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Book Reviews

The Journal of Oromo Studies (JOS) is an international scholarly publication of the Oromo Studies Association which serves as a vehicle of expression for its members and others. It is a peer reviewed journal that is published biannually. The JOS seeks to promote and facilitate rigorous analysis, synthesis, and policy recommendations of scholars on any interdisciplinary issues pertaining to the Oromo nation. As such, the journal welcomes scientific research findings of scholars on the Oromo history, culture, society, politics, economy, system of government, science and technology, law, medicine, agriculture, and regional political and economic cooperation. The JOS will also consider other topics not listed above. The major criterion for acceptance of articles is that they demonstrate high academic and practical quality research which broadens the knowledge base about the Oromo people.

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Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict 1868–1992 116
Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Reinner Publishers, 1993. 232p. Hard Cover, Price $49.50. Asafa Jalata by Mohammed Hassen.

State Transformation and National Integration: Gedeo and the Ethiopian Empire, 1985–1935 119
East Lansing, Michigan: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1988, 194 pp. by Mohammed Hassen.

Managing Editor's Note

The special anniversary issue of the *Journal of Oromo Studies (JOS)* in many ways fits this year's conference theme of the Oromo Studies Association (OSA), "Oromia: Cultural Reconstruction for Liberation and Development." We believe that our readers will be on a discovery rendezvous of the hidden Oromo treasures: their system of government (the *Gada*), political culture, literature, language, and history.

Dr. Lemmu Baissa's article, "The Political Culture of *Gada*: The Building Blocks of Oromo Polity" examines some gada values and their possible contribution to the democratization process. He concludes that Oromo cultural values will provide extremely useful and powerful building blocks to create and institutionalize a political power that will lead the nation with dignity, liberty, and prosperity.

"Aspects of Oromo Political Culture" by Professor Herbert Lewis concludes that the Oromo share some elements of political culture, of ideology, and values despite some differences among various Oromo groups and regions. The "equality" and "democracy" concepts which are popular among the educated and politically sensitive Oromos seem to be a widespread and general part of their people's background. "Respect for law, for peace making elders, for assemblies, and the recourse to voluntary organizations with elected officials who should serve the community that elected them, and be responsible to them, is basic to the life of many Oromo country people."

In his article, "Oromo Literature, *Geerarsa*, and the Liberation Struggle," Dr. Addisu Tolesa demonstrates that *Geerarsa* serves as the treasury of the national Oromo literature in its role of cultural preservation for bilisummaa (liberation). He argues that "the *Geerarsa* singers play

in the restoration of Afaan Oromo. He, however, warns that its continued development without obstacles and interferences from Abyssinian rulers requires political protection—a state umbrella

Finally, we are indebted to all the contributors who painstakingly engaged in multi-faceted research to dig out of the ruins the Oromo national treasures (*Gada*, the Oromo language and literature, history, and socio-political economy). We also want to extend our appreciation to all the reviewers. There is no doubt that the scientific studies conducted in the past, in this issue, and future issues will concretely restore the Oromo cultural identity and guide them to liberation and development against all odds. The search for truth and justice is an indestructible force which will guarantee not only the continuity of the human spirit, but also the realization of its aspirations. The currently available studies on Oromo culture (especially, language), history, society, economy, etc. are only the tip of the iceberg. Scientific studies on some aspects of the Oromo Nation present both an opportunity and a challenge for Oromos and interested non-Oromos. The success of the Oromo Studies Association and *JOS*, therefore, depends on you. Although, *JOS* is at its infancy, we are encouraged by the qualities of submitted articles. Yet, based on the criteria set by the Board of Editors, some papers have been rejected and others have been recommended to undergo substantive revisions for acceptance. However, to ensure fairness to all contributors, we have adopted the double blind review process. Your contributions are certainly welcome.

Bichaka Fayissa
April 1994

Gada Values: The Building Blocks of A Democratic Polity

*by Lemmu Baissa**

Introduction

As peoples in the Horn of Africa (and over the entire continent) are struggling for the democratization of their politics and striving to uproot authoritarian regimes, it is necessary to discuss the decisive role political culture plays in influencing the liberalization process. While it is extremely difficult for an authoritarian culture to transform, a democratic political culture has greater advantages in assisting the creation of a democratic system of government.

It is in this light that this article briefly examines the Oromo political culture (gada) which can serve as the basis for the creation and institutionalization of a democratic political system. There have been several studies of the gada system's potential contribution to Oromo self government. Asmarom Legesse (1987), Lemmu Baissa (1971), Bonnie Holcomb (1993), Dinsa Lepisa (1975), Sisay Ibsa (1992) and several others have recently examined various aspects of the gada system and have reached useful conclusions. The paper will identify some gada values and their possible contribution to the democratization process.

Before discussing these values, it is necessary to dispel certain negative views about the gada system. While the gada political culture is admired by those who have carefully studied and placed it in its historical and cultural context, there are those who attempt to minimize its role in the formation of a democratic polity. In the past hundred years, most of the Amhara/Tigre elite who saw gada contradicting their autocratic-monarchical values and presenting an alternative political model have been critical and contemptuous. For them, the Oromo without kings were stateless, uncivilized, and without worthwhile culture.

After the Abyssinian conquest of the Oromo, the gada system was outlawed and suppressed. The new masters justified their conquest exaggerating disunity, inter-clan warfare and lack of a unitary monarchical government among the Oromo.

Most foreign Ethiopianist scholars naively pursued the official Abyssinian line and dismissed the gada system as politically irrelevant system of rituals, just as they dismissed other rituals among the rest of African societies. Some scholars dismissed the existence of a unifying gada system by referring to the exceptional case of the Hulle clan states of the Gibe region which evolved into monarchies in the mid nineteenth century. Gada rule among the rest of the republican Oromo at the time of Shoan conquest was either down-played or dismissed (Clapham, 1993).

As Asmarom Legesse (1987) correctly states, many European scholars since the colonial era found incomprehensible that an African nation could develop and enjoy elaborate and highly democratic institutions comparable to a Western concept of democracy. For instance, Edward Ullendorff showed contempt for Oromo and cushitic cultures of Ethiopia (Ullendorff, 73 and 111-112). Even the reputed Ethiopianist scholar Eike Haberland did not conceal his doubt that the gada system was a borrowed institution and not an Oromo invention. However, he could not produce any evidence of the culture or people from which the borrowing occurred (Legesse, 1973:282; Haberland, 777). Like the Abyssinians, such foreign scholars preferred to reject the gada system of law and government by classifying the Oromo as stateless. Such Eurocentric interpretation would deny the existence of any form of permanent and stable government for maintaining law and order and serving justice among the people.

Critics wrongly attack students of gada as romantic, nostalgic, and intentional political manipulators (Clapham, 1993). As more objective and honest students have shown, the gada system operated effectively among most of the Oromo until it was suppressed by King Menelik,

and still continues to operate among the southern Oromo at the present time. Despite official suppression, gada symbols and some practices went underground and have survived until the present time. Similarly, certain gada cultural values and principles have been kept alive among the people as recent activities and celebrations have shown throughout the Oromo regions. This article will focus on some cultural values of gada that can be used for creating and consolidating a democratic political system.

Oromo Political Culture

The Oromo are distinguished from other peoples in the Horn of Africa by their distinctive culture. All Oromo people, regardless of their differences in region and religion, mutually communicate and understand one another through their language, Oromiffa. Most Oromo people shared a common republican form of government until the Shoan conquest in the late nineteenth century. Even in the exceptional cases where monarchical states emerged among the Hulle clans of the Gibe region, a high degree of democratic practice survived and the kings never claimed divine origin or supra-natural attributes that other African kings claimed (Lewis, 1965: 123-24, 127). Most of the Gibe kings were distinguished from their people mainly by possession of more land and power.

Main Characteristics of Gada Political Values

Even though the concept gada could refer to the eight year period of government, or the *missensa* in power, or the whole system, in the context of this article it relates to the totality of the system of governance that was practiced among the Oromo. While some elements of the gada were borrowed by neighboring peoples in the Horn of Africa, it was most rigorously developed by the Oromo. Even though the exact date of its origin is unknown, informed Oromo elders claim that it has an ancient derivation. Some scholars like Dinsa Lepisa see close parallels between the gada system and Plato's *Republic* in which leaders were progressively trained until they eventually reached the stage of maturity to assume public responsibilities (Lepisa, 1975).

Gada was a complex system in which the Oromo were divided into five *"missensa,"* or *"parties"* and participated in military, political, legal and cultural affairs (Baissa, 1971). Each *missensa* or party had specific roles and functions to perform in five stages of eight years each. Roles and responsibilities began in "childhood," that is "social age" and not biological age, with an initiation into the system. Even though the terms slightly differed from region to region, all males in a "generational age," or social age in each *missensa* had to be initiated as *itimako* or *ilman gamme* in the first stage; this stage began the process of socialization into the gada culture. The second grade, *daballe,* continued the socialization process as well as beginning military training; the third stage, *folle* or *cusa*, performed military service under the direction of the *abba dula* and the *abba gada*. *Qondala* or *raba* was the fourth stage which had dual tasks of military service and preparation for leadership to take over power from the exiting *luba* or *gada* leaders.

The *qondala/raba* leaders served as apprentices to the ruling council and elected leaders from their own group at the end of the fifth year and prepared to take over power. They observed the ruling council, attended their meetings but were not given any decision-making capacity until the formal transfer of power at the end of the eighth year.

At the transfer of power, the waiting *missensa* would hold ceremonies and become the ruling party for a period of eight years. Its leaders exercised full decision-making power and responsibility regarding military and civil matters affecting the Oromo. The leaders of the previous *missensa* retired into an advisory role while the new leaders were entrusted with defense and governance of the Oromo nation.

The leaders of the ruling *missensa*, collectively known as luba, were organized into national and local councils who administered the nation democratically. The *luba* council served as the

legislative body. The council operated democratically and each member had the right to freely debate and oppose proposals considered unacceptable (Knutsson, 1967).

Executive responsibilities were assigned to few elected officials who were selected for specific roles and functions. At the apex was the *abba gada* or *abba boku* who presided over the *luba* council and the gada government. He was assisted by two elected deputies and the three collectively formed the *"warana saden,"* or a triumvirate (Lepisa, 1975; and Legesse, 1973:63).

Other elected leaders included the *abba dula* who was responsible for conduct of military campaigns and defense of the nation. The *irrecha* was responsible for rituals and prayers after public acts and decisions. *Abba saa* was responsible for public property. Judicial authority was entrusted to officials known for their integrity and knowledge of the laws. These and other assistants provided central leadership for the whole Oromo in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, according to available historical records (Yilma Deressa, 1959:216). Similar institutions were later duplicated for the regional confederacies, such as Tulama, Macha, Arsi, Ittu, Borana, etc. When the gada power was decentralized, some degree of uniformity was maintained through the *jila* pilgrimage to and consultation of the *abba muda*, at Haro Walabu, in Borana until very recent times (Knutsson, 1967: 148).

The Oromo also relied on elected *luba* leaders for administration of justice, maintenance of law and order, and leadership at the local level. The local councils followed gada laws and practices in the same way as the regional and central organizations.

The gada institutions at both national and local levels provided the Oromo with the mechanism for participation in public affairs or self-government. Officials were elected for fixed periods and functioned according to the law. The system was based on the rule of law and was opposed to despotic and authoritarian rule. The law also provided for removal of unfit or corrupt officials even before their term expired. The system was based on elaborate institutional checks and balances to safeguard the liberty of the people (Legesse, 1973: 68).

The gada system provided the mechanism for the recruitment and socialization of leaders and for a peaceful change of government every eight years. It permitted a smooth transfer of power as the incoming *missensa* elected its leaders and closely worked with the outgoing leaders for a couple of years before the actual assumption of power. The system stressed personal merit and qualities instead of relying on tribal, clan, religious or family connections for selection to top leadership.

Each *missensa* performed specific functions in five stages of eight years as active participants in the gada. As each *missensa* moved to higher level of responsibility, the one whose members completed service in the ruling stage retired while their sons were initiated to the first stage as *itimako* to continue the cycle all over again.

The gada system emphasized two major roles: the military and the political/legal. The gada system attached considerable importance to military training and service. Male youth were trained in the art of warfare from the *daballe* stage. Precision in throwing spears, skill in horse riding, and self-defense were basics learned early. The *folle/cusa* provided military service and were regarded, with the *qondola*, as the backbone of Oromo defense. The *folle* and the *qondala* were organized into squadrons and were led into campaigns by their *abba dula* or war leaders, under the general directives of the *abba gada*.

According to a Portuguese record of about 1548, Oromo forces were organized into several squadrons in campaigns of self-defense against Abyssinian forces in the Dawaro area (Castanhoso:228-31). Almeida, another Portuguese author, also reported in 1632 that 6000 to 8000 selected mounted warriors confronted enemy forces and created havoc in frequent encounters in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He further reported that the Oromos prized heroes and victory so much that they went to war determined either to conquer the enemy or die (Almeida: 137-38).

During military campaigns and crises, full power and responsibility were given to the *abba*

dula and the *abba boku* to conduct the campaigns and defend the people. Normal legislative and democratic deliberations were suspended and unlimited powers were conferred on the war leaders. The leaders relied frequently on accurate information gathered by selected scouts (known as *doya* or *simbirtu*) sent to enemy territory to assess the size and condition of their forces. When necessary, alliances and confederacies were organized to strengthen their forces and overwhelm the enemy. Usually they preferred surprise attacks to gain an edge over the enemy. After the end of campaigns and the state of emergency, a democratic rule was restored under civilian *luba* leadership and *abba dula*'s dictatorial powers ceased.

While almost all male Oromo got rudimentary military training and provided military service, the defense of the Oromo was also shared by women. Women helped in providing logistics and in protecting children and animals from enemies.

Abyssinian kings who realized the courage and skill of Oromo warriors always tried to recruit them into their armies to bolster their defense. Best examples were Susenyos, Menelik and Haile Selassie who used Oromo forces to stay longer in power. The gada culture emphasized military service and training to protect the people's cherished liberty and democratic government based on the rule of law (*sera-tuma chaffe*).

Political/Legal Role

The political and legal component of the gada provided leadership and rules and procedures which served Oromo society well, safeguarding their liberty against authoritarian rulers (Holcomb, 1993). The gada system provided for the Oromo:

1) the institutions for self-rule at central/regional and local levels
2) the right to participate in democratic self-rule at all levels
3) the respect for basic rights and liberties including freedom of speech, and the right to own private property, and the right to debate public issues and reach compromise solutions
4) the procedures for selection and peaceful change of leaders every eight years
5) the accountability of leaders and the right to recall *(bukisu)* those who fail in responsibilities
6) the concept of rule of law, *sera-tuma chaffe*
7) a balanced representation of clans and lineages in gada offices
8) the right to make laws and regulations through their own elected officials
9) the settlement of disputes according to the law through neutral and impartial bodies
10) and the concept of pluralism in participating in public affairs through five *missensa* or "parties."

The gada system as a whole provided, therefore, the machinery for democratic self-rule and enjoyment of maximum liberty for the people. It was the suppression of the system and subjugation to Abyssinian authoritarian feudal rule that oppressed the Oromo for the past hundred years. Nevertheless, Oromo democratic values and principles have survived as manifested in present day Oromo culture. Oromo liberation, therefore, necessarily, has to draw on its rich cultural heritage to be successful. The gada political culture can serve as a useful resource for the creation and consolidation of a democratic system for the Oromo.

Expected Contributions of Gada

Elements of gada's rich political culture can be useful both in the short and long term for restoring a respectable self-government, dignity and complete political, economic, and cultural rights which were lost after the conquest in the late nineteenth century. In the short run, the Oromo people will need to draw on their rich culture and history to attain their liberty. However, to what extent the military, political, and socio-economic elements can be used will be determined by the intensity of the struggle for democratic self-government by the Oromo people.

After the liberation, however, any dictatorial powers have to be replaced by democratic civilian rule. It is absolutely essential that the Oromo leadership avoid the temptation of establishing authoritarian rule using the underground liberation organization. Almost all other liberation movements in the Third World, including the Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front, Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front, etc. have resisted acceptance of a democratic rule and conversion to freely and genuinely competing civilian political parties after their victory. In accordance with past tradition and legacy, Oromo leadership has to accept pluralism and democracy just as their forefathers did. Therefore, in the long run, priority should be given to constitutional safeguards and respect for the rule of law. The political/legal aspects of the gada can be drawn upon for the consolidation and institutionalization of a democratic polity. Since fundamental democratic principles and values have survived to the present in Oromo culture, political socialization to the democratic system can readily be achieved. Democratic institutions which operated under the gada can be mobilized (with modifications when necessary) to create a viable and lasting democracy for the people.

Based on the experience and tradition of gada, legislative assembly *(chaffe)*, the executive and judiciary bodies can be created for institutionalizing political power. When necessary, foreign practices can be borrowed to further refine these institutions. The legislative assembly will be the supreme law making body; the executive, composed of periodically elected officials, will be responsible for administration and formulation of policy; and an independent judiciary will interpret the law. The military will defend the nation in accordance to the constitution subject to civilian supreme command.

Besides the central institutions, there will be local governments where elected assemblies and officials freely deliberate on matters of local concern. Instead of dictating to the local government, the national government will provide the needed financial and technical assistance allowing maximum self-rule for the people.

Drawing on the gada political tradition and values, basic democratic freedoms and civil liberties can constitutionally be guaranteed and safeguarded. These include freedoms of speech, assembly, association, criticism of public officials, as well as freedom of religion, and the right to own private property. The right to elect and be elected to public offices, periodic peaceful change of leaders through popular elections and mass participation can be indispensable contributions derived from gada values. Strict accountability and responsibility of officials have to be ensured through legislative investigation and public scrutiny. A balanced representation of different sections of society at national and local levels have to be encouraged through popular partisan organizations.

In conclusion, Oromo's rich political culture and values can definitely serve as the foundation for creating viable institutions for a democratic society. While drawing upon such rich cultural resources and legacies, it is possible to borrow useful foreign practices, whenever necessary, to further enrich and consolidate the institutions. Therefore, with skillful and careful guidance, Oromo cultural values will provide extremely useful and powerful building blocks to create and institutionalize a political power that will lead the nation with dignity, liberty and prosperity.

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Aspects of Oromo Political Culture

*by Herbert S. Lewis**

Introduction

I was invited to participate in the *Symposium on the Making of a New Ethiopian Constitution*, held in May 1993 in Addis Ababa (Finfinie), to speak about the Oromo, with specific reference to their traditional system of law and governance. I took up the challenge, among other reasons because I believe that the subject is very relevant to the issues dealt with by symposium, and I tried to generalize about certain Oromo values and activities that appear to be widely shared despite their large population size spread over different geographical regions.

In my talk, I explicitly addressed the issues raised by the syposium participants in their introductory remarks in which they stressed the problem of political culture, the creation of a civil society, and a civic culture in Ethiopia in the *absence* of democratic traditions. I presented the case for the existence of democratic, perhaps, "republican" values and practices among the Oromo who make up a large portion of the population in Ethiopia.

Oromo Political Culture and Values

In the background document of the syposium, it was stated that "the nation (Ethiopia) could not draw on a democratic tradition" and "Peasant and neighborhood associations served less as deliberative bodies than as instruments of governmental intervention in social life." I suggested that in important ways, this is *not* true of the Oromo people who do have both democratic traditions and are used to deliberation in organizations and assemblies. In the discussions, my focus was primarily on the the *more general values and practices* upon which a number of institutions are based and which are probably related to the spirit if not the specific organization of *gada*.

Today the idea of *gada* holds a central position among Oromo. On the one hand *gada* represents the epitome of Oromo-ness—a distinctive set of institutions seen as uniquely Oromo. On the other, it stands as a statement of ideology and values—egalitarian and democratic—in explicit contrast to the powerful hierarchical and autocratic style of the Amhara, with their emperor, nobles, lords and peasants.

In my talk, however, I discussed *gada* only briefly, preferring to concentrate on practices and institutions that I had seen in operation from my first visit in 1958 to my most recent visit in 1991. I believe that *gada* itself rests upon a wider set of principles and practices which are more a part of everyday life at present for most Oromo. These principles, which I shall call "republican," include:

1 Local self-help and self-government through free choice of associates, membership in associations, and debate in assemblies (*ch'afe;* gumi). Oromo are used to gathering together in various sorts of assemblies to discuss and reach decisions together.

2. Election of leaders who serve at the request of and the pleasure of the community—their constituency rather than their subjects.

3 These officials have specific functions, as they are chosen to carry out a variety of tasks on behalf of the group.

4 As in *gada*, officials *may* serve for a limited term, after which they will be replaced by others.

Because these practices are reminiscent of the basis of government in republican Athens, as described by Aristotle in "The Athenian Constitution," I refer to them as "republican." In addition to these distinctive practices, I would mention three major "themes" or values that I believe underlie the spirit of Oromo social and political life:

1. There is an idea of "law," both customary law *(ada)* and more specifically "legislated" or decided upon and proclaimed law, *sera*.

2. There is high value placed upon peace *(naga)* and reconciliation *(arara, ararsa)* within the political community. The highest value is placed on the maintenance and restoration of peace, harmony, healing the breach among people (kin and neighbors etc.), and within communities and associations.

3. *K'it'e*—or equality—In western Shoa, at least, I encountered the notion that all participants in a group are to be considered and treated as equals—even if in reality some are richer and more powerful than others. The participation and input of all are permitted, even expected, and all have equal responsibilities to the group. There is an implicit concept of "citizen" here as against that of "subject." A more detailed discussion of these priciples and institutions are as follows

Gada

There is a written account of the institution of *gada* among the Oromo for more than 400 years. According to Asmarom Legesse's definition (1973:8), "The gada system is a system of classes (luba) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political and ritual responsibilities. Each gada class remains in power during a specific term (gada) which begins and ends with a formal power transfer ceremony." What this means is that a group of men, ideally of about the same age who are initiated together, pass through a series of grades, and when their time comes they take over the governing of their people for an eight year period. They elect officers among themselves, and administer the people, but they must also satisfy and convince the assembly of the whole people to whom they are ultimately responsible.

As noted above, the basic elements of this system are "republican" in nature. These include: (1) *Elected officials* who have (2) *specific functions* (as chair of the assembly, war leader, "assessor," ritual leader, proclaimer of the laws, etc.); (3) hold "power" during a specific *limited term of office*—but are *subject to recall* if necessary. (4) The officers are expected to lead, but are dependent upon the *will of an assembly*.

From a historical and ethnographic point of view, it is probable that once upon a time all the ancestors of today's Oromo participated in such a system as informed Oromo elders argue. Variants of such an age-grade and age-class system are also found throughout East Africa, and among other peoples of southern Ethiopia as well. These include such groups as Konso, Gedeo, Sidama, and others speaking Eastern Cushitic languages. Over time, however, *gada* was eroded more and more by the growing power of Oromo war leaders, landlords, kings, and the spread of Islam. It was also banned after the conquest and the rule of the *neft'enya* under the empire.

Nevertheless there are some areas in which *gada* is or until recently was still operating, as among the Borana, Gabra, and Guji, others in which *gada* rituals are performed even though their political functions are now largely symbolic, as among some Mech'a groups. Apparently there have also been recent attempts to revive some *gada* rituals in certain Oromo districts and we may certainly expect more to follow.

As noted, *gada* holds a central place in the thinking of many Oromo both because it represents the epitome of Oromo-ness, a distinctive set of institutions uniquely theirs, and because it stands as a statement of the values they want to stress: egalitarianism and democracy. They are very interested in the potential uses for this political tradition. Whatever the historical accuracy of their picture of gada in the past or the practical possibilities for *gada* in the future, the claims of these Oromo nationalists are important as a statement of their values and hopes. In the next section, I will argue that, even without *gada*, however, the Oromo often operate on the basis of very similar values and utilize some of the same organizational principles.

In stressing that democratic values and practices may exist without the functioning of the political

aspects of *gada*, I do not mean to deny its importance is *undeniable* (a) in those areas where it still exists; (b) as a historically important phenomenon and a basic element in the formation of current Oromo values and attitudes. This is to say that democracy, egalitarian attitudes, and "republican" institutions can co-exist even in the absence of operational forms of *gada* because of its legacy of democratic political culture

Democracy in Oromo Life

My own experience among the Oromo was in two rural Oromo areas. The first was in Jimma, a predominantly Muslim region which had once had its own monarchy; the second was western Shoa, an area where the Oromo religion held sway and whose major leaders in the 1960s were spirit mediums *(k'allu)*. Despite the differences in religion between these two groups, I also found important similarities. In both, there was an emphasis on community, the putative equality of the members of organizations and communities, or cooperation, on the need for peace among members and for reconciliation when there was a breach of the peace and conflict. There was also an emphasis on choice of association with others (through friendship and voluntary associations), a recognition of individual achievement, respect for elders who can offer their time, knowledge, and wisdom to settle disputes, and organizations run through the consensus of the group as well as the election of functionally specific officials who are supposed to serve on behalf of those groups.

In principle, all members were treated as equals regardless of wealth differences, or origin. Thus even newcomers, or people of different ethnic backgrounds, such as Amhara farmers, were accepted as full members of these associations if they accepted the local norms and participated with everyone else. I have discussed these patterns in some detail in several articles (1970, 1974, 1989, 1990, n.d.), but let me just mention two examples which have some relevance to the current deliberations.

In western Shoa, much of social life is organized through the medium of voluntary associations, each with its formal rules, its roster of members, its elected leaders, its insistence upon the equal rights and obligations of all—and mechanisms to safeguard these rights and assure these obligations. Preeminent among these is the *iddir*, a mutual aid association that is the primary element uniting otherwise dispersed homesteads spread out over the hills. In addition, they are enthusiastic participants in *mhaber* (another "fraternal" organization for mutual aid and entertainment); *ek'ub*, rotating credit associations which pool the members' monthly contributions and then distribute them to individuals; and lineage associations *(lemmi k'it'e)*, also organized with elected leaders who work for the advancement and well-being of their members.

Now it may be objected that *iddir*, *mhaber*, and *ek'ub* are well known from other parts of Ethiopia, and that they are not of Oromo origin. But I believe there is evidence that there were forerunners to *iddir*, at least, among the Oromo even before the introduction of exact institution, and that these Oromo farmers utilize the system in a spirit that is very distinctive. Because they found the institutions useful, the Oromos in these regions have adopted and operated them democratically and in congruous with their culture. These institutions have generally been described in the literature as urban in origin, and serving a function for deracinated city dwellers. Rural farmers are just as enthusiastic in the use of these institutions as the urban dwellers. In Jimma, the *abba laga* and the *abba jarsa* organized similar activities.

Voluntary Associations

The following section briefly describes the use and organization of voluntary associations in just one Oromo district of western Shoa, as they were operating in the mid-1960s. I understand that they continue to operate the same way today, despite the changes in local organization imposed by the Derg. I must emphasize that this is just one Oromo community out of the innumerable

possible ones, but I suggest that it does represent the spirit, if not the letter, of Oromo political culture.

The most important voluntary association in western Shoa, *iddir*, unites perhaps 50 to 150 households in an organization that arranges burials and funerals, supports the bereaved, and offers aid to members in time of misfortunes such as the death of an ox or the loss of a house and its contents in a fire. Although in general people belong to the group nearest them, membership is based on choice and it is possible for a family to join more than one *iddir* or to choose a group further from home, if their relations with their immediate neighbors are not as good as they should be.

Each *iddir* has formal rules of procedure, a set of elected officers, a written roster of members, and maintains a record of the members' performance of their obligations. These obligations include attendance at funerals, the preparation of food for the mourning family, contributions of money for funerals and for other extraordinary needs of members in trouble, and a contribution of labor for rebuilding houses, and in the fields of those who lose family members or oxen through death. *Iddir* holds business meetings at least once a month, at which time they handle litigation arising from members' failure to carry out their obligations. Fines are levied against those who fail to attend, to work, or to contribute. After the business is finished the assembled men drink beer and eat bread and offer blessings *(ebba, ebbisa)* to Wak'a and the spirits *(ayana)*.

In important ways the *iddir* had taken on the function, in western Shoa, of a general community organization, potentially involving every household and all members in a democratic association with elected leadership, formal rules, and a forum for debate about community problems. Here is the *ch'afe* in action! The other organizations, *mhaber, ek'ub,* and the lineage associations, operated on smaller scales, were perhaps shorter lived, but involved similar principles of organization and the same emphasis on equality, following rules, and maintaining and restoring peace among the membership through reconciliation.

It is interesting that these associations, whose formal elements are apparently recent borrowings from other groups, should have come to play such a leading role in the life of the community, probably far exceeding their importance in their places of origin. I believe this is because they were so very appropriate to Oromo political culture with its stress upon *voluntary association, self-rule, debate, and leadership by elected officials*. They seem to have filled the vacuum created by the absence of other local leaders and the distant and alien nature of the imperial regime.

Conflict Resolution

Despite the desire for harmony, peace, and the carrying out of obligations, people will often fall short of the ideal, will default on their obligations, will disappoint, and will come into conflict with their neighbors, kin, and compatriots. It then is necessary to heal the breach, find reconciliation, and restore the peace. The following describes the manner in which rural Oromo in western Shoa attempt to do this.

When a dispute arises the first resort is to call in mediators at the local level. The litigants meet before from 3 to 8 or more of their neighbors and plead their cases. Sometimes a group may be gathered in the moment of a crisis, calling upon those present or within hailing distance at the time to serve as mediators on the spot. More often, a date will be set for a Sunday or a saint's day and a Mediation Council of five members called "*Shanee*" or "*Shanacha*" is formed. Together, the mediators and witnesses will be asked to come to help solve the dispute.

There are certain men who will frequently be asked to preside over the "*Shanacha*" Council and their judgements are particularly respected. They are not necessarily old or rich but they may be either. What is most important in the eyes of the community is that they are noted for their altruism, their willingness to give their time, their knowledge of custom and precedent, and their good sense, to help solve their neighbors problems and restore the peace.

These moots are considered to be meeings of equals *(k'it'e)* for the purpose of reconciling neighbors, kin, and others in conflict. The term used most often for these sessions is *arara*, reconciliation. They are not trials and do not aim to punish but to make peace. As K. E. Knutsson (1967, p 112) has observed, "A good solution is... one which can be accepted by both parties at dispute, even if the one who seems to be right must give way a little, and judgement on the one who appears guilty is partly mitigated."

The litigants, their witnesses, and the mediators sit outside, under a tree, listen to the various parties and discuss the case at length. Frequently they send the litigants some distance away while their opponents are speaking so as to discourage the heated arguments and contradictions which would occur if both were present at the same time. The tone of the discussions is *supposed* to be one of reasonableness and the litigants are supposed to show respect for the mediators.

After discussion, which can continue for a long time, the mediators will try to agree on a course of reconciliation, a reasonable solution which will, they hope, be seen by the disputants as being as good a deal as they can hope for. If they fail to reach a settlement at a given session, they may well call another one, perhaps, involving still more respected mediators, and try again. But if they fail, there are no more sanctions available at this level of adjudication other than the sanction of negative public opinion. In western Shoa, however, there are two higher levels to which people could turn. One of these is the government courts which were run by outsiders, in Amharic, and applied non-Oromo laws. The others were Kallu courts in which respected elders attempted to resolve disputes using the same principles of *arara* (peace) as courts at the lower levels (Lewis, 1989, ; Knutsson, 1967). The mediation courts are apparently flourishing today helping people solve their problems and keeping order accorcding to the democratic Oromo principles.

Summary

Despite some of the differences among various Oromo groups and regions, they share some elements of a political culture, of ideology and values. The "equality" and "democracy" that the educated and politically-aware elite speak of seem to be a widespread and general part of their people's background. Respect for law, for peace-making elders, for assemblies, and the recourse to voluntary organizations with elected officials who should serve the community that elected them, and be responsible to them, is basic to the life of many Oromo country people. These are qualities that could have great importance for a redesigned Ethiopian political system, at least for those regions where the Oromo could be in a position to design their own.

I would like to be clear about several points:

1. I am not basing my claims of an Oromo political culture of a democratic/republican sort solely, or even primarily, on *gada*. *Gada* is only one part of the picture, albeit a very big part of it historically and in some regions today.

2. I am not necessarily suggesting that a giant revival of *gada* be attempted for today's world—although insofar as *gada* means meeting in assembly, elected officials, the rotation of office holders after a fixed term of office, debate about and proclamation of the laws, there is certainly nothing inimical to "modern" practice about it. (Indeed, steps are evidently being taken in Region 4 [Oromia] to create something like *gada* assemblies, officials, and courts, I believe. I am sorry I do not know more about this yet.)

3. I am not "idealizing traditional culture" nor propagating a "myth of the cooperative peasant." I recognize that Oromo fought wars using *gada*, and that people broke the rules of *sera* and *ada* just as individuals in *any* society break laws and try to twist the rules to their own advantage. It is the fact, of course, that individuals and groups come into conflict and break customary usages in *any* society, and this is what necessitates recourse to *arara* and other forms of conflict resolution.

Concluding Remarks

My aim at the symposium on the constitution was to point out that there may be much more of a grassroots democratic tradition in Ethiopia than has been generally recognized and acknowledged. There may be more of a basis for "civil society" and a "civic culture," for "assertive civic action," than has been utilized in the past. As with many other aspects of behavior and culture, the standard view of Ethiopia is very often formed by the nature of society in the north—and is viewed from a northern perspective. Things may look quite different when seen from the perspective of the east, west, and south (See Lewis, 1993). Patterns of cooperation, organization for joint action, and group decision-making, may be more alive and adaptable than has been previously acknowledged.

I suggested that the broadening of the political life of Ethiopia, and the opening up of it to millions of new participants (10s of millions, perhaps), may have the side-effect of introducing more elements of a democratic political culture than previously existed in Ethiopian politics at the regional and national level. (There could hardly be less, of course.)

I indicated my hope it will be possible to make creative use of this spirit and these institutions, and to build upon them. It would be a mistake to continue to try to weaken them, destroy them, or control them, making them instruments of central control, as the Derg tried to do with the *k'ebelle* and "peasants associations." If they are nurtured and permitted to flourish they could play a vital role in the political life of a new Ethiopia.

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Oromo Literature, *Geerarsa*, and the Liberation Struggle

*by Addisu Tolesa**

Introduction

The verbal art of *Geerarsa* is the treasury of the national literature of the Oromo people. A type of folksong,[1] its name is the noun form derived from the imperative *geerar*, which means "Sing!" Creating and recreating on the basis of themes, phrases, and stanzas available in the *Geerarsa* tradition, the singer, writes Ruth Finnegan, can impose more or less originality in his composition.[2] However, *Geerarsa* has remained one of the most important media for expressing and articulating the oppression and discrimination of the Oromo by successive Abyssinian/ Ethiopian colonial rulers for more than a century.

Contemporary *Geerarsa*, some of which is presented in this paper, concentrates on the Oromo struggle for the right to self-determination, including independence from the current occupation of Oromiya, land of the Oromo, by yet another group of Abyssinian/ Ethiopian rulers led by the Tigrai Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). The TPLF, which prefers to call itself the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), thus demonstrates that it is the successor determined to keep the imperial state of Ethiopia, with the exception of Eritreans, its kith and kin. The following lines of *Geerarsa* clearly illustrate the frustration of the Oromo:

Arganii Dhabuu Kanaa "Having seen and not finding/possessing it"
Nu Baraari Waaqayyo "Oh! Have mercy upon us, Waaqayyo!"

The idiomatic expression of "having seen and not finding/possessing it" refers to the short-lived "Peace Conference" period of mid-1991, when the Charter for the transitional government of Ethiopia was prepared and signed by various liberation groups, including the TPLF/EPRDF and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). In the Charter, fundamental human rights—freedom of expression, press, movement, and assembly—as well as individual and group rights were guaranteed. Any group or nation that felt its rights and freedoms were taken away, infringed upon, or discriminated against could withdraw from the transitional government. The TPLF/EPRDF has repeatedly violated the Charter and renewed its attack on the Oromo nation, culture, and way of life—violations that have been reported, witnessed, and documented by international observers. Consequently, the OLF has withdrawn from the transitional government. In this sociopolitical context, contemporary *Geerarsa* proclaims how the struggle for Oromo self-determination can be instrumental in securing other more basic values,[3] such as Oromo cultural preservation, self-defense, the survival of the nation, and justice. All of these are summed up in what currently appears to be the most popular word in the Oromo language—*Bilisummaa*.

Geerarsa in the Preservation of Culture for *Bilisummaa*

There are many reasons for the necessity of preserving the Oromo culture. Some maintain that the Oromo have made big gains in the last two years of struggle. After all, Oromiya has been placed on the map and Oromiffa, the Oromo language, is allowed to develop, so why call for the preservation of Oromo culture? But are Oromo resources benefiting the natives, or are they being illegally taken away to benefit Tigrayans in Tigrai? Are the Oromo as a nation being singled out, unjustly treated, suppressed, and summarily forced out of their jobs, jailed, or killed because of their different political views from those of the TPLF/EPRDF?

The term "culture" as used in this paper is limited to the distinct Oromo way of life. This

includes their cultural heritage, their language Oromiffa, the literature/*Geerarsa*, and such traditional values as cooperation, sense of belonging to the community, care for one another as brothers and sisters, and accountability for their words and actions, as enshrined in their democratic tradition, *Gadaa*. In articulating the continued Oromo struggle for freedom and independence—*Bilisummaa*—from alien occupation, the *Geerarsa* singer emphasizes the need for the preservation of Oromo culture, way of life, and identity when singing the following:

Yoggas Maa Wallaaltanii	"Then, why didn't you [all Oromo] know"
Akka Waa Nua'sseenee	"that something alien came into us [Oromiya]?"

The song refers to the TPLF/EPRDF occupation of Oromiya. By illegally entering Oromo territory, the occupiers took innocent lives and robbed the Oromo of economic opportunities and growth while making these opportunities available to others, mainly Tigrayans and Eritreans, who have been illegally shipping away valuable resources.[4] With the current geopolitical condition in which the Oromo are victimized, politically persecuted, and ruthlessly exploited in their own country, preserving culture-values such as cooperation and respect for the democratic tradition (*Gadaa*) becomes ever more important.

As Allen Buchannan writes, culture is valuable first and foremost because of its contribution to the lives of individuals,[5] providing the sense of belonging and community that in the case of the Oromo has been weakened by the onslaught of Abyssinian occupation. Further, as Buchannan points out, "culture provides an appropriate structure for individuals to connect what otherwise would be fragmented in a coherent, mutually supporting way, offering ideals of wholeness and continuity not only across the stages of human life but over generations as well."[6] The current *Geerarsa* texts also show how culture provides meaningful ideas in the Oromo vision of democracy and struggle for *Bilisummaa*, as well as their ideas of war as a means for self-defense and aspiration for peace (*Nagaa*). In what appears to be a warning about the consequences of not using or being informed by the structure the cultural tradition provides, not pulling their resources together for building a viable organization as well as unity of purpose for *Bilisummaa* may allow others, such as the TPLF, to take away the *Nagaa*, "peace," they value most.

The following *Geerarsa* text reminds all Oromo of the urgency of having a strong organization and unity of purpose in the process of the preservation of culture. The text was sung by a chorus in a call from the audience. Usually the lead singer starts the *Geerarsa* song, but in this case his informed audience begins as follows:

Text	**Translation**
1. *Maddii Killee Leensaa, Killee Leensaa*	Where rich, green grass is plentiful
2 *Dheeddi Fardeenille, Fardeenillee*	There, horses graze
3 *Namuu Gamtaanqabnee, Gamtaanqabnee*	People without unity of purpose
4. *Gamtaa Waliingallee, Waliingallee*	Organization without coherence
5. *Jettii Jarreenillee, Jarreenillee*	Aliens will pick on and point fingers to exploit you

The chorus draws attention to the familiar Oromo landscape, the rich green pastures ideal for grazing horses (lines 1-2). This seems to be reminiscent of the historical period when horses played a significant role in Oromo self-defense against Abyssinian/ Ethiopian occupation. The chorus alludes to the history of the Oromo under occupation, during which the "divide and rule" colonial policy has been applied to weaken the colonized people. The colonizers point fingers at the people they occupy, alleging that they have neither a viable organization nor unity of purpose (lines 3-5). Thus, the colonizers attempt to justify their conquest,[7] exploitation, and colonial rule.

The message of the chorus is to be found in the emphasis placed on the significance of individual members' commitment to the preservation of culture and societal goals of independence, *Bilisummaa*. The cooperation and consistency of individuals contributing to organizational unity will make a difference in the success or failure of the struggle for *Bilisummaa*. Further, the chorus points out the fact that the enemy/occupiers claim to know what is good for the Oromo. Accordingly, the occupiers believe that the Oromo as a nation cannot achieve their goal because they lack unity.

The lead singer then responds to the audience's call as follows:

Text	**Translation**
1. *Boqqollo Qonnaan Badee, Yaa Ijoollee*	When the corn we planted was lost, oh children!
2. *Garbuu Qonnaan Maseene*	And the barley gave no return
3. *Yoggas Maa Wallaaltanii*	Then why didn't you all know it?
4. *Yoggas Maa Wallaaltanii*	Then why didn't you all know it?
5. *Akka Waa Nua'seenee*	That a stranger entered into Oromiya
6. *Dambalii Lamuu Gadaa*	The beautiful green land of *Gadaa*
7. *Ganda Yaa Baabbii Sayyoo*	Place of Babbi Sayyo
8. *Arganii Dhabuu Kanaa*	And this seeing and not possessing it
9. *Nu Baraari Waaqayyo*	Oh! have mercy upon us, Waaqayyo
10. *Nu Baraari Waaqayyo*	Oh! have mercy upon us, Waaqayyo
11. *Nu Baraari Waaqayyo*	Oh! have mercy upon us, Waaqayyo

The whole verse of this *Geerarsa* refers to the 1991-92 Oromo experience with the TPLF/EPRDF. The singer hints at the pros and cons of the "peace" experiment. He refers to the OLF signing the Charter of the transitional government as a positive step, but decries the TPLF/EPRDF's repeated violations of the agreement, which made a mockery of it and ensured its failure.

The singer uses the imagery of crop failure, corn, and barley metaphorically to describe the disaster the Oromo are facing under TPLF occupation. If every member of the peasant family does not cooperate and contribute his or her fair share to the work of planting, weeding, and working on the field after the crop is planted, then crop failure is eminent (lines 1-5). The singer underscores that all Oromo should not forget their cultural values, such as cooperation, but should preserve them. Obviously, failure to maximize their cooperative effort by not contributing their fair share will be catastrophic.

The singer reiterates that if the Oromo, under colonial occupation, lose their vision of cooperation and individual contribution to the collective goal and common good, *Bilisummaa*, then they cannot defend themselves and their survival will be at stake. Preserving their culture and values will enable them to regain their vision and struggle for *Bilisummaa*. He artistically and vividly paints the beauty and fertility of Oromiya, land of *Gadaa*, which experienced some short-lived relative freedom that can be measured as a success during 1991-92, and then lost it (lines 6-8). He prays to Waaqayyoo for forgiveness, reminding his audience that they should never undermine the importance of meditation. That is why almost all public (and private) meetings of Oromo elders and cultural experts begin and end with prayer, so that such a loss will not happen again (lines 9-11).

Geerarsa, Literature for the Mobilization of Resources

Because of the continuous Abyssinian/Ethiopian colonial oppression and discrimination against the Oromo, laments the *Geerarsa* singer, the Oromo values and culture are under assault. By attacking their way of life and weakening the nation through occupation, as discussed earlier,

the TPLF/EPRDF has been taking away Oromo resources, thereby depleting the national wealth.[8] Consequently, the Oromo quality of life has been deteriorating.

Many recent visitors to Oromiya report the people's increasing sense of cultural identity and their determination to fight for and reclaim their resources. Accordingly, most Oromo are bonding together and realigning, thus contributing to the struggle for *Bilisummaa*. A letter in June 1993 from a friend reads:

> "... *harra'a biyya Oromia keessa diinni akka barbaade hinnaanna'u. Tigronnis/ Eritronni waggaa baayee boodde akkuma bilisooman Oromoonis tattaafataa jira hafee hinha-fuu i dafee hinta'u... Yoomiyyuu caalaa sabnikeenya Bilisummaaf qophaa'wsaa isin warra bakkee jirtaniif humna guddaadha*." (Translated: "... Today the enemy cannot roam Oromia as it desires. Just as the Eritreans, after many years, achieved their independence, it may take a while, but it certainly will happen. More than ever the people are determined and ready for independence. This may be good news for the Oromo in diaspora.")

With this encouraging report on the mobilization and determination of Oromo in the bitter struggle for *Bilisummaa*, the *Geerarsa* singer re-articulates the significance of preserving cultural and traditional values.

The singer emphasizes the loss of values and traditional culture as the primary problem for many Oromo. In the following text, he poetically uses meat, which has become unaffordable, to indicate the depletion of resources

	Text	**Translation**
1	*Garaachi Birrii Bitee*	When the stomach costs a Birr
2	*Yaa Ijoollee*	Oh children!
3	*Xeeriin Alaada Baaftee*	And the intestines cost half a Birr
4	*Fooniif Garaan Nacitee*	Then, I knew I could not afford to buy red meat
5	*Lammiin Lammii Kasasnaan*	When the Oromo turned against one another
6	*Lammiin Lammii Dhiigsinaan*	When relatives and members of the same people/ nation bled each other
7	*Firaaf Garaan Nacitee*	Then I lost hope for friends
8	*Kam Himannee Kam Dhiifnaa*	In this worsening time, which of our problems shall we address?
9	*Kam Himannee Kam Dhiifnaa*	In this worsening time, which of our problems shall we address?
10	*Firatu Firatt Diina*	It is worse when friends turn against one another
11	*Firatu Firatt Diina*	It is worse when friends turn against one another
12	*Ciriqu Godhee Nahidhee*	Ciriq *[onomatopoeic]* having held it strengthened
13	*Yaa Ijoollishee*	Oh children
14	*Akka Lolooso Kormaa*	Just like the yoke of the bull
15	*Dil Godhee Na'ukkaamsee*	Dil *[onomatopoeic]* having held me to suffocate
16	*Hinaaftuun Biyya Ormaa*	The alien occupier
17	*Gammoojiin Dheebuu Hammaataa*	The main problem of the lowland is thirst
18	*Lagarraa Infagaatinaa*	Better to stay by the riverside
19	*Halagaan Bulee Hammaataa*	The alien occupier becomes more brutal each passing day
20	*Firaaraa Infagaatinaa*	You need to bond and stay close
21	*Firaaraa Infagaatinaa*	You need to bond and stay close
22	*Firaaraa Infagaatinaa*	You need to bond and stay close

In lines 1-4, the singer describes how conditions have been worsening and the cost of living increasing so that even such food items as the stomach (*Garacha*) and intestines (*Xeerii*) have become expensive. Therefore, he could not afford buying meat. Similarly, he says that he has given up on friendship because even relatives who used to support one another started to take each other to court, thus hurting one another (lines 5-7). He says that they do not even know which of their problems they can talk about and which they can leave out when friends have become like enemies (lines 8-11).

The singer uses onomatopoeic expressions and the familiar farm implements to describe how the brutal occupation of alien forces, the TPLF/EPRDF, has imposed repression and suffocated him. Then he sings of the hot lowland terrain of Oromiya, advising people to always stay by the riverside where they can find water, because people get thirsty from the heat. Likewise, using the word "riverside" poetically as a way of connecting people for safety, he advises the Oromo to stay together, realign, and strengthen their unity of purpose for *Bilisummaa* because foreign occupation forces become more brutal each passing day (lines 12-22). Just like people die in the heat of the lowlands from lack of water, the Oromo, without preserving their culture, without realignment and mobilization of resources, may be at risk.

In the following song text, the *Geerarsa* lead singer continues to use plants and animals metaphorically (lines 1-4) to make a political point:

Text	**Translation**
1. *Gatamaatti Irkatanii*	If one leans against a creeping plant
2. *Yaa Ijoollishee*	Oh children!
3. *Gatamaatti Irkatanii*	If one leans against a creeping plant
4. *Boyyeen Lagatt Galti*	The pigs live in the valley
5. *Gantuudhan Maria'tanii*	If one reveals one's plan of action to a traitor
6. *Booddee Namatt Malti*	Then one will be betrayed
7. *Warri Miila Kabeelaa*	Those foreign occupiers with lame legs
8. *Biyyakeenyatt Achi Adeemaa*	They are heading toward our country
9. *Warri Taitaa Qabatee*	Those who are heavily armed
10. *Warri Aango Balla'tee*	And those who think they have unbeatable force
11. *Ashkarii Nu Kajeela*	They want us as their servants
12. *Du'i Hintaanu Ashkarii*	But we will never be their servants
13. *Biyyaallee Baana Malee*	Even if it means leaving Oromia
14. *Biyyoollee Taana Male*	And we prefer death to slavery
15. *Biyyoollee Taana Male*	And we prefer death to slavery

The word *gatama*, the name of a creeping plant, is used in reference to the shaky political situation. Because the *gatama* is not strong, one cannot depend on it for support. The singer uses the imagery of the creeping plant to convince people of the importance of not sharing one's plan of action with untrustworthy individuals because they can later betray them. Likewise, the foreign occupation forces, identified with lame legs, armed heavily, and thinking they are unbeatable, come to Oromiya and wish to make the Oromo their servants. The singer reiterates that the Oromo are so determined that they would rather die or leave the country than become servants of the TPLF/EPRDF.

Conclusion

The *Geerarsa* presented here have addressed the crucial question of the preservation of Oromo culture for *Bilisummaa*. This article has argued that in the face of brutal attacks on the Oromo

way of life and culture, in the face of attempts by the TPLF/EPRDF to divide and weaken the Oromo as well as exploit their national resources, the Oromo must realize that attacks on their culture are attacks on the very existence of individuals and their sense of belonging to their community. Oromo artists, such as the *Geerarsa* singers play a significant role as catalysts in reminding the Oromo the challenges that lie ahead of them in their struggle for Bilisumaa.

Many Oromo who live abroad in North America or Europe have been exposed to "Western thoughts," which appear to hold the individual as the primary and most significant unit of difference[9] in society. Accordingly, the individual is right-based but interest-oriented,[10] and not responsible for fellow members of the community. In this sense, it may even be tempting to explain away cultural values, such as caring for one another and cooperation, as subjective and even indistinguishable from individual preferences. Emphasizing individual interests more than collective or societal interests confuses the primary issue of the struggle for achieving the common goal, *Bilisummaa*. To remain clear and focused, the Oromo need to emphasize the collective interest, strengthen their unity, and contribute their fair share to the united efforts for intensifying the struggle. They still can and must accommodate their individual differences—age, sex, region, religion, talents, and so forth—and appreciate them as virtues arising from their diversity of shared activities—their Oromo-ness, their cooperative values, and their unity in the pursuit of their goal, *Bilisummaa*.

This cooperative effort and the pursuit of pluralism, *Waltummaa*, recognizes both individual sensitivity about the subjectivity of values and the aspirations for shared moral engagement that intolerable, continued Abyssinian/Ethiopian victimization of the Oromo may make them to rethink. At this critical juncture of Oromo history, differences among themselves need to be reevaluated. They need to ask what it means to struggle for *Bilisummaa* and peace within their diverse perspectives and values.[11] By repeating the sentence, "*Firaaraa Infagaatinaa*" ("You need to bond and stay close"), the *Geerarsa* singer emphasizes the crucial aspect of Oromo unity for *Bilisumma*. Accordingly, all Oromo of different regions of Oromiya, particularly in the diaspora, formally educated or not, young or old, men or women, followers of tradition or formal religions, must respond to the legitimate and urgent bitter struggle and begin to revalue *Bilisummaa*. They can celebrate their differences in a unity of purpose, as a rite of alternative visions of *Bilisummaa*, and for their potential to instruct them about the usefulness and meaning of realignment in the existing political reality.

End Notes

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2. Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970).

3. Allen Buchannan, *Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), p. 51.

4. *Bakkalcha Oromiya*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1992), p. 5.

5. Buchannan, p. 53.

6. *Ibid*, p. 54.

7. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 163-167, 251.

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Distribution of Letters in Oromiffa Text

*by Demessie G. Yahii**

Introduction

The distribution of letters in a written language has for long been of interest to linguists and information scientists alike. If the distribution of letters of alphabet is computed for a representative sample of a written language, then some statistical regularity[1] can be observed. This is due to the fact that every language has a unique set of sound (phonetic) attributes that makes it distinct from other languages and that letters or combinations thereof are merely symbols for representing these basic sound elements[2].

In a typical English text, for instance, the letter E is the most frequent (about 10%) while the letter T is a dominant consonant (about 8%). In general, different languages tend to have different distribution of dominant vowel and consonant letters due to the underlying phonetic and orthographic differences. By determining the distribution of all letters in a written language, it is possible to provide a language profile that can to some extent be used to distinguish one language from another.

The distribution of letters in a language per se also has many practical applications particularly in information technology systems for manipulating information by way of compression, encryption, transmission and the like. Although most practical applications came about recently with the use of computers, the earliest application goes back in history well before the development of computers. The Morse code, devised over a century ago for transmitting telegraphy, was based on the statistical average of letters of the English alphabet in order to minimise the overall transmission time of a text message. For this to be possible, the most frequent letters (such as E and T) were represented with shorter codes whereas longer codes were used for less frequent letters (such as Q and Z).

This article presents the distribution of letters in Oromiffa (the Oromo language). It is now over two years since the Latin-based Oromiffa alphabet or Qubee has been in use nationwide. Over this period, various Oromiffa publications have appeared and these have helped the orthography develop and mature over a short period of time. Oromiffa is transcribed almost phonetically and this has been described by T. Gamta[3]. Here, a brief overview of the basic principles will be discussed so that the reader can easily grasp how the distribution of letters relate to the underlying phonetic transcription rules and understand the results and comments made in later sections.

Overview of Oromoffa Transcription

Oromiffa has 34 basic sounds (phonemes) comprising of 10 vowel phonemes (Table 1) and the 24 consonant phonemes (Table 2) below[4]. The 10 vowel phonemes are actually made up of five basic vowel sounds each with a short and a long phoneme. This linguistic property coincidentally makes a perfect match with the Latin alphabet[5]—the short vowel phonemes are represented with each of the five vowel letters while the long vowel phonemes are represented by doubling the vowel letters as shown in Table 1.

Single-letter consonant symbols have the usual English sound except for C, Q and X which are used to represent different sounds in Oromiffa. The digraphs CH and SH are also as in English while DH, NY and PH represent different sounds.

Each of the consonant sounds can be weak or strong[6] and, analogous to the short and long vowels, weak consonants are represented by single symbols while stressed consonant sounds use double symbols. In the case of digraphs, only the first letter is doubled for stressed consonants, for instance when the DH sound is stressed it is written as DDH.

short	long
a	aa
e	ee
i	ii
o	oo
u	uu

Table 1: Oromiffa vowel sounds (Total: 10)

Oromiffa has a considerable amount of glottal stops (see Table 2) An apostrophe, and less commonly a hyphen, is used to represent this sound in writing. Sometimes an H, which represents the closest glottal sound, is also used in place of an apostrophe. For a reason to be apparent later, the apostrophe will be considered as a distinct symbol (say, as the 27th letter of the alphabet) in the analysis presented here.

	Comments Sounds are as in English unless otherwise stated.
b	
c	glottalised palatal (never as *s* or *k*)
d	
dh	glottalised dental
f	
g	always sounds as in *green*, never as in *general*
h	
j	
k	
l	
m	
n	
ny	palatal nasal (as in Spanish "Senyor" for "Mr"
ph	bilabial ejective
q	velar ejective
r	
s	
sh	
t	
u	
w	
x	dental ejective
y	
'	glottal stop (as in "a'a" to mean "no", often written as "uh-uh")

Table 2: Oromiffa consonant sounds (Total: 24)

jh	sounds as "*su*" in *measure*
kh	sounds as "*ch*" in the German proper name *Bach*
p	
ts	sounds as in Amharic *tsehay* meaning *sun*
v	
z	

Table 3: Foreign consonant sounds (Total: 6)

Oromiffa does not have sounds represented by the letters P, V, and Z in English. These letters and three additional digraphs (jh, kh, and ts) representing non-Oromiffa sounds (Table 3) provide an almost complete set of symbols, not only for transcribing foreign words, but also to facilitate the transliteration of other languages[7].

The above summarises the basic orthographic symbols used for the phonetic transcription of Oromiffa. Non-standard orthographic symbols such as numbers and symbols such as $ will not be considered in the analysis and their frequency is negligibly small anyway. It is also worth mentioning that Oromiffa makes use of the punctuation signs as in English and again these will not be considered in the analysis.

Data Collection and Results

Oromiffa texts of various articles which appeared in a cross-section of magazines[8] were first scanned onto a computer. Almost all texts contain a small proportion of numerals, abbreviations and acronyms and no regularisation of the orthography was necessary. There was some spelling and orthographic errors in the texts[9] but the effect of these on the overall distribution of letters was found to be almost negligible.

Letter	Frequency (%)	Letter	Frequency (%)
A	23.6	N	6.5
B	2.8	O	5.1
C	1.0	P	0.1
D	3.7	Q	0.8
E	6.6	R	4.0
F	2.5	S	3.2
G	2.0	T	4.8
H*	3.4 (4.2)	U	6.4
I	9.1	V	0.0
J	1.1	W	1.0
K	3.3	X	0.2
L	2.4	Y	1.4
M	4.0	Z	0.0
		'	0.8

**Note: The distribution of H will increase to 4.2% if it is also used for glottal stops as proposed*

Table 4: Distribution of letters in Oromiffa text

The above table summarises the average percentage of letters in Oromiffa text. The most frequent vowel letter quite predictably is A while the most frequent consonant is N. These contrast, respectively, with E and T in English text. It is interesting to note that the glottal stop represented by an apostrophe is more frequent than the letter X which is at the bottom of the list. As mentioned earlier, Oromiffa does not have sounds represented by P, V and Z. However, since P is used with H to form an Oromiffa sound its count is not zero unlike V and Z.

Some Observations

Oromiffa text is dominated by vowel letters due to the fact that both short and long vowels are represented explicitly for phonetic transcription. Table 4 shows that all vowel letters account for about 50% of the text. Although this seems a bit strange and inconvenient, in practice, it is very easy to learn and, most importantly, it has an advantage that far outweighs other (non-phonetic) alternatives. The fact that words are written and read in the way they sound would mean that word spellings or word pronunciations need not be memorised. This is the case because phonetic transcription is a rule-based technique for writing and reading unambiguously. One can appreciate this advantage by contrasting the effort required for memorising word spellings and pronunciations in the English language. Phonetic transcription alleviates language learning by shifting the focus on word semantics and grammar rules rather than word spellings and pronunciations which can be worked out with simple rules without memorising them[10].

At the outset an attempt was made to determine the distribution of letters for prose text and poem text separately. This is because the latter has rhythmic arrangement of syllables and alliterations which tend to use more vowels. As it turned out, the only significant difference was that the letter E tends to increase from 6.6% in prose text, to about 9% in poem text. This can be explained by the fact that many lines of verse end a double E for poems.

Other useful information can also be extracted from the result summary with some caution. For example, the most dominant consonant sound in Oromiffa is /n/. To be certain of this, however, the contribution of n to the /ny/ sound should also be checked, and this indeed is relatively small as determined by the frequency of the letter Y. On the other hand, the frequency of H does not tell us much about the /h/ sound since it is used for digraphs such as CH and DH representing other sounds. With regards to sound distribution, the result can only be used as a rough guide. For more accurate sound distribution, the sound symbols can be easily analysed in the same way by considering the phonemes shown in tables 1 and 2 rather than letters of the alphabet as reported here.

Another interesting observation is the distribution of letters with regard to their positions on the QWERTY keyboard layout. The first four (or six) most frequent letters accounting for over 40% (or over 50%) are almost evenly distributed between the left-hand side and the right-hand side of the keyboard which is a desirable arrangement for professional typists.

The apostrophe used as a symbol for glottal stops accounts for nearly 1% in Oromiffa text as shown in Table 4. The fact that it is not a letter means that it is treated differently and this makes it a bit awkward in writing. When a glottal sound is stressed then double symbols must be used if the rule of phonetic transcription has to be followed and the use of apostrophes can be very confusing[11].

The problem of the apostrophe also arises in computer systems as it is usually treated as a special symbol in certain cases. The consequence of this is that unlike letters apostrophes cannot be arbitrarily used, for instance in names for users or computer files[12]. Hence names with apostrophes can be discriminated. It is, therefore, desirable to eliminate the apostrophe, preferably by replacing it with a letter

A Recommendation for Eliminating the Apostrophe

The problem of glottal stops is not peculiar to Oromiffa. London Cockney, a dialect of English, for example is very rich in glottal stops since most /t/ sounds are pronounced as glottal stops as in "butter" In an attempt to reflect this phonetic feature, Barltrop & Wolveridge[13] proposed the exclamation sign (!) for glottal stops although this has never been put to practice. The use of (!), however, presents the same problem as the apostrophe as described above and this experience does not lend a solution other than its historical note

An ideal solution to the problem of glottal stops is to use a letter symbol. Unfortunately, there is no spare letter that can be freely assigned and the use of double letters like CH or DH may not be that attractive either. Instead, an attempt has been made here to look more into a linguistic property of Oromiffa that is suggestive of a letter symbol for a glottal stop.

A close investigation of basic Oromiffa sounds reveals that the sound /h/ occurs only at the beginning of a word.[14] On the other hand, the glottal stop /?/ (represented by an apostrophe in writing) occurs within and not at the beginning of a word. In fact, an apostrophe representing a glottal stop is in most cases surrounded by vowel letters[15]. In this sense, the /h/ and /?/ sounds are in complementary distribution, that is, they occur in different positions within a word. This suggests that the letter H can be used for both sounds—by treating it as /h/ sound at the beginning of a word and as a glottal stop /?/ otherwise. This is the only rule that needs to be observed and has no pedagogic or other problems[16]. If this recommendation is put to practice, the distribution of the letter H in the above result summary (Table 4) will increase to 4 2%.

Conclusion

The distribution of letters in Oromiffa text was analysed and summary results presented. This provides more insights into written Oromiffa, particularly considering its recent alphabetisation. Such investigations can provide the basis for many interesting applications in linguistics and information processing systems.

The use of letter H has been proposed for glottal stops in addition to the /h/ sound. This is possible because in Oromiffa the /h/ sound and the glottal stop /?/ are in complimentary distribution within a word. This eliminates the problems associated with the use of the apostrophe symbol. It is hoped that writers and educators alike adopt this recommendation immediately.

End Notes

1. This is confined to languages based on the Latin alphabet although it may also be extended to languages not using the Latin alphabet.

2. Note however that the distribution of letters does not necessarily correspond to the distribution of sounds; For instance, the distribution of the letter D in Oromiffa is contributed by sounds /d/ and /dh/, and it does not on its own tell us how these sounds are distributed. The statistical regularity of D in a written text simply tells us the statistical regularity of all the sounds it represents, in this case, /d/ and /dh/. The distribution of individual sound elements or phonemes can be analysed in the same way but this time the digraphs such as CH and DH are distinct from C and D. A further comment may be necessary for cases where letters or combinations thereof are silent, for example as in English, but we restrict ourselves to phonetic transcription as in Oromiffa.

3. Gamta, Tilahun: "Qubee Afaan Oromoo: Reasons for choosing the Latin Script for developing an Oromo alphabet," Oromo Commentary, Vol III, No 1, 1993

4. This figure does not account for allophones (variants of basic sounds) such as the variation of consonant sounds of /n/ as in "nama" (man) versus "sangaa" (ox), or different vowel sounds of the first and last /a/ in "nama." See also T Gamta, Oromo-English Dictionary, 1989.

5. In this respect the Latin alphabet serves the Oromo language better than the English language. One of the principal problems in transcribing English phonetically is that there are many more vowel sounds than there are vowel letters. One widely spoken British accent, known as Received Pronunciation, has twenty vowel sounds and American accents and other British accents have over twenty vowel sounds. See Ladefoged, Peter: A Course in Phonetics, 2nd Ed, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1982.

6. There are a few exceptions: CH and NY are always strong. Hence, it would not be necessary to apply the rule for strong consonant phonemes.

7. This can be very useful while learning other languages.

8. Magazines include *Madda Walaabu*, *Odaa* and *Qunnamtii* among other sources.

9. Spelling mistakes such as "wa'ee" for "wayee"; and orthographic variations such as "Finfinnera" for "Finfinnee irra" and "isarrati" for "isa irrati." These variations are and will be fast evolving into standardised forms as has been observed over the last two years.

10. It is understandable that even with phonetic transcription memorisation it still there instinctively with repeated usage but this is an uncompelled and voluntarily process and not forced upon the learner.

11. This can arise in words such as *Oo??a* for *hot*. The use of the apostrophe will result in *Oo'a*, which does not indicate the stress of the consonant or *Oo''a* which is confusing due to the fact that the double*apostrophe resembles a quotation mark.

12. Such problems can arise in programming languages where object names or labels may not use the apostrophe symbol. At the user level, the Unix and to a lesser degree the DOS operating systems also have some restrictions in this respect.

13. Barltrop & Wolveridge: The Muvver Tongue.

14. Extensive analysis was carried out to disprove this claim. The /h/ sounds not at the beginning of a word are those which should have been glottal stops or /y/ sound as in "tahe" for "ta'e" and "dhiha" for "dhiya."

15. In a few cases the glottal stop can occur after a consonant as in "har'a" for "today" or "many'ee" for "joint."

16. In common with other letters such as C or X, H will of course retain its /h/ sound in non-Oromiffa words. In fact, since /h/ and /?/ are both glottal sounds, no major sound variation would be noticed even if this rule is overlooked for non-Oromiffa words. In English, the words that can create this problem (words with h's surrounded with vowels) are very rare.

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The Vision and Effectiveness of Oromo Organizations

*by Bichaka Fayissa**

Introduction

This preliminary study attempts to make some observations on the vision and effectiveness of the various Oromo organizations in an effort to suggest how the limited Oromo human and financial resources can best be directed toward the economic and political liberation of Oromia. The Oromo movement for liberation is at a crossroad. The articulation and effective communication of the Oromo vision has, therefore, significant implications for the extent and speed with which Oromos can realize their freedom. Oromo organizations which are the focus of this study only include the Oromo Community Organizations(OCO), the Oromo Support Committees (OSC), the Oromo Studies Association (OSA), the Union of Oromo in North America (UONA), the Oromo Relief Association (ORA), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and other political organizations. Although specific discussions of the other political and non-political organizations is beyond the scope of this study, the issues to be addressed here are equally applicable to all Oromo organizations. In this study, I shall address : some preliminaries about Oromo organizations, membership and organizational responsibilities, the leadership of Oromo organizations, an assessment of organizational effectiveness and vision, organizational linkages, coordination, and communication. Some concluding remarks of the paper are provided in the last section of the paper.

An Overview of Oromo Organizations.

Do Oromos we really want to be organized? The answer appears definitely yes. As an evidence, Oromos have both political and non-political or humanitarian organizations (such as Oromo Liberation Front and others, Oromo Community Organizations, Oromo Support Committees, the Oromo Studies Association, the Union of Oromo in North America, and others). There is a division of labor here i.e. each Oromo organization is expected to perform mostly non-duplicating functions in order to realize its organizational and national objectives. For example, it is expected that the Oromo political organizations to protect the Oromo interests through internal and external peaceful negotiations as well as other strategies. The Oromo Relief Association(ORA) and other support committees are expected to raise and distribute funds which can be used to help displaced Oromos who are victims of natural and man-made disasters.

The Oromo Studies Association is expected to provide the results of scientific studies which can serve as platforms for debate, dialogue, and provide policy directions on issues of democracy, justice, human rights, peaceful resolution of conflicts, science and technology, social and economic development in the Horn of Africa in general, Oromia, in particular. In other words, OSA is expected to serve as a reservoir of information and knowledge for the economic and political development of Oromia.

The Oromo Communities are expected to preserve the Oromo cultural identity by teaching their off-springs the Oromo language and ways of life. They are also expected to share the Oromo cultural identity with non-Oromo communities in which they reside. This may take such forms as organizing cultural shows and communicating to the general public the aspirations of the Oromo. Thus, it appears that what Oromos need today is not more number of organizations, but rather an organizational culture which produces tangible and non-tangible results. Such organizational culture can be defined as a collective behavior of members which creates or implements every element of quality including purpose, desired future, and core beliefs about oneself and others (Covey and Gulledge, 1992).

Membership and Organizational Responsibilities of Oromo Constituencies

Do the members of the various Oromo organizations fully understand the aims of their respective organizations? If they do not comprehend the objectives of their organizations, have they made efforts to learn from the members who do know? Does being organized simply mean joining an organization because ones friends belong to this or that organization? In response to these questions, it would necessary to make certain observations about the issues of membership privileges, responsibilities, and commitment. A true trademark of any successful organization is that the members always try to understand the broad goals as well as the specific objectives of their organizations. Members can be educated through regular workshops and formal and informal mentoring Rather than dwelling too much on what may go wrong within their organizations, members can assume the responsibility to fix the problems if they know how. Once this is established, the members will be committed to their organizations' ideals. Patronage in any Oromo organization affords certain privileges. At the same time, it requires the members to take some responsibilities with the preservation of their identity. If all Oromo organizations fully focused on their mission and showed total commitment financially, materially and otherwise, they would have been preparing for a tumultuous celebration of their objectives by now. As indicated earlier, what really matters is the understanding of the mission of their respective organizations in congruence with the higher Oromo cause and their dedication to the achievement of the organizational objectives. Despite their slow pace, Oromo organizations are moving in the right direction. They must, however, strive continuously to improve their respective organizational performance by setting realistic goals, finding resources for the achievement of goals, devising effective strategies, and focusing their energies on the achievement of those goals

The Vision of Oromo Organizations

What is the driving vision of the various Oromo organizations? In other words, what is the unifying theme that transcends the goals and objectives of all Oromo organizations? What is their pledge of allegiance? To answer this question, one must first define the meaning of an organizational vision. Kotler (1992) describes it as a brief and clear description of where an organization is going In this case, the vision of all Oromo organizations might be the restoration of Oromo freedom so that they can live with dignity, peace, and prosperity. This vision is their pledge of allegiance. Quoting from the King James Version of Proverbs 29:18, Barna (1992) states that "where there is no vision, the people will perish." Abraham Lincoln also echoed the same in one of his great speeches. It must be noted that minor or even major set-backs should not discourage Oromos from keeping their eyes on the prize if they have a clear and positive vision about their destiny. Oromos should not succumb to the weight of the temporary reign of terror, but be encouraged by the prospects for lasting dignity, peace, and prosperity that they will experience upon independence. Some Oromos may have a vision that may differ from what has just been described. That is not unusual because vision is not the result of *consensus*; it should result in consensus (Barna, 1992) Visioning the future means that Oromos have to improvise their national anthem, learn it well, and be ready when the day of deliverance comes. Oromos know very well that day will never come by simply waiting for someone else to bestow it upon them. This is because freedom is never a give away, but it is a precious commodity which can only be earned In this endeavor, risk is a natural and unavoidable outgrowth of vision.

The Leadership of Oromo Organizations.

What efforts have been made by the leadership of the various organizations to raise the consciousness and commitment of their members to the higher Oromo cause? What does their learning curve look like? Did their experience over time help them to be efficient? The organizations

that have efficient, clear, reliable means of communications tend to be successful; those whose lines of communication are underdeveloped, imprecise, or otherwise restricted are more likely to experience stagnation or decline. Having a vision is of little value unless it can be communicated with clarity and consistency The leaders of the various Oromo organizations have a crucial responsibility in articulating the Oromo vision. More specifically, the function of the Oromo organizational leaders is to serve as catalysts in establishing a clear and shared vision of the respective organizations and in securing commitment of their members for the vigorous pursuit of that vision (Collin and Porras, 1991).

Although research shows that certain traits alone do not guarantee leadership success, there is evidence that effective leaders possess such traits as : drive (achievement motivation), leadership motivation, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, a vision for the future, good communications, openness to change, and the knowledge of organizational mission (Kirkpatrick and Loke, 1991). In a recent study, Harter (1992) used the 4Cs of a diamond (cut, clarity, color, carat) as a metaphor for thinking about the concept of the organizational vision of a leader. The paradigm, or cut, of a vision describes its form. Every vision not only operates within a paradigm, but it also expresses the paradigm in concrete terms. Clarity refers to the vision's precision and detail. The color of a vision represents the intensity of a leader's commitment. The weight or gravity (carat) of a vision pertains to its importance or significance Generally, people are more likely to exert themselves for a goal that has real meaning for them. Vision should, therefore, inspire members with its scale and scope.

An Assessment of Oromo Organizational Effectiveness

Many Oromo organizations have been in existence for several decades. Have they ever reexamined their effectiveness or ineffectiveness in achieving their organizational goals and the higher Oromo cause? Have they ever changed their strategies for achieving their goals and objectives in tune with the changing times and situations? Are the Oromo organizations still driven by old slogans and strategies? It must, however, be noted that some old slogans should not be changed. For instance, the "Oromia shall Be Free" slogan represents an Oromo vision in the past as well as the future. Hence, it serves as a slogan behind which all Oromo political and non-political organizations are rallying. On the other hand, past and present Oromo fund raising strategies for humanitarian objectives not only lacked(lacking) effective coordination, they also suffered(suffering) from duplications. In such a scenario, it is no big surprise that only a minuscule amount of funds have been generated to assist Oromos who have been exposed to successive disasters in the empire state of Ethiopia. The old Oromo fund raising strategies must, therefore, be replaced by those that are expected to produce satisfactory results.

According to Zammuto (1982), an assessment of an organizational effectiveness is considerably more complex than the evaluation of an individual's performance. The difficulty of assessing organizational performance arises from the fact that each of an organization's constituencies judges effectiveness from its own idiosyncratic perspective. Hence different constituencies evaluate different aspects of an organization's total performance. Young (1978) asserts that there are two dimensions to the organizational evaluation step in the planning process. One, process evaluation provides information concerning the progress of the program of action of an organization. Second, results evaluation provides information regarding the outcomes of the program of an action and examines the results to determine if the objectives and goals were achieved. It is important for the evaluation activities to be continuous through the program of action. The evaluation of an organizational performance should answer the following questions. Who should be responsible for monitoring each major activity and reporting the progress made? When will the progress reports be submitted? Who will be responsible for collecting the activity progress reports and for developing a program status report? When will the status report be made available to the general audience?

Oromo Organizational Linkages, Coordination, and Communication

How effectively are the Oromo organizations working together for the common good of all Oromos? In other words, how strong are the linkages among the Oromo organizations? How do Oromo organizations communicate within and among each other? At the moment, the linkages and communications appear rather loose and ineffective. The key to strengthening an organizational coordination is, however, dependent upon the understanding that the activities of each organization are complementary to rather than competing against each other. This requires building high performance team(HPT)—one in which individuals in different organizations are able to channel their energies toward a common purpose and to accomplish what none of them singly could accomplish. The technical term for this phenomenon is synergy. Karen Hess(1992) defines synergy as the simultaneous actions of separate entities (organizations) which together have greater total effect than the sum of their individual effects. There are many examples of synergism in athletics, music, and business (winning team, marching band, symphony orchestra, Apollo II mission team). The success of the groups listed above depends on the unselfish contribution of each member. HPTs generally experience exhilaration, stimulation, satisfaction, a sense of challenge and purpose, and a natural high. Previous research has identified eight attributes typically present in high performance team (Hess, 1987; Harper and Harper, 1992).

- *Participatory leadership*—creating an interdependency by empowering, freeing up, and serving others.
- *Shared responsibility*—establishing an environment in which all team members feel as responsible as their leaders in achieving their organizational goals.
- *Aligned on purpose*—having a sense of common purpose about an organization (team—and the functions it serves
- *High Communication*—creating a climate of trust and open and honest communication.
- *Future focused*—seeing change as an opportunity for growth.
- *Focused on task*—keeping meetings focused on results.
- *Creative talents*—applying individual talents and creativity.
- *Rapid Response*—identifying and acting on opportunities.

How do Oromo organizations feel about each other? Without a doubt, there may have been some incidence of negative feelings between or among some Oromo organizations. This is neither unusual nor unique to Oromo organizations. If these organizations operate as good partners rather than adversaries, the negative feelings do not persist since they are generally overpowered by the positive feelings (Kinslaw, 1991). In this connection, Oromo organizations can choose to be an aligned team with a strategic-creative mindset which enables them to spend their energies on the achievement of the higher Oromo cause rather than being overwhelmed by petty turf battles (Adams,1988).

Conclusion

This preliminary study has attempted to raise some issues pertaining to the vision and effectiveness of Oromo organizations in recent years. It has used an inward looking approach i.e. instead of looking for excuses why Oromo organizations find themselves far below the attainments of their liberation goal because of the organized attacks perpetrated upon them by their successive adversaries, it has examined some of the endemic factors within the various Oromo organizations which tend to reduce their effectiveness. One of the areas where Oromo organizations can improve their effectiveness is in the articulation of a clear vision which all Oromo organizations and their members share as common values. The leadership of the Oromo organizations bears a special responsibility in articulating and communicating a vision which Oromos can support regardless of their regional or religious affiliation, professional, economic or social status. This

condition is central to the formation of not only goal oriented and effective Oromo organizations, but it also serves as the foundation of their nationhood. Once the members of the various Oromo organizations share and believe in the common purpose, nothing can stop them from preserving their cultural identity and restoring their lost independence.

Another consideration for achieving high performance and effectiveness is the adoption of an organizational culture of synergy and team building among Oromo associations. This means that effective linkages and coordination of the various Oromo organizations can enhance their sum total performance. Oromo organizations also need to be aligned on purpose. Having an alignment on purpose means that the members of the various Oromo organizations are committed to the direction and outcome of the Oromo movement for liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness. Each Oromo organization has a role and a stake in the above stated efforts. This does not mean that everyone is in total agreement with the strategies for success. An alignment means that while there may be differing points of view, members are willing to set those differences aside in pursuit of a common purpose or goal. How well Oromos focus on their organizational effectiveness has a far reaching consequence on the future of their movement and how soon they can liberate Oromia. The world is constantly changing right in front of their eyes. But the wind of change is mixed with challenges and opportunities. If they are not prepared to seize the opportunity to control their destiny, the outcome will not be pleasant. They must remember that one of the critical elements in the building of a viable nation is an effective organization which can equip them with information and knowledge. How best they can harness knowledge to find solutions to pending problems makes a significant difference to the durability, consistency, continuity, and viability of their movement because knowledge is an indestructible force which transcends and conquers the physical forces which appear insurmountable.

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Some Aspects of Oromo History That Have Been Misunderstood[1]

*by Mohammed Hassen**

Introduction

Before I embark on the main subject,[2] three caveats are in order. First, I maintain that if historical knowledge is to be useful for creating understanding among the peoples of the Horn of Africa, correcting historical distortion must not be dodged but met head on. Without reliable historical information, it would be very difficult to create trust, confidence and respect among peoples.

Second, some aspects of Oromo history that have been misunderstood include (but are not limited to) the aspects discussed in this paper. These are: 1) Who are the Oromo? 2) How are the Oromo treated in the Ethiopian historiography? 3) On the Importance of the Gada System and its relevance to the current situation in Oromia, 4) On the Question of Ethiopian colonialism in Oromia?

Third, I believe history's goal is to advance the search for truth, but not to dismiss the achievements of any people, denigrate their culture and insult their human dignity. Only truth and understanding can strengthen effective cooperation and promote a pluralistic and free society and a democratic culture. In other words, the teaching of history is to make people conscious of their dignity, unity in diversity and to promote respect for each other's heritage and to strengthen the understanding. As an optimist who has strong faith in the ability of the peoples of the Horn of Africa to rise above and go beyond the system that has made us ignorant of each other's cultural heritage, I hope that one day the peoples of our region will be able to learn each other's objective history, not grotesque distortions; truth and not falsehood. I believe the road to the future democratic federated countries of the Horn of Africa lies not in ignorance, prejudice and destructive hatred (the harvest of past injustices) but in knowledge, tolerance and respect for each national group's cultural achievements. It is through knowledge that a bridge of understanding and tolerance is built between peoples. It is with this goal in mind that I present the following discussion on Some Aspects of Oromo History That Have Been Misunderstood. For that misunderstanding is not what was, but is also what is. My discussion focuses only on a few aspects of Oromo history and does not pretend to be complete. However, whatever shortcomings it may have, the story is essentially correct and it can be verified from the sources I have consulted.

Who Are the Oromo?

The Oromo who constitute probably a good half of the population of Ethiopia are the single largest national group in the Horn of Africa. They are also one of the major African peoples. The Oromo call their country Oromia. Oromia is slowly but surely being recognized as one of the major African nations. To say that the Oromo are Africans does not mean simply that they are Black. From the moment when Africa fell under foreign colonial domination in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Oromo shared the fate of other Africans, and like them, they were colonized, "brutalized, dehumanized, exploited, despised, cheated"[3] and well acquainted with an unmitigated colonial assault on their language.

The Oromo belong to the Cushitic language-speaking family of peoples, who are known to have lived for thousands of years in what is today Ethiopia. It has been said and rightly that the Oromo are one of the most indigenous peoples of Ethiopia.[4] Of the forty or so Cushitic languages spoken in the Horn of Africa and beyond, *Afaan Oromoo,* the Oromo language is

spoken by the largest number of people, being the mother tongue of around twenty-five million Oromo and used by a further one to two million non-Oromo as a second language. With over twenty-six million speakers, Afaan Oromoo is one of the major languages in Africa. In fact, of the 1,652 indigenous languages in Africa, *Afaan Oromoo* "... is the second most widely spread indigenous language in Africa. Only Hausa in Nigeria has a larger number of speakers"[5] *Afaan Oromoo* is also the third Afro-Asiatic language in the world after Arabic and Hausa.[6] Probably a third to a half of all the Cushitic language speakers are Oromo or speak Afaan Oromoo.[7] And yet, *Afaan Oromoo* not only remains one of the least studied languages, but also lacks a "... developed literature and has less printed materials than any language with a comparable number of speakers"[8] anywhere in the world. The reason for this will be explored in the last section of this paper.

How Are The Oromo Treated in Ethiopian Historiography?

Since the sixteenth century, much has been written on the military conflict between the Oromo and the Medieval Christian Kingdom of Abyssinia. The Oromo were generally described as "the enemies of the Amhara."[9] What was written about them by the Christian chroniclers mainly expressed the intense prejudice which was deeply rooted in the Abyssinian society.[10]

Even the Amhara Monk Abba Bahrey, who wrote "History of the Galla [Oromo]" in 1593, was much less prejudiced toward the Oromo than a number of twentieth century scholars. The importance of Bahrey's work lies in the fact that it contains the first detailed account of Oromo history, their social organization, and their victories against the Abyssinians, although the latter were more numerous and better supplied with weapons than the Oromo. Bahrey opened his work with these words: "I have begun to write the history of the Galla in order to make known the number of their tribes, their readiness to kill people, and the brutality of their manners."[11] The central thesis of his work is not the history of the Oromo per se, but what brought about their victories. The unstated message of Bahrey's manuscript is "know your enemy." In the light of his purpose for writing, Bahrey's claim of "the Galla readiness to kill and the brutality of their manner" is open to serious doubt. At this juncture, it must be stated clearly that "Galla" appears to have been an Amhara name for the Oromo. It is a term of insult and abuse. The Oromo do not call themselves Galla and resist being called so.[12] It is not an exaggeration to say that Abba Bahrey perpetuated the myth of "Galla brutality which was more apparent than real."[13] There is abundant evidence which shows beyond any shadow of doubt that the brutality of the Christian soldiery was unmatched by that of the Oromo.[14] Furthermore, "judging from the evidence of the chronicles, the brutality of the professional soldiers, be it to decapitate or emasculate men or to enslave women and children, does not seem to have been matched by the reputed savagery of the Galla."[15] Besides what has been said above, Bahrey also perpetuated another myth about Oromo history. He claimed that the Oromo attacked the province of historical Bali, the northern part of the present administrative region of Bale during the reign of Emperor Lebna Dengel.[16] On the basis of internal evidence, the purported Oromo attack of Bali took place in 1522. Accordingly most scholars accepted this date as the beginning of the Oromo arrival in what was the Medieval Christian Kingdom of Abyssinia (see below.). This is historically incorrect, to say the least because we find references[17] to Oromo groups living not only in historical Bali, but also in what is today the Shawa administrative region centuries before 1522! Following Bahrey's history, the Oromo were made "newcomers" to the country, of which they were the original inhabitants. As if that was not enough, after the conquest and colonization of Oromia by Emperor Menilek (1899-1913), unsubstantiated myths and untruths were created and the Oromo were arbitrarily degraded to a lower stage of material culture, as people "without history" who needed the "civilizing mission" of their Amhara neighbours.[18] Since the time of Menilek there was a systematic attempt to break the Oromo in body, soul and spirit so as to dehumanize and reduce them to

a condition of helplessness and dejection.[19] At the level of state ideology, the Ethiopian colonial ruling class typified by Emperor Menilek and his successors never credited the Oromo as creators of an original culture, or as having worthwhile history, rich language, religious and democratic institutions "which flowered in patterns of their own making and nourished their spiritual and material well being."[20] The Ethiopian ruling class which especially perceived the danger of the huge Oromo population to its empire sought not only to suppress Oromo history and the development of literature in Afaan Oromoo but also needed to keep the Oromo chained with no faith in themselves, their democratic heritage, their history, language and national identity.

Azaj Tino, a contemporary of Abba Bahrey, presented early Oromo history in a manner that was radically different from that of Bahrey. Tino seems to have belonged to the first generation of the Oromo who were converted to Orthodox Christianity. He was well educated in Geez, the language of high culture in Abyssinia. *Azaj* Tino was among the leading scholars in Abyssinia during the first half of the seventeenth century. He wrote the greater part of *The Chronicle of Susenyos* (1607-1632)[21] which is the richest, the best and the longest chronicle in the entire history of Abyssinia. As the first generation of a probably converted Oromo into Orthodox Christianity, he was supposed to have been integrated into the Abyssinian society, adopting that society's prejudices against the Oromo. However, *Azaj* Tino wrote about Oromo culture, their social organization, their traditional religion, war strategy and their history in glowing terms. Space does not permit detailing *Azaj* Tino's description of different aspects of the Oromo society of his time. Here it should suffice to mention his views about traditional Oromo religion and Oromo history.

Traditional Oromo religion was and still is centered around *Waaqaa* (God), the creator of the universe and the sustainer of all life on earth. In all their ceremonies, the Oromo prayed and still pray to Waaqaa whom they trust and to whom they turn in their moments of joy and distress.[22] "To trust Waaqaa is an indication of the fundamental belief that Waaqaa, who is the source and origin of all that exists, also cares for creation by protecting it and by bestowing it with fertility, abundance and peace."[23] The spiritual head of traditional Oromo religion according to *Azaj* Tino, was the *Abba Muudaa*. Interestingly, Bahrey, who wrote his "History of the Galla" only a few years before *Azaj* Tino, did not mention the pilgrimage to the Abba Muudaa, much less discuss traditional Oromo religion. "Bahrey's failure to mention the pilgrimage to Abba Muudaa is one of the many indications that his knowledge of the Oromo society of the time was limited."[24] *Azaj* Tino, who wrote about the pilgrimage to the Abba Muudaa in graphic manner, stated that as the Jews believe in Moses and the Muslims in Muhammad, the Oromo believe in their Abba Muudaa. They all go to him from far and near to receive his blessings.[25]

A number of important points emerge from *Azaj* Tino's remarkably accurate information about traditional Oromo religion. First, that the Abba Muudaa was the spiritual head of traditional Oromo religion whom the Oromo regarded as their prophet. Second, that the land of the Abba Muudaa which at the time of Tino, the Oromo regarded as sacred and the cradle of their birth, was located in the highlands of what is today southern Oromia. Third, that the Oromo pilgrims (*jila*) to Abba Muudaa, were their representatives of their clans. Fourth, that the pilgrimage to the Abba Muudaa was made every eight years. Fifth, that the Abba Muudaa served as the focal point of Oromo unity. Sixth and finally, that through the pilgrimage to the Abba Muudaa, the Oromo maintained contact with their spiritual leader as well as with each other.

Azaj Tino wrote about the pilgrimage to the land of the Abba Muudaa either before or during the 1620s. European travellers and missionaries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have reported a strikingly similar picture of the pilgrimage to the Abba Muudaa.[26] What is particularly interesting to note here is that on the arrival of the *jilas* (pilgrims) at the spiritual center of the Abba Muudaa, the latter not only asked them about the law of *Waaqaa* and the customs of the Oromo,[27] but also commanded them "... not to recognize any leader who tries to get absolute power and not to fight among themselves."[28]

Azaj Tino knew the Oromo society, its language and culture and had a unique perspective on

early Oromo history. "It appears that Tino gathered much oral tradition from numerous Oromo"[29] whom he met and his presentation of early Oromo history was based on the Oromo view of their own history. In this regard Tino was the first scholar who realized the need for and the validity of gathering oral tradition for writing history. As we have seen above, Abba Bahrey claimed that the Oromo arrived in historical Bali, the northern part of the present administrative region of Bale, in 1522.[30] Tino does not only indirectly refute this fallacious claim, but establishes conclusively that the Oromo lived centuries before 1522 in Dawaro in what is today the northern part of the administrative regions of Bale and western Hararghe (Charachar). Tino's central thesis which establishes the presence of the Oromo in Dawaro centuries before 1522, is supported by irrefutable historical evidence.[31] In this respect, Tino's contribution to our understanding of early Oromo history is quite invaluable. What makes his perspective of Oromo history so unique and fascinating is that it was based on Oromo oral tradition and, therefore, on the Oromo view of their own history, while Bahrey's "History of the Galla" was based on the Amhara perspective of the Oromo history. Be that as it may, both Abba Bahrey and *Azaj* Tino have contributed to our understanding of the Oromo society of their time. However, notwithstanding *Azaj* Tino's version of history, the Oromo were arbitrarily degraded to the lower stage of material culture, as "people without history"[32] In fact, 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.[33] Foreign scholars who studied Ethiopia used the Abyssinian (Amhara-Tigray) prejudice against the Oromo as a cover for their own and took on the perceptions of the Ethiopian ruling elites, and those perceptions were profoundly anti-Oromo. This explains why many scholars ignored, or distorted Oromo history. It also explains why the Ethiopian historiography has become an ideological arm of the Ethiopian ruling elites. What is more, the Ethiopian ruling class even succeeded in elevating its anti-Oromo prejudice to the plane of the state ideology, which was uncritically repeated in the name of scholarship:

> The Galla had nothing to contribute to the civilization of Ethiopia, they possessed no material or intellectual culture, and their social organization was at a far lower stage of development than of the population among whom they settled.[34]

These words written in 1960 by a well-known scholar are a good illustration of such long-held common historical prejudice. This prejudice derives mainly from the Ethiopian ruling class' systematic attempt to break the Oromo pride in their cultural achievements. A system that crushes the self-respect and self-confidence of a people, a system that kills the spirit of human dignity and pride is crude, brutal and oppressive. There is nothing more precious than the human spirit of freedom, pride, self-respect and human dignity.

The fact that there was a change of governments in Ethiopia in 1974, a change from autocratic imperial rule to military dictatorship, a change in the political awareness of the Oromo, their political organization, and their determination to assert their national identity might suggest to the reader that anti-Oromo prejudice is no longer repeated in the Ethiopian historiography. However, the works of some scholars have brought back the old prejudice against the Oromo and the misunderstanding of some aspects of their history to the present day.[35] For instance, one prominent Ethiopian scholar, recently depicted the Oromo as an "intruding Galla horde"[36] who "are latecomers to the Ethiopian scene."[37] These words written in the 1980s prove, if proof was required, that some Ethiopian nationalist scholars take pleasure in insulting the Oromo and in presenting grotesque distortion of their history, harking back to the time when they insulted and dehumanized the Oromo with impunity. This means some Ethiopian intellectuals still continue to disfigure Oromo history. However, these Ethiopian intellectuals have to make a painful adjustment to the fact that the Oromo are one of the most indigenous inhabitants of what is today Ethiopia. This historical truth which is based on irrefutable evidence has been either ignored or distorted

or denied for too long by those who wanted and still want to suppress history. There is no doubt that future research in early Oromo history will free it from deliberate distortions and establish the richness, the depth, and the importance of that history in the Horn of Africa. At this juncture, it is important to briefly mention the Gada system not only to clarify misunderstanding, but also to show how it influenced and shaped the course of history of the Oromo Nation. For several centuries, the various Oromo groups shared a common language, a culture, a very rich oral literature, customs and manners, laws, traditional religion and the Gada System, which encompassed the totality of their existence.

What Is the Gada System?

The Gada system is the treasurehouse of Oromo democracy which is very much misunderstood. It was the political, military and ritual institution at the same time. According to Professor Asmarom Legesse:

> The Gada system is a system of classes (luba) that succeeded each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political and ritual responsibilities. Each Gada class remains in power during a specific term (Gada) which begins and ends with a formal power transfer ceremony.[38]

Training for participation in the Gada political process was an essential aspect of the traditional Oromo participatory form of democracy. Before a man wielded effective political power, he received traditional, military, legal and political training. Election to political offices completed the years of training for governmental responsibility. The composition of Gada government, while varying from region to region, conformed to a certain general pattern.

First, there was an extensive election campaign ranging from weeks to months, extending over long distances among different groups.[39] The elected officials included Abba Gada ("the father of Gada," i.e., the president), Abba Dula ("the father of war"), Abba Seraa ("the father of law and justice") and several other officials. Second, the elected officials served only for one eight-year period. Third, the election and transfer of power took place at the time of the Jarra ceremony, the beginning of the Oromo New Year. Jarra was the event that ended the Gada of the previous eight years and started the new one. It was the beginning of the new period, the building of the new future, which a European missionary of the last century, compared with the Greek Olympiad.[40] Jarra was the end of one era and the beginning of another. It was the pivot of the Oromo calendar, the dividing line between Gada periods. The measurement of time was an important aspect of the Gada system and, therefore, in Oromo life. The lives of individuals, rituals, ceremonies, political, military, religious and other activities were regulated by the smooth functioning of a very sophisticated oral calendar, one of "the highest cultural achievements of the Oromo society."[41] The calendar and the Gada system were inseparably linked. During the transfer of power,

> . . . The winners and losers jointly reinstated the moral order of the nation, and resolved internal disputes peacefully. The transfer of power ceremony was the time when the achievements and the failures of the past eight years were discussed and the hopes and expectations of the next eight years were mapped. It was the time when the well-springs of the Oromo yearning for spiritual satisfaction, for peace, and reconciliation were overflowed with prayers for peace, prosperity and harmony.[42]

After the transfer of power ceremony, the *Chafee* Assembly (Meadow assembly or Oromo parliament) made laws that lasted for the next eight years. The law was issued out of and evolved from traditional Oromo democracy. In the Oromo language, there are two terms that express the concept of law. The first is *ada*, custom, habit, tradition, way of life, etc. and the second is *seraa*

(or *heraa*), the law in the formal sense of the term. Both were kept in the "living constitution" of the nation, the hearts of elders.[43] The law embodied the spirit of unity, common identity and internal peace. The primary goal of Oromo law was to restore peace, to reach a compromise acceptable to disputants on both sides. This was facilitated by the fact that the *Chafee* Assembly functioned on the basis of contact among people during which differences were resolved and disputes settled in an open discussion.

Under the Gada system, "power emanates from the people and if those to whom it was entrusted fail in their responsibilities, they can be removed."[44] In other words, government was an embodiment of popular democratic will and those who wielded power were accountable to the people. There were also checks and balances[45] and power and authority were relinquished after every eight years.

Is the Gada System Relevant Today?

For those who have grown up on the diet of the Ethiopian ruling elites' contempt for the Oromo culture, the Gada system has no relevance to the current situation in Oromia. For instance, a certain Teklu Gerbee who obviously does not understand the depth, the richness and dynamism of this institution, asserts that the Gada system is not relevant at all. He goes on to say that the Oromo ". . . do not trust a modern democratic system with free market implications."[46] If people with a remarkable democratic heritage do not trust a modern democratic system, who else will? On the contrary, the Oromo not only trust the modern democratic system, but thousands of their men and women, young and old, have already lost their lives precisely for the noble purpose of restoring their democratic heritage. There is no doubt about the Oromo yearning for democracy and freedom. In a free Oromia, the Oromo will live under the Gada system. Even experts such as Professor Asmarom Legesse maintain that the Gada system is relevant to the current conditions at least in Oromia. Of course, no one argues that every aspect of the Gada system is relevant to the current situation, but the Gada principles of accountability of leaders are immensely relevant. These include: tenure of office to a defined and fixed period, the system of checks and balances, separation of powers, extensive political discussion, the spirit of compromise and consensus, and, above all, the practice of shared roles of political responsibility which was the hallmark of Oromo traditional democracy. These democratic values had flourished in Oromo life and can be restored and practiced again. The tree of democracy cannot be imported to the Horn of Africa root and branch. Indigenous plants have also to be cultivated and watered. It is the combination of foreign democratic ideas and rich indigenous (Oromo and non-Oromo heritage) that will have to be tapped to produce freedom for the people who are hungry for democracy.

On the Ethiopian Colonialism in Oromia

Up to the second half of the nineteenth century, most Oromo led an independent existence as neighbors with, but beyond military control and political influence of Abyssinia. The independent existence of the Oromo was brought to an end abruptly and rudely by the creation of the modern Ethiopian Empire during and after the 1880s.[47] It was Emperor Menilek (1889-1913) who colonized Oromia and created a ramshackle Ethiopian colonial empire.[48]

As with all forms of colonialism, the driving social force behind Menilek's colonialism was economic.[49] The search for gold, ivory, coffee, slaves, new sources of food for Menilek's soldiers, the plunder of Oromo property, free Oromo labour, and the expropriation of Oromo land were the economic motives. Some aspects of Menilek's colonialism have similarities with European colonialism in other parts of Africa. As European colonists dominated the economic resources and controlled the politics of their colonies, Menilek's colonists dominated the economic resources

of Oromia and totally controlled the military, judiciary and political power, institutionalizing the monopoly of their advantages.

Menilek was able to colonize Oromia because he had access to the modern European weapons of destruction. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 led to intense competition and rivalry among the British, the French and the Italians in the Red Sea basin. Competing strategic interests of the three powers prevented any one of them from totally dominating the region. Menilek, the king of Shawa (1865-1889) and the emperor of Ethiopia (1889-1913), struck a better deal with competing European powers and harvested the fruit of collaboration with the French and the Italians. The French trained his soldiers and provided them with weapons.[50] The Italians and the Russians also provided Menilek with massive weapons so much so that he had the largest and the best equipped army in Black Africa.[51] With his superior firepower, Menilek devastated various Oromo groups one after the other. The Oromo utterly lacked firearms. Everywhere Menilek's victorious army looted and plundered Oromo property, burned houses, slaughtered indiscriminately and sold into slavery tens of thousands of Oromo prisoners of war.[52] As the result of Menilek's war of conquest, the Oromo population is said to have been reduced by half.[53]

> [Menilek]'s object was the permanent occupation of the conquered territories . . . . When they opposed him, his policy was one of ruthless extermination, as many districts which have been amongst the most fertile and flourishing in all Ethiopia bear witness. The population of Kaffa, for instance, is estimated to have been reduced by two-thirds. Those who succeeded in escaping the slaughter were sold into slavery or reduced to the status of gebbar [serfs].[54]

After the conquest and occupation of Oromia, Menilek gave both the people and their land to his mainly Amhara-Tigray armed-settlers known as *neftanya*. The neftanya, who played a pivotal role in the politics and dominated the political landscape of Oromia, owned Oromo people as they owned cattle and slaves.[55] Since the neftanya were neither paid salary nor engaged in productive activities, they were given Oromo *gabars* (serfs) in lieu of salary. The gabars worked for and sustained the luxurious existence of the neftanya. Burdensome and exhausting obligations were put on the Oromo gabar.

> He had to surrender a portion of the produce of the land to the landlord as tribute. The amount varied between a quarter and a third but it was usually more, as the legal ceiling was that it should not be more than three quarters! Besides, he paid a tenth of his total produce for the tithe. He was also expected to provide his landlord with honey, meat and fire-wood, dried grass and sundry other items. Labor service was an added burden, he had to grind the landlord's share of the grain, transport it to his residence . . . . build his house, maintain his fences, care for his animals, and act as a porter, an escort or a messenger. There was an obligation to present gifts on religious holidays and other social occasions. The multiple exactions imposed on the Oromo gabars meant the loss of a considerable portion of the [gabars] production, onerous labor service and manifold other impositions.[56]

It must be stated clearly that Menilek gave two-thirds of the conquered Oromo land to his colonial state, his armed settlers and the Orthodox Church, while he allowed one-third of the land to be used by "the indigenous people on condition they supplied forced labor for the settlers and various taxes, dues and tithes for his court and the church."[57] In the land of their birth the Oromo lost their rights, human dignity, and their lands and became landless *gabars* (serfs) who had no legal protection against the excesses of brutal and arrogant Abyssinian (Amhara-Tigray) armed settlers. The higher officials among the *neftanya* had their prisons and they were governments unto themselves. They were governors, judges and jury at the same time. They imprisoned, fined and tortured[58] Oromo gabars as they saw fit. In the words of a historian,

> Gabars did not have legal protection. It must be clear because Emperor [Menilek], while protecting the conquered lands as the property of the crown, gave gabars to his unsalaried officers and soldiers as material property to be owned and used as personal property[57]

The arrogant Abyssinian conquerors abused and dehumanized their Oromo gabars "who were physically victimized, socially and psychologically humiliated and devalued as human beings."[60] Productive labor was beneath the dignity of the haughty conquerors. To the Abyssinian conquerors:

> . . . the fruit of victory is leisure. They fought their wars against the neighboring tribes, won them . . . through superior arms and organization, and from then onwards settle back to a life of ease. The idea of conquering a country in order to work there, of treating an empire as a place to which things must be brought, to be fertilized and cultivated and embellished instead of as a place from which things could be taken, to be denuded and depopulated . . . was something wholly outside their range of thought.[61]

Brutal conquest of Oromia, the alienation of Oromo land and the total subjection of the Oromo to the whims of the new masters, the destruction of Oromo cultural heritage (to be mentioned shortly) were the price to be paid for being under Menilek's colonial empire. Thus, contrary to the popular misconception which claims that Menilek "united Ethiopia," instead "he created a colonial empire . . . of which all the members were subjects rather than citizens, but in which almost all the Oromo were colonial subjects."[62] Once created, Menilek's empire became the prison of nations and nationalities, with the minority who formed the Ethiopian ruling class oppressing and exploiting all, including the Abyssinian peasants who did not come to Oromia as settlers. But the yoke of colonial machinery weighed heavily on the Oromo masses who were dehumanized, abused and exploited in all ways big and small. In addition to what has been said above, there was assault on Oromo culture and national identity. No stone was left unturned to destroy the Oromo cultural heritage.

> Oromo cultural and religious shrines and places of worship were replaced by those of the colonizers. The Amhara ruling class introduced the policy not only of baptizing and Amharizing Oromo chiefs, but also of baptizing and Amharizing even the land. Oromo village and town names were replaced by Amhara ones. For example, Finfinne became Addis Ababa, Ambo was changed to Hagere Hiwat, Haramaya to Alem Maya, Hadema to Nazereth, Bishofteu to Debre Zeit, Walliso to Ghion.[63]

Systematic efforts were made to destroy the Oromo democratic institution—the Gada system. Menilek abolished the *Chafee* assembly.[64] The *Chafee* assembly was the Oromo parliament which dealt with matters of highest importance, the making of laws, the declaration of war and the conclusion of peace. Once election to the political offices and the gathering of the Chafee assembly were abolished, the Gada system lost raison d'e-tre for its existence. The system had lost all of its political significance. It was only the memory of the Gada system that continued to exist. This is addressed in the following short moving poem by a contemporary oral poet who depicts what happened to the Oromo in Gullallee after they were defeated by one of Menilek's generals.

Inxooxxoo daabatani	No more standing on Intoto,
caffee gadlaaluun hafe	to look down at the pasture below,
Finfinnee loon geessani	No more taking cattle to Finfinnee,
hora obaasuun hafe	to water at the mineral spring.
Tulluu Daalattirratti	No more gathering on Tulluu Daalatti,
yaa'iin Gullallee hafe	where the Gullallee assembly used to meet,

Gafarsatti dabrani	No more going beyond Gafarsa,
qoraan cabsuunis hafe	to chop firewood.
Hurufa Bombirratti	No more taking calves
jabbilee yaasuun hafe	to the meadow of Hurufa Bombi.
bara jarri dufani	The year the enemy came,
loon teennas indumani	our cattle were consumed.
idda Masasaan dufe	Since Masasaa[65] came,
birmadummaanis hafe.	freedom has vanished.[66]

This means after their conquest the Gullallee Oromo lost their freedom of movement, their Chafee assembly was abolished, and their cattle were looted. By 1900 Menilek had even banned the famous Oromo pilgrimage to the land of *Abba Muudaa*.[67] Abba Muudaa ("the father to whom pilgrimage is due") was the Oromo spiritual leader who lived in the region of Bale and Sidamo provinces. Before Menilek officially banned the pilgrimage, Oromo pilgrims known as Jila went to the land of Abba Muudaa from all corners of Oromia. Through the pilgrimage to Abba Muudaa, Oromo in the Horn of Africa, from the Somali border in the East to the Sudan border in the West, from Wallo and Tigray in the North to Kenya in the South, maintained contact with their spiritual father and with each other. Their regular pilgrimages to the land of Abba Muudaa served as the focal point for their spirit of unity and oneness. By banning the pilgrimage Menilek was attempting to destroy the unity and oneness of the Oromo nation.[68] In short, Menilek's colonialism brought nothing, but destruction to Oromia. It had nothing to offer in the way of social progress.

> . . . The Abyssinians had nothing to give their subject people, and nothing to teach them. They brought no crafts or knowledge, no new system of agriculture, drainage or road making, no medicine or hygiene, no higher political organization, no superiority except in their magazine rifles and belts of cartridges. They built nothing, . . . dirty, idle and domineering, burning timber, devouring crops, taxing the meagre stream of commerce that seeped in from outside, enslaving the people.[69]

In Oromia, Ethiopian colonialism was built on twin pillars: the *gabar* system (serfdom) and slavery. The wealth created by the labor of Oromo *gabars* constituted the backbone of Ethiopia's economy. The overwhelming majority of Ethiopia's export items come from Oromia. Most of the expenses of the Ethiopian government were raised from Oromo territory. And yet the Oromo gabars did not have any legal protection against the excesses of arrogant masters.[70] What is more, whenever governors and their followers were transferred from one region to another, they carried away with them their private *gabars* in chains.[71] In this sense, it is difficult to distinguish *gabars* as any different from slaves.

This brings me to the question of slavery as the second pillar of Ethiopian colonialism. It must be said that slavery existed in the region long before Menilek created his colonial empire. However, during his long reign, slavery and the slave trade increased out of all proportion. This was for six reasons. First and foremost, Menilek's war of conquest and continued raids in southern Ethiopia "yielded thousands of captives for the emperor and his generals."[72] Second and equally important, Menilek was " . . . Ethiopia's greatest slave entrepreneur and received the bulk of the proceeds."[73] Third, Menilek, the Christian King of Shawa (1865-1889) was the great sponsor of the slave trade, who collected a tax of 2 or 3 Maria Thresa Thalers per head of slave sold in the market of Rogge.[74] Fourth, some of his own generals and soldiers were slavers who depopulated a number of areas.[75] Fifth, while passing a number of proclamations abolishing the slave trade, Menilek together with his wife, were the richest slave owners possessing some 70,000 domestic slaves at the beginning of the twentieth century.[76] Finally, it has been said and rightly that

> . . . [Menilek] maintained slavery in colonies as a means of making the conquered subjects pay by their labour all the expenses of his wars of aggression against them;

> He used slavery as a method of evangelism to teach his captive *aremouyan* (pagans) Christian virtue and divine love; [Menilek] also issued a series of proclamations against the slave trade, while he maintained slavery as a means of war reparations and evangelism.[77]

The Ethiopian colonial ruling class headed by Emperor Menilek developed a unique ability of tricking and flattering foreigners with proclamations, promising to abolish the slave trade without the intention of stopping it. Such gestures were intended to trick foreign critics.

> . . . Tricking the European was a national craft, evading issues, promising without the intention of fulfillment, tricking the paid foreign advisors, tricking the legations, tricking the visiting international committees—these were the ways by which Abyssinians had survived and prospered.[78]

Menilek died in 1913, leaving behind an empire built upon the twin pillars: the *gabar* system and slavery. In the early 1920s when the League of Nations bombarded Ethiopia with a barrage of criticism for the widespread practice of slavery and the slave trade, (the joint successors of Menilek) Empress Zewditu and the Regent Teferi (the future Emperor Haile Sellassie) issued the following proclamation which justified the enslavement of the conquered people, saying

> . . . let none sell or buy a man as a slave, and since then many other such proclamations have been made. The cause of these proclamations and the reason why some men were declared slaves was that certain nations were at war with us, and this had caused money to [be spent] which these nations had to repay with their labour.[79]

This quotation makes it clear that ten years after the death of Menilek, the colonized people of Southern Ethiopia were still paying with their labour for their own defeat and subjugation. As colonial subjects, the Oromo were subjected to total domination in every aspect of life—economic, political, social, cultural and religious. In a fertile land, they were doomed to live in abject poverty, under a crude system, inherently corrupt and incapable of improving their lot. In 1935 a British diplomat had the following to say about Ethiopian officials who still practiced slavery:

> . . . As their . . . appearance and manners, their useless grandiloquent promises of future reforms and their inability to tell the simplest truth, will completely deceive any European who has not seen these same officials in their natural habitat . . . surrounded by slavery, corruption, intrigue and petty rascality such as only these same officials can practice, while professing virtue from the Emperor downward.[80]

During the short-lived Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941), the Oromo together with other peoples of Ethiopia, registered a proud heritage of resistance against the occupying foreign power. In fact, Oromo resistance culminated in the formation of the Western Oromo Confederation. Thirty-three Oromo leaders, from Western Oromia, formed the western Oromo government in 1936. Italian occupation of the region cut short the life of the new Oromo government. During their short occupation of Ethiopia, the Italians banned slavery and the slave trade and abolished serfdom. The Italians introduced Oromo language radio programme and *Afaan Oromoo,* the Oromo language, was also used in courts and the educational system all over Oromia. However, after the Italians were defeated and expelled and Emperor Haile Sellassie was restored to power in Ethiopia in 1941, the first thing he did was to stop the Oromo language radio programme and to ban the use of the Oromo language in the courts and for educational purposes. As if that was not enough, written Oromo literature was collected and destroyed[81] and it was not permissible to write, preach, teach and broadcast in the Oromo language in Ethiopia until the early 1970s.[82]

After 1974, the phrase "The Empire of Ethiopia" was replaced by "The Socialist Ethiopia". Ironically, Socialist Ethiopia turned out to be much more oppressive than imperial Ethiopia. During

the seventeen years of the military dictatorship, tens of thousands of Oromo were killed, millions displaced internally and over half a million made refugees externally. The military government's programmes of "resettlement, villagization and collectivization" were designed deliberately to force the Oromo back into new servitude.

Although positive in some respects, the change of government in Ethiopia in 1991, has not altered the reality of Ethiopian colonialism in Oromia. The Oromo have a wealth of experience about their condition under colonialism and they have a clear vision about the future: they want to be free as the last colony in Africa and live in peace and freedom with other peoples of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. The new Ethiopian ruling elites apparently assume that because the monopoly of power has shifted from the Amhara elites to the Tigray ones, the reality of colonialism in Oromia has dissolved itself. Far from it. Oromia is still a colony. Colonialism will disappear from Oromia only through self-determination of the Oromo. Self-determination is the bedrock of democracy. What is the use of talking about democracy in the abstract when people are not allowed to organize freely? Today, it is dangerous in Oromia to think of supporting an independent Oromo organization that does not receive its marching orders from the current ruling elites? It is sad to note in passing that the attitude of the Ethiopian elites toward the Oromo has not altered. However, the Oromo have changed their attitude towards their oppressors and they will not accept domination in whatever guise it may come. From the study of the struggle since 1974, it is very clear that the Oromo have decided to break out of a century-long imprisonment in oppressive colonial darkness and no force will keep them under this darkness without hope. The colonial establishment in Oromia is an anomaly, whose days are numbered. This colonialism which turns oppressed people against each other is bound to disappear.

Finally, let me end on an optimistic note. I support the unity of free peoples of Ethiopia. I sincerely believe that in a truly democratic federated Ethiopia, the Oromo will lose nothing but they will have a great deal to gain. What is needed is to decolonize Oromia and democratize Ethiopia. I consider that the decolonization of Oromia is fundamental to the self-determination of the Oromo and one cannot be achieved without the other. In short, the decolonization of Oromia will ensure self-determination for the Oromo, while democratization will create a necessary political climate in the country in which conflict will be resolved through rational dialogue, genuine search for mutual benefit characterized by the spirit of tolerance, consensus and compromise. The creation of a self-governing Oromo state is a necessary condition for the establishment of a federated democratic Ethiopia. Because of their huge numbers, geographical position and rich natural resources of Oromia, the Oromo are destined to play an important role in the future of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Consequently, Ethiopians should make an earnest effort to understand the reasons for, and come to terms with, the Oromo quest for self-determination.

End Notes

1. A shorter version of this paper was published under the title of "The Oromo Have a Rich History," *Ethiopian Review* (June 1992).

2. An expanded version of this paper was published in *The Oromo Commentary*, vol. III, no. 2 (1993): 24-31. This version is included here with permission of the publisher.

3. Tokkumma Oromoo, "The Growth of Oromo Nationalism," *Waldhaansso: Journal of the Union of Oromo in North America*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (1988): 53.

4. Darrel Bates, *The Abyssinian Difficulty: The Emporer Theodorus and the Magdala Campaign, 1867-68*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, 7.

5. Mekuria Bulch, "Language, Ethnic Identity and Nationalism in Ethiopia: History of Written Afaan Oromoo and Language Policies of Ethiopian Regimes, Part One: 1840-94," *The Oromo Commentary*, Vol. III, No 1 (1993): 8.

6. Gene Gragg, *Oromo Dictionary,* East Lansing, Michigan: African Studies Center, 1982: (Introduction) xiii.

7. Mekuria Bulcha, "Checkered Contributions to Oromo Literacy: The Writings of Onesimos Nasib and the Advent of Modern Education in Oromoland," *Proceedings of the Conference on the Oromo Nation held at York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August 4-5, 1994,* ed. by Bichaka Fayissa, Murfreesboro: Middle Tennessee State University, 1991, 51.

8. Bulcha, "Language, Ethnic Identity and Nationalism," *The Oromo Commentary,* Vol. III, No. 1 (1993): 8.

9. Bairu Tafla, ed. *Asma Giyorgis and his Work "History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Sawa"* (Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, GMBH, Stuttgart: 1987), 48-9.

10. Ibid.

11. Bahrey, *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646,* trans. and ed., C. F. Beckingham and C. W. B. Huntingford, London: The Hakluyt Society, 1954, 11.

12. Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, Preface xi

13. Mohammed Hassen, "The Historian Abba Bahrey and the Importance of His 'History of the Galla,' " *The Horn of Africa,* Vol. XIII, Nos. 3 & 4 (1990); Vol. XIV, Nos. 1 & 2 (1991): 93.

14. See, for instance, F. M. E. Pereira, *Chronica de Susenyos, Rei de Ethiopia,* 2 vols. Lisbon, 1892-1900, Chapter 41. According to what is contained in this chapter, the Agaw were exterminated and their land became a desert. Those who survived the slaughter were sold into slavery.

15. Merid Wolde Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom, 1508-1708, with Special Reference to the Galla Migrations and Their Consequences," Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1971, 282, 311 and passim.

16. The reign of Lebna Dengel lasted from 1508 to 1540.

17. Mohammed Hassen, "The Oromo of Ethiopia, 1500-1850: With Special Emphasis on the Gibe Region," Ph.D dissertation, University of London, 1983, 43-51.

18. Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia,* 2

19. Mohammed Hassen, "Some Aspects of Oromo History That Have Been Misunderstood," *The Oromo Commentary,* Vol. III, No. 2 (1993): 25.

20. Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia,* 2.

21. *Azaj* Tino was converted to Catholicism together with Emporer Susenyos in 1622.

22. Hassen, "Some Aspects of Oromo History," 25.

23. Joseph van de Loo, *Guji Oromo Culture in Southern Ethiopia, Religious Capabilities in Rituals and Songs,* Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1991, 284.

24. Hassen, "The Historian Abba Bahrey," 95

25 F. M. Pereira, *Chronica de Susenyos Rei de Ethiopia,* 214.

26. See, for instance, A. Cecchi, *Du Zeila all frontiere del Caffa,* Roma, 1886, Vol. II, 30.

27. Hassen, "The Oromo of Ethiopia," 112.

28. Cecchi, Ibid.

29. Hassen, "The Historian Abba Bahrey," 95.

30. Bahrey, *Some Records of Ethiopia,* 115.

31. Arab Faquih, *Futuh Al-Habasha,* trans. and ed., R. Basset, Paris, 1897, 135-37, 254-55.

32. Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia,* 2.

33. Ibid.

34. E. Ullendorf, *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People.* London, 1960, 76.

35. Harold Marcus, "Does the Past Have Any Authority in Ethiopia?" *Ethiopian Review,* vol. 2, no. 4 (1992): 20.

36. Getachew Haile, *Some Notes on the History of Ethiopia: A Re-examination of the Documents,* Virginia: Center of Ethiopian Studies, 19, 6.

37. Ibid.

38. Asmarom Legesse, *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society.* London, 1973, 8.

39. All major sources on the Gada system, especially Asmarom Legesse, emphasize that there were election campaigns.

40. de Salviac, *Les Galla,* 188-89.

41. Legesse, *Gada: Three Approaches,* 282.

42. Hassen, "Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution among the Oromo," *The Oromo Commentary,* vol. 1, no. 1 (1991): 19.

43. See for instance Virginia Luling, "Government and social Control among Some Peoples of the Horn of Africa," M.A. thesis, University of London, 1966, 87-9.

44. Asmarom Legesse, "Oromo Democracy." Paper presented at Oromo Conference, Toronto, Ontario, Canada 12-13 August 1989, 7-1. I am indebted to the author for giving me a copy of this paper.

45. Ibid.

46. Gerbee, "The Geda Militarism," 49.

47. Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860.*

48. See, for instance, Bonnie K. Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa,* Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 1990 and Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia, State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992,* Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993.

49. See Addis Hiwet, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution,* London: Review of African Political Economy, 1975, 4.

50. Lord Lytton, *The Stolen Desert,* London: McDonald, 1966, 160.

51. See, for instance, Robin Lukham and Dawit Bekele, "Foreign Powers and Militarism in the Horn of Africa," *Review of African Political Economy,* No. 30 (1984): 8-20.

52. Timothy D. Fernyhough, "Serfs, Slaves and Shefta: Modes of Production in Southern Ethiopia from the Late Nineteenth Century to 1941," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1986, 186.

53. de Salviac, *Les Gallas,* 86-87.

54. J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia,* London: Oxford University Press, 1952, 118.

55. Mohammed Hassen, "The Militarization of the Ethiopian State and the Oromo," *Proceedings of 5th International Conference on the Horn of Africa.* New York: Marsden Reproductions, Inc., 1991, 93.

56. Abdul Mejid Hussen, "The Political Economy of the Ethiopian Famine," *REHAB: Drought and Famine in Ethiopia,* ed. Abdul Mejid Hussen. London: International African Institute, 1976, 14.

57. Getahun Delibo, Ibid , 198-199.

58. Hassen, Ibid.

59. Delibo, Ibid., 213-214. See also A. W. Hodson, *Seven Years in Southern Abyssinia,* London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1927, 253.

60. Hassen, Ibid., 94.

61. E. Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia.* London: Methuen, 1984 (reprint), 248-249.

62. Paul Baxter, Ibid., 288.

63. Hassen & Greenfield, Ibid., 576.

64. See, for instance, *Asma Giyorgis and His Work History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Shawa,* edited by Bairu Tafla. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag; Wiesbaden GMBH, 1987, 134-135.

65. Masasaa was one of the generals of Menilek who conquered the Oromo in Gullallee.

66. Tammene Bitima, "On Some Oromo Historical Poems," *Paideuma Mitteilungen Zur Kulturkunde,* 2a (1983): 318-319.

67. K. Knutsson, *Authority and Change: A Study of the Kallu Institution among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia,* Goteborg, Etnografiska Museet, 1967, 147-155.

68. Hassen, "The Militarization of the Ethiopian State," Ibid., 95

69. Evelyn Waugh, Ibid. 25-26.

70. Ibid. See also Getahun Delibo, "Emporer Menelik's Ethiopia, 1865-1916: National Unification or Amhara Communal Domination?" Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 1974, 213-214. See also A. W. Hodson, *Seven Years in Southern Abyssinia,* London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1927, 253.

71. Fernyhough, "Serfs, Slaves and Shefta," 181-182. See also H. Darley, *Slavery and Ivory in Abyssinia,* London: H. F. & G. Witherby, 1926, 130-131.

72. Delibo, "Emporer Menelik's Ethiopia, 1865-1916," 213-14. See also Hodson, *Seven Years in Southern Abyssinia,* 253.

73. Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Mennelik II,* 73.

74. Delibo, "Emporer Menelik's Ethiopia, 1865-1916."

75. See for instance, H. Darley, *Slavers and Ivory in Abyssinia,* 197-199, 201 et passim.

76. Parkhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia 1800-1935,* 75.

77. Delibo, *Slavers and Ivory in Abyssinia,* 219.

78. Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia,* 27.

79. Quoted in M. Preham, *The Government of Ethiopia.* Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1969, 225.

80. The British diplomat E. N. Erskine, in a letter to the foreign office in 1935/36 FO/371/50506HN09582.

81. Mekuria Bulcha, "Language, Ethnic Identity and Nationalism in Ethiopia: Afaan Oromoo and the Language Policies of Ethiopian Regimes, Part Two, 1941-1993," *The Oromo Commentary,* vol. III, no. 2 (1993): 8.

82. Paul Baxter, Ibid., 136-37.

83. Admasu Shunkuri, "Geda Militarism and Oromo Expansion: A Counter-Commentary," *Ethiopian Review,* vol 3, no. 11 (1993): 53.

The Language Policies of Ethiopian Regimes and the History of Written Afaan Oromoo: 1844-1994

*by Mekuria Bulcha**

Every language represents human creativity at its noblest, the voice of gods breathing life into a dead world. 'In the beginning was the Word'
Media Development, 3/1992

It is the more strange, considering their disunity and wide dispersion, that the Oromo show so much uniformity of both language and custom. Margery Perham,
The Government of Ethiopia, 1969:29

Introduction

The Oromo language, referred to as *afaan Oromoo* by its speakers and in this article, is the second most widely spread indigenous language in Africa south of the Sahara. Only *Hausa* in Nigeria has a larger number of speakers. Oromo speakers are spread over a wide geographic area not only in Ethiopia, but also in Kenya and Somalia. In Ethiopia, *afaan Oromoo* is a *lingua franca* among the common people except in the northern provinces. In addition to its 23 million or so native speakers, *afaan Oromoo* is used by members of several ethnic groups such as the Adare, Sidama, Berta, Anuak, Koma, Kulo and Kaficho as means of communication and trade with their neighbours.

In spite of its importance as a vernacular widely spoken in the Horn of Africa, *afaan Oromoo* remains one of the least studied languages. As Paul Baxter has noted,

> . . . most of the dialects of their language have not been studied and great segments of Oromo history are blank; but if, and it is a big if, Oromos can have the chance to study their own cultures and use their own language for publication, then there could be an efflorescence of Oromo studies and creative writing"[1]

Therefore, *afaan Oromoo* today lacks a developed literature, and has less printed materials than any language with a comparable number of speakers. This does not mean, however, that the Oromo have not tried to develop their language. Interest for *afaan Oromo* is not lacking among expatriate scholars either. Starting from the first half of the 19th century, European scholars have studied it. From the latter part of the 19th century onwards, Oromo religious leaders and scholars have attempted to make *afaan Oromoo* a literate language. In the 1950s, an attempt was also made to develop an alphabet suitable to Oromo sounds.

The underdeveloped status of Oromo literacy is *mainly* attributable to the *Amharization* policy of consecutive Ethiopian governments over the last one hundred years. These governments have not only neglected, but have also actively suppressed the development of Oromo literature. The purpose of *Amharization* was to create a homogeneous Ethiopian society and identity through the medium of Amharic, the language of a dominant minority. Amharic was to be spread among the non-Amhara majority, through the school system, the Church—including the foreign missionaries—administrative institutions and not the least, settlement of Amharas in non-Amharic regions.

Because, the Oromo people confess various religions and lead different life-styles, language remains the most important factor for the maintenance of their unity and identity.

The purpose of this article is threefold. First, it will briefly explore the attempts made by Oromo and non-Oromo writers to study and write *afaan Oromoo* during the last one hundred and fifty years. Second, it will discuss the language policies of consecutive Ethiopian regimes in general and with regard to *afaan Oromoo,* in particular. It will attempt to shed some light on the responses of different Oromo groups and individuals to such policies at different times. Finally, it will look briefly at the current trends in the development of *afaan Oromoo* and the prospects of its evolution towards a national and official language in Oromia.

Early Studies of *Afaan Oromoo*.

The history of written *afaan Oromoo* extends back to the first part of the 19th century. Oromo studies started simultaneously in Europe and Africa 150 years ago. This coincides with the arrival in Europe, of some Oromos who were bought by European travellers in the slave markets of the Middle East and Africa and were taken to Europe. An encounter of some of these ex-slaves with a German law student, Karl Tutschek, who was interested in languages led to the beginning of Oromo studies in Europe. Tutschek was employed in 1838 as a tutor of four young ex-slaves, three Sudanese and an Oromo, by Prince Maximilian of Bavaria. Maximilian bought the Africans during his travels in the Middle East. One of them was an Oromo named Akkafedhee.

During his work with his African pupils, Tutschek developed an interest in their languages. He was "particularly attracted by the simplicity and euphony and grammatical formation of the Oromo language which became evident, but after a very short study"[2]. Within a short period of time he was able to speak *afaan Oromoo* with Akkafedhee and other Oromo ex-slaves who arrived in Germany around 1839-40. Based on the materials he gathered from them, Tutschek was able to complete his first draft of Oromo-English-German dictionary by 1843.

His tragic death at the young age of 28 brought the promising work of Tutschek to an abrupt end. Fortunately, however, the Oromo manuscripts of Karl Tutschek were organized and published in two works, *The Dictionary of the Galla Language* and *A Grammar of the Galla Language,* by his brother in 1844. These works introduced the Oromo language to the European world of scholarship.

While Karl Tutschek was labouring on his Oromo grammar and dictionary, another German, Johann Ludwig Krapf was studying *afaan Oromoo* in its natural surroundings. Krapf came in contact with the Oromo in 1839 on his way to Shoa. On the journey, he met several Oromos and gathered some information on Oromo culture and religion[3].

It did not pass long before Krapf recognized the importance of *afaan Oromoo* for missionary work in Northeast Africa. Therefore, by the time he arrived at the court of the king of Shoa, he was "passionately interested in the Oromo language"[4]. While at the court of the Shoan king, Krapf began to study *afaan Oromoo* with the assistance of his servant. In order to improve his knowledge of the Oromo people and language, he followed Sahle Selassie, the King of Shawa on several of his military campaigns against the neighbouring Oromo Gada confederacies and principalities. By 1840 his short work, *An Imperfect Outline of the Elements of the Galla* [Oromo] *Language,* was published by the Church Missionary Society in London. Krapf devoted part of his time to translating the Holy Scriptures to *afaan Oromoo*. Krapf's work was interrupted as he was banned from re-entering Shoa in 1842.

Apparently the enthusiasm and interest Krapf displayed towards the Oromo and their language had touched on a sensitive issue and had contributed to his expulsion from Shoa. The development of European interest and contacts with the Oromo nation may, without doubt, have been in the way of Sahle Selassie's plans to conquer the Oromo territory. The development of Oromo literature also may have been considered an obstacle to the cultural and linguistic assimilation of Oromo subjects already living in the kingdom, or of those yet to be conquered.

The Abyssinian Coptic priests were not ready to allow the establishment of a competing protestant

church using a completely different language (Oromo) deciphered in the Latin alphabet in their neighbourhood. Sahle Selassie's reaction to Krapf's interest in the Oromo was expulsion of the latter from Shoa. The priests also insistently demanded Krapf's expulsion from the kingdom. Sahle Selassie's reaction to Krapf was the forerunner of 20th century policy of Ethiopian rulers with regard to Oromo studies and particularly the development of Oromo literature. Although Krapf was able to resume his translation of the Scriptures to *afaan Oromoo* in the latter part of 1860s in Europe, his work had limited influence and was of very little use inside Oromoland.

In the second half of the 19th century, Oromos in the diaspora (ex-slaves) continued to play an important role in the development of written *afaan Oromo*. Among these, it was the works of Onesimos Nasib and his Oromo language team which came to constitute the basic literature of the Oromo language until the present day.

Onesimos Nasib's Contributions

Like Akkafedhee and the other Oromos from whom Tutschek learned *afaan Oromo,* Onesimos and his Oromo colleagues were victims of the slave trade that afflicted parts of Northeast Africa until the 1930s. As I have discussed elsewhere[5], the works these ex-slaves had accomplished between 1886-1899 at Geleb in Eritrea were the first and so far the only significant step towards creating an Oromo literature. These men and women, having been freed from the cruel grip of slave-traffickers by the humanitarian acts of individuals and ironically Italian colonialists and supported by the Swedish missionaries, toiled in a foreign land to make *afaan Oromoo* a written language.

Onesimos was born sometime in the mid-1850s in Ilu Abbaa Bor, western Oromoland. While a child, he was captured by strangers and was sold into slavery. In 1870, at the age of about 16, he was bought and freed by a Swiss named Munzinger, who lived at the Red Sea port of Massawa. Munzinger handed Onesimos over to the Swedish missionaries who had just arrived in Massawa. Onesimos was the first pupil at the school the missionaries had opened for boys in Massawa.

Onesimos was bright and studious. The missionaries, therefore, sent him to Sweden for further training in 1876 after he completed his schooling at the station. In Sweden, he studied at the Johannelund Missionary Institute for five years and graduated in 1881 with a teacher's and missionary work diploma.

Soon after graduation, Onesimos left Sweden and was back in Massawa in October 1881. Onesimos Nasib's dream had been to return one day to his native Oromoland and spread the Gospel and literacy among his people. Soon after his return to Africa, he joined an expedition that left Massawa in November 1881 to enter Oromoland via Sudan in the west. The journey, which was the first of the six "Oromo expeditions" made by Swedish missionaries to reach Oromoland, was unsuccessful[6]. After eight months of gruelling travel and the death of two of its members, the expedition returned to Massawa in mid-1882.

In November 1884, Onesimos once again joined the "Third Oromo Expedition" to his native land. This time, the expedition successfully entered Oromoland via Jibouti in the east. Onesimos and his companions arrived at Finfinnee (the site of present Addis Ababa) sometime in early 1885. However, Menelik, who was then in the process of conquering and annexing Oromoland, was displeased to see them there and ordered them to return to the coast.

Back in Munkullo, the Swedish missionary station near Massawa, in April 1886, Onesimos resumed teaching. In addition, he also *"set about the most important part of his life-work: that of creating an Oromo literature"*[7] (emphasis added). Onesimos, who in 1886 was in his early thirties, continued with the translation of religious works which he had already started on his return from Sweden.

Onesimos was assisted by a team of young Oromos liberated from slavery and sheltered at the Swedish Mission station of Geleb near Asmara. Among the young men and women of the

Oromo-speaking community at Geleb was Aster Ganno, who had been freed in 1886 and entrusted to the Swedes. Like Onesimos, Aster was born in Ilu Abbaa Bor, during the mid-1870s and was enslaved in her childhood. Together with Onesimos, she was destined to play an important role in laying the foundations of Oromo literature and introducing modern education and missionary work in Oromoland.

It was soon discovered that Aster was gifted with a remarkable intellect and possessed a real feeling for the Oromo language. As soon as she learned to read and write she was assigned to assist Onesimos. Her major task was compiling an Oromo dictionary. Onesimos "continuously benefited by her work" in finding "idiomatic words and expressions as he reviewed his draft translation" of the Scriptures. Therefore, "much credit for the final structure of the language" in the works of Onesimos "ought to go to his young female assistant"[8].

The literary works of the Oromo team were both religious and secular. Onesimos wrote and/or translated most of them between 1885 and 1898. During those thirteen years, he translated seven books, two of them with Aster Ganno. He also compiled an Oromo-Swedish Dictionary of some 6,000 words[9].

The first work (translation) by Onesimos was *Galata Waaqayoo Gofta Maccaa* ("Praise be to God, the Lord of the Multitudes"). This was a small book of Gospel songs published in 1886. Several editions of this book have appeared since then and it remains in use today. The next work translated by Onesimos was *The New Testament* which was completed and published in 1893. In 1894, together with Aster, Onesimos published *Jalqaba Barsiisaa* or the *Oromo Reader*. The reader, 174 pages in length, contains a collection of 3600 words and 79 short stories.

The most significant contribution made by Onesimos was the complete translation of *The Bible to afaan Oromoo*. In 1899, Onesimos travelled to Europe and stayed about nine months in St. Chrischona, Switzerland, to assist with proof-reading and to personally supervise the printing of his works. His translation of the Scriptures is regarded by historians and linguists as a great intellectual feat and a remarkable accomplishment for a single individual[10].

Two other works which were translated by Onesimos, Luther's *Cathechism* and John Bunyan's *Mans Heart* were also published in 1899. The translation of Birth's *Bible Stories* by Aster Ganno with the assistance of Onesimos was printed at this same time. Aster Ganno wrote down from memory a collection of five hundred Oromo songs, fables and stories. Some of the stories were included in the *Oromo Reader* mentioned above[11].

The other members of the team contributed in different ways in the preparation of the background literature for the educational and missionary work to be launched in Oromoland. A vocabulary of about 15,000 words[12] was collected with the aim of compiling a dictionary, facilitating the translation of the Scriptures, and for the preparation of educational literature. A draft of a comprehensive Oromo grammar was prepared by Nils Hylander with the assistance of his team members. These works were left unpublished.

The work that Onesimos and his language team had accomplished at Geleb may, without doubt, be viewed as the first and so far the only significant step towards creating an Oromo literature. These works, particularly the Oromo Bible and the *Oromo Reader* have since been used as reference works by expatriate students of the Oromo language.

The Beginnings of Oromo Literacy

The activities of Onesimos and his colleagues were not limited to Oromo literature and Gospel preaching. Providing education to the Oromo in their own language was, at least to Onesimos, an important goal. Onesimos also loved to teach. In one of the numerous letters he wrote in 1886 to his friends in Sweden, he remarked: "I labour with delight and happiness together with our newly arrived Galla (Oromo) girls . . . What a joy to teach them in our mother tongue"[13]. Oromo literacy remained Onesimos Nasib's passionate pursuit for the rest of his life. Nils Dahlberg,

who had visited him in Nakamte in 1923 wrote,

> After he came back to Africa, and until his death, Onesimos did every thing to make the Oromo interested in their own language. Whenever he met young people, he did not wait to raise the subject and to persuade them to learn the alphabet and read books in the language of their forefathers[14].

After 35 years in exile, Onesimos finally returned to his homeland in April 1904. Since his work was well known at home long before his return, he was received with great honour by Dajazmatch Kumsa Moroda of the Bakare *mooti* (royal) family of Leeqa Naqamte. Kumsa was the Governor of Wallaga and lived during 1904-5 in Najjo[15].

Kumsa built Onesimos a house and a school near his own residence. Kumsa sent his own children and servants to the school and persuaded his people to follow his example[16]. Enthusiastically received by the people, Onesimos and his colleagues immediately set about their work: spreading literacy and preaching the Gospel. A few months after their arrival, they had already started a school and enrolled twenty students.

By May 1905, a year after they came home, they had sixty eight regular students at their school in Najjo[17] and a basic foundation for formal education in *afaan Oromoo* had been established. Though a very humble start, this was quite a significant achievement as it occurred several years before the first public school was opened elsewhere in the Ethiopian Empire, even in its capital city Addis Ababa[18]. Additionally, this pioneering educational and religious work was performed entirely by the indigenous people themselves. The Swedish missionaries arrived in Wallaga about 20 years later in 1922.

Thrilled by the genuine interest of the Oromo in his educational work, Onesimos wrote to his friends in Eritrea that he would have several hundred students if only he had enough teachers and classrooms. He added that practically all parents implored him to receive their children[19]; and

> The master comes with his servant, the father with his son, brothers with brothers and friends with their friends and insist and beg us to teach them"[20]. Elsewhere in western Wallaga, Oromo leaders opened schools and asked Onesimos and his colleagues to send them teachers[21].

It is interesting to note that the educational work of these indigenous evangelists was not limited to the school. Aster Ganno and Hirphee (Feben) Abbaa Magaal, regularly visited the wives of the notables and taught them home and child care, and the alphabet[22]. Onesimos wrote in 1915 that in connection to these home visits, many women had learned to read and some to write as well[23].

Regarding the importance accorded to literacy by the people, "Onesimos observed . . . that young men who had been to an evangelical school refused to marry illiterate girls"[24]. Later on, Onesimos began literary classes even for prisoners in Naqamte. He advised and encouraged them to use their time in prison to learn to read and write. He distributed copies of the *Oromo Reader* to them free of charge[25].

Early Opposition to Oromo Literacy

Although Menelik did not maintain a specific language policy, *Amharization* through the spread of Coptic Christianity and the spread of Amharic language was attempted in the newly conquered territories. Coptic Churches were constructed and mass baptization of non-Christians in the newly conquered territories was practiced. The main agents of *Amharization* were the Coptic priests who had often preceded, accompanied or followed the soldiers and were among the first colonist in the south. They were also among the main beneficiaries of the conquest as they were given land and *gabbars* (serfs) upon whose labour they often thrived.

The Abyssinian priests jealously guarded their interests and were very negative towards any innovation in religious and educational fields which they considered their exclusive domains. Therefore, the activities of Onesimos and his colleagues were considered as unwelcome intrusions by outsiders. In addition, the popularity Onesimos and his Oromo literature had gained within such a short time was also the cause for jealousy among the semi-literate Abyssinian clergy. As the leading figure among the evangelists, Onesimos became a target for their envy and persecution. To the Amhara clergy, Onesimos represented Oromo defiance and rejection of the Amhara language and religion. He was seen as a "wrong" example and a "bad" influence upon the subjects[26].

The priests went to the court of *Ras* Demise Nasibu, the governor of Arjoo The *Ras* was also the highest imperial agent in the southwest and commander of the *naftanya* forces in the region. At his court, they filed their accusation against Onesimos.

Ras Demise reported Onesimos as a trouble maker to authorities in Addis Ababa. The matter reached Abuna Mateos, the Egyptian Archbishop of the Coptic Church who presided not only on religious matters of the Empire, but "who had intervened largely in politics"[27]. Onesimos was summoned to Addis Ababa at short notice and stood trial.

The Archbishop, who according to Onesimos "was much afraid of his own [Abyssinian] clergy" did not even pretend to be fair, but rather cursed and excommunicated Onesimos. Onesimos was also sentenced by Mateos to loss of all his property and imprisonment in heavy chains. The same punishment was meted out to his adherents and supporters including Kumsa Moroda[28]. The Emperor did not, however, confirm the verdict in its entirety. He cancelled the imprisonment and Onesimos was allowed to return to Naqamte. However, the Emperor did bar him from teaching and preaching[29].

Fragments of existing evidence indicate that it was the significance of his Oromo literature rather than the contents of his religious teaching that had been cause for alarm among the Coptic priests and the other imperial agents in Wallaga. This was made clear, for example, in the letter of the Governor of Arjo to Kumsa Moroda. He informed Kumsa that "the Bible is the destruction of his people", and that "the Bible must not be given to ordinary people; it would lead to disaster"[31].

One may wonder why the principal agent of a Christian emperor whose confessed motive to conquer the Oromo was "the expansion of Christianity" declared the Bible to be destructive and harmful. It should be pointed out here that ambiguity is the trade mark of the Amhara mode of communication. If we try to unravel the message of the governor's letter with that in mind, it was not the Bible per se that was considered destructive, but most likely that it was the *afaan Oromoo*. The Oromo Bible symbolized an Oromo identity which was/is separate from that of the rulers, and in fact, was an indicator of a competitive literate Oromo culture which, if left free, might have developed quickly. The literate Abyssinian "high" culture could co-exist only with spoken *afaan Oromoo*. That it was capable to co-exist with a literate Oromo "high" culture and flourish was questionable. This was made quite clear, at least to the Orthodox clergy, by Oromo enthusiasm for the literature and education provided by the evangelists. This was of course a threat to the Abyssinian claim to superiority over and right to rule the Oromo and other peoples within their empire.

The message in Demise's letter, apparently, was also a warning to Kumsa for permitting the distribution of Oromo literature. At one point, Kumsa was even forced to order the collection of copies of the *Oromo Reader* he allowed Onesimos to distribute to the people[31]. As the title suggests, the content of the reader was secular rather than religious.

Menelik's verdict also indicates that it was not only the religious teachings of Onesimos, but also his use of Oromo literature which was considered offensive. The Emperor allowed Onesimos to go free but forbade him to continue with his teaching. He was not even allowed to teach his own children. If it were only his religious activities that were problematic, the emperor could

have allowed Onesimos to continue with the non-religious aspects of his work—literacy. Obviously, Menelik was not against literacy. But literacy in *afaan Oromoo* was not to be encouraged as it would have worked against the idea of linguistic homogenization of his empire through the spread of Amharic.

The fact that Karl Cederqvist, a colleague of Onesimos, was running a school and preaching the Gospel only five kilometres away from the Imperial Palace and the Patriarchate in Addis Ababa also suggests the predominance of linguistic concerns over religious ideology in the treatment of Onesimos. Unlike Onesimos, Cederquist conducted his activities in English and Amharic.

Oromo Nationalism Finds An Outlet

Language is, obviously, a basis for the identity of a people, or an ethnic group. The history of many nations attests that language is one of the most important ingredients in the development of national consciousness. It plays a major role in the struggle for self-determination in many societies. It was natural, therefore, for the Oromo people who had lost their independence just a decade prior to the arrival of the evangelists to embrace their Oromo literature in order to preserve their identity which was being threatened by the imposed culture and the language of the conquerors. This manifestation of Oromo consciousness and nationalism, however, was unacceptable to the Abyssian rulers and clergy. It threatened their interests and the maintenance of their newly created empire. As Gustav Aren has rightly indicated,

> It was evident that government officials in alliance with the clergy formed a powerful pressure group, which tried to enforce Orthodoxy as a means of securing Amhara culture and to combat Oromo consciousness, which seemed to have found an outlet in the evangelical movement[32].

Oromo consciousness was expressed in various ways. Kumsa and the other Oromo leaders who apparently felt that their dignity was somewhat restored through the Oromo literature, from the slight of the conquest and particularly the cultural subordination to the Amhara exhorted Onesimos to teach and preach diligently even after his trial in 1905. Overjoyed by the works of Onesimos, they did everything possible to support the activities of the evangelists[33].

Onesimos was given very high respect by the Oromo aristocracy and people in Wallaga. He was bestowed with the honour of sitting by the side of Kumsa Moroda on public occasions and at banquets. In addition, " . . . Gobra Igziabher (Kumsa) himself and . . . Dibaba had Onesimos as godfather to their children"[34]. This also shows the preference for the Protestant religion over Orthodox Christianity of these important Oromo families.

Several Oromo dignitaries, such as Dibaba Bakare and Yaddessa Gumaa, who were patrons of Orthodox churches and employers of the Orthodox priests invited the evangelists to preach and teach in their districts. Although the Coptic priests were already engaged in providing some form of church education, these Oromo dignitaries put their children and their servants under the tutorship of the evangelists and called upon their countrymen to do the same. Thus the Oromo literature and the Evangelical movement were seen by many Oromos, particularly by Oromo leaders, as a convenient means to counteract the influence of the Amhara culture and language which the Coptic priests were trying to impose upon them.

The behaviour and the actions of these Oromo leaders contradict the assumption held by some expatriate scholars and Abyssinian elites that once their country was incorporated into the Amhara state, Oromo leaders would become its officials, adopt Orthodox Christianity and turn into Amharas. In fact, the resistance of the Oromo of the southwest to Abyssinian rule became more manifest in 1936, when several of the Oromo leaders mentioned above came together and formed the Western Oromo Confederation and declared independence from Ethiopia. The attempt failed due to the refusal of the world powers of the time to support it and also the Italian occupation.

Power Struggle in the Centre Favours Oromo Literacy

The Ethiopian history of the last one hundred years attests that a crisis in the imperial centre most often results in a period of increased freedom and self-assertion for the subjugated peoples in its peripheries. The sickness of Menelik 1909, his subsequent paralysis and death in 1913 ushered in a period of intensive power struggle and crisis of succession in Addis Ababa. This meant less control over the peripheries. Consequently, the restriction imposed on the use of Oromo literature was relaxed. Although the clergy with the support of the Archbishop continued until 1912 to persecute Onesimos, its influence over the fate of Oromo literature and over evangelical work had lost much of its effect by 1914.

In 1916, Menelik's successor, Lij Iyassu (1913-1916) gave missionaries permission to carry out evangelical work in the provinces. At the same time, it also became possible to run schools where the use of local vernaculars was at least not explicitly prohibited. Hence, the evangelists were able to continue with their educational and religious activities without much intervention from the clergy. The boys' schools in Naqamte and Najjo were revived and enlarged. In Naqamte, Aster and Lidia opened a school for girls. The relaxation of restriction on the use of afaan Oromoo for missionary educational and religious work also meant a wider circulation of Oromo literature in Wallaga.

At the imperial centre, power struggle continued more or less until 1930, the year of Haile Selassie's coronation. Hence, there was little concern about the languages used by the subject peoples in the provinces. Elementary education in *afaan Oromoo* was able to expand without much intervention.

The Phelps-Stokes Commission who toured Eastern Africa in 1924 reported that in some of the missionary schools in Wallaga, *afaan Oromoo* was the only medium of instruction. Amharic was not yet included even as a subject in the curriculum used by some of these schools[35].

Far from the centre and a close scrutiny of the Amhara rulers, Oromo literacy was slowly taking root not only in Wallaga, but also in the Harar-Dire Dawa area where Catholic missionaries who had published some religious works in *afaan Oromo* were active. It was during that time that many people learned to read and write in afaan Oromo.

Some significant works based on Oromo language by expatriate scholars such as Cerulli's *Folk-Literature of the Galla of Southern Ethiopia* (1922), Bishop Jarousseau's *Notions Grammaticales sur la langue Galla ou Oromo* (1922), etc., were published during that period.

The Impact of the Italian Invasion

Prior to their invasion, Italians apparently had studied well the conditions of the subject peoples in Ethiopia. Through the works of Italian scholars such as Cerulli, Moreno and other scholars, they seem to have been also informed about the language situation in the empire. Immediately after conquest, the Italians divided Ethiopia into regions using language and ethnicity as criteria. It was said that they were interested in winning the trust of the non-Amhara peoples through the elimination of the Amhara claim to superiority over them. Therefore, employment of Amharas in government offices and using Amharic language in non-Amhara territories was prohibited. *Afaan Oromo,* Kaficho, the Somali and Adare languages were used as the media of instruction in government schools in the south. In Addis Ababa schools, *afaan Oromoo* and Amharic were used.

Whatever the motives behind it might have been, the Italian policy favoured expansion of literacy in *afaan Oromoo*. It also "led to the establishment of small elementary schools at a score or more provincial towns which had hitherto been without . . . schools"[36]. Since the literature used by the schools under the Italians is not available today, it is difficult to comment on the quality and quantity of materials produced in *afaan Oromoo*. The Italian rule was too short to expect much. Nevertheless, a number of Oromo vocabularies, dictionaries and grammar books were

published by Italian writers such as Borello, Caressa, Arenzano, Cavallera, Ducati, Moreno, Thiene etc., during that period.[37]

Thus, by the beginning of the 1940s, a hundred years after Oromo studies began, several, bilingual dictionaries and grammars, bibles, and other religious literature in *afaan Oromoo* existed. Even if in limited scale, *afaan Oromoo* has been used as medium of instruction for over a quarter century. As Gene Gragg has correctly reported,

> Given the adverse circumstances, a surprisingly high degree of Oromo literacy has existed there since the early decades of this century, owing in large part to the widespread use of Onesimos Nasib's Bible translation (. . .) by Protestant and even Orthodox Christians, and the existence of mission-supported education in Oromo[38]

The development of Oromo literacy that began a century before was suddenly interrupted following the defeat of the Italians in 1941. Haile Selassie's regime no longer tolerated literacy in *afaan Oromoo* and the use of Oromo literature for educational and religious purposes was once again "suppressed in favour of government decreed *Amharization*" and hence de-Oromization.[38] They were prohibited from using *afaan Oromoo* for preaching and teaching. The prohibition lasted until the revolution of 1974.

The Imperial Decree of 1943

Following the return of Haile Selassie from exile, radical change was introduced in the language policy empire. From 1942 onwards, Amharic was promoted as the sole national language of the empire and all other nationality languages, particularly *afaan Oromoo*, were suppressed. The regime prohibited the use of Oromo literature for educational or religious purposes. The prohibition was further strengthened by the enforcement of an Imperial Decree, No. 3 of 1944, which regulated the work of foreign missionaries and made Amharic the medium of instruction throughout the empire.[39] Although very few of their converts understood Amharic, the decree made it a requirement for the missionaries to use only Amharic for teaching and preaching. Clauses 15 and 16 of the document gave the Ministry of Education certain rights of control over the school syllabus, the property of missions, and the power to deport, without appeal, any missionary disobeying the law and to close down the work of a mission. The power to deport was also conferred on the Ministry of the Interior.[40] George Lipsky wrote that although the royal decree guaranteed the missionaries the freedom to operate, "A Governor of a province . . . may have communicants of a religion jailed or harassed, or a school building erected by local parishers may be burned".[41]

Faced with threats such as those mentioned above, the missionaries accepted the conditions dictated by the Haile Selassie regime and stayed. Since the missionaries were permitted only to work in the non-Amhara provinces, one of the reasons of forcing the use of Amharic upon them was to make them agents of Amharization. A British diplomat who recognized the intention of the Ethiopian authorities informed his head office in London that "the Ethiopian government might use the missionaries as a minor instrument of Amhara imperialism in the Galla (Oromo) and other *colonial* lands"[42] (my emphasis). Viveca Halldin, wrote, "The missionaries' work was of mutual benefit for respective (missionary) societies and the Emperor, and the missionaries can thus . . be characterized as the tools of the Board (Swedish Missionary Board) in the service of God and the Emperor"[43] Part of the service to the Emperor was teaching Amharic to his non-Amhara subjects. Certainly, most if not all, of the missionaries became instruments for the government policy of Amharization and de-Oromization.

The accommodation made between the missionaries and the Haile Selassie regime in 1944 marked the end of literacy in *afaan Oromoo*, and the development of Oromo literacy that began a century earlier was abandoned. A number of incidents in which the Oromo were involved before and during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941) seem to have greatly influenced Haile

Selassie's language and centralization policy on his return from exile in England.

In 1935, the Raya Oromo rebelled against the harsh methods used by one of Haile Selassie's Amhara generals, *Ras* Mulugeta, to recruit them for war against the Italians. In order to punish the rebellious Rayas, the Ethiopian army plundered their property on its way to the war front in the north. The Raya attacked the Ethiopian forces and killed many of them, including *Ras* Mulugeta's son. Fired upon by the Raya, Haile Selassie himself had to change his route of retreat from the battlefield in 1936.[44]

But, the Raya rebellion was not the only incident which was fresh in the memory of Haile Selassie when the language policy was promulgated. On the eve of the Italian invasion, the Oromo of the southwest disarmed the *naftanya* and declared their independence from the Amhara government.[45] This movement, which was known as the Western Oromo Confederation, had clearly revealed to Haile Selassie and others that Oromo nationalism was, in spite of 50 years Amhara domination, still alive and vibrant in other parts of Oromoland as well. Haile Selassie and the ruling Amhara elites considered this episode, not wrongly, a reflection of the "underdevelopment" of "Ethiopian nationalism" and lack of "Ethiopian patriotism" among their Oromo subjects.

The Italian occupation further accentuated the cleavages between the Oromo and their previous Amhara rulers. The Italians not only favoured the expansion of literacy in *afaan Oromoo* and other nationality languages, but also prohibited the use of Amharic in Oromoland for educational and administrative purposes. Thus, on his return from exile, Haile Selassie was faced with a conscious and unruly Oromo population. Many Oromos protested against the return to Amhara rule and demanded independence. The Oromo demand also received an indirect support from officials of the British Committee on Ethiopia. Its chairman, Lord Moyne wrote to the British minister for foreign affairs,

> ... we have a moral duty to see that the people of the country are not oppressed and enslaved. When we are fighting for freedom in Europe, how can we restore the Gallas [Oromo] and other subject races to Amharic tyranny?[46]

Haile Selassie did not take lightly the Oromo demand and the interference from the British Committee. Margery Perham had noted that,

> ... few questions at issue between the British and the Ethiopians during the first months of the liberation so disturbed the Emperor as the reputed wish of one or two Galla experts on the British side to defend a Galla cause.[47]

In order to counter the nationalist feelings among the Oromo, Haile Selassie at once embarked on a programme of centralization and Amharization of the Empire. It is noted that, for a dominant minority, it is unsual to try to transmit a complete mastery of its own language in the hope that it would at the same time implant its value system in its subjects and make them loyal.[48] In the same manner, the Amhara rulers and elites believed (and still believe) that the Oromo and other non-Amhara peoples, if taught to speak Amharic, would imbibe Ethiopian nationalism, become Ethiopian patriots, and cast off their ethnic identity. Hence, they set out to implement a policy of one culture (Amharia-Tigre), one language (Amharic) and one nationality (Ethiopians). George Lipsky has observed that,

> Since the return of the Emperor in 1941, the Ethiopian government has taken a number of steps that clearly indicate it is attempting to prevent the development of strong ethnic loyalties where they do not already exist, and to supplement ethnic, local, and regional identification with allegiance to a central Ethiopian government and Ethiopian traditions.[49]

The concern with integrating and assimilating the Oromo into the Ethiopian society during the post-war period was well articulated by Margery Perham. In her very informative study about

the government of Ethiopia which was carried out during the first half of the 1940s, she commented,

> Its [the Oromo problem's] importance becomes clear when we remember that they are estimated to outnumber the Amharas and the Tigrayans, and that they quite literally embrace half the empire."[50] . . The other conquered races are of far less importance in number or in power: they offer administrative rather than political problems and are sources of weakness rather than of danger.[51]

Perham, however, questioned the existence of Oromo nationalism at that time and added ". . and there seem every possibility at this date that a development [of Oromo nationalism] that would be so disastrous to Ethiopia may be avoided"[52] She suggested that this "disaster" could be averted as "The process of their [Oromo] assimilation, if the ardour of the new bureaucrats can be restrained, could be carried on almost painlessly".[53] She added, "The spread of Amharic, through its official use, and through the schools, will reinforce the process of assimilation amongst the Gallas and the other peoples".[54] Indeed, the Haile Selassie regime relied on the administrative apparatus and the school system to extend its programme of assimilation. The school was designed to inculcate Ethiopian patriotism in Oromo children by stripping them of their language, their culture and their identity. It remains to be the belief of Amhara rulers and elites that to be an Ethiopian, one has to cease to be an Oromo. The two things were/are seen as incompatible.

In 1955, Amharic was declared the official language (national language) of Ethiopia, and the government did what it could to replace the other languages with Amharic. Thus, Ethiopian nationalism—or rather, the Haile Selassie regime's ambition to create it—found a strong expression in the institution of Amharic as an official language and medium of instruction in elementary schools throughout the empire. Later on, a National Academy of Amharic Language was founded at the Haile Selassie I University with the aim of "fostering the growth of Amharic and the development of Amharic literature".[55]

The implementation of Haile Selassie's post-war language policy created many preposterous situations and proved harmful in many ways. Such absurd situations were witnessed in the government offices and court-rooms. As has been observed by other writers[56], an Oromo had to speak Amharic or use an interpreter in court or before an official. Even a case between two Oromos before an Oromo speaking magistrate had to be heard in Amharic. In 1969, the Law Faculty of the Haile Selassie I University conducted a study of languages used in court and found out that in nearly all of the courts located in the south, the judges used only Amharic although in most of these courts one or several of the judges spoke the indigenous language.[57]

Language in Mass Media

From the 1940s up to the 1960s, Ethiopian mass media used only Amharic and some foreign languages in broadcasting and written communication. At the beginning of the 1970s, four indigenous languages: Tigrinya, Tigre, Somali and Afar were used by the government-owned radio stations and newspapers.

Although spoken by about half of the population in the empire, *afaan Oromoo* was not included. Some observers have argued that *afaan Oromoo* was excluded from mass media use because the Oromo were not seen a potential danger to the central government, while the Tigre, Afar and Somalis were considered to be volatile because of the insurgent activities in Eritrea and the Ogaden.[58] This, however, was not the true picture of the situation because a rebellion among a group was not always a condition that resulted in the permission from the Haile Selassie regime to use its language in mass-media. The Oromo were in revolt for almost the whole of the 1960s, but they were still barred from using their language. It is also wrong to suggest that the Haile Selassie regime did not see the Oromo as potentially dangerous to the central government. The brutal fashion in which the insurrection in Bale and the cultural and social activities

of the Macha Tulama Association in the 1960s were suppressed demonstrated the great apprehension of the regime with regard to the Oromo.

The exclusion of *afaan Oromoo* from mass-media, while the use of smaller nationalities' languages was permitted for broadcasting and newspapers, should be seen in light of the linguistic and cultural impact these languages have in the empire. If competition between the languages had been allowed, only *afaan Oromo* had the potential to outstrip and overshadow Amharic, and not Tigrinya, or Somali. Thus, Ethiopian (Amhara-Tigre) nationalism could only be seriously challenged by Oromo nationalism and not by that of any of the smaller nationalities. Therefore, the logic of the Ethiopian rulers was (is) that for Ethiopian nationalism to grow, any vestige of Oromo nationalism should be suppressed. *Afaan Oromoo,* being one of the main vehicles of Oromo nationalism, was to be suppressed.

The marginalization of *afaan Oromoo* was not the only method used by Haile Selassie to efface Oromo identity. The territorial boundaries between the Oromo and their neighbours within the empire were also abolished. New administrative, or *Teklay Gizaat* ("pull together, combine and rule") boundaries were drawn and peoples with different languages, cultures, and history were lumped together. George Lipsky has noted that,

> Before 1935, provinces and districts bore the names of the principal . . . ethnic groups inhabiting them. After 1942, the new boundaries of . . . administrative divisions cut across a number of ethnic groups, while others joined groups formerly administered separately. Over the last few years, the government also has been quietly substituting Amharic for Galinya [Oromo] names.[59]

The Amharization programme applied not only to the conquered Oromo society; it was also extended to its place names and its geography. What is interesting to note is that, in the drive to blur the boundaries of the Oromo territory and thereby obliterate the Oromo ethnic identity, it was not only Amharic names that were substituted for Oromo place names. Large parts of Oromia were named after smaller neighbouring ethnic groups. The Borana and Guji Oromo territory in the south was submerged under Sidamo. In the west, the previous Gibe states, including the famous Kingdom of Jimma Abba Jifar, were reduced to sub-provinces and placed under Kafa, the name of a small non-Oromo ex-kingdom on their periphery. Shoa, the name of a small region at the southern tip of Abyssinia, was stretched over the territories of Tulama, Macha and Arsi Oromos and other conquered nationalities in the south. In this Amhara exercise of cleaving and renaming of ethnic territories, about three-quarters of the Oromo population were submerged under new non-Oromo place names.

Consequences of Haile Selassie's Language Policy

Haile Selassie's policy of cultural and linguistic homogenization completely stopped literacy in the Oromo language. Oromo literature was not only banned, but most of what was already available was collected and destroyed. The overall effect of the policy was quite counter-productive. It did not result in a massive expansion of Amharic among the conquered peoples. The reason why the policy failed is simple and clear. First, in a pre-industrial, multinational empire like Ethiopia, to try to impose the culture and language of a minority on every individual and every ethnic group was an idle dream. Resources were utterly lacking to implement such a policy on a large scale. The available schools were only able to enroll a very small percentage of children; only 12% of the children between 7 and 12 years and 3% of those between 13 and 18 years.[60] Only a tiny fraction of those who attended school were Oromos. Before and during the 1960s nearly all of the schools were located in urban centres and provincial towns and enrolled mainly children whose mother tongue was Amharic. Few Oromo children could afford to go to school. The distance between local villages and the schools which were located in *naftanya* garrisons

or settlements was a major hindrance to Oromo education.

Even the limited available means (the school system) was not properly used in order to bridge the gulf between the dominant *naftanya* settlers and the Oromo or other conquered peoples in the south. The method used to teach Amharic to non-Amhara children, the attitudes of most of the Amharic teachers, and the school social environment were neither conducive to learning Amharic nor persuasive in developing a sense of identity with Ethiopia among the few non-Amhara children who attended school. The following were some of the reasons.

The Ethiopian school classroom in the south was more or less a replica of the wider colonial society in which it was located. The behaviour of the Amhara teacher towards children from indigenous families was no different than the attitudes of Amhara administrators, judges, policemen, etc. towards the conquered populations. The powerlessness the Oromo parents before the Ethiopian court of law, the police, or the administrative headquarters, or their experience with the Abyssinian officials and landlords was felt even more by Oromo children at school, before theirs teachers and among their Amharic speaking classmates.

Before the 1970s most of the teachers and nearly all of the Amharic teachers were Amhara. The problem was not that the majority spoke Amharic, but the fact that Oromo children, who knew not a word of Amharic, were expected to communicate in it from the very first day of school. They were often prevented from using their own language not only in the classroom, but even within the school compound. Hence, when an Oromo child started school he or she was often placed in a state of uncertainty and insecurity because "in . . . a predominantly Oromo-speaking area, linguistic communication between pupils and teachers was impossible at the early stages of primary education".[61]

In addition, the child was made to feel that his or her mother tongue was inferior and too "uncultivated" to be used in a civilized environment such as the school. Yet this was just the milder aspect of a dreadful, and for many, a long experience. The most difficult period occurred as a child started to use the few Amharic words he/she had learnt for communication with the teacher. Naturally, while learning a foreign language one makes pronunciation and grammatical errors. Many Amharic teachers were not satisfied with correcting errors or teaching the child correct usage. Instead, they punished him/her both physically and psychologically. They often cherished ridiculing the child in front of the whole class. Sometimes classmates joined the teacher in roaring laughter over the "erring" child. Physical punishment was meted out by the teacher if a child attempted to protest against this sort of abuse. Consequently, many Oromo children were victims of a grim type of "linguistic" mobbing which often led to very high rates of school dropouts. It was not only the less educated teachers of the lower grades who were involved in demoralizing Oromo school children. Graduates from teacher training colleges were also responsible for this sort of psychologically and socially damaging behaviour.[62]

In the school, the Oromo child was not only mobbed; but was "fed" negative biases against everything that was Oromo. Mixed in with the Amharic language and Abyssinian history, he/she was also taught many of the Amhara prejudices against the Oromo. The Oromo people were depicted as subjects and dependants in relation to the Empire and its rulers whereas the Amhara and Tigreans were presented as citizens. The Oromo were (are) described as a people without culture, history and heroes. The Amhara, in particular, were presented as chawaa (civilized) while the Oromo were pagans and uncivilized. An Amhara saying goes: *Ye Galla chewaa ye gomen choomaa yelem* (it is as impossible to find a civilized Galla as it is to find fat in cabbage). The Oromo were characterized not only as uncivilized, but as uncivilizable. The Oromo language and culture were reduced to marks of illiteracy, shame and backwardness as the school pressed Oromo children to conform to Amhara culture. Thus, the school was ". . . intimately involved in creating a national identity—one that in many ways simply continued and extended existing categories of "Habesha" (Abyssinian) and "Amhara".[63] In an article titled "On the Question of

Nationalities in Ethiopia", Walleligne Makonnen, a radical student leader the in late 1960s, had described the Amharization ideology as follows:

> Ask anybody what Ethiopian culture is. Ask anybody what Ethiopian language is. Ask anybody what Ethiopian music is. Ask anybody what Ethiopian religion is. Ask anybody what the national dress is. It is either Amhara or Amhara-Tigre!! To be a "genuine Ethiopian" one has to speak Amharic, listen to Amharic music, [and] accept the Amhara-Tigre religion . . In some cases to be an "Ethiopian" you will have to change your name In short to be an Ethiopian, you will have to wear an Amhara mask (to use Fanon's expression) [64]

Oromo children reacted to this dreadfully degrading experience in different ways. Many simply dropped out of school, never to return. In the 1960s, it was reported that 83% of the children who started school dropped out before they reached sixth grade.[65] As Randi Balsvik has rightly suggested,

> The fact that all instruction in the primary schools was in Amharic . . severely hampered the learning capacity of all those children whose first language was not Amharic. The appalling number of primary school dropouts, especially between the first and second grade, must to some extent be related to problems of communication.[66]

The attrition rate has remained very high for decades. Statistical estimates from the Ministry of education for the 1980s indicate that 80% of those children who start primary education drop-out before they reached sixth grade. About 40% of the drop-outs are from the first grade.[67] The imposition of Amharic as the only medium of instruction resulted not only in high rates of school-dropouts but also made it difficult for the non-Amhara subjects to acquire basic literacy. Additionally, in most districts in Oromia, and particularly in the regions of Bale, Arsi and parts of Hararghe Oromo families were reluctant to send their children to the Ethiopian school as they associated it with Orthodox Christianity and the Amharic language.

Those Oromo children who, against all odds, were able to surmount the language hurdle and the hostile environment in elementary schools and advanced to higher education were variously affected by what they had to endure in the process. Those who were completely overwhelmed by the unmitigated assault on Oromo culture and history, dropped (or tried to drop) their Oromo identity. Among these, were some who tried to get rid of every sign of what the Oromo themselves call *Orommumaa* ("Oromoness"). In a desperate move to assimilate, they "forgot" the Oromo language. In other words,

> The superior-inferior culture concept has so intensely applied to the languages that it became a major factor of de-humanization and subsequent alienation of groups speaking the non-official languages. Children from the non-Amharic groups were not only ashamed to speak their languages in public, but also changed their given names into Christian/Amhara names.[68]

The life of assimilated Oromos was often peripheral. In spite of their total submission to "pressures for their 'cultural suicide' and to the dominance of the Amhara over non-Amhara peoples in all aspects of life", they were seldom treated as equals by the Amhara. The Amharization of the Oromo and other groups was attempted "without integrating them as equals or allowing them to share power in any meaningful way".[69] As the "Amhara mask" they wore was often too transparent, assimilated Oromos rarely reached decision-making positions within the Ethiopian bureaucracy. Despite the hard efforts they were making to sound like a native speaker, and the change of their personal names to Amharic ones, their pronunciation of some of the Amharic words often exposed their ethnic origins. Hence, they usually were confined to middle and lower rungs of the bureaucracy, and were expected to act as zombies carrying out orders from their Amhara superiors.

However, the Ethiopian educational system did not always succeed as the assimilatory mechanism it was intended to be. Only a minority of educated Oromos seem to have succumbed to the Amharization process. Among many educated Oromos, it failed to mobilize the negative bias that could turn them against their own culture and language or that could weaken their ethnic loyalty. Instead, it produced an awareness that gradually led to organized action against the injustices inherent in the system. Many educated Oromos gradually learned to think in terms of "them" (the Amhara) and "us" (the Oromo). The confrontation was an awakening which led them to appreciate their own language and culture *Afaan Oromoo* became, more than anything, the core of their identity. Thus, the dehumanizing treatment they received at school in Amharic and history classes, in addition to the status of their parents and relatives in relation to the Amhara state, its officials and the *naftanya* landlords, sowed seeds of awareness which gradually developed into a social and national (ethnic) consciousness.

But this consciousness had to take its time to develop and mature in order to manifest itself as Oromo nationalism. First, very few Oromo children went to school in the 1940s and 1950s. The majority of those who started school dropped out because of, among other things, the language problem and the poor treatment mentioned above. Consequently, before 1974, the Oromo were grossly under-represented in institutions of higher education in Ethiopia. Oromo students accounted for about only 10% of college and university students in the country.[70] Second, since it takes 15-20 years to come of age, gain experience and engage in political activities, the few Oromos who braved the school environment of the 1940s and 1950s and reached higher levels of education only began to organize and act politically in the second half of the 1960s

This does not mean that resistance to the Amharization policy was totally lacking between the early 1940s and 1960s. Oromo struggle against Abyssinian rule has had its many "unknown soldiers" during the last one hundred years. Apparently, there were many individuals and groups who opposed the policy but were effectively silenced by the regime. Nevertheless, it could be said that pan-Oromo consciousness started to manifest itself in the 1960s. It was also during that period that the issue of language became a more important item on the Oromo agenda for freedom

The Macha Tulama Association

It is difficult to by pass the Macha Tulama Association when discussing pan-Oromo nationalism. Organized in the beginning of the 1960s by a fledgling and tiny class of educated Oromos, the association aimed to develop education, health, communication and social welfare facilities in the Oromo areas. It was the first Oromo organization with roots in both urban and rural areas. Mass-meetings were held in many parts of the Oromo country and taboo topics such as the exploitation of the Oromo peasantry and suppression of Oromo language and culture were raised and discussed. In addition to the issues raised, the continued expansion of the association worried the Ethiopian security, who had always doggedly followed its leaders to every mass meeting. "What was especially worrisome was the fact that they [the leaders] addressed meetings in the language of the Oromo, which had been proscribed in public . . ."[71] In his fiery speeches at these meetings, General Taddese Birru, the most prominent leader of the association, "linked his appeal to the dignity of Oromo culture, a culture that he emphasized was being destroyed at the hands of the Amhara", and "sensitized the Oromo to the importance of their culture and language and to the contradictions inherent in the emerging politico-economic system"[72] In a campaign against illiteracy, the members of the association pledged significant amounts of money and land towards the construction of schools in several districts[73]

Anxious about the growing consciousness among the Oromo, the regime banned the association in 1966, and arrested more than 100 of its prominent members and leaders. Later on, two of the leaders, namely General Taddese Birru and Lt Mammo Mazamir, were "condemned to death for subversive activities against the state, and for disseminating false propaganda in an

effort to divide the Ethiopian people"[74] Among the rest, many were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and banishment to very remote places in the empire.

The Macha Tulama Association was an important landmark in many respects. It dispelled a wrong belief about the "readiness" of the Oromo to assimilate and Amharize. The frailty of the assimilation theory was exposed as members of the association who previously were or seemed to be totally assimilated rediscovered their identity and pledged their solidarity and loyalty to the Oromo cause. General Taddese Birru was a good example whose "Oromo origins were not apparent to many until he began to champion the cause of his people"[75] Thus, it was in the Macha Tulama Association that pan-Oromo nationalism was first ignited and found leaders and resonance among urban intellectuals and military officers.

The manner in which the Haile Selassie government reacted also revealed the fear that the Abyssinian rulers and elites had and continue to have about the Oromo. In contrast to the Macha Tulama Association,

> The equivalent association among the Gurage people . . . has been tolerated or encouraged by the administration; part of the reason for this is that the Gurages . . . present no political threat to the regime.[76]

The University Students

Oromo students were active participants of the radical student movement in Ethiopia in the 1960s. They struggled against the Haile Selassie regime along with students from the various nationalities of the empire. However, concerning the question of nationalities, they had a different opinion from that held by the majority of Amhara-Tigray students who constituted more than 80% of university students. While national (ethnic) consciousness was developing among Oromo students, Abyssinian students, particularly the Amhara, were actively promoting the idea of one nation and one language. The Amhara-Tigre students saw Ethiopia's problem as class oppression and, not as a question of national (ethnic) oppression. The argument was unconvincing to the Oromo students who started to form their own clandestine organizations, independent of the Ethiopian student associations.

In 1969, some Oromo students at the social sciences campus of the Addis Ababa University started a clandestine Oromo paper, *Kana Beektaa?* ("Do You Know?") Its initiator(s) wanted to impress upon the educated Oromos the need to preserve their language and culture in the face of an eminent ethnocide resulting from the relentless assault perpetrated by the minority Amhara rulers. Although *Kana Beektaa?* ceased circulation after about a year and half, it revealed the mounting resentment among the educated Oromos about the suppression of their mother tongue, the denigration of their national culture and effacement of their history, and signalled their readiness to act and alter the situation in order to preserve their identity. In this task, the students had the sympathy and support of some prominent Oromos outside of the university campus.[77]

The question of language was also taken up by some individuals among the few Oromo students abroad. In 1973, an Oromo grammar, *Hirmaata Dubbii Afaan Oromoo,* was produced by such student(s) in Europe. The work was significant in that it used the Latin alphabet to transcribe the Oromo language.[78] The concern for Oromo culture and language was felt not only by Oromos with modern (western) education. The need to preserve and develop the Oromo language was also felt by individuals living in the provinces far away from the circles of university students and the Macha Tulama Association. One such individual was Sheik Bakri of Saphaloo. Sheik Bakri was a historian, a poet and a respected religious teacher. He wrote and taught in *afaan Oromoo.* He created a script, which, in spite of several shortcomings gained some popularity in eastern Oromia in the 1950s and 1960s, before the Ethiopian authorities discovered and suppressed it.[79]

Thus, in the beginning of the 1970s the level of political and cultural consciousness was quite widespread. The feeling was expressed in a paper entitled, "The Oromos: Voice Against Tyranny", and circulated in 1971. The author(s) commented,

> In its policy of assimilation, the curriculum designed by the Ministry of education aims at the aggrandizement of the culture and history of their regime [Amhara] while Oromo culture is ridiculed, or at best ignored. Oromo children are discouraged from asserting their identity. They are taught in Amharic which is the language of the regime . . . Oromo students who fail in Amharic language examinations are not admitted to institutions of higher education, even if they possess high grade points in other academic subjects. In textbooks and literature, bad characters are given Oromo names so as to make the Oromo people ashamed of their identity[80]

By the time the Haile Selassie regime met its demise in the popular revolution of 1974, it monolingual and mono-cultural policy was far from being a success. Instead, ethnic consciousness was increasing among the subjugated peoples of the empire. On the eve of the Ethiopian revolution, "Ethiopianist", C. Clapham lamented,

> I used to regard Ethiopia as an assimilatory system, in which initially conquered territories were gradually involved in the national policy through the spread of the Amharic language, Orthodox Christianity, and the political culture associated with the imperial court. Now I am not so sure.[81]

The Language Policy of the Dergue

One of the main issues the military regime that ousted Haile Selassie promised to tackle was the grievance of the various nationalities with regard to the suppression of their languages. It declared, therefore, that

> . . . each nationality will have regional autonomy to decide on matters concerning its internal affairs. Within its environs, it has the right to determine the contents of its political, economic and social life, use its own language and elect its own leaders.[82]

Many Oromos had believed the Dergue. Seizing the opportunity the declaration purported to offer them, they organized cultural activities and worked out Oromo literacy programmes. They also started to translate books from other languages into *afaan Oromoo*. An Oromo language weekly, *Bariisaa*, was launched and started to focus on the problems of the day as well as long-standing Oromo grievances against the Ethiopian government and its main beneficiaries, the *nafianya*.

The Dergue did not keep its promises. Its policy declaration on the nationalities issue was neither a lasting compromise nor a pledge to build a pluralist and multi-lingual society in Ethiopia. Rather, it was a tactical move to buy time and gain popular support against Somali invasion in the south and southeast of the country and against opposition led by the EPRP (the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party) in the urban centres. Once the danger from those quarters was averted, the regime went back on its words. Amharic continued to be the medium of instruction for primary education and the issue of nationality languages was not even raised as a subject of discussion. A major step was taken to strengthen the status of Amharic in the educational system. A trial use of Amharic as a medium of instruction at the secondary school level was launched under the Dergue. Amharic as the language of government and administration remained as it was during the Haile Selassie period and became even more established at all levels of government and administration. Moreover, the regime allocated considerable resources for the development and promotion of Amharic as a national language in the schools, in the educational mass-media and in mass media in general. Lionel Bender a specialist on Ethiopian languages, wrote in 1985 that,

> The present government has followed the Leninist doctrine of the right of nations (ethnic groups) to self-determination . . . To date no instance of self-determination has been seen, and the persistence of armed conflict . . . show that the problems are far from settled. The present policy seems to be one of issuing liberal statements, carrying out largely token literacy and cultural programmes . . . and a de facto continuation of the old policy of Amharization. Several recent reports on the composition of the ruling military circles show a swing back to Amhara domination after an earlier period of more balanced make up[83]

In 1979, five years after the revolution, the former "National Amharic Language Academy" was renamed the Academy of Ethiopian Languages. But the charter of the Academy remained unchanged, so did its programme for the expansion of Amharic. The Academy's record of accomplishments clearly shows its bias in favour of Amharic. In cooperation with other institutions, the Academy worked to enhance terminological development in Amharic, particularly for science, technology, the social and political sciences and for other fields. McNab reported that in 1988, the Academy's lexicography department was working on an Amharic dictionary of 350,000 words. But only a small dictionary of 18,000 words was, at the same time, underway in *afaan Oromoo*. The Oral Literature Department collected materials in the rural areas through the peasant associations. By 1987, it had collected 10,593 Amharic items and only 3,300 Oromo items, of which 1,300 were translated to Amharic.[84] None of the Amharic items were translated to *afaan Oromoo* or any other nationality language in Ethiopia, an indication of the fact that the Academy gave priority to the development and expansion of Amharic

The "Socialist" Mass Media

During the 1980s, 14 manuscripts (newspapers, magazines and journals) were published in indigenous languages in Ethiopia. Of these, 12 were in Amharic, 1 in Tigrinya and 1 (Bariisaa) in *afaan Oromoo*. The total number of copies of newspapers and magazines printed and distributed was about 21,121,250. Of this total 19,923,550 copies (94.3%) were in Amharic, 1,094,000 copies (5.2%) in Tigrinya and only 104,000 copies (0.4%) were in *afaan Oromoo*.[85]

The story of *Bariisaa*, the only magazine that existed under the Dergue in a language spoken by over 40% of the population, is interesting because it sheds light on the true language policy of the regime. It also helps us to understand the interconnections between ethnic oppression, culture and language in Ethiopian politics. Although the publication of *Bariisaa* was launched by a few individuals, it was, within a short time, able to engage many Oromos in the capital city and the provinces and become a movement of sorts. *Bariisaa* quickly gained popularity and was thus widely distributed. Because they considered the paper their own, people from all walks of life contributed money towards its production and participated in its distribution. In Addis Ababa, the production of *Bariisaa* brought together many Oromos who used the opportunity to discuss other national problems. In 1977, a cultural show involving troupes from many of the Oromo regions[86] was staged to raise funds for the production of *Bariisaa*. The show was a great success. It seems that the Dergue was nervous about the effects of the paper. Therefore, it decided to nationalize and "control" it. Later on, the Oromo staff of *Bariisaa* were jailed and were replaced by Oromo speaking *naftanyas* and several of the artists who participated in the cultural show were also killed.[87]

Before its nationalization in 1976 the number of copies printed weekly was 35,000 or about 1,820,000 annually. Immediately after nationalization its circulation plummeted by 90%. In 1982/83, only 104,000 copies of *Bariisaa* were annually produced.[88] This was 5.7% of what was produced and distributed before nationalization. Yet, this drastic reduction in the number of copies produced was not the main problem. It was the non-circulation of printed copies that plunged the paper into obscurity. Very few copies of *Bariisaa* reached its readers after nationalization.

According to a former staff member, the Ministry of Information, which became the owner of the paper, withheld most of what was printed and later sold it to shop-keepers who used them for wrapping goods.[89]

Under state ownership, *Bariisaa* printed only translations of the government propaganda, and it is not clear why the regime went to such an extent to restrict its circulation. Apparently there were individuals or sections in the ruling military circles who were opposed to any form of literacy in the Oromo language. But the opposition to *Bariisaa* was not limited to members of the ruling circles. Reportedly, it was widespread among Amhara bureaucrats and other groups who saw a revival of Oromo language and identity reflected in the paper.[90]

Under the Dergue the output of literary work and modern fiction was almost entirely in Amharic. No fiction nor novel was published in *afaan Oromoo*. As the eruption of Oromo literacy activities after the demise of the Dergue has clearly attested, this was not due to lack of writers.[91] The system discouraged creative writing in many ways. Any effort by the Oromo to develop and use their language was labelled as "tribalism" or "narrow nationalism". Individuals who attempted to engage in such activities were harassed.

The "Socialist" Adult Literacy Programme

One of the languages in which the Dergue launched adult literacy classes in 1979 was *afaan Oromoo*. Although the literacy programme was highly lauded and had received a UNESCO prize, the token contribution it had made in spreading literacy in the nationality languages was insignificant. Those who attended the "Oromo" literacy classes gained no more than an ability to identify the various characters of the Amharic *fidel* (alphabet). According to various observers from within and outside of Ethiopia, a number of factors made the programme less successful than what it was reported to be.

The use of the Geez (Ethiopic) script to transcribe *afaan Oromoo* and the other Cushitic languages made it difficult for most people to read materials in their mother tongues. Partly because of the unsuitability of the Geez script to Oromo writing and partly because they were amateurs, the instructors themselves were not capable of fluently reading the literacy material.[92]

Those who managed to learn to read and write *afaan Oromoo* were not able to develop their reading skills because reading materials were lacking in it. Since formal education was conducted only in Amharic, suitable texts, newspapers and magazines were available only to those who went to literacy classes that were conducted in Amharic. The lack of literature in *afaan Oromoo* meant that those who acquired reading skills in it regressed to illiteracy soon after graduation from the programme. The time spent in such literacy classes was considered by many as time wasted. Hence, it would not be an overstatement to assert that the adult literacy programme did not raise the status of *afaan Oromoo*. In fact, it had perpetuated the discrimination and bias created against it under the previous regimes. In other words, literacy in the Oromo language was neither a stepping stone to formal education nor relevant for employment in the modern sector of the economy and government. Knowledge of Amharic continued to be a requirement for employment even as a guard, or a gardener.

In general, despite the initial promises, the Dergue did very little to develop the language of the oppressed nationalities. Instead, it accelerated the development and expansion of Amharic at the cost of the nationality languages. Through the educational programme, "demographic invasion," or the settlement of hundreds of thousands of Amharic speaking Northerners in Oromia, literacy programme, mass-media, peasant associations and other forms of mass organizations that it had initiated and implemented, the Dergue was able to immensely accelerate the expansion of Amharic throughout the Oromo and the other conquered regions of the south. In addition, in its 1987 constitution, the regime declared Amharic as the sole official language of Ethiopia.

Oromo Response

The language policy of the Dergue regime was not simply accepted but was challenged by the Oromo. In its political programme issued in October 1974, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) stated as its objective: "To develop the Oromo language and bring it out of the neglect that colonialism has imposed upon it." The OLF considered the struggle to develop the Oromo culture and language as one of the major aspects of struggle for national survival. Hence its language policy was implemented alongside armed struggle from the very beginning. In fact, literacy in *afaan Oromoo* was made a requirement to become a fighter, and all OLF recruits were given lessons in literacy and courses in Oromo history. The front adopted the Latin script, developed an appropriate alphabet and began to print various educational and political literature. By 1982, the humanitarian wing of the front, the Oromo Relief Association (ORA) was able to publish a full range of primary school textbooks and readers along with a teachers' handbook and literacy material for adults.

The OLF literacy programme was also adopted by Oromos in the diaspora. ORA and OLF members conducted literacy classes for Oromo refugees in the Sudan, Djibouti and Somalia. The example was followed by Oromo oraganizations in Europe, the Middle East and gradually by those in North America.[93] By the mid-1980s, *afaan Oromoo* had become a language for correspondence among Oromos abroad and between their organizations. It was used for office work, report writing and communication within the entire Oromo liberation movement, both inside and outside the country. Elementary education for refugee children in the Sudan and a daily radio broadcast by *Sagalee Adda Bilisummaa Oromoo* ("Voice of the Oromo Liberation Front") were implemented during the second half of the 1980s. One may argue about OLF's achievements in other areas of its programme, but it could be safely said that its achievement in the area of cultural and linguistic revival is quite significant.

The revival of Oromo language was not only the concern of the OLF and Oromos in the diaspora during the Dergue period. There were also individuals who had struggled from inside and made significant contributions to Oromo writing.[94] However, very few people outside the Oromo movement noticed the progress the Oromo were making in this aspect of their struggle. Among the Amhara elites who recognized that the Oromo were using the Latin Alphabet, some made derogatory jokes about it, while the majority did not bother to take any notice of it. They did not entertain the thought that the Amhara could lose control over their empire or that the Oromo would ever gain the right to make their own decisions about their own affairs.

The Situation Today

Following the demise of the Dergue, the OLF quickly moved to every part of the Oromo country and began to introduce literacy in *afaan Oromoo* using the Latin script. The literacy programme and the Latin script were enthusiastically accepted, and for the first time, many Oromos became literate in their own language.

In November 1991, the Latin script was accepted by a meeting of Oromo scholars, intellectuals, politicians and organizations as the most suitable script for Oromo writing. Subsequently, *afaan Oromoo* was made the medium of instruction for primary education and administration in Oromia. Under the leadership of Ibsa Gutama, member of the OLF and Minister of Education of the Transitional Government between September 1991 and June 1992, text books for elementary curriculum were prepared in a matter of four months and school teachers were given crash courses in the Oromo language. In September 1993, school instruction was "legally" launched in *afaan Oromoo* for the first time in more than fifty years.

The policy of cultural and linguistic homogenization, in other words the Amharization programme followed by consecutive Ethiopian regimes over the last 100 years has contributed, as could be expected, to the expansion of Amharic in urban areas of the non-Amhara regions

However, Amharic did not become an instrument of effective communication throughout the country and particularly not in the rural areas where the vast majority of the population live. The policy contributed still less towards a feeling of common nationality between Abyssinians and the non-Abyssinian peoples in the south and the peripheries of the empire. On the contrary, the policy of Amharization had aroused aversion towards the Amharic language and culture.

The development of the Oromo language would, in the 1990s, mark the beginning of the end of Amharic expansion at least in Oromia. Already, the number of Oromos learning Amharic is decreasing. Most Oromos in the diaspora have already abandoned the use of Amharic and their consumption of Amharic literature and music has drastically decreased. Now that *afaan Oromoo* is establishing itself as a language of education, law, mass media and administration in Oromia, the majority of Oromos will soon have very little use for Amharic. Very few Oromos today live outside of the Oromo region in Ethiopia, whereas thousands of Amharas and others were born or have settled and are employed in Oromia. Thus, more and more Amharas and members of the other nationalities will, hereafter, find it useful to learn *afaan Oromoo* and not vice-versa. To some extent, this will in the future mean a change in the trend of language shift in favour of *afaan Oromoo*

The trend in the development of the Oromo language, which is now underway, is hardly reversible. Language is a societal and individual resource. It is a major element of cultural capital, a source of power, and inequality in society. The revival and development of *afaan Oromoo* for modern use, will enable more and more Oromos to gain easy access to education, knowledge, information and employment. It will mean jobs for many Oromos as cultural workers, i.e. writers, journalists, artists, publishers, etc., fields that have been closed to *afaan Oromoo* so far. The Oromo people will be able to replenish and develop their cultural capital that has survived the mono-lingual and mono-cultural policy of the Ethiopian rulers. In short, they will be empowered to take control over their own affairs and resources.

Nevertheless, this does not mean the path will be free of obstacles. In the past, Abyssinian rulers were not known for declaring liberal policies out of enlightenment, or will for change. As was with the case of Mengistu's land tenure proclamation of 1975 and his decree on nationality rights for self-determination, liberal policies are devices designed by a weak government in the centre bidding its time to avert threats to its power from subject nationalities in the peripheries. Hence, it is naive to expect an Amharic-speaking Tigrean regime, to sit idly in the centre of Oromia while the Oromo are reviving their culture and language and building their identity. Although it may not find it prudent to interfere at this stage, if and when the EPRDF government becomes secure in the seat of power, it may not allow the Oromo to freely develop their language.

At present, the loudest protest against the use of *afaan Oromoo* in education and administration is being voiced by Amhara elites and clergy. For those who see the use of *afaan Oromoo* as a threat to "their" interests, the Latinized Oromo alphabet has become the main hate object. The most hysterical among these, the clergy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, have labelled it a "work of the devil himself"[95] There is even a case where an individual was excommunicated and refused burial on Orthodox church grounds for teaching the Oromo language.[96] The opposition against the use of the Oromo language is as strong among the Amhara bureaucracy and intellectuals. Recently, when a news reporter asked an instructor of the Oromo language department at the Harer Teacher Training College if there were problems facing training programmes for teachers in *afaan Oromoo,* the reply was,

> "... the training process has proved successful and the would be teachers are taking their final examination, ... Our major problems are the people possessed of the archaic belief that the [Oromo] language is incapable of being a medium of instruction. These people including some of the staff members in the Amharic department attempt to undermine the teaching-learning process".[97]

The same source indicates that bureaucratic intrigues within the Ministry of Education continue to procrastinate the training programme of Oromo teachers. This means, if the Amhara elites gain the upper hand in controlling the affairs of Oromia once again, their first target will, without doubt, be the Oromo language. As one writer has candidly observed, "... every girl ought to have a husband, preferably her own, and every high culture (meaning a culture with a written language) ... wants a state, preferably its own"[98] The same writer tells us that every pre-literate culture cannot become a literate culture since those without serious prospects of becoming one tend to give up without struggle. It is only those languages and cultures whose human carriers and speakers credit them with good prospects that fight it out for available populations and available state-space.

As I have tried to show in this article, the Oromo people have struggled long for the right to speak, read and write in their language. They have taken up arms to restore their freedom which was lost when their country was conquered a century ago. The struggle has resulted in some dividends. Among other things, the use of *afaan Oromoo* has been restored. However, its continued development without obstacles and interferences from Abyssinian rulers (Amhara as well as Tigrean) requires political protection, a state umbrella. In other words the Oromo must be able to have control of the state they live in.

Endnotes

*A version of this article was first published in two parts in *The Oromo Commentary*, Vol III, nos 1&2, 1994.

1. Baxter, Paul, "The Present State of Oromo Studies: A Resume", *Bulletin des Etudes africaines de i'Inalco*, vol VI no 11, 1986, p.69

2. Tutschek, cited in Pankhurst, R "The Beginnings of Oromo Studies In Europe", Africa, (Rome) XXX no 2, 1976 p 178.

3. ibid.

4. ibid. p 186.

5. Bulcha, M. "Onesimos Nasib's Contributions to Oromo Literature", Paper presented at the II International Symposium on Cushitic and Omotic Languages, 16-18 November 1989, Turin Italy.

6. ibid.

7. Aren, Gustav, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia. The Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus*, Stockholm, 1977, p.262.

8. ibid

9. Nordfelt, M. *The Galla Grammar*, Lund, 1947, p. 1.

10. Aren, op cit. p. 385.

11. The collection is in the possession of Nils Hylander's grandchildren. I did not get the opportunity to examine it

12. I found only about 13000 words both in main and sub-entries. The manuscript is deposited at the main library of the Uppsala University.

13. ibid. p. 302.

14. Dahlberg, N. *Onesimus*, 1932 p. 47.

15. ibid. p. 54.

16. Idoosa Gammachiis ("A Short Biography of Onesimos Nasib", no date.) noted that Kumsa presented Onesimos with 30-50 youngsters to teach.

17. Terfasa Digga, "A Short Biography of Onesimos Nesib: Oromo Bible Translator, Evangelist and Teacher", B. A. Thesis in History, Haile Selassie University, Addis Ababa, 1973. p. 32.

18. The first government school in Ethiopia was opened in 1908 (See C McNab, *Language Policy and Practice: Implementation Dilemmas in Ethiopian Education, Stockholm, 1989, p 62.*

19. Aren, p. 420.

20. Lundgren, Manfred, "Fotsparen" ("The Path") in Bortom Bergen (*Beyond the Mountains*), Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsen, Stockholm, p 140.

21. Terfasa Digga, op. cit. p. 38.

22. ibid. p. 32.

23. Onesimos to Lindgren, 29.7.1910. cited in Aren, op. cit. p.438, fn. 341.

24 ibid.

25. Onesimos encouraged handicraft and also visited the socially submerged groups such as blacksmiths, tanners and weavers, and encouraged them to be proud of their trades and improve their skills. See Terfasa Digga, op. cit. p. 45.

26. Dahlberg, (op cit. p. 59) notes that the priests were furious over Kumsa's support to Onesimos They complained: "he (Onesimos) is not like us. He is like a European. He cannot be a good man He is not an Abyssinian (Coptic) Christian".

27. Perham, M. *The Government of Ethiopia*, 1969, p. 62.

28. Aren, op. cit. p. 426.

29. ibid. p. 427.

30. Terfasa Digga, op. cit. p. 34; Aren, op. cit. p. 425.

31. ibid p 37

32. Aren op cit. pp 427-428.

33. ibid. p. 424.

34 Terfasa Digga, op. cit. p. 31

35. McNab, op. cit. 1989, p. 78.

36. Pankhurst,, R. "Historical Background of Education in Ethiopia", in M. L. Bender et. al. (eds.), *Language in Ethiopia*, 1976, p. 322.

37. In general, very little research is done on the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, and virtually nothing on its mpact education.

38. Gragg, G. *Oromo Dictionary*, 1982, p. xvi.

39. *Negarit Gazeta*, "Regulations on the Establishment of Missions", Decree No 3 of 1944, Addis Ababa, 1944.

40. Perham, op. cit., p. 134

41. G. Lipsky, *Ethiopia*, 1962, p. 120.

42. R.G Howe to A. Eden, cited in Viveca Halldin, *Swedes in Haile Selassie's Ethiopia*, 1924-1952, 1977, p. 77.

43. ibid. p. 257.

44. Perham, op. cit., p.304

45. See, Consul Erskine's letter to Anthony Eden, May 30,1936, J 5495/4044/1 about this declaration by the Oromo.

46. Cited in H Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain and the United States, 1941-1974: The Politics of Empire*, 1983,

47. Perham, op. cit., p. 379.

48. L. Thompson, "Historical Perspectives of Pluralism in Africa", in L Kuper & M. Smith, *Pluralism in Africa*, p. 355.

49. Lipsky, op. cit., p. 38.

50. Perham, op. cit., p. 377.

51. ibid , p. 380.

52. ibid , p. 377.

53. ibid

54. ibid. p. 380

55. Negarit Gazeta , "Foundation of the National Academy of the Amharic Language", 1972

56. See for example P. Baxter, "The Problem of the Oromo or the problem for the Oromo?",

in I M Lewis (ed.) *Nationalism and Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa,* 1983 p 137.

57. R. Cooper & F. Nahum, "Language in Court", in *Language in Ethiopia,* M Bender, et al (eds.), 1976, pp. 256-263)

58. Tesfaye Shewaye, cited in McNab, p 81

59. Lipsky, op. cit p. 38.

60. McNab, p. 64. McNab says that this may be an overestimation. The actual proportion of the children attending school could be much lower than this.

61. Negassa Ejeta cited in McNab, ibid., p.135

62. When I was in grade six we had a science teacher who was a graduate from a teacher training institute. He used to make derogatory jokes about our Oromo names every time he came to our class He was also so violent that several of the pupils had to drop out of school.

63. D. Donaham, "Old Abyssinia and the New Ethiopian Empire", in Donaham D. & Wendy James, (eds.), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia,* 1986, p 35.

64. W Makonnen, "On the Question of Nationalities", Struggle, 1969, pp: 4-7.

65. R. R. Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students,* 1985, p. 7.

66. ibid, p. 10.

67. Computed from McNab, op cit., Table 6.7, p. 75.

68. Lemma Arity, cited in McNab, ibid., p. 59.

69. E. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia,* 1988, p. 136.

70. Balsvik, ibid., p. 44.

71. J. Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa,* 1987, p. 260.

72. Keller, op. cit., p. 162.

73. Several members of the association generously contributed land and money towards the building of schools particularly in Shawa and Arsi Oromo regions.

74. *The Ethiopian Herald,* 3.8.1968.

75 Keller, op cit., p. 162.

76. C. Clapham, "Centralization and Local Response in Southern Ethiopia", *African Affairs,* No 74, 1975, p. 80.

77. One such prominent person was Rev. Gudina Tumsa, the late Secretary General of Evengelical Church Mekaneyesus. Without his support, it could have been difficult to produce Kana Beektaa? Rev Gudina was kidnapped in July 1979, by Ethiopian security forces and was killed in prison.

78. The late Haile Fida and Mitiku Tarfasa are often mentioned as the authors of this book.

79 For details see R Hayward and Mohammed Hassen "The Oromo Orthography of Shayk Bakri Saphaloo", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies,* London University, Vol. XLIV, 1983

80. The paper cited here is published in Horn of Africa, Vol. III, No. 3, 1980, pp. 15-23.

81 Clapham, op. cit., p. 78.

82. See "Programme of the National Democratic Revolution", *Basic Documents of the Ethiopian Government,* 1977.

83 L. "Bender, Ethiopian Language Policy 1974-1981", *Anthropological Linguistics,* Vol. 27, No. 3, 1985, pp: 276-277.

84. McNab, op. cit. Table 8.4, p.98.

85. Based on McNab, ibid , Table 9.1, p. 106.

86. The cultural troupes came from Arsi, Bale, Hararghe, Shawa and Wallaga.

87 Among *Bariisaa* staff who were jailed were Wolde Yohannes Hundee and Martha "Kuwee" Kumsa. They spent 10 years in Mengistu's jail

88. Personal interview with a former *Bariisaa* staff member.

89. According to my informant, the Ministry, sent more copies of *Bariisaa* to non-Oromo regions such as Eritrea, Gonder, etc. and to Ethiopian Embassies abroad than to the Oromo regions.

90. It was reported that few newspaper vendors dared to sell *Bariisaa*. Those who did so were beaten by unidentified persons. Inccidentally, Oromo newspapers are still subjected to similar threats. See Urgi, no.5 (1994).

91. See, Kifle Djote's article in this issue of *The Oromo Commentary* about the present state of Oromo literature

92. See, McNab, op. cit., p. 118.

93. The Union of Oromo Students in Europe (UOSE) and the Union of Oromo Students in North America now the Union of Oromos in North America (UONA) are two such organizations.

94. Dr. Tilahun Gamta's *Oromo-English Dictionary,* 1989, was one such contribution by Oromo scholars from inside

95. Toleeraa Tasammaa, "Sheexanaa fi Qubee" ("The Satan and the Alphabet") in *Madda Walaabu* no. 1, 1993, pp: 17-19. The article is about a priest who, in his teaching, has associated a certain "foreign" (read Oromo) alphabet to the devil.

96. Such an action was taken by priests in Chancho, a rural town 40 km. north of Addis Ababa against a 22 years old woman who died in December 1993. For details see the Amharic weekly, Urgi nos. 1 and 2, 1994

97. Getachew Kejela, "Teachers' Training in the Vernaculars: Problems and Promises", *The Ethiopian Herald,* 30.6.1983.

98. E. Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, 1983, p. 51.

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Book Reviews

Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict 1868–1992, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993. 232 p., Price: $49.50. Asafa Jalata by Mohammed Hassen

This highly valuable book embodies not only the result of the author's many years of research in institutions of higher learning in the United States but also his long experience in the Oromo national movement both in Oromia and North America. The main purpose for writing the book is "... to examine how Oromia was incorporated into Ethiopia and the world economy, the origin of Oromo nationalism and the development and current status of the Oromo national movement" (p. 1). In other words, the book was inspired by and written to inform the international community about the just cause of the Oromo. The author, Asafa Jalata, is an assistant professor of sociology, African and African-American Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He received his doctorate degree from the State University of New York, Binghamton. In fact, the book under review grew out of Asafa Jalata's Ph.D. dissertation.

Dr. Jalata is a well-read scholar who expresses his ideas with courage, eloquence, charm and frankness. His command of the English language is admirable. His ability to articulate complex concepts in clear and simple terms is remarkable.

Dr. Jalata has written a brilliant history of Oromia and its relation with Abyssinia (Ethiopia) from the point of view of the Oromo, whose voice has been omitted from Ethiopian historiography. In terms of clear articulation of the rich and wide use of Oromo sources, careful interpretation of data the book is an excellent antidote to Ethiopian historiography. While the author's extensive documentation of the sources used in the book is more than adequate to please those who seek historical truth, his bold interpretation of data which departs from the old paradigm of Ethiopian historiography will anger many Ethiopian nationalists and entrenched Ethiopianist scholars. It will anger Ethiopian nationalists because this book explodes many myths about Ethiopia while placing Oromia on the intellectual map of the international community. It will anger Ethiopianist scholars because they "... have spent most of their time in admiring and writing about Ethiopian kings, official history and culture. The new paradigm that emphasizes social history and challenges their approaches makes them angry and nervous" (p. 165). Above all, those accustomed to the official Ethiopian history which treats as heroes and nation-builders the Emperors Tewodros (1855-1868), Yohannes IV (1872-1889), Menelik (1889-1913) and Haile Selassie I (1930-1974), will be startled by Dr. Jalata's narrative. From the beginning to the end of this book, "there is a reversal of perspective, a reshuffling of heroes" and criminals. In the words of the author, "In Oromo oral history, Ethiopian leaders are seen as criminals, bandits and slavers; in Ethiopian history, they are depicted as heroes and builders of the nation" (p. 163). Dr. Jalata argues his case with enthusiasm and provides telling quotations from numerous sources in support of his argument. There are vivid descriptions of the destruction of Oromo lives and property, and the depopulation of some areas of Oromo territory by the Ethiopian government officials-cum-slavers that are usually ignored in that official Ethiopian history.

Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992 has a short introduction and eight chapters. In the introduction, the author defines Oromia and Ethiopia, the relation between the two and the basis for the conquest and colonization of Oromia. According to the author, Oromia which Professor Harold Marcus characterized in 1992 as a "fictitious nation created by a few Oromo intellectuals who want to distort history for their national political motives" (p. 165) is not a new name. Its predecessor, Ormania, was already in the literature as early as 1840. It was in 1974 that the founders of the Oromo Liberation Front changed the name Ormania to Oromia, which in this book "... is used interchangeably with the Oromo

nation and also indicates the geographical location of the nation in the Horn of Africa" (p. 3). Oromia was colonized by Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in the 1880s and since then Oromo subjugation, exploitation and dehumanization have persisted through eleven decades. The changes of regimes in Ethiopia in 1974 and 1991 were fruitless in terms of decolonizing Oromia. And the latest replacement of Amhara ethnic hegemony by that of the Tigrayan, according to the author, is nothing but reorganization of Ethiopian colonialism (p. 11).

Chapter One deals with pre-colonial Oromia, 1500-1850, which is not adequately discussed, to say the least. There are a number of weak points in this section; two of which are briefly mentioned here. First, Dr. Jalata claims that the "recorded history of Oromia begins in the sixteenth century" (pp. 15-16), which is not true. It goes back to the fourteenth century, if not earlier. Second, he characterizes the Gada system as a form of pre-class constitutional institution (pp. 15-20). This implies that Gada as a pre-class institution does not have relevance to the stratified modern Oromo society. If this is what is in the mind of the author, he is quite wrong. The democratic values of the Gada system, one of the highest cultural achievements of the Oromo, are timeless treasure which have and will have practical relevance to the future of democracy in Oromia, Ethiopia and the rest of the Horn of Africa. However, the author is correct in stating that the Amhara/Tigre political culture is not only discriminatory (p. 22) but it is also authoritarian and exclusive, while the Oromo political culture is open, democratic and inclusive.

In Chapter Two the author discusses the pillars of Ethiopian (Amhara-Tigray) society, namely, the monarchy, Christian ideology, mechanisms of population control and surplus extraction. What is missing from this chapter is the plight of the Amhara-Tigray peasantry. Although the Amhara-Tigray peasants had access to land, they supported a large nobility and paid more than one-third of their produce as tribute, which was the highest surplus extraction in pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa. What is more, tribute collection was more often by direct means—by plunder and the nobility fought literally over the body and produce of the peasantry. In short, warfare was endemic to the Amhara-Tigray society, which stunted its political, economic and cultural progress.

Chapter Three is the richest and the best part of this book. It deals with the politics of empire-building, the brutality of the Ethiopian soldiery and the relation between Ethiopian colonialism and European imperialism. It was Sahle Selassie (1814-1848), the grandfather of Menelik (1865-1913) who first intensified cattle and slave raids against his Oromo neighbours in what is today the Shawa administrative region. The author is wrong to claim that the king's " . . . forces made 84 raids in one year against the Tulama Oromo" (p. 48). It was in sixteen years that Sahle Selassie made 84 raids against the Oromo, which were characterized by plunder, looting and burning and wanton destruction of lives and property. However, it was King Menelik (1865-1889), later Emperor of Ethiopia (1889-1913), who carried out "mass killings, destruction and expropriation of property, plundering, enslavement and cultural genocide" (p. 54). According to the author, the Italians who armed Menelik, harvested the fruit of their investment at the Battle of Adwa (which is misspelled as Aduwa) in March 1896 (and not from December 1895 to March 1896) when they were defeated and humiliated by Menelik. "The impact of European army technology and expertise effectively reflected as much on the Italians as it did on the Oromo" (p. 60).

Among the institutions of settler colonialism in Oromia, the *Katamas* (garrisons towns), slavery and the *Nafxanya-Gabbar* system (serfdom) are adequately discussed. The wealth created by the Oromo serfs was squandered on the extravagant consumption of the parasitic colonial ruling class rather than invested in productive enterprise.

Chapter Four covers the short Italian occupation of Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941 and the period from 1941 to 1974. Interestingly, it was the Italians who abolished slavery and the *Nafxanya-Gabbar* system, destroying the twin pillars of Ethiopian colonialism (pp. 83-84). After the Italians were defeated in 1941, Emperor Haile Selassie was restored to power by the British against the expressed will of the Oromo. During his long reign, Haile Selassie intensified both the settlement of Amhara-Tigray in Oromia and the transfer of Oromo lands to the new settlers.

Consequently, by the 1960s, around 60 percent of the Oromo farmers were landless tenants or sharecroppers who paid various types of taxes to educate the children of their oppressors and to prolong the lives of their enemies (p. 102).

Chapter Five discusses: (1) the crises of the Ethiopian Empire, which consumed Haile Selassie and the ruling class he headed, (2) the consolidation of the Amhara military regime, which destroyed its opponents and adopted radical ideological discourse (p. 119), and (3) the 1977/78 Ethio-Somali War which was fought in and over Oromia.

Chapter Six examines the politics of famine and the new colonial programs of resettlement and villagization "designed to extend garrison centers into village levels in Oromia" (p. 137). According to the author, the main purpose behind the military regime's colonial reorganization was to alter the demography of Oromia and destroy Oromo nationalism both of which are well documented. The resettlement program, which involved between 1.5 and 2 million people (p. 142), focussed on Western Oromia; while villagization, which uprooted over 8 million Oromo peasants, centered on Eastern Oromia. Ironically, both programs were implemented with generous financial, and material aid from Western countries, while the former Soviet Union and its surrogates, provided transport planes and security expertise to the Ethiopian military regime. In short, through the programs of colonial reorganization, Oromo farmers were coerced into financing the destruction of their own nation (pp. 141-146).

Chapter Seven deals with (1) the Oromo struggle against Ethiopian colonialism (1860s-1950s), (2) the rise of Oromo nationalism (1960s-1970s) and (3) the birth and growth of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Two important points emerge from this chapter. First, after a century-long process of Ethiopianization, colonial oppression and exploitation, the Oromo national identity remained strong and vibrant. Interestingly, it was a section of the Oromo elite who were supposed to have been Ethiopianized and incorporated into the Ethiopian power structure who first articulated Oromo yearning for freedom and human dignity and created the political organization for its realization. Second, it was the OLF leadership which made the intellectual leap to a definition of Oromia as a colonized nation, articulated the course for a free Oromia, organized the people and fought for it and brought it to the attention of the international community.

The final chapter touches upon the events which took place since 1991. According to the author, the demise of the Amhara military regime and its replacement by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Forces (EPRDF), a new code name for the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), is a new form of colonial reorganization. This explains why the TPLF tried its very best to subordinate or undermine or destroy the OLF through various mechanisms (pp. 185-186). This reviewer concurs with the author that the suppression of Oromo nationalist movement is impossible, and consequently, the current Tigrayan rulers of Ethiopia should learn a lesson from the mistakes of the former Amhara rulers of that country. As the former Amhara rulers "...failed to keep Eritrea under Ethiopian rule" the current leaders of the TPLF "...cannot keep Oromia under Ethiopian colonial rule by force for long" (p. 197).

However, there are two points which this reviewer considers important, which are missing from the last two chapters of this book. First, Dr. Asafa Jalata concentrated only on the strength of the Oromo Liberation Front, while failing to mention some of the glaring weaknesses of that organization. As a well informed Oromo, and the president of the Oromo Studies Association, the author is in a strong position to express his views on the weakness of the organization and the OLF leadership. The purpose of mentioning OLF weakness is not for negative criticism, but corrective one, for impressing upon the leaders of Oromo national movement to have clear vision, direction and a sense of purpose. Second, although Dr. Asafa Jalata has eloquently argued for the decolonialization of Oromia, he has left us in the dark about his vision beyond the self-determination of Oromia. We need a broader vision, which takes into consideration the geography and the economy of the Oromo.The decolonization of Oromia and the democratization of Ethiopia are dialectically related. The future importance of Oromia lies not in its separation from Ethiopia

but in becoming the basis for a democratic federal or confederal structure in the region. Educated Oromo have a national duty to argue for the self-determination of Oromia. They have also the moral responsibility to articulate the Oromo yearning to live in unity, harmony and peace with the people of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

Finally, despite what has been said and minor other weaknesses that have not been cataloged, *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992* is an excellent book. It not only shows Dr. Asafa Jalata's intellectual maturity, his acquaintance with the literature on the region and beyond, but also his ability to control an extensive body of sources and the experience to select data and interpret it intelligently.

Supporters of the Oromo national movement for self-determination or anyone who is interested in understanding the complex historical problems of Ethiopia will find rich food for thought in this fascinating book. The last chapter which deals with the current struggle in and over Oromia should be necessary reading for those who are interested in bringing the OLF and the EPRDF together for peaceful negotiation. The book is well written, a great joy to read and is captivating to the end. This is an invaluable and much needed book on the current situation in Oromia and Ethiopia

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State Transformation and National Integration: Gedeo and the Ethiopian Empire, 1895-1935 by Charles W. McClellan, East Lansing, Michigan: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1988, 194 pp. Charles W. McClellan by Mohammed Hassen

This extremely interesting, well researched book emerged from a doctoral dissertation submitted to Michigan State University in 1978. The book is a case study of the Gedeo (Darasa), one of the peoples conquered and incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire created by Emperor Menelik II in the late nineteenth century. It is one of the best case studies on Southern Ethiopia, richly documented to illuminate the slow and painful process of Gedeo integration, or the lack of it, into the modern Ethiopian state. This book is educative and it leaves the reader with optimism. Educative because it provides vital and much needed historical information about the complex historical process which created the Ethiopian Empire while simultaneously documenting the economic exploitation, political oppression, and cultural subjugation of the Gedeo who were incorporated into the empire. Optimism because the author stresses and rightly that Ethiopia needs fundamental changes to create trust, understanding and genuine equality among all Ethiopians in every facet of life—political, economic, religious, cultural and social. Such equality is the key to the unity of the people and the future of the region. From this perspective, Dr. McClellan's book is a very good contribution not only to our knowledge of the Gedeo society, which is important in itself, but also it adds to our understanding of the multi-faceted problems that are bleeding Ethiopia in our own days.

The Gedeo, who are the subject of the book under review, are one of the Cushitic language-speaking groups of people in southern Ethiopia. Their language is related to and the Gedeo share cultural and social similarities with the Burgi, Hadiya, Kambata, Oromo and Sidama. However, Gedeo's relation with the Oromo appears to be much more profound than the author suspects. It is not only in the areas of borrowed words and the Gada system (pp. 25-28) that the Gedeo are related to the Oromo, but also the Gedeo landholding system, their social organization, religious orientation and their view of the world are closely related to those of their Oromo neighbours.

The author argues and rightly that the Ethiopian Empire was the product of the European scramble for and partition of Africa in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The dialectical relationship between European imperialism and the Ethiopian Empire is interesting and tragic at

the same time. Interesting because Emperor Menelik who created the empire, faced the challenge of European imperialism and scored decisive victory at the battle of Adwa in 1896, the victory which assured Ethiopia's independence at the time when the rest of Africa fell under European colonialism. Tragic because Menelik created his empire with European weapons through indigenous imperialism which turned the small historical Abyssinia into vast Ethiopia.

According to the author, Menelik conquered southern Ethiopia by the process of expansionism (p. 50). However, it was much more than expansionism, it was colonialism. One may argue whether it was internal colonialism, or adjacent, or settler, or feudal-military, or classical colonialism, or the combination of some of these. Nevertheless, it was colonialism. As with all forms of colonialism, the driving social force behind Menelik's colonialism was economic. In the words of the author, "land and labour . . . were the two chief attractions" for Menelik's conquest (p. 53). Besides, the search for gold, ivory, slaves, coffee and new sources of food for the ever expanding number of soldiers of Menelik were the economic motives for the conquest and colonization. According to the author, Menelik's conquest of southern Ethiopia was undertaken mainly by his Oromo generals such as *Ras* Gobana and *Dejazmach* Balcha. This should not surprise McClellan (pp. 50, 133) who is a good historian, "for it is a characteristic of empires to turn their victims into their defenders."

Dr. McClellan's book establishes striking similarities between some aspects of Menelik's colonialism with European colonialism in other parts of Africa. As European colonists dominated the economic resources and controlled the politics of their colonies, Menelik's armed settlers dominated the economic resources of Gedeo and totally controlled the military and political power institutionalizing the monopoly of settlers' advantages (pp. 57-59). The Gedeo were forbidden to possess firearms while the settlers monopolized them (p. 59). The author is not correct when he asserts that firearms played a minor role in Menelik's conquest of the south (p. 21). On the contrary, firearms played a pivotal role in Menelik's conquest and one can clearly demonstrate the pace of his conquest with the speed with which firearms were imported to Shawa during the 1880s and 1890s.

The author again establishes a universal truth about colonialism: the link between colonialism and militarism. Most of the Abyssinian settlers in Gedeo, as in other parts of southern Ethiopia, were mainly soldiers, known as Neftenya (gun bearers, p. 57). European colonial administration in Africa imposed forced labor and heavy taxation upon the Africans, but at least they abolished slavery and stopped the slave trade. Menelik's colonial administration in Gedeo was based on the twin pillars of the Neftenya-Gabbar system and slavery. Menelik gave both the land and the Gedeo Gabbars (serfs), who bore the brunt of supporting the unpaid settlers, the state and the church (pp. 66-74). In and around Gedeo, slaves were fair game for the settlers, while Emperor Menelik himself was "Ethiopia's greatest slave entrepreneur" (p. 116). Menelik also had a slave population of more than 70,000 at the beginning of this century, a point not addressed in this book. Both the Neftenya-Gabbar system and slavery were abolished during and after the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936 to 1941).

European colonists in other parts of Africa viewed Africans as "barbarians". Similarly, Abyssinian settlers viewed the Gedeo and the conquered people of southern Ethiopia generally as "primitive people without culture, or effective government, lazy, dirty . . . heathen" (p. 138). Menelik's armed settlers regarded themselves as "superior" to the "uncivilized" Gedo. European colonists in other parts of Africa expressed similar attitude towards their conquered subjects. However, sadly, Menelik's settlers had very little, if anything, to offer in the way of social progress to the Gedeo.

According to the author, "Despite the economic growth that occurred, Gedeo remained largely underdeveloped, for although Gedeo participation was vital, they were denied the full benefits of the changes" (p. 114). Anyone who is acquainted with the literature on the economics of colonialism in Africa, can appreciate that Menelik's colonialism was similar to that of European colonialism in more ways than one.

The author wants us to believe that there is no particular national elite that has monopolized political power in Ethiopia. This is denying the reality. The Ethiopian state is the state of the Abyssinian (Amhara-Tigray) elites. Behind the elites exists state power, the objectives and maintenance of which cannot be abandoned without profound transformation of the Ethiopian state structure. This reviewer would regard the Abyssinian elites' monopolization of state power not only as one of the major root causes of the current tragic conflict which is threatening the very survival of Ethiopia, but also as a major obstacle for creating the opportunity for all the peoples of Ethiopia to participate in the political, economic, cultural, religious and social life of the country as equals at all levels" (p. 8).

Furthermore, the author dismisses the Gedeo and the Oromo Gada system as a social/ritual institution (pp. 8, 28-30, 59). But the Gada system was much more than that. It was a participatory form of democracy based on a remarkable system of power sharing, for the lack of which Ethiopia is paying terrible price today. Under the Gada system, the leaders served for a fixed period of time and their authority was based on the democratic will of and election by the people. Under this system, an individual was a citizen with rights and responsibilities rather than a subject with duties only. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Gedeo and Oromo Gada system articulated rich principles of African democracy, of which Africans would be proud.

Finally, despite what has been said, and minor other errors that have not been stressed, *State Transformation and National Integration: Gedeo and the Ethiopian Empire, 1895-1935* is an excellent book. The book not only shows Dr. McClellan's philosophical grasp of history, but also it reveals his acquaintance with the literature on Ethiopia. His respect for the people and concern for their unity are admirable. His strongly stated message which stresses the unity of purpose and the importance of building bridges of understanding, tolerance, the spirit of compromise and concession between the various Ethiopian peoples, make it a very useful book that will contribute its share to finding lasting solutions to Ethiopia's problems.

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THE Oromo Commentary

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Aims:
The OC attempts to provide a forum for the expression and dissemination of various views regarding the political and economic crises affecting the Horn of Africa. It publishes critical comments and analytical papers on current issues, book reviews, etc. pertinent to the Horn in general and Ethiopia in particular. It aims to serve as a means of communication not only among the Oromo themselves, but also between the Oromo, other Horn Africans and the international public. It, therefore, provides a platform for debate and dialogue concerning the important issues of democracy, justice, human rights and peaceful resolution of conflicts, and social and economic development in the Horn of Africa.

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Theme: Cultural Reconstruction for Liberation and Development

Conference Place: The University of Toronto, Toronto, Ont. Canada.
Date: July 30 - 31, 1994

Organizers: The Oromo Studies Association (OSA) jointly with the Union of Oromo in North America

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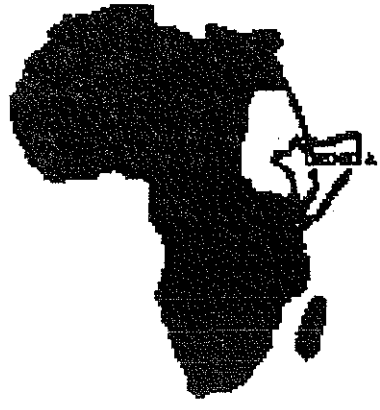
A new book on the Oromo

Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992, by Asafa Jalata, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 1993.

The original work traces the cultural and political history of the Oromo, their incorporation into the modern state of Ethiopia, and their long struggle against colonization.

Focusing on the development of the class and nation-class contradictions manifested in the continuing crisis of the Ethiopian state, Jalata explores why the reorganization of the state in the 1970s and again in the early 1990s failed to change the nature of Ethiopian colonialism. He challenges the assumptions of many modernization and mainsteam Marxist theoretists that colonized peoples like the Oromo would disappear through a process of assimilation. To the contrary, the Oromo case serves as an apt demonstration that imperialism has not been successful in destroying the cultural identity of colonized peoples, nor their desire for self determination.

Lynne Rienner Publishers offer Oromo Studies Association (OSA) the opportunity to purchase *Oromia and Ethiopia* at a special 20% discount off the regular prices of $45. Lynne Rienner Publisher, Inc., 1800 30th St., Suite 314; Boulder, CO 80301-1032, USA. tel. 303 444-6684, Fax 303 444-0824.