

OSA Newsletter 10

May 2006

The Oromo Studies Association *Two Decades of Service and Scholarship*

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A message from OSA president: Discrimination and Religious Intolerance Allowed at Mekelle University

In 2005 the History Department of Mekelle University (MU) in Ethiopia published a textbook for its Hist 102 class. The textbook, which apparently received a generous support from the University administration, is a mockery of the missions of education and academia because, driven by extreme tribal fanaticism and hateful politics with which we are very familiar from the gloomy past of the country, the book resorted to outright insult of a people and religion - unbecoming of an institute of higher learning.

I recently wrote a letter to MU President objecting to the discriminatory and inflammatory teachings of the University. In my letter dated May 9, 2006, I asked MU to distance itself from racially and religiously biased teachings of its History Department and disallow the use of MU as a vehicle to promote discriminatory and supremacist views. I also asked the University to exclude such writings of its faculty from use as a textbook. Disappointingly, I did not hear from MU President and the practice of teaching hate and racial supremacy at MU has continued. Convinced that this very old politics of hate and intolerance should be exposed so that it doesn't grow deep roots in academia, I decided to revisit the matter in this newsletter as a message from OSA President.

Voltaire once said, "Prejudice is the reason of fools." And another great thinker, Samuel Johnson wrote "prejudice, not being founded

on reason, cannot be removed by argument." The attempt here is therefore to expose it, not argue it. What purpose would it have served to argue against Hitler who thought "If I can send the flower of the German nation into the hell of war without the smallest pity for the shedding of precious German blood, then surely I have the right to remove millions of an inferior race that breeds like vermin?"

OSA, as a scholarly organization with a mission deeply rooted inside Oromia assumes that harm on Oromo students is harm on OSA's mission. And from an academic point of vantage, there is no harm more engrained than false teaching, telling the young that one race or tribe is superior to another. OSA rejects such a destructive teaching.

OSA has received several complains from MU students, that in the name of dissemination of knowledge, the History Department has deliberately and shamefully taught deceit, demonstrating abhorrence towards Oromo students, the Oromo and other peoples of the region, and the Moslem religion. As a result, the book and the lectures of the Department have caused distress among OSA members and widespread anger among Oromo students of MU and elsewhere.

As a scholarly institute whose mission includes dissemination of knowledge and whose members consist of internationally recognized scholars of Oromo and non-Oromo origin, OSA is deeply troubled by such reproachful development at MU, an institute of higher learning after all. It is indeed distressful that even university level instructors continue to spread religious intolerance, tribal animosity, and racial

supremacy so openly and blatantly, even at a risk of reinforcing the looming danger of war and ethnic conflict that have kept the country so immensely impoverished. This irresponsible and callous act has invited bad name to MU and tainted its scholarly image. It is in the interest of the country, including the tribe which the department faculty paint as a superior race by superlatives, that such faculty members are removed from playing any role in academia or elsewhere by denying them societal responsibility that exceeds their reasoning capacity. Below are some quotes from a history book used as a textbook at MU:

“Considered uncivilized and inferior, even compared to the plateau’s Muslims ... Inevitably, the pagan Galla heroes ...when they began their great migration to the plateau seemed even more inferior in the eyes of semetized Christian elites than the Somalis and Danakils” (page 145 par 2 line 1-5).

“...of the kings mistaken sequence of priorities and distorted perception of the Galla migration and the contempt in which he and Ethiopian society in general held these ‘uncouth and wild’ pastoralists” (Page 153, par 1, lines 3-7).

“... Writing his monograph about 1593 the monk Bahrey already found it difficult to comprehend how the numerically and culturally inferior Galla were able to overcome the numerous Ethiopians” (Page 166-167, par 4, line 4).

“..., lacking a sense of mission and generally uninterested in proselyting together with the ruling class, rejected

the “uncouth galla” and despised them.” (Page 169, par 2, line 11).

These are just a few of the quotes from the book which page after page delivers insults and derogatory diatribe to the Oromo and other peoples and religion of the region.

The spirit of hate is reviving in so many ways and in so many places – it is a cause for alarm.

Nagaan,
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New Book
Seyoum and Mohammed



OSA 2006 Annual Conference - Update

CONFERENCE SITE: the conference will be held at:

The University of Minnesota
Coffman Memorial Union
Great Hall
300 Washington Ave. S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55455-0110



ACCOMODATIONS: you may choose either a dormitory or a hotel:

Hotel:
Holiday Inn Metrodome
1500 Washington Ave S.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55454

A block of rooms are available to the conference participants. Please call 1800 448-3663 and reserve before July 4, 2006. The hotel rate is \$105.00 + tax.

To get this reduced rate one must request for the "Oromo Studies Association Conference rate". This hotel is a short walking distance from the conference site.

Dormitory:
The dorm is located at:
Centennial Hall
614 Delaware Street SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455

The dormitory rate is \$32.00/night/person, breakfast included. To reserve a dorm room, you can call Kim Araya at 612-624-0656 48 hrs before arrival. However, to guarantee availability it is recommended that reservation be made as early as possible. The Centennial Hall is adjacent to the conference hall.



OSA Panels (Tentative)

Welcome: OSA President
Welcome: U of M
Keynote Speech: Dabbasa Guyyo

Award Ceremony

Panel 1: Viability of the Economy of Oromia, (Sisay Ibsa's Memorial Forum)

Panel 2: Nationalism: Perspectives for the Horn

Panel 3: Nationalism and Democracy in the Horn, International Perspectives (Adam Jilo's memorial Forum)

Panel 4: Identity, Democracy and Nationalism under EPRDF

Panel 5: Challenges of the Oromo National Liberation Struggle and a roadmap

Panel 6: A Reassessment of Discourses in the Oromo National Quest for Political and Economic Power

Panel 7: Unity and Leadership (Waaqo Guutu's memorial Forum)

Panel 8: Human Rights, Recent and Historical Perspectives

Panel 9: Student movement

Panel 10: Building a United Front

Panel 11: Language and Tradition

Panel 12: Sustainability and Progress

Panel 13: Imagining Oromia and Ethiopia: Reflections on Political and Scholarly Discourse on Oromo and Ethiopian Identities

OSA Business Meeting, Members Only



Important: Paper submission is now closed and no more panels or papers will be accepted.



New Book

Title: Arrested development in Ethiopia: essays on underdevelopment, democracy, and self-determination; edited by Seyoum Y. Hameso and Mohammed Hassen.

Published by Red Sea Press, 2006.
ISBN: 1569022828 (hardcover); 1569022836 (pbk.)

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[Bibliographic record](#) and links to related information available from the Library of Congress catalog.

This new book, a cooperative output of so many scholars is a welcome addition to OSA library.



Materials on Sisay Ibsa, Adam Jilo, and Waqo Gutu

OSA is looking for materials such as photographs, memoirs, clips, videos, etc. on Sisa Ibsa, Adam Jilo, and Waqo Gutu. If you have anything related to these, or if you know who may have and share it with us, please drop me an email at abeyene@rohan.sdsu.edu. Your support is greatly appreciated.



Ad-hoc Committee Updates

Fund-raising: Dr. Bahiru Dhuguma's fund-raising project is going well. We are now very close to achieving our goal. **Please send your contribution to OSA treasurer listed below under Donations and membership dues.**

Membership: Dr. Misgana's new membership project is stuck at about 22 new members. He needs three more to acquire the target of recruiting 25 new members this year. This is a remarkable achievement indeed. If you have new candidates, please contact Dr Misgana at mkmuleta@yahoo.com.

Unity Project: Dr. Asafa Jalata's unity project is finalizing its brainstorming and research. Summaries of the findings of the group will be presented at OSA 2006 annual conference under Panel 5: Oromo Unity and Leadership.

OSA in Oromia: This project has been completed. I will submit a plan on expanding OSA in Oromia at OSA 2006 business meeting.



Update from other committees:

Last call for 2005 conference papers: If you presented a paper at OSA 2005 and still have not submitted your manuscript to Dr. Gobana Huluqa, please send it immediately. Dr. Gobana's email address is hulukgo@auburn.edu.



Letters from readers

Dear Dr Beyene,

I read your commentary about the history teacher at Mekelle University. I am disappointed that you focused on the history teacher but saved the university administration. The instructor will not last a day leave alone write a blasphemous textbook without full moral and financial support of the administration. As far as I am

concerned, the entire University must be declared discriminatory and unmerited and the system too. This is why Oromos should rethink this talk about unity with Abyssinians. Can't you see it doesn't work?

G. Gamachu
Australia



Mr. Asfaw Beyene, OSA President
Thank you for the letter about Sintayehu. This person is born in Oromia in Bale, Gobba and yet hates Oromos so passionately.

You should also know that some members of the University officials support him. They told Oromos who protested to go and get a gun and fight. They ignored our protests. The situation for Oromo students in Mekelle is very bad. We are treated differently and many discriminate against us. If you have an Oromo name, it is really difficult.

Odaa Jimma
Mekelle University



Asfaw: I admire and appreciate OSA's intelligence work for being able to discover such a book is in the making. However, I am not sure if appealing to the miserable xxx is the right thing to do -- bringing ourselves to his level, especially when it is obvious that this will only elevate his ego and unlikely to influence the decision his school has made.

B. D.
Washington DC



Please email your views and opinions to OSA president:

abeyene@rohan.sdsu.edu

for inclusion in this section of the newsletter. Texts may be edited for space and format consistency.



Donations and membership dues: Those who want to pay OSA dues, join as new members, or want to donate to OSA, please send your pledge to:

OSA
P. O. Box 7508
Silver Spring, MD 20907

Please note that all contributions are tax deductible.



Please, visit our web site:
<http://www.oromostudies.org>
for more information.

