garrisons were set up all over newly acquired territories to hold down the conquered people. To maintain the army, part of the conquered land and, indeed, even the conquered people themselves as *gabbars* [semi-slaves] were assigned to the soldiers” and colonial officials.

From these garrison centers Ethiopian soldiers and colonial administrators were dispatched to impose colonial rule on Oromos through subjugation, enslavement, and expropriation of the basic means of production such as land, cattle, and other valuable resources. With products collected from Oromia and other regions, Menelik continuously purchased quantities of weapons and military expertise from Europe (see Jalata 1993). Further, products in the form of gold, grain, cattle, honey, and slaves were channeled to Ethiopian colonial settlers in Oromian urban centers and towns. The colonialists gradually developed these urban centers into towns by using Oromo economic resources and labor and by build-

ing regulatory and service institutions such as offices, prisons, churches, medical and communication facilities, and schools. Several non-garrison towns emerged in eastern and western Oromia with the development of trade and communication networks. As rail service was introduced, the towns of Aqaqi, Bishoftu, Mojo, Adama, Walanchiti, Metahara, Awash, Mieso, Afdem, Gota, Munesa, and Dire Dawa (see Map 2) flourished.

While Oromos were evicted from their urban lands and forced to migrate to rural areas, Abyssinians were encouraged to migrate to cities and towns in Oromia. These processes were started by Menelik and have continued into the present. Menelik encouraged the migration of Abyssinians to the colonized areas in the late nineteenth century and the turn of the twentieth century. The great famines in Abyssinia proper also pushed people to migrate to Oromia and other colonized areas (Benti, 1988, 133). According to Charles W. McClellan (1978, 111-112), "Menelik's redistribution of . . . resources had two major foci: one involved the movement of resources directly to the north [Abyssinia] for reallocation there; the other, the movement of needy northerners to the south [mainly Oromia] to be provisioned with non-commercial resources." To solve economic and famine problems in Ethiopia proper, Menelik sent a series of large expeditions to Oromia. Harold Marcus (1975, 64-65) argues that "Expeditions were often organized during times of famine, when numerous refugees went along to settle in newly conquered lands along with the soldiers who stayed behind to garrison the fortified villages (*katamas*) erected as control points." Further, the domination of institutions by Habashas and the glorification of the Amharic language, Orthodox Christianity,

and Habasha culture encouraged the migration of more Ethiopians to Oromian cities and towns.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CENTRALIZATION OF HABASHA POLITICAL POWER

The Ethiopian colonial state made Oromian cities and towns attractive to Ethiopians by providing them with land and by building churches, schools, hospitals, and supplying other social amenities. These favorable conditions enabled the Amharas to become the majority in most cities and consider themselves as hosts, and Oromos as outsiders and foreigners (see O'Connor 1983, 108). Social amenities, such as health services, transportation and communication facilities, employment opportunities, and industries were concentrated in major urban centers. For instance, there were 93 health centers and 649 clinics in Addis Ababa before 1974 (Benti 2000, 177). Menelik II Hospital was opened in 1910, Ras Tafari Makonnen Hospital in 1922, Empress Zawditu Hospital and Ras Dasta Damtew Hospital in 1931, Tesema Imperial Body Guard Hospital in 1944, St. Paul Hospital in 1947, and Dejach Balcha Hospital in 1948. Omedla (police) Hospital, Takle Haimonat Hospital, Princess Tsehai Memorial Hospital and other health centers and clinics were opened and concentrated in the same city. In the 1990s, there were 91 hospitals, 187 health centers, and 2,470 health stations in the Ethiopian Empire, and almost all of them were located in cities (Benti 2000, 182; Ministry of Ethiopia, 1995).

Oromos have been denied meaningful access to these hospitals and other health services, schools, colleges, and universities in Oromian cities and urban centers. In their

own country and urban centers, Oromos have become foreigners and are even discouraged from migrating to larger cities (Benti 2001, 159). Oromian cities and towns have been numerically, politically, economically, and culturally dominated by Abyssinians. For instance, in 1978, about 59 percent of Addis Ababa's population was Amharas and Tigrayans, 17 percent Oromos, 17 percent Gurages (Benti 2000, 265). In 1994, almost 58 percent of Addis Ababa's population was Amhara and Tigrayans (i.e., 48.3 and 7.6 percent respectively) and almost 20 percent Oromos out of the total population of 1 million (Ethiopian Central Statistical Authority, 1994, 44). Even in the two cities, namely Harar and Dire Dawa, where the Oromos constituted the majority ethnonational group (52.3 percent and 48.0 percent respectively), they did not have political power and the right to develop their institutions, language and culture. The manifestation of Oromo identity and language was not allowed in Oromian cities and towns until Oromo nationalists started to resist such colonial and racist policies in an organized way. In Oromian cities and towns, the Oromo language was discouraged and despised and the Amharic language was glorified and became the official language of the Ethiopian empire (see Benti 2001, 158).

When people from different parts of the world visit Oromian cities and towns, they don't come into direct contact with the Oromo people, their culture, history and civilization. As Oromia was removed from the world map by colonization, the Oromo people and their culture were removed from Oromian cities and towns through systematic government policies. The Ethiopian government made the culture and language of the Amhara the symbol and the defining trait of Ethiopian identity and

nationalism. It prohibited the writing, broadcasting or speaking at public functions in the Oromo language as a part of its attempt to culturally assimilate the Oromo into the Amhara identity without structurally assimilating them (see Markakis 1994, 225). The Ethiopian state has been rooted in the Amhara-Tigrayan culture, language and Orthodox Christianity, and these characteristics were reflected in Oromian cities and towns. The Abyssinian colonial settlers created two worlds in different centers of Oromia: The world of those who have socially, politically, economically, and culturally dominated Oromian cities and towns, and the world of the people who lost their country and have become marginalized and impoverished. Only a few Oromos, who have collaborated with the Ethiopian colonial system, have escaped this humiliation. The Ethiopian government made it a requirement that Oromos and others who sought “upward mobility must do so within the Amhara cultural framework” (Shack 1973, 276).

Until they learned to speak Amharic, Oromos were denied employment in the government bureaucracy and the service industry (Benti 2001, 158-161). But ordinary Amharas and Tigrayans even without formal education could get different kinds of jobs in Oromian cities and towns because they spoke Amharic and they were members of the ethnonational group that dominated the institutions of government and business (Benti 2001, 161). In the early 1960s, Girma Amare (1963, 340), an Amhara bureaucrat, declared that Oromos and others “wishing to obtain a position in government offices [are] required to have a good command of Amharic.” More than 60 percent of government bureaucrats, 75 of army officers, and 70 percent of governors in the colonized

regions were Amharas by 1974 (Michael 1989, 71). Most of these positions are filled by Tigrayans today, since they took state power from the Amharas in 1991. Because the Oromos in cities and towns and rural areas do not have institutional and organizational control over their land and what they produce and their labor, they do not receive the benefits that can improve their quality of life. The Oromos live under Ethiopian political repression, darkness of ignorance, and poverty.⁴

Since urban areas and cities in Oromia are primarily populated by Ethiopian colonial settlers and their collaborators, they are the ones who have access to the limited public facilities such as schools and hospitals. Oromo urbanites like their rural counterparts have been exposed to massive and absolute poverty and have been denied their fundamental human rights and needs that Ron Shiffman (1995, 6-8) calls subsistence, protection, affection, and understanding. Most Oromos in urban and rural areas have low levels of subsistence because they lack adequate income, enough food, and livable homes. They do not have protection from disease because they are denied adequate access to health and medical services. They do not have protection from political violence because the Ethiopian state engages in massive human rights violations and state terrorism (Jalata 2000). Oromos have been ruled by successive authoritarian-terrorist regimes⁵ which have exploited and impoverished them by expropriating their resources. Successive Ethiopian regimes have not had any concern and affection for the Oromo people because they have been considered inferior people who do not deserve basic human rights (Jalata 2001). Oromos have been denied their inalienable right to self-determination and

democracy. They have been denied the right to build their social, economic, cultural and organizational infrastructure.

Without political freedom, democracy, and a legitimate government, a community cannot improve its quality of life. People like the Oromos who do not have personal and public safety in their homes and communities, and who are denied the freedom of expression, association, and organization, are denied a good quality of life. In the twenty first century, when the world is changing quickly because of the intensification of globalization, social revolutions, as well as revolutions in technology, information, communication, and transportation, the Oromo people are relegated to the darkness of ignorance and poverty. Because of the magnitude of the problems of the Oromo people, it is impossible to provide a numerical face to the devastating effects of poverty, suffering, hunger, malnutrition, starvation, sickness, illiteracy and ignorance, alienation, and hopelessness. Because the majority of Oromo urbanites face these problems, they are underdeveloped.⁶ When a community or a society lacks independence or autonomy to determine its political destiny through self-determination and democracy, it is confronted with the problems of underdevelopment, which is characterized as powerlessness, victimization, illiteracy, poverty, and other forms of socioeconomic crises (see Rodney 1982).

REACTION TO POLITICAL REPRESSION IN URBAN CENTERS

Beginning in the 1960s, the migration of a few Oromos to urban areas brought about some changes.

These migrants brought the Oromo language and culture to Oromian cities and towns. Some Oromo elites who were trained to be intermediaries started to recognize their lack of equal citizenship rights and the mistreatment of the Oromo people. Despite their individual achievements, these elites were given an inferior status to Ethiopians due to their Oromo identity. They started to form urban self-help associations because organizing a political party was not allowed. These self-help associations were united to form the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association. The formation of the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association in the year 1963-1964 marked the beginning of building urban community efforts to solve Oromo problems and the public rise of Oromo nationalism. The Oromo elites, by forming this association in Addis Ababa, started to express the collective grievances of the Oromo people, and to formulate programs to solve some economic, social and educational problems of Oromo society.

In May 1966, the leaders of the association at one of its meetings, articulated 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 [currently all Oromos are landless since the Ethiopian state owns Oromo land]; (4) . . . a very small percentage of the Oromo population has access to 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). The Ethiopian colonial state and the Ethiopian settlers in Oromia did not tolerate any manifestation of Oromo

identity by either association or organization. To stop the development of Oromo consciousness and collective efforts, the Ethiopian government banned the Macha and Tulama Association in 1967, killed or imprisoned its leaders, and prevented Oromo urbanites from organizing and developing their communities. The banning of this association forced Oromo nationalism to go underground. These events forced some Oromo nationalists to go underground in Oromia; others went to Somalia, the Middle East, and other countries to continue the Oromo national movement. They clandestinely produced political pamphlets.⁷

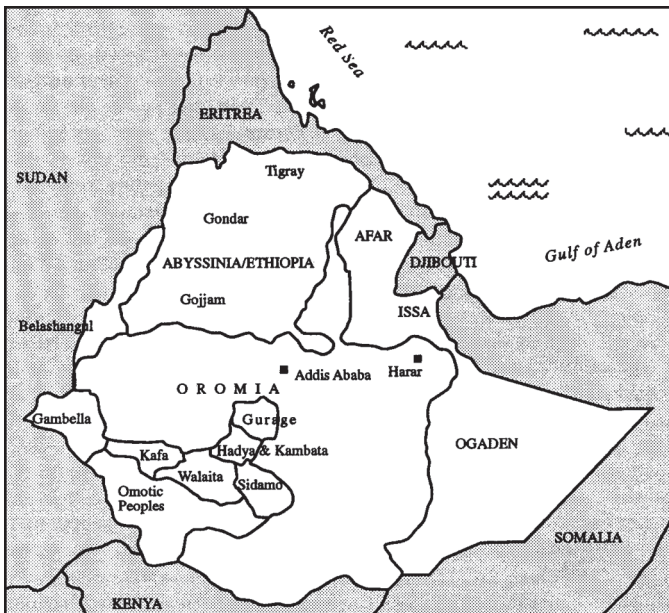
CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the twenty first century, in Third World countries like Ethiopia, modern facilities, technologies, and public services are concentrated in cities and urban centers. The intensification of globalization as well as revolutions in transportation and communication technologies has allowed local and regional cities access to global cities and their services. The Oromos who are marginalized and impoverished in their own cities and towns have not received adequate benefit from the new technological and global changes. The Ethiopian state elites and the Ethiopian urban communities in Oromia are determined to maintain the existing political and economic order by investing meager available resources in building unproductive institutions, such as the army, security infrastructure and colonial bureaucracy. The remaining economic resources are consumed or invested in social services that mainly benefit the Habashas.

Under these conditions, the chance to improve the quality of life through investing in Oromo communi-

ties is nonexistent. By dominating the Ethiopian political economy and centralizing and concentrating state power, successive Ethiopian regimes have formulated and implemented policies that benefit Habasha elites at the expense of Oromos and other colonized peoples. Ethiopian rulers, Menelik, Haile Selassie, Mengistu Haile Mariam, and Meles Zenawi, have caused the destruction of millions of lives to promote "their own personal advancement over and above the goals and aspirations of their followers and Ethiopians in general" (Hagos 1995, vii). These leaders have been more concerned with a "ferocious love of material and worldly comfort," while ignoring the welfare of the people (Hagos 1995, 131). They have privatized and ethnicized public power, and used it for destroying rather than building a country.

The fundamental resolution of the contradictions between Oromo and Habasha urban communities requires the implementation of the principles of self-determination and multicultural democracy. Without an accountable, democratic and legitimate state, various population groups in Oromian cities and towns and the colonized regions may soon face dangerous conditions similar to Rwanda, Congo, and the former Yugoslavia. Today millions of Oromos are exposed to fatal diseases (including HIV/AIDS), famine and massive poverty in Oromian cities and urban centers. Since state-terrorism, poverty, famine, and ethnonational challenges are increasing and since the major world powers have a role in shaping these problems, they have a moral and political responsibility to become capable of mediating these processes and developing procedures and criteria by which these conflicts must be solved fairly and democratically before it is too late. On its part, while promot-



Map 3: Modern Oromia

Source: *The Oromo Commentary* 1991. Reprinted with permission.

ing the principles of self-determination and democracy, the Oromo leadership must demonstrate that the Oromo people because of their democratic tradition, demographic size, geographic location, and cultural ties with other oppressed ethnonations can play their constructive role in establishing a multinational democratic society and in bringing a just and durable peace. Whether they like it or not, the fates of Oromo and Habasha urban communities in Oromia are interconnected. Therefore, these two communities should start a constructive dialogue as equal partners and search for a common ground to work together to reorganize the existing urban political and economic arrangements to improve the quality of life, social services, and community development for

all the people without exclusion and discrimination. As Habasha urban communities need to dissociate themselves from the ethnocratic Ethiopian state, the Oromo urbanites need to make constant efforts to demonstrate that they can democratically work with the Habasha communities without revenge and exclusion.

Notes

1. These sensitive issues have been avoided by *Ethiopian Central Statistical Authority*. Because of censorship by the Ethiopian government, Oromo scholars and others who are interested in Oromo issues cannot collect information on the disparities in quality of life and public services between Oromo and Amhara communities in Oromia.
2. Naqamte was the center of *gadaa* at which the Leeqaa Oromos and their elected leaders administered their economic, political and religious services. It was there where “the *gada* officials gave justice deliberated on the defense of their territory and held prayers in cases of bad harvest ... or epidemic diseases” (Ta’a, 1994: 677).
3. Bakare Godana chose Wacha as the place of his residence because of the following reasons: Waacha was rich in water supply since it was surrounded by streams and springs. It was also economically rich because it was located near the Handaq forest which was endowed by resources such as ivory, cotton, honey, and other valuable products. Waacha had also a strategic significance since it was easy to attack or control the movement of the enemy from there.
4. It is superficial to discuss about the quality of life and public services in Oromian cities and towns without having some understanding of the general political, economic, and social conditions in the Ethiopian Empire. In the early 1990s, out of the total population of 53,130,780, only 7,315,687 were living in urban areas

(Ethiopian Central Statistical Authority, 1994: 41). Economic and health indicators of Ethiopia show the severity of the hardship the powerless people like the Oromo face. Ethiopia is one of the three poorest countries in the world, and its per capita income was only 116 U. S. dollars in 1997. Life expectancy is only 45 years. The mortality rate for children less than five years is 177 per 1,000 live births. The infant mortality rate is 113 per 1,000 live births. The maternal mortality rate is 1, 400 per 100,000 births. Millions of people die of a simple disease because of lack of medical treatment. Less than half of the population has access to basic sanitation, and only 25 percent of the population has access to clean water (WHO, 1998). HIV/AIDS is having serious negative consequences. In 1997, 2,600,000 adults and children were infected with HIV/AIDS. Number of children orphaned by AIDS since the beginning of epidemic was 840,000. Although Oromos have been providing the majority of resources on which people in Ethiopia survive due to their numerical strength and abundant economic resources, such as land, natural resources, and labor, they do not have a reasonable access to public facilities and institutions.

5. The policies of the Ethiopian state are different in Ethiopia proper and the colonized regions. This state is authoritarian to Amhara and Tigrayan communities because it imposes dictatorship on them, and it is terrorist to the colonized peoples like the Oromos because it rules them through state-terrorism and massive human rights violations.
6. The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia do not provide vital information on education, poverty and disease in relation to ethnonational groups.
7. These pamphlets include *Kana Beekta?* and *The Oromos: Voice Against Tyranny*. For the first time the original name of this people, Oromo was used in publication by rejecting the derogatory name, *Galla*.

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SOCIALIZATION, SYMBOLISM, AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE: ASPECTS OF TRADITIONAL POTTERY MAKING AMONG THE JIMMA OROMO, WESTERN OROMIA

Bula S. Wayessa

Pottery making is one of the oldest material cultures in Africa (Agorsah 1991; Atherson 1983; Close 1995; Gosselain 1999; David and Kramer 2001; Haaland 1992, 2007). In most parts of the continent, though oral information is lost with the passing of each elder, it is still possible to preserve data related to material culture (Atherson 1983). In Ethiopia, production of pottery in traditional ways is still prevalent (Lyons 2007; Wayessa 2007). Studying technical and social aspects of traditional pottery making helps reconstruct the antiquity of use of pottery vessels and interpretation of potential archeological assemblages of pottery vessels. Studies indicate that cereals require specific types of cooking practices and technologies to be processed, and that some foods cause diagnostic pitting and erosion on ceramic

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vessel interiors in the course of their preparation. These material signatures potentially provide indirect means for investigating the antiquity of contemporary culinary practices and specific crop use in the archaeological record (Young 1999; Young and Thompson). This is one reason that makes Ethiopia attractive to carry out ethnoarchaeological research (Arthur 2003; Lyons 2007).

The majority of the existing ethnoarchaeological works have focused on the northern half of the country (Clark 1988; Finneran 2007; Wayessa 2007). Specifically, the southwestern farmers of tuber crops have been the subjects of comparatively scant study. This is partly because it is believed that high levels of year round rainfall and temperature in the region cause rapid decomposition of organic matters. Hence researchers presuppose that archeological investigation of the production and consumption of tuber crops in the region would hardly yield recovery of archeological remains (Wayessa 2007). Consequently, the archaeological reconstruction of early plant use and domestication in Ethiopia has focused on the relatively arid environments where macro plant remains are likely to be preserved.

Indeed for several decades, archaeologists have established the importance of looking for direct evidence of agricultural production and plant use in the northeast Africa (Reid and Young 2000; Young and Thompson 1999). In spite of the awareness, a significant number of scholars have noted the lack of primary archaeobotanical evidence across northeast Africa (Finneran 2007; Young and Thompson 1999). While one way of investigating archaeobotanical remains is through novel findings of preserved plant macro-remains (Barton 2007; Chandler-Ezell et al. 2006; Piperno 2007; Piperno et al.

2008; Sandweiss 2007), an investigation of micro-plant remains such as starch granules and plant phytoliths on archaeological material and soil sediments is becoming popular (Piperno et al. 2000; Dumont and Vernier, 2000; Chandler-Ezell et al. 2006; Haslam 2004; Mercader et al. 2009; Perry 2002). Besides, ethnoarchaeological examination of pottery objects used for food preparation would be an alternative or supplementary route to developing an understanding of crop processing and consumption (Young and Thompson 1999; Reid and Young 2000).

A few studies have been conducted on technical aspects of pottery making in the southern half of the country. The studies indicate that large numbers of archeological potsherds from the Holocene period have been uncovered in the region (Clark 1988). It has also been stated that, although Holocene ceramics in southwestern Ethiopia are not yet well documented, it is highly likely that they will be distinct from those from the more arid parts of the Horn of Africa region as they might be shaped predominantly to steam tuber crops (Arthur 2003; Clark 1988; Hildebrand 2003; Phillipson 1985). However, only a little research has been conducted on the social aspects pottery making in southern Ethiopia. Above all, no ethnoarchaeology of pottery making has been done in western Oromia so far.

Presently the number of traditional pottery making societies is declining rapidly throughout the world, portending that the traditional potter might disappear altogether in a few generations (Longacre 1991; Wjmne-Jones and Mapunda 2007). In many regions of Ethiopia, traditional pottery making is being replaced by modern potting techniques that do not involve the traditional

stages of molding and norms around the technology (Abawa 2005; Wayessa 2007, 2008). It is therefore critically important to pursue ethnoarchaeological/anthropological studies from the technical, social, and commercial aspects of traditional pottery making technology before it vanishes (David and Kramer 2001).

This article contributes toward bridging the patchy nature of such research in Ethiopia focusing on the social aspects of traditional pottery making in Jimmaa with special emphasis on Seka Chekorsa district. It examines the major types of pottery vessels and underlying factors for the continuity of pottery technology in the region irrespective of the decline of traditional pottery making worldwide. It also explores the social aspects of pottery making by dealing with symbolism and prohibitions around pottery and linked metaphors. In so doing it will contribute to our knowledge of pottery tradition in southwestern Ethiopia in general and western Oromia in particular, shedding new light on pottery technology, the social norms around pottery making and the link between pottery and culinary practices among the Oromo of Jimma.

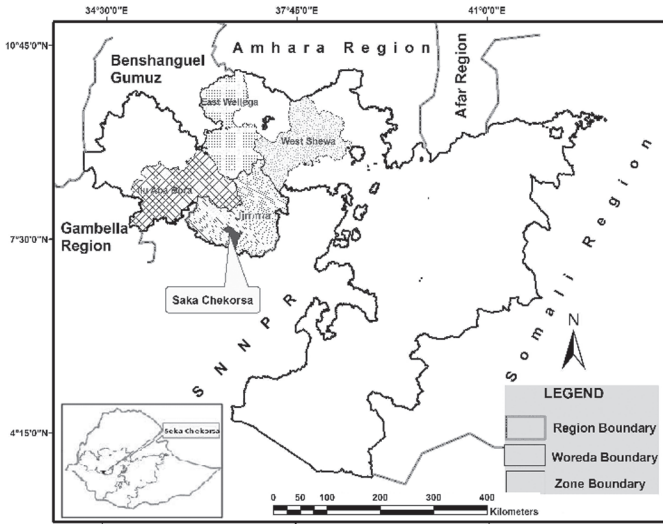
POTTERY MAKING IN JIMMA

Currently, Saka Chekorsa, the study site, is one of the thirteen districts (*aanaas*) in Jimma Zone of Oromia Region (Debu 2008; Lemessa 1999). The majority of the inhabitants of Jimma are from the Oromo ethnic group. The district was part of the Kingdom of Jimma, one of the five Gibe Oromo states¹ (Debu 2008; Gemeda 1983; Hassan 1990). While a plurality the inhabitants of the study area are followers of Islam, there are also adherents

of *Waqeffannaa*² and Christianity. A great deal of mingling of the three faith traditions also takes place.

The economy of Jimma is based on agriculture, trade and craft works. The major crops cultivated in the region are coffee, chat (*Chata edulis*), enset (*Ensete ventricosum*), pepper, fruits, maize, *teff* (*Eragrostis teff*), anchote (*Coccinia abyssinica*), Oromo potatoes, and yams, both aerial and ground (Debu 2008; Wayessa 2009). Bread, porridge, steamed tuber crops and beer are the major staple foods of Jimma.

Among the Oromo in general and Jimma Oromo in particular, artisans are generally known as *ogeeyyii*, the skilled ones (Wayessa 2007, 2009). The works of the *ogeeyyii* include tannery, weaving, spinning, woodcarving, smith, beekeeping, basketry and potting (Bartles 1983; Burka 2006; Lewis 1965; Wayessa 2007). Traditional midwives, healers, rain makers and rain stoppers are also make the category of *ogeeyyii* (Lewis 1965; Wayessa 2009). From the traditional craft works, pottery making, iron forging, mat making, tannery and wood carving are widely practiced. The works of anthropologists such as Bartless (1983), Huntingford (1955), Knutson (1967) and Lewis (1965) show the development of craftworks in western Oromia. According to Beke (1843), for example, Jimma *ogeeyyii* enjoyed a reputation of being advanced. He attests that “manufactures flourish here in a higher degree than anywhere else in this quarter of Africa,” and the crafts products of Jimma were exported to northern part because they produced goods “much superior to that of Abyssinia” (Beke 1843:258-59). In general, however, these studies focused on iron working and wood carving.



Map 1: Map of the study Site

In Jimma, pottery making is the exclusive domain of artisan women. Skill in the technology is transmitted from mother to daughter. The persistence of traditional pottery making and utilization of pottery objects is linked to interwoven variables such as economic activity, physical environment, and culinary practices. Jimma is the wettest area that favors the cultivation of tuber crops. Farmers primarily cultivate and use tuber crops as their mainstay. Steaming of the tuber crops as a matter of necessity requires pottery objects. Furthermore, porridge, local bread and toasting coffee require clay objects for processing. The majority of the rural households also use water jars for water storage. In addition to these uses, the current economic deterioration in the region is forcing many woman and girls to embrace pottery making as livelihood option.

Potters shape pots primarily for sale in the marketplace in Saka. Because income from pottery is not high, potters are not full-time specialists. The income from pottery is intended to subsidize their earning from agriculture. Although potters are the primary sellers of their wares at markets, in some cases, a number of inter-market traders purchase pots and transport them for resale to areas in the local market served by potters or to other regions. Ceramic griddles from Seka are transported and sold as far away as Addis Ababa, the capital city of the country.

POTTERY MAKING: A SCHOOL OF SOCIALIZATION

In many societies, the traditional knowledge of craft production lies in the hands of respected elders who take pains to preserve the tradition. These kinds of traditions are of great importance because they define and maintain group identity from generation to generation. Knowledge and skill of pottery making remains vested in potter households. In Saka Chekorsa, most commonly, pottery making knowledge is transmitted from mother to daughter and from elder to younger within the households or to related households. Accordingly, although the majority of the potters today are those who inherited the skills from family or neighbors, others joined the sector in the last two decades. The new potters were given training by NGOs and government agents as part of the program of ensuring women's self-sufficiency (Wayessa 2009). Training is offered to help them to grasp basic skills. Because the training is often offered by senior potters, pottery making in this new setting does not, by itself, bring about a radical change. However, the trainees are involved only

in shaping simpler pots. The complex pots like water jar, brewery, coffee, storage and steaming pots need special skills and long experience, and often the knowledge is transmitted from mother to daughter.

As pottery making workshops are often located around the home, potters with children often shape pots while taking care of their offspring. Their children observe what their mothers do as well as how they do it. Both daughters and sons begin playing with clay. In the course of trial and error and imitation, their children grasp the skills necessary to model clay at an early age. What is interesting here is that female children mimic their mothers shaping ceramic griddle and baking mud bread. Traditionally, among Oromo people, it is believed that breeding and nurturing children is considered the duty of mothers. Mothers are appreciated or blamed for the behavior of their children both by their husbands and neighbors. In other words, the behavior of their children may be a source of reputation or humiliation for them. There is a tendency for mothers to direct their sons to follow their fathers' role model. Accordingly, potters encourage their boys to follow their fathers. On the other hand, in the Oromo society it is believed that the daughter of a morally good mother would turn out to be good as well. Mothers want to help their daughters have good moral character as their daughters are their reflection in the society. The girl is trained and skilled in every possible aspect of life to be a full woman, or exhibit a motherly character. As such, daughters try to mimic behaviors and skills of their mothers.

As the boys are encouraged to follow in the footsteps of their fathers' career, they commonly try to mold a figurine of an ox from clay. On the other hand, daugh-

ters follow their mothers' role whereas sons follow their fathers as oxen drawn farmwork is commonly practiced by males. Daughters of the potters gradually develop this simple knowledge to the level of making actual pots. Sons of the potters eventually abandon activities linked to pottery, following the injunctions of their mothers. The potters convince their sons by telling them, for example, that shaping vessels would result in their sterility and hence the eventual demise of their family. The potters not only restrict involvement of their sons in pottery making but also their presence during firing and post firing treatment because their presence is believed to affect pots being treated. This is because metaphorically an adult male is related to heat and their presence is symbolically linked with overheating that affects the vessels. From the later childhood (ages 9 to 12) on, boys are practically out of pottery technology related activity.

SYMBOLISM IN POTTERY MAKING

Among many sub-Saharan African countries, the body of finished pots is given terminologies related to human anatomy (David *et al.* 1998; Gosselain 1999). Similarly, among the Oromo, the body of a pot is given equivalent names such as *uddu* (base), *garaa* (stomach), *morma* (neck), *afaan* (mouth), *funyaan* (nose) and *gurra* (ear/lug). The reason for personification of pots is linked to the Oromo myth of origin.

Among the followers of the traditional Oromo religion, if somebody murders a person he/she must pay *gumaa* (monetary compensation for loss of life). To pay the *gumaa* the murderer collects money from the surrounding community since it is not the norm to pay such kind of payment from one's own pocket. Likewise, if a person

breaks pots several times, he/she is perceived as guilty of murder in the family because pots are traditionally associated with the human soul. For this reason, the person who is guilty of breaking pots requests somebody in the family or surrounding areas to give him/her money to buy pots as a replacement of the broken one. The 'criminal' holds one piece (potsherd) of the broken pot and move around to get the money. The individuals put the money for him/her on the potsherd saying, "*kan akkana lamuu si hinmudatiin*," which literary means "let you not encounter such kind anymore." This tradition is common across western Oromia. Bartels (1983) also states that a pot also symbolically represents an image of lineage cohesion by the very fact that it is shaped from many pinches of clay and every pinch in its turn is made of several handfuls of clay. Moreover, the combination of pinches of clay for shaping during shaping of vessels symbolizes sexual intercourse of husband and wife that often results in an offspring.

After shaping vessels, potters keep the vessel in the open-air under the shade. They keep the vessels from direct sunlight that may result in the overheating of the pot which in turn leads to cracking. When the pot becomes firmer and the excess moisture has almost evaporated, the potter dries it in the sun. The potter turns each side to the sun's heat so that the pot is exposed to the thermal thoroughly. While in the state of leather-hardness, the pots are subjected to a variety of finishing treatments to smooth their surfaces. Often local traditions influence decorative treatments of pot. This is primarily because potters express traditions of the community through their decorative treatments. For instance, among the Oromo *okkotee* (water jars) metaphorically represent women. Potters therefore treat *okkotee* as beau-

tifully as much as possible as they symbolically represent them. One of the decorative treatments of *okkotee* is adding *hammartii*, a necklace. Every *okkotee* has *hammartii* on its *morma* or neck. This is linked to the fact that traditionally Oromo women wear necklace often made from beads. In addition, during male circumcision, the foreskin removed from male reproductive organs placed under *okkotee* holding water. Here the water in the jar symbolically represents fertility which happens through the meeting of husband and wife that would result in child birth that keeps continuity of family.

PROHIBITIONS IN POTTERY MAKING AND FUNCTIONS OF POTTERY: RULES OF THE STRUCTURE³

Prohibitions linked to pottery technology constitute an inseparable part of the craft in sub-Saharan Africa (David *et al.* 1998; Gosselain 1992; Sterner and David 1991). Many potters feel that everybody should be made aware of the prohibitions in order to avoid endangering the vessels by their presence. From a technical point of view, violating a taboo may affect three stages of the manufacturing process: clay extraction (clay loses its workability), drying (pots crack, even if sheltered from the sun); firing (pots explode during the process). The prohibitions are related to the philosophy of thermodynamics as among peoples living in different parts of the African continent. The philosophy is connected to the ritual to fight against any form of damaging heating in order to maintain human actions at a constant temperature. In the thermodynamic philosophy, males in general and girls at the stage of initiation are associated with overheating (Gosselain 1999).

Among the Oromo of Jimma, boys and girls at a stage of initiation and circumcision are explicitly thought to produce heat. Their presence at any stage of heat treatment metaphorically means overheating. Overheating damages pots. Accordingly, both males and matured girls are expected to be away during any heat treatment of pots which metaphorically means heat regulation that is crucial in effectiveness of pottery production.

As during firing, there is prevalent belief systems associated with post-firing treatments (*siilessuu*). Traditionally, only adult women can undertake 'post-firing treatments' and eat the *buddeena siilettii*. The women in the neighborhood come together and eat the first experimental bread singing songs of wishing a long life for the griddle. All boys and girls at the stage of initiation are not given the *siilettii* because it is traditionally believed that it makes them childless. Further, girls are not allowed to go there or to undertake the activity because it is believed that if they would do so they face excessive bleeding during circumcision. This prohibition is also linked to taking control of firing. Overheated ceramic griddles are poor in baking. Likewise, a griddle overheated during *siilessuu* will need more firewood for baking bread which is economically not appreciated. The effectiveness of a griddle in baking is a mark of the reputation of the potters who shaped the griddle as well as a woman who use the griddle in the family or neighborhood. Thus the quality of the griddle shaped does not only affect the potter but also the customer. Therefore, she takes care of all the taboos around pottery providing for her dignity and for the sake of other women who buy the vessel.

The other prohibitions seem connected to avoidance of disclosing specific shaping technique to others to keep the technology. This is done because the expertise is source of potter's income and reputation. Metaphorically wet vessels and vessels under shaping represent a baby. According to the local tradition, babies are unable to endure evil eyes, which are said to possess the power to do harm. They are thus not shown to strangers. Like that among the community under investigation, *durjii* (wet pottery vessels and vessels being shaped) are likened to babies and must be protected from passersby or strangers (non-craftsmen). Otherwise the pots in making or wet pots would break. Thus, any person out of the village of pottery making, either male or female, is not allowed to look at an unfinished pot. If someone stumbles upon one, she/ he must spit on the ware and say *haa oofkalu* (which literary means 'let it be spared from eyes'). If a person is not familiar with the tradition surrounding pot making, the potter tells him/her to say: *ha oofkalu jedhi durjiin ija hin baatu* (which literary means 'say let it be spared from eyes for a ware cannot survive eyes. Like the potters, other *ogeyyii* (rain stopper, rain makers, traditional healers etc) avoided disclosing the ingredients they use in their respective trade. For instance, it is believed that a medicine man or women should guard the type of plant they use because, if someone learned the secret, the medicine would be rendered ineffective. This has been one of traditional ways by which the *ogeyyii* (potters, rain stopper, rain makers, traditional healers etc) maintain and keep traditional knowledge within their respective families.

The tradition of keeping the knowledge of a certain craft a secret within a family has had the effect of creating a social group resembling an occupational caste. Unlike

the situation in many parts of Ethiopia, however, where potters as other artisans were perceived as *budaa* (evil eye) (Quirin 1998; Pankhurst 1999; Reminick 1974), among the Oromo the artisans are not perceived as *budaa* | *nyaattuu*. In relation to this, Bartels (1983) states that among the Oromo '*nyaattuu*' are "...people who have evil eye against their will. ...It is a matter of inheritance, of descent; it is like disease. Such unlucky people often do their utmost to prevent themselves from harming others," (Bartels, 1983:196-97). Because his background is not known, any stranger is feared. Accordingly, the potters suspect any person outside of a given potting village, in particular, and non-artisans in general, as possessors of evil eye. Overtly this is to protect their pot from damage but covertly the prohibition is to take control over exposure of their specific shaping techniques to the outsiders.

CONTINUITY IN TRADITIONAL POTTERY MAKING: RESOURCES OF THE STRUCTURE

These days, manufacturers of mass-produced plastic, aluminum or metallic objects are trying to persuade consumers to substitute pottery objects with their cheaper, lighter, stronger, and trendier products. As stated above, however, traditional pottery making has persisted to date in Jimma. Its persistence is based on the fact that pots serve a wide variety of utilitarian and ceremonial functions. Thus the traditional uses of pots are more or less intact. This is partly because the senior potters in the Jimma area would like to carry on the traditions of their ancestors, choosing to mine the clay, shape the pots, and fire them and finally use or sell the pots. They are preserving this ancestral tradition through their innovative

ideas and masterful craftsmanship. Potting is a tool for sustaining a mark of prestige among the society.

Moreover, pottery technology persists because the users believe that pots work well with their tradition and cuisines. Owing to the diverse climatic and cultural conditions, numerous groups of crops such as cereals, legumes, leafy vegetables, fruits, and root and tuber crops are grown in Jimma (Atlabachew 2007; Debebe 2006; Taye *et al.* 2007). Besides the culture of cooking in pots, pottery technology has persisted in the region for utilitarian and non-utilitarian values of pottery vessels.

Women, potters and non-potters, use pottery vessels in their day-to-day cultural practices. Among the Oromo, porridge is prepared as part of daily meal or ritual purposes. *Xuuwwee marqaa*, a popular pot among the Oromo women, continues to be used for ritual and regular porridge preparation. One can distinguish the pot used for preparing ritual porridge and pot for regular meal by their surface decoration, especially appliques. The major occasions on which porridge is prepared for ritual purpose are: *ateetee* (women's ceremony in which women pray for fertility and general welfare), birthing ceremonies and *waqeffannaa* (worship) ceremonies.

A woman who gave birth would receive special treatment for nine days. During the nine days, she is fed porridge. This is because of the belief that porridge strengthens new mother, and helps her lactate for the new born baby. Therefore, as her delivery day approaches, a mother prepares (buys) *xuuwwee marqaa dahumsaa* (pots for delivery porridge). She prepares at least three types of pots. The first is common porridge pot with three or four *gurra* (lugs). The second is *xuuwwee marqaa shaanan*,

which has five lugs. The last one is *xuuwwee marqaa saalgan*, which is a pot with nine ears.

On the fifth day after a mother gives delivery, a birthing ceremony in which only women participate takes place. Women come together and sing songs in honor of *ayyoole /Maaram* (fertility goddess) for enabling women to conceive and bear a child. The porridge is prepared from flours of different grains brought by every participant. The participants bring the flour in small pot called *wacciiti*. In the ceremony, women divided into two groups based on clan seniority sing in celebration. One of the songs was compiled by Ta'a (2000) as follows:

<i>Kan Maaram nama gootu</i>	What Maram does for humans,
<i>Haat ofii nama hingootu</i>	One's mother cannot do,
<i>Sibiila mutaa gootee</i>	he changes the iron into needle,
<i>Dhiiga mucaa goote</i>	She changes blood into a child

On the ninth (*saalgan*) day after a birth another ceremony is held. The women prepare porridge in a pot with nine appliqués for the *saalgan* ceremony. The use of a pot with nine appliqués signifies a belief among the Oromo that their *primordial* father, Boorana, had nine children who grew to nine *goosa*, patrilineal clans. Thus each appliqué represents one Oromo clan. The songs are prayers of thanksgiving for a healthy delivery and prayers of supplication for childless women. They pray to *Waaqa* and Maram, “the goddess of motherhood” who guards pregnant women and gives childless women babies (Bartels 1983). Put differently, birth shows continuity of family lineage. For that they thank *Waaqa* and *Maaram*. Another associated ritual ceremony is *ateetee* (Ayana 1984; Bartels 1983; Baxter 1983).

Porridge has been also used in *sagaduu* or worship that takes place at the ritual house of *qaaluu* the ritual expert, known as *gaalma*. In the *gaalma* sacred porridge is prepared in a pot with nine or seven appliquéés under the supervision of the *qallittii*, the *qaaluu*'s wife. The assistants of the *qaaluu*, nine men (*saalgan*) or seven men (*torban*), holding bunches of grass touch pots containing the sacred porridge three times and finally kiss a bunch of grass (Knutsson 1967; Magersa 1994). They also touch the hearthstones three times. As stated above, the nine persons designated by the nine appliquéés on the sacred pot symbolize the nine clans of Oromo. Three hearthstones (*sunsumaa*) on which the pot is placed for cooking the ritual porridge, symbolize the husband, wife, and children in a household. The three ears of certain pots represent the three *sunsumaa* (hearthstones) (Wayessa 2007). The hearth also designates the alliance of two families through marriage (Magarsa 1994). One of the stones, which larger and is buried half way into the ground, represents the husband and his position of authority within a family. Generally, the core of the prayer at *gaalma* is for the wellbeing and prosperity of the families.

Fire is a common metaphor used to designate the wife in the family. This is because the Oromo maintain a belief that there is no household without a wife and no wife without a household. For instance, according to Duressa (2002) there is a belief that a man establishes *daaraa/ ibidda* (blaze of fire/ fire) with *sunsumaa* (hearthstone) as soon as he gets married. In other words, the man establishes an individual family line. Continuity in the blaze of the fire is maintained by begetting son (substitute). The implication is that non-married man

has no blaze of fire with *sunsumaa* (Duressa 2002). The idiom in Oromo, *ibidda isaatu dhaame* (his fire ceased to exist), is used on death of a wife. At the same time, the expression, *ibiddi haa gabbatu*, literally, “let the fire grow fat, is used as a blessing of a bride and bridegroom on their marriage by elders. This implies the wish for the newly formed family to prosper in all corners of life, and the belief that there is no hearth without fire and no family without a wife.

Pottery decorations which are most salient and technically malleable are easy to fluctuate through time. The less salient ones continue to exist with less transformation (David *et al.* 1998; Gosselain 2000). Accordingly, pottery decoration with five, seven, and nine appliqués has become rare today in Jimma. The pots with two, three and four appliqués are still prevalent but this form of decoration has been modified in appearance of the handles. Only a person with an attentive eye can recognize the modification apparent in the handles. Yet, one can recognize the differences in the number of handles. Despite the change in pottery decorations and introduction of metallic vessels, pottery making traditions continued because some pottery objects simply have no substitute. Ceramic griddles of different size are some of them. The most common ceramic griddles in Jimma are *eelee cumboo* which is used for baking thick bread (*cumboo*). Medium size griddles known as *eelee caabitaa*, used for baking thin bread are rare. Preparations of this food are inseparable from pots. Basically the griddles are differentiated based on rim thickness, appearance, size and intended use. Metallic griddle is manufactured to replace ceramic griddle. However, they are found to be not suitable for baking bread. Ceramic griddles are

found to be best as far as baking of local bread is concerned and in some towns where electric power is available, ceramic griddle is used with little modification to traditional griddles.

The utilization of tuber crops has also its role in sustaining the technology. In the area, tuber crops such as anchote (*Coccinia abyssinica*), Oromo potatoes, Irish potatoes, yams, cassava, and dasheen are widely cultivated. As pottery making and cooking are gendered chores of women in the study area, they know efficiency of ceramic pots for cooking. In such a way, they prefer ceramic pot for steaming of tubers because they believe that clay pots transfer heat gradually, thus making slow cooking possible. In this regard, it is identified that traditional potters treat pots they shape differently based upon the intended purpose of the pots.

Equally, *jabanaa* (coffee pot) is being used in both rural areas and urban centers for making coffee. Coffee is prepared not only for its stimulating effect but also for the occasion that coffee drinking affords *olla* (neighbors) to come together to discuss social issues or for conviviality. The traditional coffee ceremony is inseparable from the coffee pot in both rural and urban areas where residents invariably use coffee pot for making the ceremonial coffee. The coffee ceremony follows the coffee ritual steps strictly, giving enough time for the clay pots to boil the coffee gradually. Metallic kettle does not allow for slow boil and make for the desirable flavor at coffee ceremonies. Hence, the clay pots continue to persist.

CONCLUSION

Among the Oromo of western Ethiopia pottery making in traditional ways is still persisting. In Jimma

there are several pottery making villages where potters shape pots in traditional ways to meet daily needs of the community. For instance, in Saka Chekorsa district alone, there are five intensive pottery making villages in which women are part-time specialists. Because of continuing economic deterioration in the region, many are taking up pottery making as an alternative livelihood. Changes spurred by introduction of new religions-Islam and Christianity and the revival of *Waqeffanna* have created some demand for ceramic products. The continued employment of traditional uses of pottery products, such as the Oromo of southwestern Ethiopia commonly using tuber steaming pots is also a factor in keeping up demand. On the other hand, the Oromo who occupied central highland are more dependent on cereals and the common pots they make and use are directly related to processing of cereal foods. The Oromo who live in semi-arid parts of southeastern and southern Ethiopia are mainly semi-pastoralists, and their pots related to processing milk and milk products and cooking meat. Despite divisions caused by the physical environment, religious affiliations, and economic specialization,⁴ the Oromo also attribute similar meanings to pottery objects. This paper has provided hints that there is an opportunity to reconstruct the early exploitation of tuber crops of southwestern Ethiopia where pots are shaped for specific purposes. The next step in research would be to look at the traceable signatures that food processing leaves the pots to reconstruct the plant use and domestication of food in Ethiopia.

Notes

1. In the Gibe region, there were five Oromo states: Jimma, Limu-Enarya, Gumma, Gera and Gomma.
2. *Wageffannaa* is one of the surviving African indigenous religions in which its followers believe in one Supernatural God known as *Waaqa*.
3. In this subsection and in the next, I am referring loosely to Anthony Giddens's notion that social structures are rules, patterns people may follow in social life, and resources, properties of social systems created by human action. Anthony Giddens, 1984. *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
4. This study benefitted from the generous support and assistance of a number of people and institutions. Funding for this project was provided by Jimma University Teachers Development Program. I am grateful to potters of district of Saka Chekorsa of Jimma among whom I conducted the research, Marame Dabala for her assistance during the research, and Dr. Ezekiel Gabissa and an anonymous reviewer for insightful comments.

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CUSTOMARY LAWS IN ETHIOPIA: INSTITUTIONS OF DISPUTE RESOLUTION AMONG THE GUJI OROMO AGROPASTORALISTS

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This paper seeks to shed light on the plurality of the judicial system among the agropastoral Guji Oromo in southern Ethiopia based on an ethnographic fieldwork in the region. The state court system commenced operation in the region with Emperor Menelik's conquest in the late nineteenth century. The relationship between customary and state legal systems has historically been antagonistic rather than complementary. For the Ethiopian ruling elite and Ethiopianist scholars alike, the replacement of customary systems by state administrative and legal systems was a necessary step and an inevitable part of a strategy of nation-building. As Norman Singer noted long ago, "any dual aspect of the law represented ... an undermining of the rule of law" (1971, 325). The assumption was that the

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incorporated people in the south gradually would have to adopt northern legal norms¹ and abandon their own customary systems.

Contrary to the assumption, Guji agropastoralists had been able to preserve their customary practices until recent times for various ideological and practical reasons. The customary judicial system has been instrumental in protecting group rights as well as property rights among the Guji. In this article, different aspects of the Guji legal system ranging from those dealing with the family to property and crime will be discussed and compared with state laws and administrative dispute settlement mechanisms. The analysis of state judicial system is based on local dispute cases that were settled at the Peasant Association (PA)² court, which were established by the government and represent its legal and administrative structure at the local level. As part of archival research, I have collected court papers including selected plaintiff and defendants' files. Problems surrounding local courts will be evaluated on the basis of selected court cases. Then the effectiveness of these cases will be evaluated and compared to customary dispute resolutions.

In the past several decades, there have been changes in the Guji customary practices, livelihood activity, and land use system which have some bearing on their customary judicial system. One of these major changes is the emergence of enclosures and de facto private land use and a simultaneous increase in resource related disputes, over which customary law has limited jurisdiction. With increasing number of individuals taking their cases to state courts, the ideological resistance to the system seems to give way to practical realities. The shift can also partly be explained in terms of local people's partial rep-

resentation in state judicial system. The extent to which local people are represented in administrative and judicial systems may help reduce tensions³ between state and customary courts, whether this manifests itself through adopting new ideas of justice or reinterpreting local ones or both.

APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMARY LAWS

Similar to institutions in many other societies, the Guji social system contains a legal aspect. As Sally Moore (1969) once commented, "Not only does every society have law, but virtually all significant social institutions also have a legal aspect" (p. 253). In anthropology, therefore, a treatment of judicial systems, directly or indirectly, has never been absent from ethnographic reports. Their interpretations of customary laws, however, vary with changes in anthropological theories. Early anthropological theories framed judicial systems within evolutionary perspectives. Evolutionists believed that modern legal institutions such as courts emerged in early agricultural societies (e.g., Diamond 1965). Hence, societies progress from a primitive stage, characterized by the absence of social institutions beyond the family, to a more complex state. Institutions of a judicial system, according to this theory, also evolve from simple to complex.

By the late 1920s, evolutionism was attacked and replaced by structural functionalism which viewed a legal system as an important component of social structure that maintained stability. Structural functionalists rejected evolutionism as speculative and ethnocentric, and generally viewed the law as an important mechanism of social control. In societies under colonial rule, where

anthropologists encountered a multiplicity of legal systems, they tended to explain how each system operated to maintain a peaceful equilibrium independently of one another. As such, they ignored how a legal system was positioned in relation to another system and to that of the colonial government. Today, cultural and legal differences are understood in relation to groups of people with collective identities whose interests are opposed to one another (Moore 2001, 96). By the same token, customary and state laws represent ethnic groups and nationalists who are often engaged in political struggle.

Scholars whose interests are intricately interwoven with those of the ruling elites conveniently dismiss customary laws as traditional, oral, and overly discretionary. Even though customary laws are oral, and therefore porous and malleable, they proved to be effective in an African context. Contrary to the assertion that “the legal traditions contained in oral form are generally unspecialized... [i.e.,] there is no group of people devoted to the application, interpretation or making of rules” (Benett 2004, 2), the Guji have customary legal experts known as *hayyu* (see Debsu 2008; Hinnant 1977; Legesse 1973). Law is made and revised every eight years at a general assembly called *Gumi Bokko*, and the *hayyu* study and interpret the law of the land.

Another area of critique of customary law is its lack of precedents and the great deal of discretion judges have in making decisions. Still, customary judges do not make uninformed decisions. As Rosen (quoted in Moore 2001, 100) argues with respect to Islamic law in Morocco, “the regularity lies... in the fit between the decisions of the Muslim judge and the cultural concepts and social relations to which they are inextricably tied.” If standardiza-

tion and consistency are taken as a merit of legal system, customary laws may not satisfy these requirements. In fact, lack of these qualities is the reason for the enduring significance of customary laws. Both in dispute and conflict resolutions, informality and flexibility rather than rigid rules tend to be effective. In customary practice, informal as it is, rarely do negotiations fail once initiatives are taken. An informal peace process “domesticates disputes, where the office makes them official” (Hagberg 2005, 46).

DISPUTES AND COMPETING FORMS OF RESOLUTION

While disputes and conflicts among pastoralists have increased in the past few decades, the role that customary institutions play has declined following changes in their livelihood activity (from predominantly pastoralism to agropastoralism) and land use system (individualizing the commons) which have an impact on their customary judicial system. Bennett (2004, 5) notes that “as changes occur to the physical and institutional structures in which customary law is talked about, so changes will also occur in the meanings and applications of the rules.” Radical changes that have taken place in the area, whether these are internal or provoked by forces external to the Guji culture, significantly impacted their customary legal system.

Compared to other African societies, the impact of market forces on the Guji has been minimal. Unlike other areas in Africa where colonial powers introduced wage labor and ushered in transformations in local economies and social structure, the Guji remained predominantly agropastoralists and kinship-based. The

most potent influence on the Guji came from administrative and legal changes following their incorporation into the Ethiopian empire in the late nineteenth century. A plurality of legal and administrative systems has since characterized Guji society.

The imperial administration initially used local legal and administrative systems to govern its new subjects. Later, it gradually extended the state legal systems and began to marginalize customary laws, including institutions of resource management. The local system was replaced by a system that was based on “the notion of a unitary legal system generating uniform legal rules from a central state authority” (Donovan & Assefa 2003, 505-6). Today, the Guji agro-pastoralists have experienced institutional crises that have weakened their capacity to resolve conflicts arising over resource use. Although resource-based conflict settlements are becoming a central function of local government administrations in natural-resource management (Kirk 2000, 45), a clear, acceptable land policy that can ensure local participation and can avoid conflicts is lacking in Ethiopia. The Oromia regional state only recently issued proclamation no. 56/2002 regarding the region’s land use and administration.

The proclamation, however, lacks clarity and demonstrates several misunderstandings of pastoral landholding and use systems. For example, article 15 (1) of the proclamation states that “any peasant or pastoralist, with a holding right of land, shall be provided with a lifelong certificate of holding right by the responsible organ.” It is not clear from the document whether the provision in this article applies to communal landholding or assumes the privatization of communal lands. A government official

I interviewed (and who chose to be anonymous) agrees that the document contains unrealistic provisions and suggests that a clearly defined implementation strategy and procedure for certifying pastoral lands are needed.

In terms of the role customary institutions play in conflict resolution, Rachel Berger (2003, 8) notes that “rebuilding traditional authority can only occur with the support of government, because it involves handing some power back (such as the resolution of conflicts other than through the process of law)”. No specific provisions are provided in the Oromia law for such mechanisms, except article 25 (4) which merely acknowledges disputes resolved through other means as acceptable. Customary institutions of conflict mediation, which in the past were marginalized by state policies, need to be strengthened through legal provisions. It is clear that the imposition of state administration undermined customary institutions, including conflict resolution mechanisms, and made reconciliation very difficult. Dealing with ethnic and/or resource-based conflicts requires strengthening those indigenous institutions that regulate and allocate scarce rangeland resources in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas.

Among the Guji today, conflicts and disputes are dealt with in three different ways based on customary laws, statutory laws, and political decisions. In spite of its acknowledged merits, the former is increasingly marginalized by the latter two mechanisms. In the following section, the operation of the customary legal system of the Guji-Oromo is discussed.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION IN ELDERS' COURTS

In pastoral areas, local people have little knowledge about and even less access to the state court system. They have to go through several procedures to take their cases to court, including written applications. Often litigants are non-literate and have to pay someone to complete their written court applications. In addition, written evidence and personal witnesses are needed to win cases at court while elders might not need these forms of proof. After all, the role of elders' court is to achieve reconciliation through a search for cultural truth. Elders, *jarsa biyya*, depend on their own knowledge of cases and personal experience to make their judgments. They also put cases in contexts and consider events, circumstances, relationships, expectations, and values to resolve cases. Most dispute cases are therefore resolved locally using customary conflict and dispute resolution mechanisms. As Cotula points out, "given the often limited accessibility of courts, customary and other local authorities continue to play a key role in dispute settlement throughout sub-Saharan Africa" (2004: 16). My field survey shows that 86 percent of the households preferred to solve cases through local elders than going to courts. Only 12 percent showed preference for government court system while the other 2 percent preferred other official intervention in conflict cases.

Increasingly, the state court system has attracted disputants (at the expense of customary laws) for various practical reasons. One reason lies in the fact that elders' courts have limited jurisdiction over disputes related to land litigation. For example, disputes arising over land are often seen as the purview of state courts. The declin-

ing loyalty of clan members and the redefinition of the notion of justice have pushed some litigants to state courts. Today, clan-based reconciliation alone may not constitute justice compared to state courts which focus on individual culpability, punishment, and compensation. According to some informants, the imposition of fines by state courts is viewed by victims as a justifiable retribution against perpetrators.

Institutions of Dispute Resolutions in the Context of Common Property Resources

In such important areas to the Guji as pasture and water, the *abba olla* is one of the most important institutions that people depend on for regulating resource use. The institution complements the elders' court by combining administrative and judicial responsibilities in resource use. *Olla* is a territorial concept but also it is an institution for the management of resources. *Abba olla* is a person who is elected for his knowledge of *aadaa* (culture) and *seera* (law), and for his oratorical skills. He plans migration of people and allocates settlement sites for newcomers. His responsibility is to administer the residents under his jurisdiction, often settler residents who in most cases share the same *kaloo* (common grazing areas) and sometimes a common *eela* (water wells). *Abba olla* is also responsible for adjudicating disputes arising between community members and conflicts with other communities. There are several recurring causes of disputes among herding communities: conflicts over wells, salt licks, crop damage, pasture, and violation of Guji customary conventions.

Abba herrega is another institution represented by a person whose main task is to keep order for residents when watering animals. He spends most of his time

around water wells auditing water use and management. The watering order is usually determined based on who traveled the longest distance and who watered first in the previous order, among other factors. He also assigns users to various water wells according to proximity and the number of water users. Sometimes he communicates with the *abba herreega* of the neighboring settlement and requests permission to use their wells if he thinks the water under his control is not sufficient for all the residents.

Abba herreega has the authority to fine violators or totally expel them from community membership. He tells him, “*Waan laga ajeeftaaf kana keessaa hin qadu*,” which means “you violated the rule of river (well) and you have no membership in it.” As a punishment, his livestock might not get water for three days. The neighboring *abba herreega* is also informed about the offender so as to not let him water his livestock at their wells before his case is investigated. If he is found *adimale*, guilty, he is required to prepare *buna qala*, buttered roasted coffee, and sometimes to slaughter a cow for the elders who presided over the case.

Disputes over “private” pasture

The most common causes for disputes are pasture, water, and violation of Guji social conventions. Enclosures are becoming the major causes for disputes in recent years. Enclosures are often built around plots of farmlands, theoretically to protect crops from damage, but practically it is intended to enclose pasturelands. Encroaching on one’s pastureland could cause a serious dispute between individuals and sometimes even between groups. The disputes are usually resolved through the intervention of *jarsa biyya*, elders. Even though enclosures are denounced by elders, de facto

rights are respected when it comes to conflict resolution. The elders investigate the history of land users in the area and make their judgments to resolve disputes.

There is a considerable effort by the customary institution to cope with changes caused by the state and market forces. As new problems arise, local people modify their customary practices or adopt alien rules. Nowhere is this change more apparent than in the administration of resources and rules governing their use. The expansion of enclosures has already posed a dilemma to the elders' court since traditionally land was communally used and any private use was considered illegal. When individuals enclose a field either for cultivation or pasture, disputes could flare up with the adjacent users. Also, it can become a source of protracted dispute when two or more people lay claim to the same piece of land. In such circumstances elders often recognize private ownership on the basis of prior occupancy (see Debsu 2008).

In general, however, pastoral communities often rely on the commons. Private property regimes rarely sustain the pastoral way of life. In the past half a century, common grazing areas have changed to de facto private farm and pasturelands. Such transformations have challenged culturally-accepted rules, altered meanings attached to resources, and resulted in a crisis of customary institutions and reconciliation.

The Guji consider the division of communal land among individual users as a rupture in their group solidarity. Social cohesion is cemented through the social ideology provided by the clan system. Membership in a particular clan, and through it in the larger Guji society, gives individuals their identity, security, and protection. Communal resource use mirrors their social organization

which emphasizes common good rather than individual benefits. Therefore, the emergence of private pastures and farmlands not only threatens access to resources, but also jeopardizes their social fabric.

Customary leaders use different venues to stem the impending threats from privatization. For example, the *abba gada* (gada leader)⁴ denounced the expansion of enclosures at the *Gumi Bokko* assembly held at Adola in 1998 (Dubo 1998). On the other hand, land disputes arising over enclosed pastures and farmlands are adjudicated by state and PA courts based on the principle of prior occupancy, thereby encouraging exclusive use of rangelands. The Guji agropastoralists today are caught in the paradox of these structural and institutional tensions. While disputes and conflicts arising over resource use and tenure changes are the concern of this paper, it also addresses other sources of disputes that the Guji have to deal with on a daily basis.

Other Sources of Disputes

There are several other sources of disputes in addition to those over enclosed pastures and farmlands. Broadly, violation of Guji social conventions can cause tensions between individuals and groups. These may range from failure to reciprocate invitations to cooperation in homicide cases. For example, there is an elaborate coffee ceremony to which all neighbors are invited. Eating *buna qala* together with neighbors implies a social contract to help each other on various activities, such as watering livestock when the owner is not available, assisting in searching for lost animals, and so on. A household which does not participate in coffee invitation does not get such help, and may indeed strain relations with its neighbors.

There are certain expectations of being neighbors. Failure to live up to such expectations may force some members to change neighborhoods. Fighting between husbands and wives requires intervention by neighbors, and those who fail to intervene may be considered bad neighbors. Disputes with neighbors are sometimes avoided by migrating to new areas and neighborhoods. In general, failure by neighbors to act according to the custom, such as failure to invite to coffee ceremonies or intervene in family disputes, may induce migration by the aggrieved party. However, disputes are often resolved through timely interventions by elders before they cause community discord.

In the past, when honey production was an important part of the Guji economy, violation of honey harvesting rules had been a matter of frequent disagreement. Commonly, a man planning to start bee keeping first assesses the appropriate tree for his beehives. To claim ownership he then ties a rope-like piece of cloth, known as *gaalee*, to it. Violation of this ownership claim can be the basis for serious dispute. Elders who preside over such issues inquire if the defendant is cognizant of the *gaalee*. If he deliberately committed the act, heavy cash fines could be imposed. Traditionally there was no fine in cash, but the violator was simply reprimanded and expected to prepare *buna qalaa* for the elders. The increasing role of the formal institution of conflict resolution, state court, and a cash economy provided grounds for cash fines.

Abduction is one customary way of obtaining a wife by young men among the Guji, but this system has always been considered violent. There is a tension surrounding the practice itself since the Guji consider it a violent act while they continue to tolerate it. Abduction of a girl by

a man could cause a serious conflict between the relatives of the two parties. If the relatives of the girl happen to be at the site where the abduction takes place, it is a lawful act to try to rescue the girl by force, including beating the abductor. Some follow the abductor to his house, beat him, and retrieve the girl. The latter action is considered illegal, *adimalee*, and the customary law does not support it.

There is a peaceful customary means of demanding justice after a girl was abducted. The father of the girl appeals to the *hayyu*, clan legal experts. The verdict of the *hayyu* could either be to return the girl or pay some compensation to her parents. If it is the latter, the compensation carries a heifer and 1000-2000 birr, depending on the situation⁵. Compensation in cash for such damages is again a recent phenomenon. There is a chance that any of the afore-mentioned sources of disputes might result in a homicide. Until 1994, customary law was not recognized in Ethiopia as a legitimate means of determining appropriate to provide remedies in the case of homicide (Donovan & Assefa 2003).

Resolution of Homicide Cases

The resolution of serious cases, such as homicide, is highly ritualized and of special concern to the community. In cases where a Guji man kills another Guji, there are two customary ways to settle the case: *gondoro* for manslaughter and *gumaa* for murder cases. For *gondoro*, clan members from both the victim and the perpetrator's sides walk towards each other from the north and south directions, respectively, and make reconciliation through a ritualized performance. Between the two groups there is a third clan, facing a *balee*, chasm, to restrain any attempt of vengeance. The perpetrator (always a male)⁶ is dressed

in his best clothes for the ritual. A man from Balla clan (one of the Guji sub-clans) steps forward and slaughters a sheep, anoints the hands of both clan members with the blood, and instructs them to shake hands. The two opposing clans are ordered to face away from each other, and the slaughtered sheep is thrown in to the chasm.

In addition to the above mentioned clans, a man from Wata⁷ clan, pottery-making experts, is hired for the ritual. The man performs a purification ceremony by undressing the perpetrator completely, shaving his hair, including his pubic hair, and cutting his nails. After this, the Wata man takes the clothes for himself and the perpetrator is given new clothes. Any attempt to take revenge after this ritual is believed to cause leprosy. After the conciliation ritual is over and everyone goes home, the Wata man goes back and obtains the slaughtered sheep for consumption.

Guma is another form of reconciliation in homicide cases. If the homicide is deliberate, then *guma*, indemnity, which carries 1000 birr, is paid. On the other hand, if the killing is within a clan, no *guma* is paid; rather the man is expelled from the clan, banished from the territory, and considered an enemy.

Since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this institution of conflict resolution has been weakened by a system of criminal investigation imposed by the imperial administration, known as *afarsata*. As a result of the institution of the *afarsata* system of crime investigation in Guji land and other conquered territories, state courts are said to have gradually displaced the customary legal system (Singer 1971). *Afarsata* was convened when somebody was killed or something was stolen, and the offender was not identified. In cases of homicide a *balab-*

bat (local government official),⁸ together with imperial security forces, *nachlabash*, constructed a prison-like enclosure where all men in the same territory were kept for a month or more until they acquiesce to identify and handover the offender to state officials. Meanwhile, their wives were preoccupied with carrying food to the place of *afarsata*. Alternatively, they could be released if they paid a large sum of money to the officials. Thus, the *afarsata* system provided local officials with informal revenue from the arbitration of conflicts. This had several consequences for local economic activity and the customary justice system in general. As a result of this system, the institution of conflict resolution between groups was weakened and replaced by a practice susceptible to corruption.

The *afarsata* proclamation of 1933 seems to have recognized the problem surrounding the institution. The preamble to the proclamation reads,

Whereas before, whenever cattle were lost, [or] money stolen, people were forced to leave their crops or occupation and gather for *afarsata*;

Whereas now we have come to realize that the harm done by such an act is greater the wealth lost or stolen, and whereas many used this system in falsehood, and whereas innocent people have been said to have done an act by informers who change their names only to harm their enemies, for the future we make the following law” (quoted in Fisher 1971, 720).

From the accounts of local informants, none of the provisions in the proclamation had an impact in the area because of the power local governors wielded autonomously from the central government. Some governors and

landlords maintained their own local prisons. Moreover, while, as understood in the proclamation, the institution was originally designed to investigate thefts, *afarsata* also was convened for homicide cases in the Guji area.

DISPUTE RESOLUTIONS IN STATE COURTS

For this section, PA court files that were opened over three years (2003-5) were collected and charted in the following table (table 1), according to types of cases and the nature of their settlement. The years mentioned above were chosen only because complete records were available for those years. While generally petitions steadily picked over the three years period indicating the rise in disputes, particularly over resources, no explanation was found for the exceptionally high petitions for the year 2004.

Table 1: Local Disputes and Resolution Mechanisms

Year	Number of Cases	Types of Cases				Cases Settled in Court	Cases Referred to Local Elders
		<i>Crop Damage/Land/ Pasture Dispute</i>	<i>Theft</i>	<i>Domestic Disputes</i>	<i>Money Matters</i>		
2003	30	20	4	6	-	18	12
2004	46	26	5	10	5	29	17
2005	40	22	4	10	4	26	14

Source: Finchawa-01 *Kebele* Social Court

In spite of the pressures on customary institutions of dispute resolution, the role of *jarsa biyya* in mediating, reconciling, and resolving disputes has remained enormous. Table 1 shows that slightly more than one-third of the cases taken to courts were referred to the local council of elders⁹. This figure is underrepresented because many of the cases were settled by elders even before they were taken to courts.

In the mid-1970s, Hinnant (1977, 25) pointed out that the Guji preferred customary law to the court system for dispute settlement. The data I collected in 2006 from the Guji household survey show Hinnant's observation was still the prevailing pattern more than three decades later. However, the number of cases taken to government courts, according to local informants and data from the local court, is on the rise. Although court data were obtained only for three years, it indicates an increase from 30 in 2003 to 40 in 2005, a 33percent rise within two years. Out of the total cases filed with the local court, slightly over half of the cases are again related to crop damage or land/pasture disputes.

The cases demonstrate the nature of court procedures used to resolve disputes. For example, in one of the cases Dambi,¹⁰ the petitioner, states the dispute between him and Birbirs, the defendant, over a farmland. Dambi claims to have owned the land in question for over six years. The evidence he presented to the court include a copy of the land contract agreement,¹¹ a receipt for the payment he made for fencing permit, and a number of receipts for land use tax payments for over three years. On his part, the defendant responded by claiming that the plaintiff encroached on his land property. The decision was given by the court seven months later in favor of

the plaintiff establishing his right over the farmland and demarcating the boundaries of the farmland. The defendant appealed to the district court and the issue was not settled at the time of this field work.

In another case, the plaintiff accuses the defendant of misusing his official position as a PA chairman and allocating the farmland he had been using for over thirteen years to another user. He also complains about his petition to the defendant who then brought the case to a mob decision, where in fact, the community bore witness to his ownership of the land. Further, his application states that the defendant (who also was an official) rejected the witness account and gave the land to another person. Therefore, the plaintiff demanded compensation for the economic damage and property loss he had suffered. No court decisions were found regarding this case.

The cases discussed above are typical of many other cases and are interesting for various reasons. One observation is the time gap between the date of filing with the court and issuance of rulings by the court. In the first case, the verdict was given six months after the case was filed, i.e., after two farming seasons.¹² As indicated above, the economic impact of delayed ruling is enormous. Often, in cases of dispute over boundaries between two individuals, disputants are ordered to refrain from using the land until a decision is given by the court. Given that court cases can take two to three years before any resolution is reached, its impact on the disputants' households is clear. The case presented above shows that court ruling was not handed down until six months after the disputants were banned from using the disputed land. This means that they did not plow the land for two farming seasons. The same court prohibitions often apply to

kaloo, grazing fields, since pastures and farmlands are the major causes of disputes.

Moreover, as noted above, the defendant appealed the ruling to the district court. As a rule, land related disputes can only be considered by state courts unless the court refers a specific case to the local council of elders. This means the court system supersedes the customary dispute settlement mechanism but it does not resolve land cases in a more expeditious and efficient manner.

The fact that the defendant appealed to the district court also indicates his dissatisfaction with the ruling. Of course, the customary mechanism also cannot fully satisfy both parties at the same time, but its focus on non-written evidence and the elders' personal knowledge of the cases allows them to get to the bottom of the problem quickly. Evidently, most households resort to local elders for dispute resolution. The reasons are many: cases are disposed off with dispatch; litigants can navigate the system with ease; the local people trust it more than the government courts; the absence of the onerous demand for documentation; and the elders are generally viewed as incorruptible. More importantly, the elders' court is believed to bring *kayyo*, good fortune. Even those who have a better knowledge of court procedures prefer the local system.

Table 2: Reasons for Preference for Elders' Courts over Government Courts

Elders' Court	Government Court
no heavy fines	courts impose heavy fines
low litigation costs	high litigation costs
accepted by custom	externally imposed
important for peace/deep investigation	depends on personal evidence
resolve disputes easily and quickly	delay cases (long appointments)
more accessible to ordinary people	less accessible
know the behaviors of the disputants	have little knowledge about the litigants
good for <i>kayyo</i> (gives blessings)	no beliefs attached to court systems
do not demand bribe and love justice	demand bribe and do injustices
aims to restore peace/reconciliatory	aims to compensate the victim/compensatory
elders speak cultural truth	courts speak legal truth
disputants speak the truth	disputants make false allegations
elders investigate cases deeply based on their cultural knowledge	courts are limited by the inadequacy of evidence
elders give advice for wrong doing	courts imprison if convicted
proceedings take place during spare time	court appointments compete with other tasks
elders involvement seen as a reconciliation	court involvement considered a revenge
considered as respect for custom	considered as disregard for custom
easily accessible geographically and technically	less accessible geographically and technically

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2006

Hinnant writes about the problems surrounding the Ethiopian court system vis-à-vis the indigenous Guji system as follows:

anyone having a dispute over land ownership must resolve it through the courts. The legal system by which government courts operate is very different from Guji law, and is poorly understood by the Guji. The Guji are therefore at a distinct disadvantage in their dealings with the courts, and are well aware of this (1977, 28).

The list of responses in table 2 above shows indisputable preference for the elders' court or the customary conflict resolution mechanism. The customary adjudication derived its power from the customary polity, the gada system, but these were not recognized by the Ethiopian government. With regard to the legal code and constitution of 1955, Fisher (1971, 710) commented on the absence of provision for the customary legal system in the new code and justification for its negligence. According to him, the justifications "range from denial that customary really existed in Ethiopia, to negative comments on its changeability, lack of uniformity, incompleteness, obscurity, and low status".

One reason the Guji mistrusted state courts was because all the judges were northern settlers, and they expected little justice from them. Fisher (1971) speculated that courts in conquered areas might have applied some sort of customary law: "Although most of the Imperial judges appear to have been (and, indeed, remain) Amharas, and they may have tended to apply the law known to them, it is very likely that imperial courts in non-Amhara areas, with the aid of assessors, did at least attempt to apply the local customary law"

(Fisher 1971, 712). The reality in the Guji area, however, shows that since these judges did not speak the local language, litigants barely understood court proceedings, and no attempts were made to incorporate customary laws whatsoever. In fact, article 3347(1) of the Ethiopian Civil Code of 1960 outlaws any application of the customary law: “Unless otherwise expressly provided, all rules whether written or customary previously in force concerning matters provided for in this Code shall be replaced by this Code and are hereby repealed” (quoted in Brietzke 1976, 46).

In recent years, while the role that customary conflict resolution plays has been decreasing, its importance is increasingly recognized in various studies. For example, Abebe identifies several advantages of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in Ethiopia:

- 1) They quickly respond to crisis;
- 2) They contribute to the reduction of regular court caseloads;
- 3) They contribute to saving public money;
- 4) Given the shortage of judges who work in the regular courts, and budget constraints, they are complementary to modern government structures and are not substitute or competitors as some government officials think and worry about;
- 5) They give access to many people who do not find modern system of conflict resolution comfortable, affordable or suitable to their needs;
- 6) Disputants are satisfied with their operation and view their outcomes as fair, and the like” (2005, 72).

In spite of these recognitions and local peoples' preferences for elders' courts, an increasing number of people have begun taking their cases to the state courts. The changes affect not only customary rules governing relations between individuals, but also inter-group relationships. In the past, rich and wide ranging social relationships have flourished in pastoral areas of southern Ethiopia.

CONCLUSION

Like many other African countries, the makers of the Ethiopian legal system did not attempt to incorporate customary laws, favoring the European legal system as a model. The attitude of Ethiopian regimes towards indigenous cultures and legal systems has ranged from outright ban in the past to the current indifference. Just like Europeans, Bennett notes, African governments in general consider legal pluralism as "antithetical to the goals of unity and equality before the law" (Bennett 2004, 17). Given that African nations were forged out of an assortment of cultures, their legal systems would naturally be expected to recognize this reality.

The failure to recognize customary laws in Ethiopia has led to mistrust between local communities and state institutions that were supposed to serve the communities in which they operate. The prevailing perception about state court among the Guji is that it is alien, detached from local realities, and unrepresentative of their values. As a result, communities view government courts with suspicion, and only marginally engage it. The resistance from the local people included avoiding use of government courts and depending on customary legal systems. People prefer to resolve their disputes without external

interventions in an attempt to maintain their autonomy and self-determination (Nader cited in Moore 2001, 104).

Even though customary laws continued to operate side by side with state laws, it was gradually relegated into disuse as the state legal system came to serve the dictates of the Ethiopian state and international corporations. Customary laws were tolerated provided that they did not deviate from practices of national laws. Legesse (1973), who conducted his ethnographic study among the culturally and ethnically related Borana group, observed that “there was pressure from the district administration to abolish some gada practices that violated the national system of laws” (p. 238).

In addition to the existence of customary and statutory laws, a distinction between ‘judicial’ and ‘political’ types of dispute settlement is also important to reflect on the Guji case. Officials often intervene, with or without local elders, in conflict situations. While in the elders’ courts normative rules are still important in determining the outcome of negotiations, in state courts and political interventions the more politically connected individuals and parties win negotiated settlements. The Guji distrust the state system because it obviously does not work for them.

Notes

1. Even though the modern Ethiopian legal system has European origin, Amhara customary law “is the one which is most closely intertwined with that of the Ethiopian state” (Donovan and Assefa, 2003: 518).
2. A PA encompasses households living in a 20 *gasha* of land (or 800 hectares of land).

3. The tension between customary and state laws is also noted in Dolores A. Donovan and Getachew Assefa (2003: 506): “Tension exists between the Ethiopian government’s commitment to the concept of uniform legal rules throughout its territory, including rules protecting human rights, and its commitment to preservation of the Ethiopian customary law systems.”
4. The *gada* broadly encompasses the social, political, and economic institutions of the Guji and other Oromo branches. Legesse (1973) correctly describes the term *gada* as a concept that stands for the whole way of life of the Oromo.
5. In negotiating a marriage payment, whether this is arranged or abduction, the wealth and social status of the groom and his parents are taken into consideration. Payments for the latter may also consider physical damages caused to the girl during abduction.
6. No cases of homicide committed by women are known or reported to this author. In the Guji tradition, women are generally associated with peace and harmony (see Debsu, 2009) while endurance and vigor are considered positive attributes of men.
7. Wata as such is not a clan, but an occupational class which specializes in pottery.
8. The term *balabat* is defined differently by different authors. For example, Crummey (2000) suggests ‘gentry’ as an equivalent English meaning for the term ‘*balabat*’ while Gemedā (2007) broadly defines it as an indigenous chief.
9. It is common to withdraw court cases by plaintiffs at the request of defendants and to demand reconciliation through local elders, wherein the court refers the cases to the elders.
10. All local names mentioned in this manuscript are pseudonyms intended to protect the identity of informants and research participants.

11. Since land sale is illegal both customarily and under the Ethiopian law, land transaction agreements often are prepared as a land lease. For further land sale practices in other Oromo communities, see Hebo (2007).
12. The planting season in the agropastoral area of Finchawa and Burqitu is January-February for maize, April for wheat and barley, and September-October for second round maize, chickpea, and other crops. Land litigation and delayed court cases affect the production of these crops. The same problem applies to grazing lands which are seasonally utilized.

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THE FRAMING OF PROBLEMS AND
SOLUTIONS BY NGOs, CORPORATIONS
AND STATES:
THE CASE OF OROMIA, ETHIOPIA

Elizabeth A. East

When considering non-governmental work and campaigns highlighting poverty in the global South, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) pursue singular targets when framing solutions to complex issues. In the case of the Starbucks-Ethiopian coffee trade-marking agreement, Oxfam America, an international NGO, focused on economic disparities and market solutions in their campaign to support coffee farmers in the Ethiopian state. Oxfam did not, however, highlight the political issues within the state, particularly the political oppression against the Oromo people who reside in the main coffee regions of Ethiopia. Oxfam nevertheless describes its campaign, which culminated in an agreement that the Starbucks Corporation reached with the Ethiopian government

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as a “win-win” situation. Without encompassing political dimensions, touted economic solutions to poverty alone cannot create conditions to fully realize justice and emancipation from oppression.

In this paper, I explore the interplay of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), transnational corporations, and oppressive states, and expand upon the overarching issue of political oppression that is often ignored when highlighting economic disparities within markets in the peripheral part of the world. The political side of a state can be completely ignored when examining economic activities and poverty, particularly in campaigns of international NGOs. Though NGOs certainly contribute to international awareness of injustices and often facilitate crucial dialogue among multiple actors, it is important to question the saliency of the solutions and campaigns they pursue and advocate rather than accept them as comprehensive solutions to complex problems. NGOs and corporations who claim to have a commitment to social justice have great power with Western consumers in how they portray the plight or promise of a better future for producers in the global South. When the political side of poverty is left out of the dialogue, however, only one part of the story is heard and “solutions” pursued are often not comprehensive enough to realize lasting social justice.

To examine these topics, I begin with an overview of a recent coffee trade-marking campaign pursued by Oxfam America, setting out the parameters of the campaign and introducing the actors of Starbucks, the Ethiopian state, and the coffee farmers themselves. Next, I explore the problems in Ethiopia particularly the political issues within the country related to the oppression

of the Oromo people. Third, I emphasize the need for Starbucks and corporations to understand how alternative markets, such as the Fair Trade market, can often fail to bring about equitable, systemic change, particularly in a state with as much control as Ethiopia. While progress may be made through alternative markets, trade-marking and other economic measures, this progress will be limited and even overshadowed as the result of the continuance of political oppression against the poor. I close with expanding upon how economic solutions must be coupled with political solutions and how problems should be framed as issues of political economy, not only in Oromia and Ethiopia, but throughout the global South.

THE CAMPAIGN

In March of 2005, Ethiopia began its quest to trademark its regional coffees. In a report with CNN, Getachew Megistie, the head of Ethiopia's Intellectual Property Office, expressed that there is much value in a name—and the coffees that are sourced from Ethiopia often sell for three times the price of other coffees (Faris 2007). However, this higher price and the profits from the selling of the coffee were not captured by Ethiopia or its coffee producers, but by retailers and other companies that sold the coffee. Therefore, in early 2005, Ethiopia filed three separate applications with the United States Patent and Trademark Office for the trademark of the names of three coffee-producing regions in the state of Ethiopia: Yirgacheffe, Harrar, and Sidamo. These regions are mainly located in Oromia, a place of high political contention. The trademark application for Sidamo, however, met an interesting resistance—Star-

bucks, a large United States based coffee company, had filed a trademark claim of the name one year earlier. Until the application dispute was resolved, the trade-marking could not go forward (Faris 2007).

This was just the beginning of the battle between Ethiopia and Starbucks. Indeed, leaders of the state and the coffee company bantered back and forth about the legality of trade-marking and the logic of trade-marking versus certification, which finally climaxed around outright control of the coffee trade within Ethiopia itself. As this conflict escalated, Oxfam America, an international relief and development organization, began, in the fall of 2006, to voice its support of Ethiopia's attempt to gain control of the coffee trade within the country. Citing Starbucks's commitment to social responsibility, Oxfam called on Starbucks to be a leader in the coffee industry by supporting Ethiopia in its efforts to capture its intellectual property rights (Oxfam America 2006a) and to stop "bullying" the poor (Oxfam America 2006b). Oxfam estimated that Ethiopia could potentially earn an additional \$88 million a year in revenues if it could have better control of its coffee market and gain a larger share in the retail price (Oxfam America 2006b).

Continuing with its campaign, Oxfam cited the example of other companies, such as Green Mountain Coffee, that had taken positive steps to build relationships and work with Ethiopian farmers so the farmers could earn more from their product (Oxfam America 2007b). Oxfam also released a statement calling on reforms within the International Coffee Agreement (Oxfam America 2007a), which it had been pursuing during the prior six years of their Coffee and Make Trade Fair campaigns.

By February of 2007, Starbucks announced its concession to Ethiopia's right to trademark and officially withdrew its application for the trademark control of Sidamo. Oxfam continued to push Starbucks to follow through with not only its concession regarding Ethiopia's right to trademark control, but also to work on building relationships with coffee farmers in Ethiopia by signing licensing agreements meant to ensure that Starbucks recognized the value in Ethiopian coffee (Oxfam America 2007c, d). As May of 2007 began, Oxfam's tone began to turn positive as signs of progress between Starbucks and Ethiopia began to emerge. Finally on 20 June 2007, Oxfam announced a win-win outcome of the dispute that had lasted for over two years—Ethiopia and Starbucks signed a distribution, marketing, and licensing agreement. Oxfam America's President, Raymond Offenheiser, congratulated each partner, and commented that this agreement was "a business approach in step with twenty first century standards in its concerns for rights rather than charity and for greater equity in supply chains rather than short term profits" (Oxfam America 2007f). This agreement, according to Oxfam, had the potential to lift millions out poverty in Ethiopia, in a country where millions live on less than a dollar a day.

Both the campaign pursued by Oxfam and the agreement hold historic and promising implications. For one, given the way that most business is pursued in the global economy, an agreement such as this one that promotes trade instead of aid and cooperation instead of domination is a step in a new direction. What that step constitutes, however, needs to be examined more closely. With the case of the Starbucks and Ethiopian coffee agreement, Oxfam's highlighting of problems within the coffee

industry, such as intellectual property rights and the poverty of coffee farmers, left out some intricate pieces of the puzzle of injustice and poverty, especially within the modern state of Ethiopia. Without searching for those other pieces, the whole picture of struggle within Ethiopia is not fully realized. When focusing upon such a macro initiative, such as reforming the coffee industry, we may not see the micro problems and crises within a state. The following sections highlight what Oxfam America, Starbucks, and ultimately the media have left out of the story of poverty and injustice within the state of Ethiopia.

OXFAM AMERICA AND ITS STATED OBJECTIVES

Oxfam America, which is an affiliate of Oxfam International, is an international relief and development organization that roots its work in the fight against poverty, hunger, and social injustice. Supporting local and indigenous partners across the globe, Oxfam is a well respected non-governmental organization and relies upon the local input and knowledge of its partners to work on solutions to overcome problems faced in the everyday lives of the people with whom they work.

A cursory examination of Oxfam America's website, reveals that the stories and images used by the organization inspire hope, show joy, and illuminate progress, whether it be the smiling faces of young children or the strong stance of a woman next to her newly built grain silo. This emphasis on the empowerment of people from all walks of life and the visible signs of laughter and learning, echo to a different kind of activism and mission of a non-governmental organization. Oxfam, though criticized in the past for its depiction of their partners (see Rodney 1973),

has changed many aspects of its outreach to the public for support of sustainable development and relief work.

When considering the Starbucks-Ethiopia agreement, however, we must look more closely at questions and issues that Oxfam did not ask or pursue within this campaign. What this campaign showcases well is international cooperation and respect—facets of what Oxfam has pushed for within its Make Trade Fair campaign in the past decade. The plight of coffee farmers and other small farmers across the globe has been chronicled by NGOs such as Oxfam. Within its press releases around this campaign, Oxfam stressed statistics about the poverty in Ethiopia with figures such as “one in four people live on less than \$1 a day and 80% of its people live on less than \$2 a day” and “Ethiopia is in the bottom 10 of the UN human development index of income, health and education” (Oxfam America 2006b). And with the closing of the campaign, Oxfam’s President Ray Offenheiser expressed his confidence that this agreement “should help improve the lives of millions of poor farmers” (Oxfam America 2007f) and “create real change for the 15 million Ethiopians dependent on the country’s coffee sector” (Oxfam America 2007e). The last article on Oxfam’s website highlighting this campaign is titled “Starbucks Campaign: Anatomy of a Win” (Perera 2007). The article expounds upon a “thank you” from coffee farmers and praise for over 100,000 people who showed support for the campaign itself.

There is certainly a need for celebration within activism—it is often a thankless route. But as any campaign comes to a close, it is important to realize that the fight for justice within communities and countries within the global South is a daily and very real struggle. While

Oxfam and its supporters find this to be a win-win situation, there is much more of the story that must be explained and examined, particularly the suffering and human rights abuses within the modern state of Ethiopia.

THE ETHIOPIAN STATE, UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY IN OROMIA

Throughout the trade-marking campaign, Oxfam and Starbucks referred to working with Ethiopia and Ethiopian coffee farmers. The intricacies and ethnic identities of the modern Ethiopian state, however, are much more complicated when it comes to poverty, underdevelopment, and injustice. For a campaign that called attention to the importance of justice and rights, it is problematic that Oxfam did not call attention to the amount of human rights abuses committed by the modern Ethiopian state itself. Perhaps Oxfam is unable to address political and human rights problems in Ethiopia, particularly in the coffee producing regions, for fear that they will have no access to working with the people it feels it most needs to work with.¹ But when looking at Oxfam's mission to eradicate hunger, poverty, and social injustice, ignoring or keeping the political situations out of the dialogue does not serve to achieve those goals. It is necessary to understand the political economy of the Ethiopian Empire to adequately deal with the problem of poverty and underdevelopment.

The modern Ethiopian state is one with a history riddled with injustice. Multiple scholars (Hassan 1990; Marcus 1994; Jalata 2005a) have found that previous records of the history of Ethiopia left the oppressed completely misrepresented or out of the story alto-

gether. This is particularly true for the Oromo peoples in Africa.² Mohammed Hassan (1990) surmises “it is not an exaggeration to say that no people have had their history so distorted or ignored and their achievements and human qualities undervalued as the Oromo have in the Ethiopian historiography” (p.2). The Oromo people are particularly important when considering the story of coffee within Ethiopia (see Aregay 1988; Gemedo 2002).

The history of Ethiopia is somewhat different from many places within Africa. While many African nations and territories were being colonized by European powers in the second half of the nineteenth century, certain ethnonational groups, which identified themselves and were identified by Europeans as “Ethiopians,” effectively colonized surrounding peoples. By forming an alliance with European powers, the Ethiopians gained power over certain ethnonational groups and gained control of new lands (Jalata 1993). As the borderlines were drawn by European powers to create states in Africa, the Oromo nation was colonized and included within the state of Ethiopia. Coffee, which is an indigenous plant within Ethiopia, grew abundantly in the wild and has always been an important component in the traditional lives of the Oromo (Yedes, Clamons, and Osman 2004). Throughout this campaign, Ethiopia was referred to as “the birthplace of coffee.”

As the Ethiopians gained control of the territories within these new state lines and the demand for coffee by European powers increased, the commercialization of coffee was necessary in order to create a sector of trade for the new state; a sector that could meet various needs of the state. As coffee began to rise as a desired and necessary commodity that provided financial support to the

Ethiopian regime, the already limited autonomy of the coffee growing regions declined dramatically (Gemeda 2002). And with the newly acquired lands and the support of Europeans, the Ethiopians began to use coffee as a product to be sold on the emerging international market though it was produced on confiscated Oromo lands, while also exploiting the labor of the Oromo people (Jalata 1993). The Ethiopian state captured the coffee sector within the Oromo lands early on.

Coffee continues to be an important part of the Ethiopian economy. Despite the exploitation by the state, the Oromo voice and representation is still alive in the coffee growing regions in the state. In fact, the faces for the Oxfam campaign were representatives of the Oromia Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union (OCFCU), a 90,000 member cooperative that Oxfam has worked with for the past few years (Oxfam America 2006c). Tadesse Meskela, the manager of the OCFCU, was featured in a film *Black Gold*, which chronicled the lives of struggling Oromo farmers in Ethiopia and the inequalities within the global coffee industry. He also spoke at many Oxfam sponsored events and met with members of the public in the US. Similarly, the face of the campaign, an 85-year-old coffee farmer Gemede Robe, could be seen on posters in the US, Japan, Scotland, and many other Western countries (Perera 2007).

With the incorporation of Africa into the European-dominated capitalist world system, the peoples in the coffee growing regions of Oromia faced harsh poverty and political oppression. Whether we consider state sponsored colonialism and oppression to be the obtaining and capturing of commodities such as coffee, gold, and ivory (Jalata 2005), the lack of access to stable

democracy and representation as recently as 2008 (Aalen and Tronvoll 2008), or state-induced famine intended to control uprisings (Howard-Hassmann 2005), the peoples within Ethiopia have been subjected to a brutal existence because of the Ethiopian state itself. As recently as 15 April 2009, the human rights abuses occurring in Ethiopia today were explored in the media (Butty 2009). The government of Ethiopia, however, denies any wrongdoings, and even goes as far as to say that the design of the government is “aimed at respect and protection for human rights” (Butty 2009). Echoing back to colonial times, the support that Ethiopia receives from Western governments often keeps the issues and atrocities of human rights abuses out of public discourse. Ethiopia has been identified as a key ally in the War on Terror, as a stronghold in Africa for the United States (McLaughlin 2005). Instead of focusing on the issues within Africa such as the famines and the displacement and oppression of peoples like those within the state of Ethiopia, news sources are much more interested, at least in 2009, about piracy off the coast of Somalia. But inland in Africa, many more atrocities exist.

Political oppression is ultimately coupled with the economic oppression. Coffee production within Ethiopia has a bitter past: the proud birthplace of coffee has experienced poverty and human rights abuses as it became colonized and commercialized. The modern day coffee farmers within Ethiopia share a common link to their ancestors from colonial times—oppression by the state and oppression by the market. This has created a political economy of oppression.

This is not to say, however, that the agreement achieved and promoted with this campaign has no

legitimacy or meaning. Within the global economy, the voices of a historically underrepresented group must find an avenue for their voices to be heard, and within the state of Ethiopia, coffee farmers, particularly Oromian coffee farmers, are given such an avenue when working with a well known organization such as Oxfam. The poverty of farmers in the global South clearly needs to be addressed by NGOs and especially by large transnational corporations such as Starbucks. This agreement is important because the voices of these farmers are beginning to be heard in relation to the injustice that occurs within the global economy. This agreement does give more control of the coffee trade to the country of Ethiopia (if it follows through completely) and allows a much more participatory process for producers or at least producer country representatives. That in itself is an important and meaningful step in the creation of a global economy that respects the voices of all members involved and allows for members to have access to the abundance created by such an economy.

The economic side of existence alone, however, does not shape the daily life of peoples within a state. The political side of existence must also be addressed when considering issues of freedom, wealth, and autonomy of poor producers. Oxfam has done well to consider the plight of coffee farmers by looking at the injustices within the current global economic system. But in the case of Ethiopia, one cannot overlook the political sources of poverty and human rights abuses. Poverty does not only stem from economics—it also has deep political roots (see Austin 2008; Bowden and Mosley 2008; Saine 2008).

While Oromia is considered one of the eleven states in the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, the power and source

of political oppression is concentrated at the center of the national government (Adugna 2006). In his comparative study of the four main regions of the Ethiopian state, Adunga (2006) found that while the region of Oromia has the lowest poverty rate, quality of life indicators showed a different story—Oromia has the highest infant mortality rates and lower access to healthcare and education than most of the regions studied. This revelation certainly denotes that poverty is not necessarily about money. Indeed, poverty is about power discrepancies and is a complicated mixture of political and economic factors. As Adunga (2006) explains, while the Ethiopian Constitution gives regional states the rights to run their own affairs, such as managing their economic sectors, this does not happen in practice. Power over all affairs within the Ethiopian state is centered in the federal government. While this is obviously the case within other states as well, we must take into consideration how and to whom resources are distributed to within Ethiopia. Adunga found that while the Oromo region contributed significantly to the state through taxes, the region was allocated much less through the state budget distribution plan. Not only is redistribution a problem within Ethiopia, possible program implementation, which could potentially lead to investments in institutions such as healthcare and education, lacks sustained and predictable funding from the state. This inhibits the ability of regions to create programs that could build healthy institutions, which could certainly aid in lifting people out of poverty.

Finally, the Ethiopian state shows favoritism to certain ethnic groups in its allocation of the federal budget. While this is not as overt as the rich and terrifying history of violent oppression and discrimination against groups

such as the Oromos (see Baissa 1998; Jalata 1998, 2001, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Lata 1998), such favoritism holds great implications in relation to access to resources and the ability to build human capital and autonomous institutions. By relying on existing corrupt political institutions to implement structural programs, which a trade-marking program would need to rely upon, this agreement pursued by Oxfam to mediate between Starbucks and supposedly coffee farmers, while encouraging, is limited. The political injustices of Ethiopia will continue to overshadow progress made in the economic realm.

Therefore, even if coffee farmers and regions are able to capture more profit for their product, which is the idea behind the trade-marking campaign, it is unlikely that they will be the recipients of such monetary wealth because of the highly centralized power and unequal and unjust income distribution within the state of Ethiopia. The extra funds will not likely transfer into development programs that invest in human capital of the coffee producing Oromo in Ethiopia.

The main shortcoming of this campaign was that Oxfam did not explain why the Oromo and others have been facing absolute poverty. While Oxfam may understand this, without critically and comprehensively understanding the root cause of poverty in disadvantaged and politically oppressed regions of Ethiopia, it is impossible to solve this salient problem. Without fully engaging in the interconnections between the economic and political roots of poverty and oppression, NGOs fall short in realizing the goals set out in their missions and, ultimately, are limited in their capacity to deal with the deep structures that uphold poverty.

STARBUCKS, COFFEE, AND THE ETHIOPIAN STATE

Starbucks is a coffee company that has a self-proclaimed commitment to social responsibility and “putting people before products” (Starbucks Coffee Company 2009). Starbucks has been delivering quality coffee since 1971 and cites within its values a passion to ethically source the coffee beans they buy and to improve the lives of the people who grow them (Starbucks Coffee Company 2009). This notion of social responsibility and bringing human connections back into the coffee market sparked Oxfam’s campaign pushing for an agreement in the first place. Oxfam challenged Starbucks saying the corporation was not living up to its commitment to social responsibility and used this as a springboard from which to launch its trade-marking campaign.

Admittedly, Starbucks appears to do much more than other coffee companies such as Proctor and Gamble and Sara Lee. Indeed, Starbucks participates in Fair Trade Certified coffee buying and has also established its own set of practices, called CAFÉ practices, to ensure some appearance of social responsibility within the coffee industry. In fact, Starbucks announced its plan to go 100% Fairtrade in the United Kingdom (Frenette 2008) and double its Fair Trade buying in 2009 (Bohrer 2008). Fair Trade markets, which are alternative commodity markets that guarantee a higher percentage of profit for producers through a fair price, are markets that have been extensively promoted by Oxfam America via its campaigns. With the so-called win-win situation with Ethiopia and the buying of more Fair Trade coffee, it seemed that Starbucks was making all of the “right” decisions and moves as a transnational corporation and

had recovered from a potentially damaging public relations scandal.

In following with its commitment more specifically to farmers within Ethiopia, Starbucks' Chairman Howard Schultz met with Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in 2007 and unveiled plans to open a farmer-support center within Ethiopia (Heinlein 2007). Starbucks had opened a similar center in Costa Rica and also had plans to work with Rwandan farmers as well. The purpose of such centers is to provide guidance in improving the quality of beans to certain standards which would allow Starbucks to buy more of them and also to meet other social standards set by Starbucks CAFÉ practices. In addition to the center, Starbucks was also eager to find an Ethiopian manufacturer for the black aprons its employees wear. With the initiatives and promises of 2007, Starbucks and Ethiopia seemed to have reached a great convergence of interests.

But as time has progressed, Starbucks has seemed to fall behind on its plans for the center in Ethiopia (Allison 2009). Citing the economic crisis, Starbucks is unsure when the Ethiopian center will be opened, though the corporation continues to voice its promise of support for Ethiopia and East Africa in general.

In the age of globalization, however, the coffee crisis of 2001 displayed a terrible example of how a single crop can cause devastation among communities throughout the global south. Alternative markets, such as the Fair Trade and Fairtrade (which is the United Kingdom name) markets, were meant to address this possible devastation by guaranteeing more profit for farmers and allowing some security from the fluctuating free market system. Fair Trade is also more than a development

strategy—it is a movement meant to promote a more participatory dialogue across the whole supply chain of commodities from the consumer to the producer.

But what one must understand and consider about Fair Trade is that it is only an alternative. Without extending the values, such as greater equity on the supply chain, transparency, respect, etc, of Fair Trade into the market as a whole, a great systemic change does not occur. And within the Fair Trade system, a corporation like Starbucks can work explicitly with a repressive regime such as the Ethiopian government and still be seen as a good global citizen because they are “helping” poor farmers.

This is a difficult and complicated road to explore. On the one hand, the Fair Trade market and buyers of that market such as Starbucks give farmers an ability to participate more equitably within the global economy. On the other hand, buyers do not have to consider and often outright ignore the injustices and brutality that a state such as Ethiopia can inflict on its people, including the farmers and cooperatives they buy from. Economic development such as Fair Trade does not often ask the important political questions that should accompany questions about poverty—questions about democracy and autonomy as well. The Ethiopian, more correctly perhaps, the Oromian coffee farmers who are meant to benefit from an agreement such as the Starbucks Ethiopian agreement may not see that promised profit in the end. And with the evidence of how the media and the Ethiopian government tend to hide the injustices of the state, outsiders may never know if they do.

It would actually be within Starbucks best interests to promote human rights, autonomy, and democracy within a state. Pursuing stability would guarantee that

the product they need (i.e.: coffee) would continuously be available. Stabilizing the production side of the chain is essential to future buying in a region. With recent reports about the possibility of Ethiopia re-nationalizing its coffee markets, the quality of the beans and the diversity of the beans may be put in jeopardy (Weissman 2009). And with this, small farmers may lose even more control and revenue from their product. If Starbucks actually has a commitment to farmers and quality coffee, conceding to the government of Ethiopia the ability to take complete control over this market is a step in a new, but wrong, direction.

A WIN-WIN?

This paper is not meant to tear down the work that this agreement achieved. Surely this is an exciting agreement for producers in the global South and a model for transnational corporations to invoke when considering the rights of the people that truly make their industries possible. It is also important to imagine an economy where all voices are heard and all peoples receive enough (or more) to sustain a livelihood. But as we come out of our first decade in the new millennium, we must analyze issues of development in a more comprehensive fashion—we must consider the political economy of a state, not just the economy itself.

Though we no longer measure wealth or poverty by income levels alone, it appears that we are constructing our solutions to such disparities only through an economic lens. If we conceptualize poverty as a multifaceted phenomenon then we must also consider that solutions need that same characterization. Poverty thrives because

of a complex system of oppression. Shouldn't it be solved by a complex system of justice?

The implied success of this campaign is problematic for two reasons. For one, it takes the focus off of the repressive nature of the state of Ethiopia. Unless Western consumers, coffee drinkers, and participants in this campaign knew of the oppressive nature of the Ethiopian state, they would likely believe that the Ethiopian state is just a victim of free market capitalism. While this is partially true, it doesn't explain the many roots of poverty and oppression that the Ethiopian state itself is directly responsible for. Oxfam America does well in its mobilization of people within global North countries such as the UK, the US, Australia, and many other industrialized nations. People become inspired and enthusiastic about campaigns that Oxfam presents—just consider how many people turned out from across the US for this campaign: 100,000. Bringing to light the poverty of peoples within Ethiopia will probably stay with many forever. But what will not stay with people is how the Ethiopian state lacks the political means and the political will (at least within the federal and centralized part of the government) to allow justice and peace to flourish in the coffee producing regions—for the state itself actively inflicts injustices upon people daily.

Two, this campaign doesn't incite global action with more comprehensive approaches to justice. While market solutions are certainly important and ownership of trademarks should lie in the hands of producers, they must be coupled with other points of action to get at the root causes of such complex issues as poverty. Poverty embodies more than markets disparities—it also has

deep political roots. Political justice must also be pursued alongside economic justice.

The slice of the story about Ethiopia that many Oxfam and Starbucks supporters received because of this campaign may be remembered for a lifetime. The end of that story for many will be a happy one, touted as a win-win. They will remember the faces of the farmers like Gemedo Robe, in his white garb explaining the deep pain of hunger and the reality of the figure “one dollar a day.” They will remember Tadesse Meskela as he was followed in the film *Black Gold*, searching for a way to bring more profit home for the farmers in his cooperative. People who participated in this campaign will remember a swell of pride in feeling that they had made a difference. And it is important not to take that swell of goodness away from others. But it is equally important to broaden the scope of this issue to include an even more encompassing view of the problems faced by the people within Ethiopia.

The danger of considering this campaign and other market-based approaches to justice as “win-win” situations lies in ignoring how systems of oppression intersect to create not only poverty, but also violence, repression, and incredible inequality. The case of Oromia and Ethiopia showcase that focus upon only one sector, such as the economy, sidesteps important questions about the twisted nature of oppression. A holistic examination of these twisted roots is necessary to move towards true “wins” and ultimately, towards justice.

Notes

1. While some may also suggest the professionalization and political economy of NGOs as a problematic component of development projects (see Jad 2007), I would suggest that most NGO workers and structures look forward to the day when their work is no longer necessary. Indeed, Oxfam actually considers this a win and closes the case for its campaigning and outreach around coffee in Ethiopia.
2. The Oromo are the largest ethnonational population group, and they are estimated at to represent half of the 80 million people in Ethiopia.

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SPECIAL FEATURE

NOTES ON SOME RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE OROMO¹

By R. Chambard

Translation from French by Ayalew Kanno

I. GALMA

The *Galma* is a ceremony less and less practiced in Harer, because it is purely pagan. It is nevertheless still current with the Ittuu (observed once by the Oborraa). It only takes place during days of great calamity and is practiced in Harer, according to the *galma gabaroo* rite. All of the Afran Qalloo are from Barentu (on Galma Gabaroo and Galma Barentu, see Cerulli, *Folk Literature of the Galla*, p. 187). The clan gathers in an enclosure, and the ceremony begins with a sacrifice of

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a male goat by the oldest Oromo of the assembly. Prayers are then said jointly and the sacrifices continue, more or less in great numbers, based on the importance of the clan, and generosity of the rich people, etc. In any case, all the attendants gathered in the enclosure must eat all of the sacrificed animals. The ceremony continues like this for four days, during which time all the Oromo board in the huts they have constructed from leaves. Occasionally also, they could have a duration of an *ulma*, that is eight days. Injured men are excluded from these manifestations. They call the elder, who guides the ceremony and orders the prayers, *Abba Galma*.

They also practice the *Galma* before the big *Wadaja* and before the festivals of *Atara* and *Ateetee*, in order to win protection of deity.

Father Martial de Salvac (*Les Galla*, p. 145) says that they “celebrate the *Wadaja* during *Galma*,” and that “it is accompanied by self-restraint.” According to what we have been able to gather, the *Wadaja* follows the *Galma*, and none of our informers have mentioned to us that the self-restraint made sexual abstinence obligatory. (See Bottego, *L’Omo*; Cecchi, *La Zeila alle frontiere del Coffa*, vol. II, pp. 29 and 30).

II. ATEETEE

Ateetee seems to be the name of an Oromo goddess (this is also the opinion of Cerulli, *Folk Lit.* p.127) and of a ceremony in which Oromo women invoke this deity of fertility. The ceremony has completely disappeared among the Muslim Oromo of Harer, but still exists in the south of the province, among the *Anniyaa*.

The *Ateetee* is always preceded by a *Galma* of four days, during which time the women invoke the goddess

by the name of *Ayyoo*, “a mother,” and even *Ya Maryam*, “Oh Mary,” begging her to give them fertility. They invoke her using these words: “*Ateetee! Ayo!* Oh you who preside over the multiplication of humans and animals.” The women wear a necklace dedicated to the goddess; and once the *Galma* is over, they emerge in bands, armed with long sticks, and go to gather sacred herbs that they deposit under a tree they also deem sacred. There, they perform a sort of dance while continuing to invoke the goddess. Then they go to a house of a prolific woman, by preference. Inside, they fumigate certain plants (one among the women is named *galma bure*) and they engage in some acts about which they refused to give us any details. (See Martial de Salviac, p.145; Cecchi, vol. II, p.20; Cerulli, *Folk Lit.*, p.127.)

Montandon, in his book *Au Pays Ghimirra* (pages 339 to 342, illustrations, pages 340-341), indicates a ceremony which he saw women practice, on the right bank of the Gumaaro, and which he designates under the name “Ya Rabbie”. That ceremony was a celebration of *Ateetee* followed by an embryonic *Wadaja*. *Ya Rabbie* is a general format that all Oromo use in their invocations of God: “Oh Lord.”

III. WORSHIP OF MISTLETOE

The mistletoe which grows on mimosa and sycamore, etc., is adored by the Oromo. It is, they say, a symbol for them: “It is grafted on the trees like soul is grafted on our bodies.” They collect the mistletoe without a special ceremony, at least when we were able to observe, and put its branches in their huts as a bangle (ornamental disk). The mistletoe of *hallo*, a large thorny mimosa tree, is particularly venerated.

IV. FATI

Worship under sacred trees is also designated under the name *Awulia*. At certain periods of the year, above all before harvest, the Oromo go to these sacred trees and place a green branch at the base of the tree, asking God for his blessing of the family and the harvest.

V. RAYYAA

Ceremony of asking for the rain during times of drought is called *Rayyaa*. (See Cerulli, *Folk Lit.* p.145, the chant of children asking for rain.)

[Here is Cerulli's description taken from the *Folk Literature of the Galla*, inserted by the translator]:

In the paganism of the [Oromo], as in so many other primitive religions, there exist special ceremonies for asking the divinity for rain. One of these ceremonies is that of *rayyaa*, which is a solemn procession of women and children who go in search of a special grass, out of which they then weave wreathes. It is a part of the ritual to eat a barley pudding before the procession. On such occasion, songs are sung invoking rain. Here are two of them with updated translation:

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A. | 1. <i>kusurru Gibee</i> | 3. <i>eesa si dhibee</i> |
| | 2. <i>hursaa Mandiyo</i> | 4. <i>roobi roobi</i> |
| | 1. O kusurru (grass) of Gibee! | 3. What part of you is hurting? |
| | 2. O storm of Mandiyo! | 4. Rain, rain! |

Notes: The *kusurru* is a kind of grass which grows on the banks of rivers, and which the [Oromo]

use to cover their huts; Mandiyo (v. 2) is the diminutive of Abba Mandoo, a *caamsitu* (sorcerers believed to be capable of checking rain). Perhaps it is the same Abba Mandoo, magician of the Sibu Ganti [an Oromo clan] who has held back the rain now invoked by the singer.

- | | |
|--|--|
| B. 1. <i>bokkae 'ano</i> | 10. <i>jaarsa diinqaa fudhuu</i> |
| 2. <i>'ano gabbaro</i> | 11. <i>jaartii golaa fudhuu</i> |
| 3. <i>dullacha kaasoo</i> | 12. <i>mucaa ukaa fudhuu</i> |
| 4. <i>deega badhaasoo</i> | 13. <i>bokkaa gama waddeessas</i> |
| 5. <i>ciicoo jijjisoo</i> | 14. <i>didibbee qaallicha</i> |
| 6. <i>gaadii dheresoo</i> | 15. <i>seera nagaadichaa</i> |
| 7. <i>bokkae roobi</i> | 16. <i>bokkae abba garbuu</i> |
| 8. <i>roobi lafa ga'i</i> | 17. <i>bokken hara 'ndarbuu</i> |
| 9. <i>lafee lafaa fudhuu</i> | 18. <i>roobuma roobi</i> |
| 1. Rain of Ano; | 10. Take the old man from the bed; |
| 2. Ano Gabbaro; | 11. Take the old woman from the inner chamber; |
| 3. It will make the old cow rise; | 12. Take the child from under the arm (of the mother); |
| 4. It will make rich the poor; | 13. Rain from beyond the waddeessa; |
| 5. It will moisten the milking pot; | 14. Drum of the magician; |
| 6. It will lengthen the rope (for tying cow's leg when milking); | 15. Custom of the merchant; |
| 7. Rain, rain down; | 16. Rain, master of barley; |

- | | |
|---|---|
| 8. Rain down and
reach the soil; | 17. The rain will not pass
by today (without
falling here); |
| 9. Take the bones
away from the
ground; | 18. O rain, rain in earnest. |

VI. FATA

Morning coffee, taken ceremoniously, constitutes a sort of Morning Prayer, called *fata*. They also give this name to a stake of wood planted in front of the house, to which they throw a residue of morning coffee as a means of divination (see below).

VII. SOOTHSAYERS

The men who elicit soothsayers are called *ogeesa*. The method most widespread is to view the peritoneum, or *mora*, of an animal just killed.

The *fata* is a divination practiced according to the disposition of the stones in a certain place, and observation of the mouth of cows.

The *fata* is a divination practiced by throwing *qat* and coffee waste on a stake of wood, and by observing the disposition of the waste around the wood.

VIII. SUPERSTITIONS

The Oromo are very superstitious, and their superstition is entertained by sorcerers, or *qaalluu*, who find in it their account.

All superstitious practices are called, in Oromo language, *Ooda*.

Here is a concise list of them that we were able to note:

- They do not deliver their animals on Mondays or Thursdays;
- They do not eat the flesh of a *gadamsa* (deer), which, they pretend, was created the same day as humans;
- They themselves do not raise a child born the same day of the week as their father;
- They never kill a viper, *buutii*, which they call *akko* “grandmother,” nor the adder, called *ilmo*, young “son,” that they hold in veneration;
- They do not decamp their herds on Sunday, which they call *ayyaana loonii*, “holiday of oxen”;
- If they see in their house a “praying mantis,” *dendi*, it is a sign of bad luck. They kill it, and bury it near a tomb or with the bones of a sacrificed animal;
- They do not cut the trees that grow on a stump;
- They do not say something pleasant to beasts, the cattle would die;
- They never enter water without rubbing their chest and their forehead, and never pass a ford without, first of all, having thrown a fistful of grass to it;
- They never point to the sky with a finger, that is an insult to God;
- They never point to an object with the index finger (that would bring bad luck), but with the middle finger;
- When they warm themselves, they avoid holding out the palm of their hands to the fire;
- When they build a new house, they kill a chicken and sprinkle the soil with its blood.

Notes

1. Translated from: Roger Chambard, "Notes sur quelques croyances religieuses des Galla," *Revue d'Ethnographie d'ethnographie et de traditions populaires*, 26 (1926):121-124.

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