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OSA Annual Conference 2023 Call for Papers

“Constructing the Future: Authoritarianism and the Quest for Oromo Sovereignty”

The 2023 OSA conference takes up a theme that is timely on a global scale, highlighting and exploring the immense potential contained in the vibrant cultural values, practices of resource management and historic legacies that were silenced and violently suppressed at the time of conquest and colonization during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The experience of the Oromo and other nations and peoples who were forcibly brought into the Ethiopian empire fits the same pattern of subjugation as peoples conquered militarily and directly colonized by European powers, yet it has gone unrecognized as such. Although an “Ethiopianist” interpretation – which claims 3000 years of shared history of the peoples in this region – has dominated the scholarship of Ethiopia, empirical evidence is to the contrary. The conference theme presumes that values developed by independent nations constitute an immense reservoir of societal knowledge and environmental wisdom available for constructing a collective future and thus deserves scholarly examination.

This widespread phenomenon of the emergence of wisdom and suppressed historical knowledge has given rise to new perspectives and rich studies of peoples in the process of emerging from colonized status. Among a multitude of ways that indigenous populations secure stability in the future, access and control over natural resources and agency to practice and employ cultural principles are essential components. Colonial forms of control and subjugation gave rise to multifaceted violent consequences – among which is the rise of authoritarian political systems and extractivist political economies. These practices notoriously restrict people’s resource sovereignty through physical removal of the material resources and by detaching people from spiritual and cultural sites tied to alternative ways of living on the land. Such disembodiment constitutes structural, symbolic, and mundane forms of violence (e.g., displacement, destruction of sacred spaces, environmental pollution, and disruption of livelihoods).

Oromo is a case in point. When Ethiopia was established in the late 19th century, the Oromo and other formerly autonomous nations lost sovereignty over their socio-cultural, spiritual and economic/material resources. Successive Ethiopian regimes have consistently used land and resource dispossession as a violent instrument of consolidating and maintaining state building. Oromo and other peoples who are indigenous to the Horn of Africa have been displaced from their ancestral land and disabled from developing their resources, subjected to poverty, landlessness, and environmental pollution. Similarly, colonial rulers in other parts of Africa legitimized displacement of native African population under the guise of development projects.

Nevertheless, domination and injustice are always resisted and defied by those who have been forcibly suppressed. They inevitably find clandestine means to express cultural articulations. In the Ethiopian context, imagining the future entails invoking the suppressed knowledge, culture and history of a society in order to resist past and current forms of domination and bring viable alternatives. A key question posed here is: How do scholars of the Oromo and other peoples in the



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Horn of Africa reflect on their past and re-imagine a common future amidst the successive authoritarian political orders that have prevailed and still prevail? OSA invites scholars to explore the many dimensions of this theme that are relevant to re-imagining many forms of sovereignty appropriate to the current era based upon such knowledge.

Scholars are invited to submit full abstracts for the 2023 Annual Conference on the following dimension of this general theme:

The Oromo Experience with Authoritarianism: Lost and Projected Futures

- The struggles of Oromo and others against successive forms of authoritarianism: past, present, future
- Oromo youth – aspirations, resistance, and uncertainties
- Lost and imagined futures as represented through art

Authoritarianism and Questions of Socio-Political Sovereignty

- Indigenous institutions, wisdom and practices employed in projecting an alternative future
- Principles of the Gadaa system employed in imagining a future self-determined Oromo
- Analysis of indigenous wisdom regarding social, economic, and environmental relations
- Oromo women’s articulation of the future through the Siinqee Institution

Authoritarianism and Questions of Resource Sovereignty

- Examining theoretical and epistemological debates regarding “resource sovereignty”
- Patterns of access and ownership of resources, particularly land rights, within authoritarian systems
- Projection of Oromo resource sovereignty specifically based in indigenous principles upheld by the Gadaa system
- Experiences of Oromo and other conquered peoples living with and resisting specific forms of extractivism
- Environmental pollution and issues of public health in Oromia and other peoples in the Horn

Fruits of Authoritarianism: the Political Ecology of Dominance through War and Famine

- The violence of minority rule: historical and contemporary background of war on Oromia and similarly dominated regions
- Case studies of livelihood disruption due to climate change, war and conflicts: evidence-based policy recommendations
- Documenting socio-economic consequences of war and famine in Oromia and other peoples in Ethiopia
- Issues of agricultural productivity and questions of food security
- Territorial expansion leading to displacement and conditions of IDPs (internally displaced people)
- The prospect for peace in Oromia – employing the concept of *nagaa*

Submissions are welcome for individual papers and panel proposals. Priority will be given to papers and panel proposals that apply the theme to contemporary political situations in Ethiopia.

Abstract submission deadline: May 31, 2023. Acceptance will be confirmed by June 15, 2023.

Submit proposals to: osaconferences2023@gmail.com

The conference will be held in-person on July 29-30, 2023, at the University of Maryland.