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THE “GALLA” THAT NEVER WAS:
ITS ORIGIN AND REFORMULATION
IN A HINTERLAND OF
COMPARATIVE DISADVANTAGE

Daniel Ayana

Before it fell into disuse in the wake of the Ethiopian revolution of 1974, the name “Galla” had been used pejoratively to refer to the Cushitic-speaking Oromo who live in the Horn of Africa countries of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. In the Sudan and Chad, Galla or Dar Galla has been associated with the Zaghawa, a Nilo-Saharan speaking group, identified in the region’s history at least since the eighth century C.E.¹ Tracing the term’s first usage in Ethiopian sources to *Abba Bahrey*, the Ethiopian monk who wrote on the Oromo population movement of the sixteenth century, G. W. B. Huntingford stated pointedly that the people whom Ethiopians and Europeans called “Galla” actually identified themselves as Oromo. He suggested

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the term probably originated in the Sidamo language without excluding the possibility of an Oromo language derivation of the term.² By not ruling out the possibility of an Oromo provenance for the word, Huntingford basically revived an idea Alice Werner had rejected in her early twentieth century study of the Oromo in colonial Kenya.³ Huntingford's proposal remained unchallenged probably because of the implicit assumption that Bahrey, who had lived in Gamo close to the Sidama, might have used a local nomenclature.

This article demonstrates that Huntingford's assumption lacks strong evidentiary foundation to support the proposition. The study combines two branches of history—intellectual and environmental—to investigate the origin of the term *galla*. The intellectual aspect traces the evolution of the name and its gradual diffusion in the Horn of Africa over the centuries. It will then evaluate Bahrey's history of the Oromo that he claimed was inspired by al-Makin, the famous medieval Arab historian. Specifically this research argues that Bahrey deviated from al-Makin's standard of objectivity in writing history and reformulated a diffuse loan word to describe the Oromo.⁴

The environmental aspect links the initial use of the word *galla* to the struggle over relatively better endowed geographical regions of the Horn. In the Horn, as elsewhere, access to land and its resources had been a bone of contention for centuries among many groups. Since the Horn has been partly blanketed by an extension of the Sahara desert for millennia, conflicts over land with comparative advantages have shaped this region's history. Communities living in geographic zones of comparative disadvantage yearned for and acted in ways

that would gain them access to better endowed regions. In this all-too-common struggle over land, humans produced ideas to guide their actions, described their neighbors or rivals, and forged shifting alliances. The production of ideas must have also included words to exclude competitors from the scarce resources.⁵ Thus, human thoughts are also related to the environment which in turn influenced human ideas. In this context the intellectual and the environmental histories converge to illustrate the interrelationships between human action and the physical environment.

The title of the article attempts to capture the two components of this essay. “The ‘Galla’ that Never Was” echoes a book on Africa that analyzed how four centuries of European writings had fabricated a non-existent negative image for Africans.⁶ The “Hinterland of Comparative Disadvantage” tries to conceptualize the unevenly endowed geographical resources of the physical environment. The central argument is that the name “Galla” was of Somali origin and is deeply embedded in their culture and history as it relates to the spread of Islam in the Horn. I will first trace the dictionary definitions, and root words and their meanings. This will be followed by an analysis of how the struggle over resource-endowed geographic zones has shaped the origin, spread, and reformulation of the term. My aim is to situate the evolution of the name “Galla” in the tug of war over access to relatively better endowed lands and the resulting historical processes. In this study, the macro-region of Horn of Africa, including present day Somalia and Ethiopia, is referred to as a hinterland of comparative disadvantage.

ORIGIN OF THE TERM

My investigation of the term's origin begins with what the east-Cushitic cognate *ga* came to denote and connote over centuries. Detecting the east Cushitic languages will bring us closer to the origin of the term *galla*. The focal points of the investigation will be the Sidamo, the Oromo, and the Somali languages due to past geographic contact and historical interactions. Contrary to Huntingford's assumption, the Sidamo language and culture could not have been the source for two reasons.⁷ First, although about twenty three words in the Sidamo language are derived from or related to *gal*, there is no word derivation referring to groups of people. For instance, *gala* means "staying overnight." Other words include *galata*, to thank or praise; *galla*, the name of a plant; *galma*, a big house; *galo*, an old thing; *galte*, wife, etc.⁸ As a Cushitic word, in Sidamo, *gal* evolved to express ideas in a trajectory unrelated to identity. It is belaboring the obvious to say that these words have convergence with ideas in the Oromo language. Second, the Sidama recollect the Gujii in their tradition as the nearest Oromo group. They also claim to have had the Gujii dialect of *Afaan Oromoo* as their ancient language. They still use this language occasionally for *gerarsha*, war songs, feast songs, etc.⁹ There was no cultural or environmental basis for the Sidamo language to have originated *galla* as an identity classification.

This leads us to investigating identity related Oromo words through dictionary definitions and the embedded meanings in Somali cultural and historical traditions. Both *Afaan Oromoo* and Somali belong to the east Cushitic language family along with the Sidamo

language discussed above. According to experts the Oromo and Somali languages share up to twenty percent common vocabulary.¹⁰ Among the many common words is *gal*, literally enter, in both Somali and Oromo languages.¹¹ But then the usage and the words derived from this root diverge widely, signifying how far the two ethnic groups have separated over the millennia.

For the Oromo, the noun *galaa* or *galuu* refers to a stranger residing in a group without sharing descent from the residents’ eponymous father.¹² This is the only aspect of identity from the root *gal*. The evolution in the meaning of the word and its derivatives in Oromo are captured in Tilahun Gamta’s comprehensive Oromo dictionary. There over fifteen words derived from *gal* or *galuu* refer to mundane, non-identity aspects. The one aspect of the meaning related to identity has been attenuated to mean changing a residential area.¹³

I consider the Boorana dialect at length separately for identity expressing terms linked to the cognate *gal* for three reasons. First, the Boorana had a long historic contact with Somali clans. The geographic location fostering this contact also facilitated trade and sharing cultural aspects. Second, the Boorana have a special status as cultural repository for the wider Oromo community. Three, because the Boorana dialect has also a repertoire of vocabularies distinct from the widely spoken Oromo speech mode, some scholars suggest that the Boorana have a larger share of common vocabularies with the Somali language.¹⁴ It is difficult to disaggregate the cultural components due to the geographic contiguity, the shared Cushitic heritage, and the common root words in the two languages. In

this context I want to ascertain that mutual borrowing would not be implicated as a source for the term *galla*.

In the Boorana parlance, there are additional concepts derived from *gal*. These terms and their meanings are not widely known in other regions. They express unique Boorana cultural dimensions and attest to the dialect's richness and depth. The term *gale* (long "ga") means to follow, to pursue, to provoke, or to annoy.¹⁵ The word *galca* refers to terrace or a ring of rocks or stones around grave sites or water wells. *Galdaba* means to have tantrums or fits, to be outraged or having a bad mood. Though usually reserved for domestic animals, occasionally the word also applied to humans. *Gali* is the process of relaying water during watering cattle. It also expressed the rhythm involved in passing on water along the line of men from the bottom of the well to the cattle. *Galifo* is a word for a child's unsteady first steps to walk. *Galo* is a female personal name, while *galo*, (short "ga"), means tree branches hanging over a road. *Gaaltama*, (emphasis on "ta"), is a mature marriageable girl.¹⁶ All these Boorana concepts express temporal ideas unrelated to identity.

Interestingly, the Boorana word for identity derived from *gal* is the same word discussed above. *Galtu* is used to describe identity for Boorana with a subtle twist. For the Boorana *galtu* is someone who assimilated or became a member of another group. The cultural expression is captured in *mata na haadi na Boransisi; shave my hair and let me become a Boran*.¹⁷ Here the meaning of the word *galtu* hinged on inclusivity. The individual's moment of becoming Boorana defined the personal identity. He/she is part of the whole. Obviously this cultural component did not come from contact with

Somali clans. It is in contrast to the word’s meaning in Somali language, where exclusion is emphasized. Among the Oromo in the macro region there was an undertone of this connotation for the word *galtu*. The meaning signified the individual’s genealogical dissimilarity from a group with whom he resided. However, for the Boorana the culturally entrenched meaning rested on belongingness. Thus, I can safely say that *Afaan Oromoo* in its varied speech mode could not have been the source of the term *galla* to describe an identity. Rather it is fruitful to interrogate the Somali language, culture, and history.

Investigating the Somali language reveals that the name “Galla,” with its derogatory connotation, is embedded in Somali narratives about their history, culture and identity.¹⁸ It is difficult to provide a precise date for the layers of meanings attached to the word, but the word itself must have evolved between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries. This argument is partly old and partly new. In 1886 Paul Soleillet suggested that *galla* was derived from the Somali word *gal*.¹⁹ In 1931 Enrico Cerulli asserted that the term evolved from the word *gal* when the Somali embraced Islam, also adding that the Somali used the term to refer to the non-Muslim Oromo. This eventually became their identifying ethnic name.²⁰ Soleillet’s suggestion is generally correct in the sense that the word *gal* is common to east Cushitic languages. While I concur with Cerulli on the term’s origin, I argue that the early referents were not the Oromo, but Somali clans who initially resisted Islam between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries. The Somali still use the term in various ways. Moving chronologically backwards from the twentieth

century, my analysis traces the evolution of the word *galla* and delineates its spread and reformulation in the Somali context.

In 1959 I. M. Lewis countered Cerulli's thesis insisting that his formulation was based on a linguistic confusion. He tried to prove the presence of regional variation in the Somali meaning of the word *gal*. According to Lewis, at least in northern Somalia, the word *gal*, its plural *galo* and when used with the article *galada*, meant pagan, infidel or non-Muslim. Lewis says that this is different from the meaning of *galla* in northern Somalia. He then made an end run and stated that linking the origin of the term and its usage by the early Islamized Somali is irrelevant since the Oromo had long embraced Islam. In another work, Lewis wrote that the Somali refer to the Oromo as "Gaalla or less commonly as *Gaallaawi* whom they scorn[ed] and raid[ed]." ²¹ He then concluded that the word's origin is obscure, and there is no solid evidence to support the link to the Somali language. ²² I shall provide the evidence below.

There is indeed ample evidence showing Somali provenance of the term *galla*, but Lewis's conclusion was apparently colored by his personal commitment to the ideal of Greater Somalia. This can be seen from his works over three decades. ²³ In his 1959 work, Lewis argued that, as an ethnic nomenclature, Oromo does not include the Boorana and the Oromo in Northern Kenya, ²⁴ evidently to pave the way for these two Oromo sections to join a future Greater Somalia. In 1988 he called for the Oromo and the Somali, as Cushitic groups, to rise against their mutual oppressor, the Amhara. ²⁵ Below the common oppression there

were unequal political undercurrents. The historical process of subjugation did not produce an equally overlapping historical memory among the Oromo and Somali. What Lewis in his latest work calls Cushitic identity is diffuse and can sometimes be contradictory.

Claiming regional variation in the Somali language, Lewis makes a glossy argument that, “in modern Northern Somali, at least, Galo and Galla are quite distinct, although this may of course have not been so in the past.”²⁶ In effect, he denies the presence of the word *galla* in northern Somalia. It is an implausible proposition. Though there are indeed regional or clan Somali dialects, the word *gaal*, *gal* or *galla* have the same meaning in all regions.²⁷ Moreover, a Somali-English dictionary composed for northern Somalia published in 1897 contains the word *gal* and *galo*. The former meant “to enter” while the latter collectively referred to believers in traditional religion, or people having a different religion from the Somali.²⁸ Contrary to Lewis’s assertion, the dictionary word reveals the presence of the term *galla* in northern Somalia, with meanings that Lewis tried to deny. In a 1920s description of Somali language and culture, a British colonial district officer for Jubbaland, in southern Somalia, had documented the meanings of the words *gal*, *gaal*, *galti*. It meant a non-Muslim stranger or a European, confirming that in both northern and southern Somalia these words carry similar meanings.²⁹ They were related mostly to aspects of identity.

That the word *galla* originated in Somali language is evinced in a 1987 Somali–English dictionary, written by Virginia Luling, an anthropologist who studied Somali culture and society. The work provides addi-

tional nuanced meanings of the cognate *gal* and the word *galla*. In its noun masculine form *gaal* meant an infidel, a non-Muslim, a European, or a cruel person. Here the word also connotes an outsider. As a noun in female gender the word refers to a disposition, a character, or nature of a non-believer or a female non-believer. Its verb *gaalee* or *gaaleeyee* means turning someone into a non-believer or changing his religion away from Islam. *Gaaloob* or *gaaloobay* means to become a non-believer or to abandon Islam. *Gaali* or *gaalliyey*, also a verb, means to spoil or alter for the worse. In its noun form, masculine or feminine gender, the word substitutes for non-believer.³⁰ Here beyond any doubt the dictionary definitions establish the gender implications and shades of meanings associated with the term. All of them are linked to identity and self definition. There are also additional layers of meanings.

If Luling's dictionary is considered a late twentieth century composition, a nineteenth century dictionary and twentieth century cultural traditions provide further layers of meaning linked to identity. In a dictionary composed in 1897 and cited above, the word *galo*, as a plural form of *gal* means an infidel. The illustrative sentence reads *habashi o dami wa galo*; which meant "all the Abyssinians are infidels."³¹ Here a collective Somali religious identity is expressed in contrast to the non-Muslim Abyssinians. From the traditions Lewis himself collected in the 1940s and 1950s in northern Somalia, the word *galla* meant "people who were there before." The meaning is here very clear and with no ethnic specification. The only identifiable meaning is that these allegedly pre-Somali groups were non-Muslim.³² They could also be non-Muslim Somalis. In the 1980s

Catherine Besteman collected oral traditions from the Somali of the Jubba River Valley. One such tradition narrated about a local hero who had led a *jihad* against the “*gaal madon*” or black non-believer, in British-ruled Kenya over land disputes.³³ The cultural narratives prove that the word *galla* has a potent currency even in the twentieth century. In both the dictionary definitions and the cultural traditions the word referred to either the pre-Somali inhabitants of the Horn or non-Muslim groups in eastern Africa. In this context the stretched meaning of *galla* as a reference to pre-Somali inhabitants shows how ideas have “elective affinity.”³⁴ The non-believer status of the pre-Somali inhabitants was emphasized in this regard. Reference to blackness also carried a pejorative framework. Here the meaning portrayed a self-definition; a smaller group identity or larger collective Somali religious identity.

The word *galla* has multi-layered meanings in Somali historical narratives. One layer caused a confused understanding for early researchers on the ancient location of the Oromo homeland. For instance, some Somali from Cape Guardafui informed a French archeologist that the nearby ruins at Olok, east of Berbera, belonged to the “Galla.” Elsewhere in the region, G. Revoil, another French archeologist, who visited coastal regions of northern Somalia in the 1870s, reported that the ruins of a rectangular structure of a European type millstone were attributed to the “Galla.”³⁵ F. L. James, the first British traveler to enter the interior of the Horn of Africa in 1884, also reported on alleged “Galla settlements” south of Berbera.³⁶ A. Hamilton, another British traveler, reported about “Galla ruins at Rat” in today’s northern

Somalia.³⁷ H. G. C. Swayne, a British colonial official, recorded Somali traditions identifying the “so-called Galla graves” during the second half of the nineteenth century in northern Somalia. These were “stone cairns” or burial sites marked by stone mounds scattered about the former British Somaliland. Italian explorers visiting the Obia and Alula, east of Berbera in late nineteenth century, were also shown similar mounds or “stone cairns.” Asked about these stone cairns, Somali elders unanimously described them as “Galla graves.”³⁸ European travelers’ curiosity about these visible landmarks as potential archeological sites popularized the issue. The oral information from Somali elders claimed the antiquity of these graves.³⁹ The tradition carried a message that the Somali heroically defeated and expelled the “Galla” from northern Somaliland. However, subsequent archeological research revealed that these graves were recent constructions and contained Somali remains.⁴⁰ Here the phrase *galla* only indicated pre-Islamic Somali settlement sites and burial practices. Obviously those categorized as “Galla” were mostly non-Muslim Somalis.

Another layer of meaning came from an autobiographical narrative revealing the hidden legacy of slavery in Somalia.⁴¹ Scholars lamented that Arabs, minorities, caste groups and descendants of former slaves bore the brunt of the brutalities of the 1990s civil war in Somalia. For the warring militias, these were non-Somali and were targeted for violence.⁴² Escaping the hellish condition, a Somali lady applied for an asylum in Holland. Since she had not learned the Dutch language, another Somali interpreted for her asylum application. In describing the atrocity perpe-

trated against the asylum seeker, the translator referred to her as a “Galla” woman. Apparently she descended from the enslaved families liberated by colonial rulers and settled as farmers in the Jubba River Valley. Both Lee Cassanelli and Catherine Bestman concur that a significant, if not the majority, of these enslaved were Oromo.⁴³ Bestman also wrote how in the 1980s the Somali disdainfully identified descendants of former slaves as *galla*.⁴⁴ The autobiography of this immigrant also shows that the word has even evolved among some Somali in the West. Some Diaspora Somali referred to their compatriot as *gaalo* if they manifested such western habits as punctuality.⁴⁵ Rather than diminishing in importance, the term has evolved to denote exclusivity and disdain.

The cultural narratives and dictionary definitions we have considered so far came from the late nineteenth and twentieth century. An early nineteenth century work shed further light on yet another denotation. In the 1840s Charles Guillain, a French explorer, documented a regional economic and political rivalry leading to a civil war between the coastal and the Bardheere Somali. In his writing about the civil war, remembered as the Bardheere *jihad*, Guillain noted that the Bardheere described their enemies as a “crowd of unbelievers,” and the commander as leading “a pack of infidels.”⁴⁶ Here, regional power struggle was couched in religious terms. Although both parties were Muslims, applying the word *galla* was politically expedient. Commenting on this meaning, Lee Cassanelli states how the different Somali Muslim groups generated opposing worldviews through the use of the term *galla*.⁴⁷ The central meaning of this worldview was embedded in

and expressed with the key term *galla*. It helped one group of Somali to demonize the other. Thus, rather than being obscure or regional, as Lewis had claimed, the term had been central to Somali culture and the cultural dimensions embedded in the word were well encapsulated in Somali historical narratives.

In this cultural dimension and in the historical narratives, one can locate the evolution of the name “Galla” and its diffuse applications in the footsteps of Muslim Arab missionaries. Moving chronologically backwards to the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries, we use Abdirhaman A. Hersi’s study of the “Arab factor” in Somali history for two reasons. First, this work established a chronology for the cultural narratives that included the term *galla*. Second, Hersi’s investigation also provided the time frame for the spread of Islam among the Somali. He also identifies two rival interpretations concerning the role of Arabs in eighteenth and seventeenth century Somali history: a secular interpretation which considers the two centuries as a period of incessant warfare and inter-clan rivalry and a religious perspective which marks them as a victory laden “heroic age in the history of Somali Islam.” In the latter context, Somali traditions remember defeated clans disparagingly as “*Gala madow*” or black infidel.⁴⁸ From gradations of Somali skin pigmentation, it is difficult to prove how many of the victors were *gibil ad* or white-skinned. It is also impossible to determine if all the vanquished were dark or brown skinned. One can safely presume that most, if not all, of these reportedly “*Gala madow*” were Somali clans. Along this we can infer that minority Bantu caste groups such as the Tumul and Yibir, Gosha, and Adoni were categorized

as *Galla* or “*Gala madow*.”⁴⁹ For the purpose of this study the terms *gaal* or *galla* were widely used among the Somali during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

Hersi’s dissertation reveals the usage of the word *galla* with a deeper timeframe among the Somali than known so far. The earliest mention of the word is in the hagiography of Sheik Yusuf Aw Barkhadale, reportedly a Sharif among the Somali who, according to Arabic sources, died sometime after 1289. This situates the application of the word in the thirteenth century. In one of the miracles attributed to him, the sheik encountered a “pagan Galla called Qanana,” whose death he had caused to overcome pagan resistance. While I. M. Lewis considers this chief to be an Oromo, Hersi asserts that he was “pagan and black,” and not necessarily an Oromo.⁵⁰ Either way Qanana, the chief, is identified in the hagiography as one Islam-resisting “Galla” chief sometimes before 1289.

The second of many references to the term come in the context of internal jihad among Muslim statelets in the area around Harer in the fourteenth century. The source is *kashf as-Sudul an Tarikh as-Somal*, gleaned from a collection of local Arabic manuscripts in Somalia.⁵¹ In between the wars with the medieval Christian Abyssinian kings, the leaders of the Muslim statelets conducted an internal jihad against the allegedly nominal Muslims and adherents of traditional religion. These resisters were listed as “Galla”. Citing Maqrizi, who used the term “barbarians,” Hersi identifies the resisters as Somali, not as Oromo. Imbued as it were with the ideals of Greater Somalia, Hersi insists on the nonexistence of the Oromo in the area around Harer

in the fourteenth century. As evidence Hersi cites the absence of the term *galla* in *Futub al Habasha*.⁵² Here we are not interested in the extent of Oromo settlement during the fourteenth century, but in the application of the word *galla*. As such Hersi's debate is immaterial in as much as we have the mention of the word *galla*.

Whether Shihab ad-Din, author of *Futub al Habasha* mentioned the Oromo or not should not detain us here for four reasons. First, the reference to the "people of Bali" in the *Futub al-Habasha* was a generalized identification of the Oromo in the lower altitudes of Bali.⁵³ Second, there were many references to Oromo personal names such as Dallu and Jalati, sectional names such as Warra Qaalluu, and place names such as Handhura in *Futub al Habasha*.⁵⁴ Third, the Oromo were known with their sectional names, not under a diffuse classification such as *galla*. This is attested in the hagiography of Sheik Ishaq Ahmed of Alawi, who arrived in Zeyla in 1153. The Sheik then moved to Harer and then traveled among the "Arussi" (Arsi) before he finally settled in Meit, a small coastal town on the Gulf of Aden.⁵⁵ The mention of Arsi proves that the Oromo were mostly known by their sectional names as early as the twelfth century. In any case, Shihab ad-Din used the Arabic equivalent rather than the local term *galla*. My argument here is that the name "Galla" or Gaallaa had already become a reference for non-Muslims by the thirteenth century. Fourth, Shihab ad-Din referred to all of the Somali clans as the faithful. There was no mention of an infidel Somali clan by the sixteenth century. The Somali clans identified in the *Futub al-Habasha* were still identifiable in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, it is very likely

that some of those identified as “Galla” could have been Oromo clans. From this study we can safely state that the name “Galla” had entered a written lexicon at least by the thirteenth century. One can infer that the usage of the word could have started earlier.

The thrust of my argument is that the word *galla* was formulated by the early Islamized Somali as a generic reference to the non-Muslims inhabitants of the Horn, including the Somali. However, the term’s first referents could not have been the Oromo because of their known geographic location.⁵⁶ Since the coastal region of northern Somalia was first Islamized there is considerable distance between them and the Oromo in the interior of the Horn. Somali adherents of traditional religion were the first obvious targets. Other groups adjacent to the early converts might have also been the earliest referents. This was indirectly clear from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries religious history of Somalia indicated above in the frequent references to “*gaal maadow*,” black pagan.

This process will also be evident from the chronology of the spread of Islam among the Somali. Revising I. M. Lewis’s tenth-century date, Hersi had established the thirteenth century for the popularization of Islam and its spread among the Somali. Based on al-Yaqut, and other Arabic sources on the Horn of Africa, Hersi concludes that most Somali asserted Islam as their shared religion during the thirteenth century. They also refrained from enslaving fellow Somali around the same period. Though ninth century Chinese sources refer to Somali slaves, Hersi argues there were no Somali slaves in the Middle or Near East from the thirteenth century onwards.⁵⁷ Thus, it is plausible to argue that the early

Somali converts referred to Somali and non-Somali adherents of traditional religions as “Galla”.

It is apposite now to check the presence of root words for *galla* in Semitic languages, Hebrew and Arabic, to show the absence of any obvious link. Contrary to widespread assumption, there is no root word for *galla* in Arabic. In Arabic *gallat* means “wrong.” In Hebrew *galab* means to discover, reveal, disclose, or appear. Its derivation, *galut* means “exile, captivity, or the Jewish Diasporas.”⁵⁸ Reference to exile connotes emigration. However, here the word carried sacredness in the sense that “God appeared to the exiles to make them holy.”⁵⁹ One can safely state that the original languages of the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, do not contain the word *galla*.⁶⁰ In Geez, the liturgical language of Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Getatchew Haile recently identified a rare term *gallat*, meaning “cohort,” as a possible plural form for *galla*. However, he also admitted that this word is rare and a later addition to the original text by few writers.⁶¹ It might not have been the origin of the word.

There is also the infamous legend on the origin of *galla* which Richard Burton bequeathed us. Following his 1855 visit to Harer, Burton attributed the term’s origin to the Prophet Mohammed through an alleged intermediary. The legend states the Prophet’s invitation to an Oromo chief to convert to Islam. After extending the invitation, “The messenger returned to report that the chief had “said no,” *‘kal la’*” in Arabic, inaccurately pronounced *galla*. The rejection of the pious invitation prompted the Prophet to designate the people with that name.⁶² The Arabic term *la* meant no. So there is an addition, *kal* to fill the gap. Getatchew

Haile suggested a corrupt African Arabic to explain the deficiency.⁶³ As indicated above, given that there is no root word related to *galla* in Arabic, it is more plausible that the term *galla* has its origin in the Somali root word *gal* than in Arabic language.

ENVIRONMENT: A HINTERLAND OF COMPARATIVE DISADVANTAGE

In the foregoing section, I traced the origins of the word *galla* to a Cushitic Somali word invented to express identity issues. This expression was embedded in the Somali narratives about their culture and history. The term was usually used in identity and self-definition for a larger collectivity or small group identity. I also showed how the related Cushitic Oromo word diverged to signify mainly non-identity and mundane issues. I considered the Sidamo language and concluded that it could not have been the origin of the term. What accounted for the difference in the evolution of the Cushitic words was partly the geographic environment. The sub-title of this paper is formulated as a hinterland of comparative disadvantage. Experts consider the Horn of Africa as “the hub of a vast desert world... that was arid even when North Africa was forest.” In the Horn of Africa, the Somali faced a harsh geographic reality. This mostly barren regional environment is the extension of the Sahara desert snaking around the coastal areas of the Red Sea littoral and the Gulf of Aden towards eastern Africa.⁶⁴

The Somali had encountered this arid geographic environment from the dawn of their history and adapted to a life in search of meager resources. This less endowed geography and the struggle over pasture

and farm land transformed the word *gal* into a vehicle of “othering” outsiders. The application of the word *galla* to signify “alterity” or “otherness” helped to define an enemy against which the Somali promoted their own group cohesion and protection of their meager resources. What Hersi referred to as “the march of Islamized Somali”⁶⁵ during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was partly a conflict over the scarce resources: pasture and water. A favorable geographic location endowed with pasture and water was decisive for survival. Alliances shifted to defend or maintain access to these resources.⁶⁶ Existential struggle has always been to get access to or maintain control of lands with comparative advantage. The endowed geography is replete with lands of comparative disadvantage. A quotation from the role of saints in spreading Islam in southern Somalia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries illustrates the frequent conflict over land. “Omar... helped to organize the Rahanwein tribe...The people then were divided...and were always fighting with the Arussi and Boorana... Omar...appointed [clan military commanders] to lead the army.” Cassanelli believed that the Rahanwein embraced Islam later than many Somali clans.⁶⁷

Three points are clear from the preceding quotation. First, Islam as a religion is tangential to the conflict. The conflict over land could have had similar dynamics under another monotheist religion. Second, the struggle over land was a survival issue for the Somali groups. Third, the Muslim saint allegedly facilitated unity against the external enemy by forging internal cohesion presumably using rhetoric against a non-believing group. Whether a foreign Arab or a local

Somali, the saint enhanced his religious standing in helping his followers address an existential issue. Casanelli made an insightful observation in this regard. Both Arab and Somali sheiks first planted the idea of a “wider Somali identity.”⁶⁸ Yet from the Oromo perspective an ingredient in the making of this identity was linked rhetorically or existentially to the genesis and deployment of the expression *galla*.

The link between the rhetoric and the existential struggle can be illustrated with the plight of the *warra* Dhaayee and the Orma Oromo. For these groups the historic-geographic drifts followed western side of the Jubba River Valley along the Lorian swamp.⁶⁹ Until the 1860s they lived there in relative peace. By the middle of 1860s a smallpox epidemic broke their demographic strength. Taking advantage of this situation the Darood and then the Ajuran Somali opened a war of attrition against them. The aggressors gradually took Oromo lands and livestock, reducing most of these Oromo to slavery. The enslavement process persisted even under British colonial rule in Kenya. Colonial officers preferred to identify them as assimilated Somali rather than enslaved Oromo to avoid the thorny issue of slavery.⁷⁰ For instance, a British writer who lived in East Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century documented that outsiders were called the Orma “Galla,” to mean “wanderers.”⁷¹ The minority of the free Orma continued to struggle for their land and freedom. They petitioned for the banning of the loathed name “Galla”. Although they had embraced Islam, the classification was directed rhetorically at the group’s distinct existence. The Orma then claimed to have descended from the Quraysh clan of the Prophet

Mohammed. They declared their distinction from the Somali, and then affirmed their Oromo identity.⁷² For the Orma demographic weakness limited the possibility of redress. Yet they managed to imaginatively confirm their distinctiveness and detached themselves from the label “Galla”.

Once developed to the point of categorizing identity, the term *galla* spread into the hinterland of the Horn. The medium for the spread of the diffuse loan word could be sought in the contemporary interaction patterns between the coast and the hinterland. The first popular medium could have been the Christian traders from Zeyla along the trade route into the interior. Tadesse Tamrat wrote about Byzantine Christians as royal trade agents during the late Aksumite period. Although he did not specifically write about such agents for Yikuno-Amlak’s dynasty, he did allude to the presence of Semitic families coming inland through Zeyla and suggest a possibility that more such immigrants coming from the Gulf of Aden as early as the ninth century.⁷³ Based on the authority of al-Idrisi and other Arabic sources, Hersi also described Zeyla as a Christian Abyssinian city during the tenth, eleventh, and the middle of twelfth centuries.⁷⁴ In addition, a thirteenth century Chinese map of Africa linked Zeyla to Abyssinia.⁷⁵ As late as the sixteenth century Shihab ad-Din wrote about Egyptian and Syrian Christian traders and their descendants residing in a town located on the salubrious plateau in today’s central Ethiopia.⁷⁶ Probably these Christian traders entered medieval southern Abyssinia through Zeyla. They must have had trading posts along the trade routes into the interior.

The trade routes from Zeyla reached the commercial hub in the medieval Muslim sultanates that paid tributes to the Christian kings, and these traders could have transmitted the loan word into the interior to their co-religionists. The spread of Islam in Somalia and medieval southern Abyssinia was a parallel historical process. One should not expect a chronological sequence for the interaction patterns. Christian and Muslim trading communities in both regions conducted trade with each other and the other non-Muslim communities.⁷⁷ The exchange of ideas between these two religious groups cannot be excluded. Both the Christian and Muslim traders could have served as cultural transmitters and as a link with the outside world. The two religious groups could have used the loan word as a sneering classification category. In fact one meaning in Christian chronicles is exactly in this sense: someone who is neither a Christian nor a Muslim.⁷⁸

The second conduit could have been Christian communities and soldiers spearheading the south or eastward expansion between the ninth and thirteenth centuries.⁷⁹ These frontiersmen could have picked the loanword during their interactions with Semitic Muslim or Christian groups. Before the sixteenth century, pockets of Semitic speakers inhabited the areas between Harer and Gurageland.⁸⁰ The other inhabitants were predominantly Cushites.⁸¹ According to Cerulli there was a Semitic super-imposition over the pre-existing Cushites in Harer.⁸² For our purpose, the existence of influential Semitic trading communities and political elites is relevant. These traders had their supporters in the palaces of the Christian kings.⁸³ The Semitic groups, both Christian and Muslim, had

developed a common accord over the centuries against the pagan Cushitic communities.⁸⁴ That most of these early Christians and Muslims were mostly of Semitic origin facilitated easy interaction across the religious divide. The interaction pattern between the Christian ruling elites and the Muslim merchants could have served as a medium for transmission.

The third pattern of interaction was the mass conversions and reconversions between the two religions due to the changing military balance especially after the thirteenth century. This is probably one of the neglected aspects of the Semitic communities of central Abyssinia before the sixteenth century. Some members of the Portuguese contingent that came to Abyssinia in the sixteenth century were amazed by the ease with which both Christians and Muslims changed their religion. The Christian clergy devised a total immersion as a form of baptism for Muslims or reconverting former Christians.⁸⁵ The fourth possible medium was the westward movement of sedentary Muslim communities under pressure from the lowland pastoralists from the east.⁸⁶ All these interaction patterns could have easily transmitted the loan word.

As a loan word we do not know when the term *galla* entered the written Abyssinian lexicon. In the above analysis the word was popularized among the Somali between the ninth and thirteenth centuries with the spread of Islam. Around the same time frame, the term spread into the interior of the Horn. According to Mohammed Hassen, Ethiopic sources from the Zagwe period first employed the term *galla*.⁸⁷ It is possible that with the relocation of the center of power from Axum to Zagwe and then Beta-Amhara, Christian rulers and

chroniclers encountered the expression *galla*. Thus, the name “Galla” was used long before it was mentioned in the work of Bahrey. For instance, the phrase *Hagara Galla* was used in a rarely known chronicle of Amde-Seyon (1314-1344). The account goes: “on April 28, [1332] the king first passed through and reached the Galla country. On June 7, he left the Galla country, along with his army.”⁸⁸ While the expression *Hagara Galla* sounded classic Geez, like Beta-Amhara or Medri-Bahiri, the chronology coincided with the evolution and spread of the word into the Horn’s hinterland.

In Amde-Seyon’s chronicle, composed in the fourteenth century, the use of the term *galla* carried two dimensions. In the first, it denoted a geographic space with known physical frontiers to the contemporaries. The word *galla* was also used as a diffuse reference to the inhabitants, probably indicating a religious difference. Citing Ethiopian chronicles, Getatchew Haile notes that *galla* meant “one who is neither a Muslim nor a Christian.”⁸⁹ The term had attained specificity as a reference to the pastoral Oromo. For instance, the Fra Mauro map contained such a geographic reference, with a group of people along a river valley.⁹⁰

Here *galla* as “neither a Muslim nor a Christian” category being a label for only the pastoral Oromo needs further elaboration. Medieval sources mention groups such as the Gebel, Worjii, Hadiya, Kambata, Gurage, and Damot in the general area. There might have been many individuals or communities among these groups who did not embrace Christianity or Islam. But the elites of these linguistic groups and probably many ordinary people had already accepted Islam and/or Christianity.⁹¹ This might have made

it inconvenient to label them collectively as “Galla,” since they had accepted or were in the process of converting to these religions. Probably the centrality of the *gadaa* system, the indigenous Oromo politico-military system, and its regular ceremonies must have caught the attention of the Muslims and the Christians in the hinterland. The derogatory term was probably popularized as a reference to the pastoral Oromo who retained their longstanding culture. Even in the twentieth century the pastoral Boorana steadfastly retained their traditional religion,⁹² a process that stood out as unique before the sixteenth century. The genesis of the modern Oromo came from these pre-sixteenth century pastoral groups.⁹³ The settled Oromo sections seem to have abandoned practicing the *gadaa* system early under various pressures.⁹⁴ Thus the farming Oromo communities were not seen as distinct from among the many contemporary sedentary groups in contrast to the pastoral Oromo.

The second dimension in Amde-Seyon’s chronicle is its reference to the religious “other” or non-Christians. These pre-sixteenth century sources do not carry non-religious prejudices. The prejudiced view does not necessarily preclude the group’s humanity. Religious prejudice carries within it the project of changing the other through religious conversion. Probably, it is in this sense that term *galla* was known until the sixteenth century. If there was any animosity between the Oromo and the Abyssinian kings, the intensity was not known or could not have been more than the one manifested against the contemporary regional pastoralist groups often mentioned in the historical literature.⁹⁵

However, Bahrey in his *History of the Galla* reformulated this name and fabricated the “Galla” that never was, caricaturing their humanity. While among the Somali the term “*Gaal Maadon*” or “*galla*” continued to be used broadly as a reference to the “other,” among Abyssinians it gained specificity with loaded meanings. In the above reference or any other source there was no implicit or explicit indication that the Oromo in the pre-sixteenth century were known as Bahrey had portrayed them. This writer drew a new picture of the existing group of people with his historic pen. The title of this article reflected a parallel development elsewhere in Africa where four centuries of British writings filled with ethnocentric biases, prejudices, and misrepresentation had created *The Africa that Never Was*.⁹⁶ In the same way Bahrey’s piece formulated a previously unknown “Galla” and transformed into a term denoting a sub-human horde that was neither Christian nor Muslim erupting suddenly from an unknown territory. From socio-psychic perspective, “Galla” was uttered “from a fountain of purpose to hurt” just as the epithets nigger in the U.S and *Kaffir* in apartheid South Africa.⁹⁷ It is in this sense of the term that Abyssinian chroniclers reported on the Oromo for the subsequent four centuries. Bahrey’s reformulation presented Europeans with a misleading signal, and they replicated this formula in their writings about the peoples of Ethiopian empire with adverse political, social, cultural, and economic consequences for the Oromo.

Bahrey’s resentment toward the Oromo primarily arose due to the territorial loss of Abyssinian Christian kings. While his personal loss could be the initial reason, the presentation of the Oromo as immigrants

entering Abyssinian lands indicated his major thrust.⁹⁸ Controlling lands of comparative advantage had formed the tax base and the source of the Abyssinian emperors' political power. In this regard Bahrey's perspective mirrored Somali clans' desire for a better land and their use of the term *galla* to exclude a rival group. The Abyssinian kings' loss of lands was the basic cause of his anguish. Bahrey's aim in writing his *History* was to forge unity among the Abyssinians for a sustained campaign against the Oromo.⁹⁹ When Bahrey writes, "they are coming to kill you," he was telegraphing to his fellow Abyssinians not to mistake the Oromo for their traditional enemy, the Muslims. His piece was a call to arms to reverse the loss of land and potential defeat of the Christians. From this angle he portrayed the Oromo as immigrants without right to land. One major objective of Abyssinian kings had always been a southward expansion from their northern base. This southward shift was dictated by the desire to control lands with comparative advantage. In the chronicles and hagiographies this expansion was presented as a struggle against the pagans or Islam, while the underlying reality was the desire to control land and its resources.¹⁰⁰ In this respect the reformulation of the name is linked to the regional environmental history.

BAHREY AND AL-MAKIN: DIFFERING STANDARDS

As regards intellectual history, Bahrey justified his writing in reference to the written history of Islam and the Prophet. Getatchew Haile recently showed Bahrey as an avid book lover.¹⁰¹ For the purpose of this paper the monk left us an important clue about his readings.

He urged his contemporaries to read: “Search in the books, and you will find that the history of Mohammed and the Muslim kings has been written, and they are our enemies in religion.”¹⁰² He then listed having read al-Makin’s (1205-1273) work. Al-Makin was a noted medieval Arab historian. A copy of al-Makin’s work was translated into Geez during the reign of Emperor Lebna-Dengil (1508-1540). Bahrey apparently had access to this translation.¹⁰³

Al-Makin’s work is relevant to evaluate Bahrey’s work for two reasons. First, his work brought a new standard to European historians. They were surprised that al-Makin wrote “the deeds not only of the Arabs” but also other peoples regardless of religious affiliation. Al-Makin belonged to a group of historians unburdened by religious prejudices in writing history.¹⁰⁴ Medieval Europeans saw al-Makin writing without prejudice the history of peoples he knew or events he witnessed. In this regard, Al-Makin’s work was aptly titled as “Universal History.” Second, just as al-Makin modeled himself after al-Tabari (839-923), the prolific medieval Muslim world historian; he also inspired later historians such as Ibn Khaldun, al-Maqrizi and other European historians who tried to emulate them. Through al-Makin, al-Tabari’s world history was eventually found and published in thirty-nine volumes. The work of al-Makin initiated the search for manuscripts, editing, analyzing and preserving them for posterity.¹⁰⁵ By linking his name to al-Makin Bahrey associated himself unwittingly with a circle of noted and objective historians.

Based on what is known four benchmarks can be highlighted to evaluate Bahrey’s work. First, al-Makin

belonged to a generation of Arab historians who have “transcended confessional boundaries” intellectually in their approach to history writing. Second, al-Makin and his group used sources different than their own cultural background to analyze events. Third, they emphasized their own contributions by referring to official documents, informant interviews, or eyewitness accounts. Fourth, their works have stood the test of time, inspiring generations of historians. Even today writing universal world history with inclusivity is a challenging project. Al-Makin and the other historians laid the foundations for world history. Their model rested on a conscious effort to reduce prejudice and present facts as they were known to the contemporaries.¹⁰⁶ In this regard, Al-Makin’s work was praised widely for his objectivity.¹⁰⁷

Bahrey justified his work because al-Makin had written the history of Muslims, “enemies of our religion.”¹⁰⁸ To what extent did he follow al-Makin’s standard? Only in some respects did the monk echo a distant similarity with al-Makin. The monk’s chronological organization, and his structure into numbered sections apparently followed al-Makin’s work. His genealogical approach to the various Oromo sections probably followed al-Makin.¹⁰⁹ One can surmise that Bahrey gathered oral information from contemporaries. Yet he does not identify written sources or informants. His information on the various sections and sub-sections has been the foundation for Oromo history. The writing clearly appears to have been original and his own.

However, Bahrey violated the principle of presenting historical subjects without prejudice. Al-Makin and his colleagues cited Islamic, Jewish, Catholic and other

sources in their writings. They also wrote the history of some of these groups. In their writings, they did not show prejudice towards sources or groups different from their own cultural background. They made observations about individual Muslim rulers or governments. Yet in analyzing historical events al-Makin’s Christian background did not cloud his judgments. For instance, al-Maqrizi, who wrote about the history of medieval Abyssinian kings and was influenced by al-Makin, did not demonstrate prejudice against the Christian kings. His complaint about the “land of apostates” was confirmed by other contemporary observers. Al-Maqrizi even noted that the Christians were better at common fighting.¹¹⁰ Yet Bahrey ridicules the history of the Persians as a “childish legend.”¹¹¹ He took the liberty of writing history from a prejudiced perspective. His rationale for writing his piece, just as the “enemies of our religion” deserve their history written, shows his inequitable view toward the Oromo. Though Bahrey claimed al-Makin’s work as an inspiration, he departed from the canons that made al-Makin and his medieval colleagues notable. In violating the al-Makin’s standard of objectivity, Bahrey created the “Galla” that never was to refer to the Oromo.

CONCLUSION

Combining intellectual and environmental history, this study traced the origin of the word *galla* to Somali history and culture. By the thirteenth century the word had spread among the Somali who had embraced Islam. For those early converts, and subsequently the name articulated a contrastive group identity and defined religious enemy. It provided a cohesive group

consciousness to promote an existential interest: competition over water, pasture, and land. Once the Islamized Somali used the term against non-Somali Muslims, both Christian and Muslim traders spread the word to the interior of the Horn. Among the Somali the word continues to be used down to the present.

In the interior of the Horn of Africa, the term *galla*, as a loan word, initially meant one who is neither a Christian nor a Muslim especially in the medieval Abyssinian Empire. However, Bahrey portrayed the “Galla” as a sub-human species. Just as the Somali used the word for group religious identity, Bahrey deployed the term to mobilize Abyssinians against the Oromo. His *History* depicted the Oromo as immigrants erupting into the lands belonging to Christian kings. His writing also established a guideline for many Europeans to replicate these prejudiced views that are detrimental to the Oromo. Bahrey claimed al-Makin as his model to write about the Oromo. This article has shown that Bahrey significantly deviated from al-Makin’s standard of writing history without prejudice in depicting the Galla that never was out of the pre-sixteenth century Oromo.

NOTES

1. R.S. O’Fahey, *State and Society in Darfur* (London: C. Hurst & company, 1980), 2-7. On the ethnography of the Zaghawa, see M-J. Tubiana and J. Tubiana, *The Zaghawa from an Ecological Perspective* (A.A Balkema: Rotterdam, 1977).
2. G. W. B. Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia; the kingdoms of Kafa and Janjero* (London: International African Institute, 1960), 10-11.

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3. A. Werner, “The Galla of the East Africa Protectorate. Part I” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 13, 50 (1914): 121-122; C. J. Jaenen, “The Galla or Oromo of East Africa,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (1956): 171-172.
4. On Al-Makin Jirjis b. Abi al-Yasir b. Abi-Al-Makarim see the works of P. M. Holt, Johannes den Heijer, W. J. Fischel and C. Cahen and R.-G. Coquin cited below.
5. In the classical debate about the primacy of idea or praxis, this author maintains the primacy of ideas. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Trans. and edited with an introduction by H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 62-63; A. Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 53; E. Labriola, *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1908).
6. D. Hammond and A. Jablow, *The Africa that Never Was: Four Centuries of British Writing about Africa* (Prospects Heights III: Waveland Press, 1992).
7. On Sidama culture and history, see J.H. Hamer, “Sidamo Generational Class Cycles: A Political Gerontocracy,” *Africa* 40, 1 (1970): 50-70.
8. A. Gasparini, *Sidamo-English Dictionary* (Bologna: Zola Predosa, 1983), v, 109-11.
9. *Ibid.*; Hamer, 50-52.
10. B. W. Andrzejewski, “The Position of the Gala in the Cushitic Language Group,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 9, no. 1 (1964), 135-138; *Idem*, “The Categories of Number in Noun Forms in the Boorana Dialect of Galla,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 30, no. 1 (1960): 62-75.
11. Nicholas Awde, *Somali-English English-Somali Dictionary and Phrasebook* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1999), 32.

12. Ibsaa Guutama, *Special Oromo Dictionary* (New York: Gubirman's Publishing, 2004), 73, 113; Jaenen, 172.
13. Tilahun Gamta, *Comprehensive Oromo-English Dictionary* (New York: Karrayyu Publishing, 2004), 36-61.
14. Hilarie Kelly, "Orma and Somali Culture Sharing in the Jubba Tana Region," In *Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Somali Studies, University of Hamburg*, August 1-6, 1983, vol. 4 (ed.), Thomas Labhan, (Hamburg: Helmut Busk Verlag, 1984), 13-15.
15. The Borana saying, *bineensi nati gale*, offers an illustrative example. It means: "a wild animal is provoking me coming repeatedly to cattle enclosure."
16. Ton Leus, *Boorana-English Dictionary* (Schijndel: W.S. D Grafisch Centrum, 1995), 327, 329-331.
17. Ibid.; William I. Tory, "Subsistence Ecology among the Gabra Nomads of the Kenya/Ethiopia Border," (Ph D diss., Columbia University, 1973). 372-393; A. Kassam, "The People of the Five "Drums": Gabra Ethnohistorical Origin," *Ethnohistory* 53, no.1 (2006), 182-188.
18. There was no standardized spelling for the word "Galla" among Somali scholars. This research reproduces the spelling format of the source/author under consideration.
19. Paul Soleillet, *Voyages en Ethiopia* (Rouen: 1886), 114.
20. Enrico Cerulli, "Tradizione storiche e monumenti della Migiurtinia," *Africa Italiana* 4 (1931): 154
21. I. M. Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 11.
22. I. M. Lewis, "The Galla in Northern Somaliland," *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* XV (1959), 20-23; *idem*, *A Modern History of Somalia* (London: Westview Press, 1988), 272.
23. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa* (Boulder: Westview Press, C1988), 266; Lewis, "Introduction." In *Nationalism and Self-Determina-*

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- tion in the Horn of Africa* ed. I. M. Lewis (London: Ithaca Press, 1983) 9, 20-22, 75.
24. Lewis, “The Galla,” 22.
 25. I. M. Lewis, “The Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) and the Legacy of Sheikh Hussein of Bali.” In *Modern Ethiopia: From the Accession of Menilek II to the Present, Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Nice, December 19-22, 1977* ed. J. Tubiana (Rotterdam, 1980), 410.
 26. Lewis, “The Galla,” 23.
 27. On Somali dialects see L. V. Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People, 1600-1900* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 113.
 28. E. de Larajasse, *Somali-English and English-Somali Dictionary* (London: Kegan Paul, 1897), 50-51.
 29. C. W.I. Haywood, *To the Mysterious Lorian Swamp: An Adventurous and Arduous Journey of Exploration through the Vast Waterless Tracts of Unknown Jubbaland* (London: Seeley, Service & Co., 1927), 20-21; Awad, 32.
 30. V. Luling, *Somali-English Dictionary*, (Wheaton, MD: Dunwoody Press, 1987), 201, 207, 210.
 31. de Larajasse, 51.
 32. Lewis, “The Galla,” 22-23.
 33. Catherine Besteman, *Unraveling Somalia: Race, Violence, and the Legacy of Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 85-86.
 34. Gerth and Mills, 62-63.
 35. G. Revoil, *La vallée du Darror* (Paris; 1882), 41, 52-53, 100-101.
 36. F. L. James, *The Unknown Horn of Africa: An Exploration from Berbera to the Leopard River*, (London: G. Philip, 1890), 64-65.

37. A. Hamilton, *British Somaliland* (Westport: Negro University Press, 1970), 24.
38. Robecchi-Bricchetti, *Nel paesi degli aroma: diario di una esplorazione nell'Africa Orientale da Obbia ad Alula* (Milano: C. F. Cogliati, 1903), 443; C. Citerni, *Ai confine meridionali dell' Etiopia: note di un viaggio attraverso l'Etiopia ed I paesi Galla e Somali* (Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1913), 137.
39. H.G.C. Swayne, *Seventeen Trips through Somaliland and a Trip to Abyssinia* (London: 1903), 22, 27, 103.
40. I. M. Lewis, "The so-called Galla Graves," *Man* (1961): 103-106.
41. Besteman, 49-69, 81-84.
42. V. Luling, "The Somali of the Horn of Africa." In *Endangered Peoples of Africa and the Middle East: Struggles to Survive and Thrive*, eds. R. K. Hitchcock and A. J. Osborn (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 221.
43. Cassanelli, 154, 168; Besteman, 21, 57-59.
44. Besteman, 59, 81-84.
45. Ayan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, (New York: Free Press, 2007), 216, 224, 234.
46. Charles Guillain, *Documents sur l' histoire, la geographie et le commerce de l'Afrique Orientale*, 3 (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1856), 143-145; Cassanelli, 145-146.
47. Cassanelli, 145-146.
48. Abdirahman Ali Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and Development of Arab Enterprises and Cultural Influences in the Somali Peninsula" (PhD diss., University of California, 1977), 231.
49. Lewis, *A Pastoral*, 11, 14, 22, 188.
50. Hersi, 128, Lewis, "Sharif Yusuf Barkhadle: the Blessed Saint of Somaliland," *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Ababa, 1969), 75 cited in Hersi, 128-129.

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51. Sheik Ahmed Abdullahi Rirash, *Kasf as-Sudul an Tarikeb as-Somal:wa-Mamalikabum as-Saba* (Mogadishu: Wakka-lat ad-Dawla il-Tabaa, 1974), 36-67 I am indebted for the other details of this rare book to Dr. Mohammed Hasen.
52. Hersi, 231-232.
53. Shihab ad-Din Ahmad bin Abd al-Qader, *Futub al-Habasha: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, trans. L. Stonehouse (Holywood: Teshai Publishers, 2003), 116, 114, 109; M. Hasen, “The Pre-Sixteenth Century Oromo Presence within the Medieval Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia.” In *A River of Blessings: Essays in Honor of Paul Baxter* ed. D. Brokensha (New York: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1994), 58-59.
54. Shihab ad-Din, 85, 109, 85, 109, 112, 153, 170.
55. Hersi, 122-132; Shihab ad-Din Abi Abdalla al-Humawi Yaqut, *Kitab Mu’jam al-Buldan* (Tehran: Maktabat al-Asadi, 1962) II, 967.
56. G. P. Murdock, *Africa: Its Peoples and their Culture History* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1959), 46; Mohammed Hasen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1994), 1-26.
57. Hersi, 170-171, 132-134.
58. R. Alcalay, *The Complete Hebrew English Dictionary* (Masada: 1990), 352, 353, 355.
59. Ibid. I acknowledge the help of Dr. Helen Sinnreich, Chair, Center for Judaic and Holocaust Studies, at YSU for the information and references.
60. I am indebted to Dr. Isam Amin, a faculty member at Youngstown State University.
61. Getatchew Haile, *Ye Babriy Dersatoch* (Coldeville: Minnesota, 2002), 98.
62. Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa* (London: 1856), 99.
63. Haile, 103.

64. Jonathan Kingdon, *Island Africa: The Evolution of Africa's Rare Animals and Plants* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 79-81, 146-148.
65. Hersi, 24.
66. Cassanelli, 116.
67. Ibid., 122-23.
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**INVISIBLE MATTER:
“GALLA” IN ETHIOPIAN
AND EUROPEAN IMAGINATIONS**

Brian J. Yates

“I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like bodiless heads you see sometimes at circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me.”¹

The northern highlands of present day Ethiopia has been a multi-ethnic territory for more than a millenia.² It has been argued that the original habitants mixed with populations from across the Red Sea and the result was the ethnic group that the Arabs called Hābāsha, which in one interpretation

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means “mixed people.”³ These groups controlled the highlands of Abyssinia and later established two institutions, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Solomonic dynasty that promoted an ideology which stated that Ethiopian leaders had to be direct male descendants of Solomon who also profess Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and practice Hābāsha land tenure. Their dominance in the highlands was not significantly challenged from 1270 until the time of Lebna Dengal (r. 1508-40), when Muslim people from the southeast of the Abyssinian empire successfully defeated and overran the highlands of Ethiopia, under the leadership of Ahmad ibn Ibrihim al-Ghazi, also known as Ahmad Grañ (1506-1543).

After the Muslim jihadist Ahmad Grañ’s invasion in the mid sixteenth century, Oromo groups began to migrate and conquer lands of northern Abyssinia.⁴ These groups were given the term the “Galla” by the Hābāsha.⁵ There is no interpretation of the term “Galla” in the Oromo language. Its use by others displays the invisibility of the Oromo in the highlands of the Horn in both the Hābāsha chronicles and travelers narratives from the sixteenth century to the early twentieth century.⁶ “Galla” is generally understood to mean individuals who were rejected by God.⁷ I argue that interpretations of the term “Galla” stemmed from both Hābāsha and European travelers’ perception that the Oromo were uncivilized barbarous usurpers of Ethiopian authority due to the fact that historically they did not practice Christianity or settled agriculture. However, this perception led to two distinct approaches towards the Oromo which reinforced previously conceived notions of the Ethiopian state. These notions

of the state rendered the “Galla” invisible in that either their presence was believed to be the cause of the decline of the Christian state or their condition provided a justification for European involvement in the domestic affairs of Ethiopia.

The first viewpoint, generally held by Hābāsha and European travelers from the sixteenth through the mid eighteenth centuries, posits that the “Galla” are uncivilized and unknowable and, therefore, should be feared and despised. A conclusion to this belief is that the Hābāsha and the “Galla” are and will continue to be natural enemies. While there were efforts to “know” the invisible “Galla,” they, like the protagonist in Ralph Ellison’s classic *The Invisible Man*, were defined by their recognizable cultural differences and inferiority. In this literary classic novel, the black protagonist, who is never named, travels throughout America during the mid twentieth century and has many experiences that are linked by his constant search for not only an identity but a place in America. He finally decides to withdraw from society and live the rest of his days as a man without a place or identity in an abandoned building. An additional element of this view of the “Galla” will again borrow from a literary source, and argue that an important element of their invisibility, characterized through their perceived consequences on their environment, a defining quality of dark matter, which can be observed only through its effect on other matter.⁸ Sheree R. Thomas makes this argument relative to the black presence in the science fiction genre, I believe that it has similar illuminating qualities in understanding views of Oromo in Ethiopian and European texts.

The second viewpoint generally held by dissident nineteenth century Ethiopian scholars and European travelers asserts that the “Galla” were indeed uncivilized, but attributes the cause to the actions of the Hābāsha, and to make the point that their condition needs to be redressed through European involvement (religious and/or political). Therefore, a Hābāsha led Ethiopia is uncivilized and the evidence is the condition of the “Galla.” Both of the views cast the Oromo as “invisible” and many of the accounts of them during the last few centuries do not detail the cultural practices or the actions of the Oromo. Rather they display internal Hābāsha and Europeans feelings about themselves or notions of who should govern the Ethiopian state.⁹ Also, the Oromo, are, again, defined by the effect they had on the underdevelopment of Ethiopia or by their exemplification of Hābāsha oppression.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the thirteenth century a new dynasty was founded in Northern Shāwa by Yekunno Amlak (d. 1285). This dynasty couched its authority in Christianity and descent from Solomon. One of its most important leaders was Za’ra Yaqob (r.1434-68), a man of many talents.¹⁰ In addition to his political position, he wrote religious and philosophical texts. He was a devout Christian who helped the expansion of Christianity within the state, including varied Christian groups, who did not practice the religion according to Zara Yaqob’s norms.¹¹ Zara Yaqob’s singular notion of the proper practice of Christianity caused unrest from the many competing notions of the religion. In addition to an increasingly diverse Abyssinian empire, there were

also significant changes in the power dynamics in the Horn of Africa.¹² Due to the military successes of the Solomid emperors, access to the Red Sea was finally achieved, and with it, a window to Christian Europe and its lucrative trade routes. While Europe was enthralled by myths of the land of Prester John,¹³ Islamic dominance in the Mediterranean region blocked them from making direct and enduring contact with their Christian brothers. Grañ, ironically provided the setting for the introduction of pre-modern Europe to Ethiopia.

Ahmad Grañ led armies from Adal (a neighboring Islamic state) through the non-Christian, but tribute paying areas of Eastern and Southern Ethiopia to the highlands of Abyssinia.¹⁴ He established the Sultanate of Adal, which lasted from 1531-43. The Ethiopian emperor Lebna Dengal (r. 1508-1540) could do little to stop the invasion, but through established contacts in Europe asked for Portuguese assistance in 1535. Six years later, Portugal responded with 400 musketeers who changed the tide of the war. Grañ quickly sent word to Ottoman Turkey, a powerful Muslim state dominant in the Red Sea, for assistance. A war which started over tribute thus became a full-fledged religious war.¹⁵ In perhaps a sign of events to come, the Ethio-Portuguese alliance overcame the Muslim forces.

Three long lasting effects of Grañ’s rule may be seen in the reign of Emperor Susenyos (r. 1607-1632). Susenyos was captured by the Oromo as a child of noble parentage, but returned to the land of his ancestors after a failed Oromo campaign. He fought his way to power after the death of Sarsa Dengel and became emperor in 1607.¹⁶ He attempted to bring the Oromo into the empire by using them in his army and

the imperial court and also married an Oromo.¹⁷ Early in his reign, Portuguese missionaries converted him to Catholicism. Although he kept it secret until 1622, when he attempted to convert his county to Catholicism, which resulted in unrest similar to that of Zara Yaqob's reign. Instead of involving his country in another costly civil war, he rescinded his new faith and died three months later and his successor expelled the Portuguese Jesuits from his country.¹⁸

Susenyos' reign displays two major factors facing the survival of the Abyssinian state, varying Christian ideologies and non-Christian subjects. An essential policy was integrating the empire's various people, who were increasingly becoming more heterogeneous, into a homogenous nation. While "Galla" military prowess was respected, this respect was not extended to other spheres. The following decades saw large numbers of Oromos becoming Christians or Muslims and influential political figures in the northern Ethiopia, and Muslims and significant traders and independent leaders in the south.¹⁹ In reaction to the demographic situation, many Hābāsha fostered the creation of a distinct identity that was seen as superior to that of the "Galla" in order to protect one of the last vestiges of the "pure" Abyssinian state. This reaction, militarily and politically, led to the "Galla" being rendered invisible because, to the Hābāsha and the European travelers they influenced, they could only represent the weakness of Ethiopia and its institutions, thus continuing the view of the "Galla" as dark matter, unknowable, and only discernable through the consequences of its presence.

THE “GALLA” AS UNCIVILIZED BARBARIANS

The earliest substantial text on the Oromo in the Ethiopian highlands is Abba Bahrey’s work, *History of the Galla*, written during the Oromo migrations of the sixteenth century.²⁰ He wrote this text out of the fear, in his home in Gamo (Southern Ethiopia), of the pastoral Oromo migrations that were encroaching on the Amhara highlands of Shāwa, Gojjam, Wällo and Bägémdér.²¹ The Oromo pillaged Bahrey’s house and forced him to seek refuge with the emperor.²² Compared with the two religious/cultural challenges (European Christian missions and the Islamic legacy of Grañ), the Oromo migrations, although not seen as enduring in Bahrey’s time due to his belief that Hābāsha “superiority” would eventually prevail, are the longest lasting consequence of Grañ’s conquest. The initial waves of the Oromo migration, once felt in the heartlands of Abyssinia, called for an understanding of “Galla” cultural and social practices.²³ Bahrey writes, “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.”²⁴ Bahrey attempts to find the direction and nature of what he perceived as the “Galla” flood. His work presents an early Amhara understanding of the Oromo. He views the “Galla” and the Hābāsha as homogeneous groups without analogous cultural practices and social organization. The relating of perceived group cultural characteristics to their state of civilization is an important connection which will be repeated many times in the next few centuries.

In his presentation of the “Galla,” Bahrey describes a group that is organized in a very different way from

the Hābāsha. Bahrey states that the “Galla” are organized by the *Gada* system, which separated males according to age grades, in which the warrior grade, called *luba* was the leading grade. He attempts to organize his text along “Galla” lines, detailing each by *luba* instead of by monarch, one of hallmarks of Ethiopian royal chronicles. He describes the accomplishments of each in succession with an ethnocentric and religious tone that denies a “civilized” nature to the militarily dominant Oromo. Due to the ramifications of military loss, Bahrey attempts to rationalize Amhara military inferiority in terms of culture. Bahrey writes,

The wise men often discuss these matters [“Galla” dominance] and say, “How is it that the Galla defeat us, though we are numerous and well supplied with arms?” Some of us have said that God has allowed it because of our sins; others, that it is because our nation is divided into ten classes, nine of which take no part whatever in war, and make no shame of displaying their fear; only the tenth class makes war and fights to the best of its ability.²⁵

He sees two reasons for Oromo victory, both of which are direct reflections of Hābāsha culture. The first is the distinctions in his society, which include monks, scribes and farmers, who do not fight. The second is that the “Galla” were sent by God to punish the Hābāsha for their arrogance and decadence.²⁶ Ultimately, he points to the numbers of Oromo troops as irrelevant in relation to victory. He states,

And if those who are numerous always conquer those who are few, the words of the Holy Scrip-

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ture which say ‘One man shall put a thousand to flight, and two shall pursue ten thousand’, would be found to be vain. However, you wise men, you can judge if the claim of the first [religious punishment] of these arguers is right, or that of the second [numbers of troops].”²⁷

This statement alludes to the belief that a small number of soldiers with the will of God could take on any force, regardless of size. In sum, Bahrey argues that the “Galla” appeared due to a punishment by God; however, the Hābāsha losses are due to unproductive aspects of Hābāsha culture. Therefore, this curse of God can be cured only through God’s will, a return to Zara Yaqob’s view of the connection between religion and politics, which will remain unless the Hābāsha change their behavior and expel the “Galla.”²⁸

This image of the “Galla” as an uncivilized barbarian is more fully developed by both European contemporaries of Abba Bahrey and travelers until the mid nineteenth century, who viewed the increasing “Galla” presence as the cause of Abyssinia’s backwardness, and vice versa. Generally, these travelers, who occasionally were also missionaries, aligned themselves with Christian leaders of Ethiopia, mimicked their philosophies and saw the Oromo leaders as usurpers.²⁹ For example, a contemporary of Abba Bahrey, Manoel de Almeida’s *History of High Ethiopia* displays critiques of both “Galla” and Hābāsha culture relative to the religions they practice and views the “Galla” presence as a sickness in Ethiopia. He writes,

Thence first came this plague and scourge of God in the days of Emperor Dawit, who was first called by his baptismal name, Lebna

Dengal [r.1508-40], and was called Wonag Sagad afterwards. They emerged at the same time as the Moor Grañ of Adal had invaded and already conquered a large part of the empire...for the Gallas were scourge, not only of the Abyssinians, but also of the Moors of Adal.³⁰

He continues to state that their presence is God's punishment for the Abyssinians' rejection of the only "true" Christian faith, the Roman Catholic faith. He tells us, "So the Patriarch [Dom Joao Bermudez, was in Ethiopia from 1541-1543], as he came on his way, pronounced many curses of the lands through which he passed, and said many times that there were certain black ants invading the kingdoms and provinces of the empire, destroying and wholly devastating it."³¹ Almeida not only racializes the Oromo people, but also argues that their presence is not due to the disunity or decadence of the Hābāsha, rather it is their lack of Catholic faith.³² Three other qualities he observed about the Oromo are pastoralist occupation, an aversion to cultivating, and utter fearlessness in warfare.

In the mid eighteenth century, the Scot James Bruce came to Ethiopia in an attempt to find the source of the Nile, but found himself in the middle of a complex political battle for control of the country. He fell in with the Qwara, a group that, while culturally anti-Oromo, did not refuse political marriages to Oromo elites.³³ Bruce internalized many of the Qwaran beliefs. He used the royal chronicles to reconstruct Abyssinian history prior to his visit. He states that the "Galla" entered Ethiopia in 1559 through Dawaro.³⁴ In his synthesis of Ethiopian history, he argues that

the “Galla” did some good for the Abyssinians, specifically completely destroying the former Islamic state of Grañ, Adal.³⁵ Generally, he presents the “Galla” as Abyssinia’s greatest enemy. He writes, “this nation [the “Galla” nation], which has contributed more to weakening and reducing the Abyssinian empire, than all its civil wars and foreign enemies put together [sic].”³⁶

He views the “barbarous” actions of the “Galla” bringing down the civilization of Ethiopia and mentions many acts of “Galla” cruelty, especially those against the Hābāsha. He writes,

All these tribes of Galla gird Abyssinia round at all points from east to west, making inroads, and burning and murdering all that fall into their hands. The privities of the men they cut off, dry, and hand them up in their houses. They are so merciless as to spare not even a child, whom they rip up in hopes of destroying a male.³⁷

In essence, Bruce is making an argument that not only is their presence eroding Abyssinian civilization, the “Galla” desires to literally destroy the Hābāsha. Another element of his view on the “Galla” is the belief that while they previously had a semblance of order, the “Galla” upon arriving in Abyssinia lost it. He continues: “All these tribes [the “Galla”], though the most cruel that ever appeared in any country, are yet governed by the strictest discipline at home, where the smallest broil or quarrel among individuals is taken cognizance of, and received immediate punishment.”³⁸

An episode in Bruce’s account of his encounter with a “Galla” in his employ brings further under-

standing of the meaning of the “Galla” term in the late eighteenth century. Bruce, a local leader named Shalaqa Waldu and his companion are discussing the aftermath of the battle of Fagidä (1757), when *Ras* Mikael returned to Gondar and purportedly blinded 44 “Gallas,” Bruce writes, quoting a Håbåsha companion’s response to Bruce’s disbelief at the events,

‘O ho’, says he, ‘but it is true; your Galla are not like other men, they do not talk about what is cruel and what is not; they do just what is for their own good, what is reasonable, and think no more of the matter, Ras Michael,’ says he, ‘would make an excellent Galla; and do you believe that he would do any cruel action which my master Fasil [a rival of *Ras* Mikael’s] would not perpetrate on the same provocation, and to answer the same purpose.’³⁹

Here the term “Galla” term takes on the additional element of senselessness and cruelty.

Relative to the position of the “Galla” in the court of Gondar in the mid eighteenth century, Bruce, again, sees them as uncivilized usurpers to the throne. Ironically, he begins the account with a positive description of the Oromo leader. For example, he writes, when describing “Kasmati Waragna” [Qañazmach Warånna], the Oromo governor of Damot during the reign of Iyoas (r. 1753-1769), “He is almost a single example in Abyssinian history, that never was in rebellion, and a remarkable instance of Bacuffa’s [Bäkaffa (r.1721-30)] penetration, who, from a mean condition, chose him as capable of the greatest offices.”⁴⁰ In the reign of Iyoas (1755-69), the “Gallas” were central in the court and according to Bruce, nothing but the Galla language was

heard in the castle.⁴¹ He concludes, “the Abyssinian saw, with the utmost detestation and abhorrence, a Gallan and inimical government erected in the very heart or metropolis of their country.”⁴² However, he ends the account of Iyoas with an episode where the emperor views a rival, YäMaryam Bariyé (an Amhara and political rival of Fasil, Iyoas’ Oromo ally) as a greater threat than the “Galla” in the court.⁴³ Also, another European traveler, Henry Salt presents early nineteenth century Oromo leaders like Liban and Gojee in a positive light; he also views their presence as detrimental to the region.⁴⁴ Similar to other travelers, Salt confuses alliances with Oromo groups with Oromo descent and conflates different Oromo dynasties.⁴⁵ Due to these misunderstandings, Salt’s view of the Galla decades after Bruce, while nuanced, still holds this group as culturally inferior usurpers of the throne.⁴⁶

A useful transition occurs in the changing image of the “Galla” with the mid nineteenth French traveler, Arnauld d’Abbadie, who lived throughout the Ethiopian highlands from 1833-1845 and gave detailed descriptions of the various Ethiopian notables, political structures and peoples.⁴⁷ His travels coincided with a high point of Oromo power in the region and he describes Gugsa in glowing terms.⁴⁸ He is one of the few travelers of the time to use “Ilmorma” or children of the Oromo to describe the various “Galla” groups in the highlands.⁴⁹ He views the actions of the various late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Oromo notables, such as Gugsa, Ali, Ali II, Birru, and Mänen as just another faction in the war ravaged early nineteenth century Ethiopian high plateau.⁵⁰ In general he views the “Galla” as hated enemies of the Christians

of the North, but with significant cultural similarities between the two due to centuries of interactions.⁵¹ While those “Galla” in the south are viewed as “the golden age of humanity and the barbarians, having few needs, have nothing to press themselves toward moral disorder.”⁵² If one follows d’Abbadie’s views, when Hābāsha leaders like Téwodros, Yohannes and Menilek penetrated “Galla” areas, they “pressed” the “Galla” into moral disorder. Ironically, this belief manifests itself in the chronicles in the opposite form as the “Galla” bringing disorder to the highlands.

The issue of an Oromo presence in the upper echelons of Hābāsha political society was a feature of the chronicles of the Ethiopian emperors, the Amhara Téwodros II (r.1855-1868) and the Tigrayan Yohannes IV (r.1871-1888), which viewed the Oromo in the Gondarine court and in the highlands as a hindrance to Ethiopia returning to its former glory.⁵³ These trends include arguing that “Galla” political dominance during the *Zāmāna Māsafent* (lit. Age of Princes, 1769-1855) was a curse from God due to the decadence of the Gondarine period (1636-1769), viewing the “Galla” and/or Muslims as a threat to Ethiopia’s sovereignty, and understanding present Hābāsha political dominance as the inevitable result of religious and cultural superiority.⁵⁴

In Zānāb’s chronicle of Téwodros one finds interesting snapshots of the early part of emperor’s reign. His chronicle, like Walda Maryam’s chronicle of Tewdros is quite critical of the Wāra Shék (a partially Oromo dynasty, seen by Europeans and Ethiopians alike as “Galla”), *Ras* Ali (1818-66) and *Etégé* (Empress) Mānān (d.1853).⁵⁵ Zānāb writes,

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Ras Ali inconveniently [to the wishes of his country] behaved according to the words of St. Paul: “The males commit ignominies with the males”; his relatives became strong, the poor men [became] oppressed; he neglected to give justice to all the Abyssinians and to do good, [he] didn’t fear God; a Christian only in name, not subject to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

Accounts of *Ras* Ali’s commitment to Christianity vary, but this quote makes Téwodros’ ascension not only preordained, but righteous. Zānāb continues, “In the year 71 (1853) from the disappearance of the king, God aroused the King Téwodros; and he ended the empire of the Galla in Bāgémder, in Gojjam, in Lasta, in Yājju and in Wällo.”⁵⁷ He uses the Amharic verb “**ጠፋ**” (lit. lost) to describe the status of Ethiopia during the *Zāmāna Māsafent* which completely discredits the legitimacy of the Wāra Shék’s.⁵⁸ Lastly, the chronicler even uses Muslim clerics to discredit the Muslim Mammadoch dynasty in Wällo. He relays a story that a cleric had a dream that an “angel would not allow this dynasty to rule.” He told it to the current leader of Wällo, Wārqitu, and she fled before Téwodros arrived in the province.⁵⁹ Lastly, Téwodros’ brutality towards the Oromo was not described in a negative light. He writes without moral compunction, “One day, Negus Tewodros exterminated all of the Galla from Dabra Berhan to Angolola⁶⁰; the dead bodies appeared [on the ground] like a carpet.”⁶¹

Yohannes IV was an emperor who held religion central to his identity and that of his country. His chronicle reflects this and presents the “Gallas” as a threat to the Ethiopian nation due to their non-Christian beliefs and uncivilized culture. Before he became

emperor, Yohannes IV was a powerful *Däjjazmach* (lit. commander of the gate) in the Northern Ethiopian highlands. His chronicle states,

He [Yohannes IV] marched rapidly and reached the region of the Galla the name of which was Azabo [Azeboo]⁶², for the inhabitants of the country had become rebellious in every place and killed passers-by for this was their custom. Any man who had not killed a man and never took the trophy of the dead would not butter the hair of his head, and his wife would not be able to draw water (from a well) except after all the women, whose husbands have killed, had done so.⁶³

This event continues with the leaders of Azeboo begging for mercy from Yohannes and him giving it on Christian grounds, after installing leaders to pay him tribute. This passage marks the beginnings of Yohannes' 1870s drive to purify Ethiopia of pagans and the "Galla" and to unify the Ethiopian highlands by subduing the Muslim and Oromo Wälloyé.

Later in the chronicle he visited Azeboo again, this time as emperor. The chronicler claims that the population of Azeboo continued to kill innocent people, Yohannes purportedly made the following rallying cry to his army,

This land of Azabo [Azeboo] was formerly a holy country for a long time and many churches were erected in it. In each church were many priests and deacons, men and women, old and young. After a long time, the Galla prevailed and killed them with blades sparing none, for killing a soul is bravery in their view. Thus, after

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the extermination of the children of Baptism, they burnt down churches and set up idol temples in which they offered frankincense for their demons.⁶⁴

This passage speaks to the perceived destruction brought by the “Gallas” to the country and the Christian religion. The chronicle continues,

... [Yohannes’ commanded his troops to] penetrate this country [Azeboo] fast and receive them with sharp spears so that their injustice may turn on their heads for blood cannot be purified without blood. Anyone who does not kill one of these rebels is not a strong man, but a timid and a fearful one like all women...He is not to be numbered among the perfect man, my servants.⁶⁵

The upshot of this passage is that, ultimately the crimes against Christianity and Christians had to be punished by death, and it was a Hābāsha duty to take part in the killing. Ironically, this masculine bloodlust endeared Yohannes culturally to some Oromo groups.⁶⁶ Overall Yohannes’ chronicle is explicitly anti-“Galla,” whom it defined as culturally and religiously inferior and a threat to the Ethiopian nation, religion and its people. These chronicles, in a sense, were extended arguments for the legitimacy of a ruler through a description of their actions, and in these works one could not be an effective ruler (or teacher) without defeating the uncivilized barbarians who usurped the throne (or existed in your community).

Another *History of the Galla*, written by the Catholic Shāwan, As’māGiyorgis (As’mé) (1821-1914) in the

late nineteenth century, gives an especially illuminating view of the term “Galla.”⁶⁷ A key difference between other Ethiopian works and his text is that As’mé was not beholden to any institution or political leader which allowed him the freedom to write what he desired. As’mé gives us a nuanced view of the term Galla, which is based and centered neither on Abyssinian nor Oromo culture or class nor ethnicity. His work still echoes many of *Abba Bahrey’s* ethnocentric beliefs. He writes: “Thus, they [the Galla] increased their efforts to kill the Amhara. They do not say, ‘We will govern the country,’ neither do they say, ‘We shall till the soil.’ They rove⁶⁸ about, driving the cattle, killing, plundering, capturing women and children, enslaving the captives and selling them off.”⁶⁹ This passage displays the lack of settled agriculture, the practice of slavery (something the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is against) and the arguing that the Oromo have only base desires (killing, enslaving and robbing).

The first part of his book outlines and describes Abyssinian myths on the origins of the “Galla.” A main theme of the myths is that the “Galla” derived either from the devil or from slaves. As’mé successfully criticizes the logic of these myths and posits the origin of the “Galla” in Asia.⁷⁰ After this section, he describes law in “Galla” societies and states that it is better than Amhara law. We have seen how As’mé’s forerunner Bahrey argued that the “Gallas” were a punishment from God. As’mé complicates this view by arguing that the “Gallas” were able to defeat only certain Abyssinian groups, specifically those of Wällo and Gondar. Along these lines, he argues that the Tigrayans and Shāwans who were able to defeat the “Galla” did so

because of their culturally superiority to the “Gallas.” He writes, describing the Tigrayans,

But the people of Tegrē were sincere. Religion means two things. First, it means observing carefully the Ten Commandments that God prescribed, and believing in Christ. Secondly, faith is loving one’s country and people and obeying the leader of the people. Because they (the people of Tegrē) loved their country and the leader of their people, they (the “Galla”) fell like leaves. Hence, the Galla have not until this day penetrated their country.⁷¹

As’mé’s understanding of the term “Galla” seems retroactive, in the sense that once something, someone, or someplace has been discredited, then, and not before that time, it established it is labeled as “Galla” directly or indirectly.⁷² Thus, As’mé argues that Tigray was “Galla” free, because they were loyal to their leaders and to God.

As’mé’s rationale, for the condition relative to ethnic thought, is culture. Superior cultures never lose to inferior cultures, and if such loss occurs it is due to deviation from the superior culture, as in the case of the decadence of the Gondar religious elite in Ethiopian history during the *Zämbäna Mäsafent*. Debra Sanders’ recent dissertation presents another interpretation and argues, “Tigre were primary ‘intellectual’ architects of ‘Ethiopia’ and the Ethiopian imperial system that nurtured the perception of the supremacy of Tigre-Amhara cultural values while justifying the subjugation of others.”⁷³ If, the Tigrayans, as Sanders argues created the Ethiopian Imperial, then it must

follow that they must remain “pure” in order to protect the sanctity of this system.⁷⁴

In sum, As'mé gives a complicated view of the “Galla.” While he presents “Galla” culture as inferior, they are not the main targets of his criticism. His main targets were the Ethiopian clerics and scribes, whom he blamed for the lack of unity during the *Zämäna Masafint*, a belief echoed in contemporary traveler’s accounts. In addition, As'mé does not espouse a homogenous “Galla” culture, he views certain Oromo groups as superior to others.⁷⁵ His standard for culture is not Ethiopian, but European. Thus, the superior people in As'mé’s view were those who were highly influenced by Western forms of culture, while those who were not, be they Hābāsha or “Galla,” remained uncivilized. As As'mé writes, “The Galla, however do not have religion, obedience was unknown to them they lived in ignorance, but they put their hope only in the next Luba [ruling Gada grade]. Where would he lead them? Nobody knew! They did not know it!”⁷⁶

THE “GALLA” AS UNCIVILIZED VICTIMS OF HĀBĀSHA EXPLOITATION

As the *Zämäna Masafent* came to a close, Hābāsha dominance in highlands ushered in the resurrection of the Solomonic dynasty and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which were used to extend political control in previously independent Oromo lands. These developments led to a view reflected in late nineteenth century chronicles and travel narratives of the Ethiopian state as returning to its former glory due to legitimate Ethiopian leadership. However, in the eyes of Europeans this new leadership was still African, and therefore

inferior. European travelers used views of Oromo oppression to buttress this claim.⁷⁷ European travelers, while agreeing with their Ethiopian counterparts regarding the “barbaric” image of the “Galla,” argue that their inferiority was not a result of innate characteristics; rather due to Hābāsha oppression. The European ultimate objective was the argument that the “benevolent” hand of European missionaries and governments would allow them to reach their potential. Thus, again, the “Galla” were rendered invisible matter, as solely the effect of oppressive Hābāsha rule. Even the European travelers who view them positively argue that their potential will be realized only through European influence. Therefore, the “Galla” are defined by what is influencing them and not through their own actions or characteristics.

During the *Zāmāna Māsafent* and in the decades before, the “Galla” were undoubtedly political players on the Amhara highlands. While the northern territories were engulfed in battles for supremacy, to the South in Shāwa, Sahlā Sellassé (r.1813-1847), created a buffer zone of “Galla” provinces around his province in order to insulate himself against northern Amhara highland rivals. Beginning in the 1840s and continuing into the twentieth century, a growing number of missionaries arrived in Abyssinia, who observed the growing Hābāsha presence in the previously independent Oromo lands. Travelers during reigns of Téwodros II, Yohannes IV, Menilek II were generally very sympathetic to the condition of the Oromo for many reasons.⁷⁸ Common trends in their works including severe criticisms of Hābāsha leadership, culture and religion, and the ideology of the white man’s burden led

these writers to see themselves as the ones who would save the Oromo from Hābāsha exploitation, especially in the newly conquered areas of Southern Ethiopia.

Antoine d'Abbadie writes a particularly detailed account of the Oromo in Ethiopia. He states that Oromo were God's gift to Ethiopia in order to prepare it for Christianity. He writes,

Perhaps God had wished, in His own time to bring forward His foresight from far, to throw a new blood into the anemic old nations in order to prepare them to receive the Christian faith by the infusion of this durable energy, which although wild at first, made up the strength of these barbaric people.⁷⁹

One of the last British travelers of the *Zāmāna Māsafent*, Mansfield Parkyns traveled extensively in Tigray during the last years of the reign of Tēwodros II.⁸⁰ His narrative is anti-Tigrayan, but pro-Amhara and "Galla." Specifically he argues that unproductive elements of Ethiopian society began with the nobles of Tigray. He ends his narrative with "Anecdotes of character" and in these anecdotes the heroes, save one, are always Amhara or "Galla"⁸¹ Parkyns and other travelers, almost universally, display a belief that Abyssinian domination of the Oromos had actually retarded their development and that of their agriculturally rich land. Herbert Blundell writes,

The Gallas were probably the aboriginal inhabitants of the country prior to the advent of the Abyssinians; they are said, however, also to be immigrants. They have been conquered, and are held in subjection by the help of firearms,

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which their conquerors take care they shall not obtain, and by this device they are kept in a position of distinct inferiority and abject servitude.⁸²

Blundell continues, “As we moved along our route [at this point of his journey he was in the southwestern part of Menilek’s kingdom] it was often pitiable to see the servile manner in which the Galla bowed and did homage to us or to our Abyssinian escort, and points to a savage oppression which does no honor to the Abyssinian.”⁸³ An interesting observation is that Blundell had no problem with the deference shown to the European members of the party, but similar deference to Abyssinians reflected harsh treatment.

Another group who wrote similar accounts of the “Galla” was the European prisoners of Tēwodros during the last years of his reign. While they harbored significant ill will towards their captor and the ethnic group he represented, they wrote in glowing terms of the Oromo who surrounded their prison in Maqdāla in northern Ethiopia. Henry Blanc writes, “The Wallo Gallas are a fine race, far superior to the Abyssinian in elegance, manliness and courage...they excelled so greatly the Amharas in horsemanship and in courage, that not only did they overrun the land, but lived for years on the resources of the country in imprudent security.”⁸⁴ Henry Stern writes,

The Gallas—by their prowess far more than by their Mahomedan creed—had incurred the resentment of the implacable tyrant, and to annihilate these martial tribes was the longing ambition of his fiendish heart. Animated by a corresponding passion, blended in the present

instance, with an innate desire for rapine and bloodshed, the fanatical Amhara, avalanche-like, descended on the unsuspecting foe, spreading far and wide ruin and desolation, misery and death.”⁸⁵

These writings view military dominance in completely different terms. The Oromo conquest of the Wällo highlands is seen as a sign of superiority, while Téwodros’ conquest of those same highlands is seen as a sign of pettiness, vengefulness and lack of civility.

Even Italian travelers in the last decades of the nineteenth century in the southern parts of Menilek’s expanding Empire, espouse similar views, while looking at different Oromo groups. Jules Borelli, writes,

However, the importance of strength is tantamount in a country where friendship and the recognition [of higher authority] are unknown. Of the Oromo I met, [there were] individuals capable of good feelings. They are less civilized than the Amharas; but, in my sense, they could be more efficiently [governed]. Some are simple and deprived of all pretension; others are proud and silly.⁸⁶

This thought is echoed by Gustavo Bianchi, who writes, “A better government would get good results among the Galla, that they are the most honest, hard-working tribe, [and] nicer than [those] of the whole [Ethiopian] plateau.”⁸⁷ The Oromo are seen, as the preferred colonial subject for everyone but the Häbäsha. This is certainly a different picture of the Oromo, but still not one which recognizes the ability to control their own destiny.

As Menilek’s reign came to an end, another group of travelers from the nations of France, Georgia and Russia continued to perpetuate this belief. These travelers also criticized Abyssinian rule and sought to uplift the Oromo people. Reginald Koettlitz was a companion of Blundell in his earlier travels, but returning on his own in 1898, he writes,

All portion of our route lay through the Galla country—beautiful, diversity, and fertile. The Gallas here have comparatively lately been subjugated by the Abyssinians; they are a fine featured, well formed race, who are kept in abject subjugation to their conquerors by means of not allowing them to have firearms. The Abyssinians rob, ill-treat, and tax their produce without mercy, and they are evidently in a very unhappy state.⁸⁸

According to these sources, not only did the Abyssinians take immense quantities of produce and tribute, but they also have altered the way of life of the Oromo people. In the opinion of Koettlitz, this change had caused an unnatural subjugation of a superior race. The Russian traveler A.K. Bulatovich, agreed. In his view,

The Galla is a beggar, sooner generous than stingy, sooner good than bad. You can only believe him with caution. Formerly, there was almost no thievery among the Galla, but this was not due to principled honesty, but rather to the absence of want—all the more so because the distribution of property was very equal. But now, theft has become very common⁸⁹

Bulatovich argues that not only did the Abyssinians rob the Oromos of their land, produce and tribute, but also contributed to the increasing moral depravity of these people.⁹⁰ A French traveler of the nineteenth century, J.G. Vanderheyem, writes, “The Gallas are certainly the most hard-working [in Ethiopia]; contrary to the Abyssinians, they are loyal to Europeans, to which they are attached.”⁹¹ In the early twentieth century, Paul Mérab, Menilek’s physician, writes referring to one of key Oromo figures of Menilek’s court, *Fitanrari*⁹² Häbtä Giyorgis (1842-1927),

He seems to foresee that the future of his country depends on the European civilization...he knows, among others, that the soft, patient, laborious and brave Galla, that bends the head under the fire arm of the Amhara, will be the master of the destiny of the country the day when liberty and the equality occurs in the morality [of the country] with European influence.⁹³

The majority of travelers reported that the Southern “Gallas” did not have a high status economically or politically, and according to these travelers, it is because of Häbäsha domination, and not necessarily innate characteristics.

This belief is also seen in As’mé’s text. He attributes their pagan condition on their Abyssinian neighbors, not a sign of barbarism. He states that the Bible commands Christians to teach the word of God to non-Christians, but the Abyssinian priests and monks have not done this. Instead, he writes,

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They have expropriated their land by the Qalad system⁹⁴: a Qalad for the priesthood, a Qalad for the deaconship...they induced the Negus [to allot] a Qalad for himself, a Qalad for a tenant farmer, a Qalad for a soldier [and a Qalad for a] Saqala. Having thus divided the land among themselves they ruled the Galla like slaves, and they have not shown them the path of Christ. They [the clergy] are not educated, and they do not allow other teachers to come.⁹⁵

This critique of Abyssinian colonization mirrors European travelers at the time and the connection they made between the Ethiopian church and Shāwan expansion. As'mé was heavily influenced by the Italian Cardinal Guglielmo Massaia (1809-89), who lived and preached in Ethiopia from 1846-79, and his experience reflects many of the new converts to Ethiopia.⁹⁶ Generally, Ethiopians religious teachers did not travel to traditional religion areas; rather, European missionaries came, but they had been expelled from the country many times over the last four hundred years. While As'mé concedes that the “Galla” were uncivilized; he blames this on the barbaric practices of the Abyssinians and argues that Europeans are the ones who can bring them out of their primitive condition.

Of the European travelers, no one exceeded the *fin de siècle* traveler Martial de Salviac in his simultaneous praise of and paternalism toward the “Galla.” He describes the Oromo as African conservers of the environment and the land that they populate as “the one from all of Ethiopia which best preserves the gracefulness of nature.”⁹⁷ He describes the Hābāsha as natural destroyers of the environment, who, after destroying their own lands, force the “Galla” to deliver

the fruits of their own lands.⁹⁸ Like many missionaries, he discredits the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, but believes the Oromo are not only capable of becoming good Christians, but also moral men through exposure to European forms of Christianity. He argues that the “Galla” are similar to the Romans and Gauls of ancient time, especially when it comes to cultural practices.⁹⁹ In a similar vein, he, unlike many of his European counterparts speaks well of the reign of the Yäjju Wära Shék.¹⁰⁰ Due to his belief of the natural nobility of the “Galla,” he views their subjugation in the late nineteenth century as especially horrendous. He writes,

The conduct of the Abyssinian armies invading a land is simply barbaric. They contrive a sudden irruption, more often at night. At daybreak, the fire begins; surprised men in the huts or in the fields are three quarter massacred and horribly mutilated; the women and the children and many men are reduced to captivity; the soldiers lead the frightened herd toward the camp, take away the grain and the flour which they load on the shoulders of their prisoners spurred on by blows of the whip, destroy the harvest, then, glutted with booty and intoxicated with blood, go to walk a bit further from the devastation, that is what they call “civilizing a land....If the first time, they say, the people are not crushed, they rebel, and that must be followed by a great expedition to *civilize* them entirely.”¹⁰¹

While these statements may be true of any conquering imperial army of the late nineteenth century, the important parts of this quote speak to the brutality and the focus of the conquering army. The objective was to

maximize what could be taken from the land, including people, livestock and agriculture while simultaneously frightening the “Galla” into unquestioned submission.¹⁰²

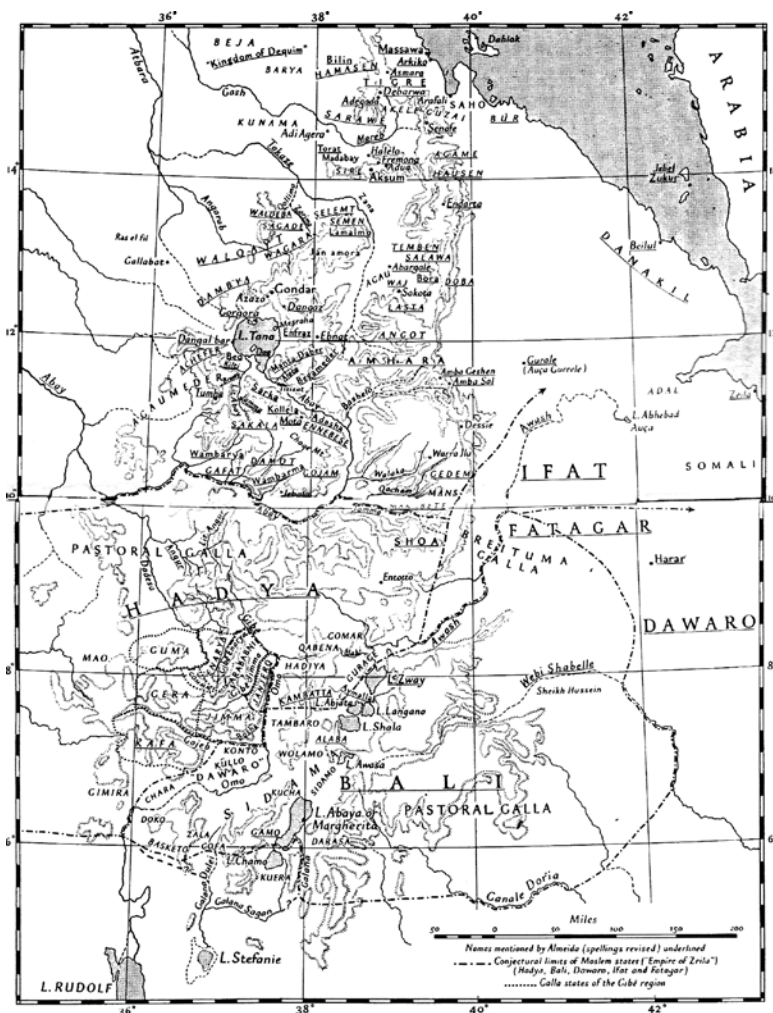
CONCLUDING REMARKS

Similar to the various images given to the protagonist in Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, the “Galla” term had different cultural, moral, social, political and religious connotations. Such ambiguity seems to have little utility in terms of describing a group. The “Galla” term is more a reflection of the perceptions of Hābāsha literati, European political motivations, and the discontentment of both with Oromo involvement in the Ethiopian state than with Oromo identities per se. After Grañ’s invasion, Abyssinia was vulnerable on multiple fronts, one of these was cultural, and, in an effort to strengthen cultural unity, the Hābāsha looked for reasons why their state was declining, and the conquering Oromo were an easy target. As opposed to perceiving their military and political success as a means to reinvigorate the Abyssinian Empire, the Oromo actors were rendered invisible and were equated with barbarism or the negative consequences of their presence. The “Galla” were individuals or groups that were a threat, perceived or real, to Hābāsha nationalism and a homogenous Semitic nation. As C.W. Isenberg writes, “They [the Oromo] seem to be hating all, and hated by all.”¹⁰³

However, after the *Zāmāna Māsafent*, the Hābāsha leaders attempted to impart their culture and religion on the newly conquered peripheral groups of the Ethiopian empire. This acculturation added new dimensions to group definitions. In the late nineteenth century, “Galla” began to be used as a term that con-

veyed political inferiority due to cultural inferiority by royal chroniclers; therefore, power became attached to an ostensibly superior culture. Again, the “Galla” were rendered invisible, they continued to represent the uncivilized, but changes in the socio-political climate continued their presence as incompatible with the well being of the Ethiopian state. At the end of the nineteenth century, Shāwan Amharas achieved political dominance over both the northern highland Hābāsha provinces, which contained many Oromo and the southern Oromo lowland provinces. For the European travelers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the use of the “Galla” term was meant to endear them to the Christian Hābāsha elites. When motivations shifted from Christian solidarity to imperialism and missionary endeavors in the late nineteenth century came to an end, the “Galla” label was used by European to discredit Hābāsha rulers in Ethiopia. In sum, the ambiguity in the term “Galla” had more been due to the changing representations of the Oromo people by outsiders than changes within Oromo societies.

FIGURE 1: SIXTEENTH CENTURY ETHIOPIA



Source: Bahrey, et al. *History of the Galla (Oromo)*, xi-xii.

NOTES

1. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: The Modern Library 1994 [1947]), 3.
2. Here, I am describing the territories that became Ethiopia, and not making an argument that Ethiopia existed at this time.
3. For example, see Martial de Salviac, *An Ancient People, Great African Nation: The Oromo* Trans. Ayalew Kanno (East Lansing: self published, 2005), 13.
4. I am not arguing here that the sixteenth century is the first appearance of the Oromo on the highlands of Ethiopia; rather, that it is the first instance of wide-scale Oromo political and military significance in Ethiopia.
5. Herbert Joseph Weld-Blundell, *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia, 1769-1840, with Translation and Notes* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1922); Bairu Tafla trans. *Asma Giyorgis and His Work : History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Shawa, Èathiopistische Forschungen; Bd. 18.* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1987). The term Håbåsha refers to the Semitic speaking Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. The term is derived from Arabic and it means “mixed people.”
6. Mohammed writes “. . . the Christian literature of Abyssinia, the Muslim literature from Harar and European traveler’ accounts make considerable reference to the Galla. This was a name, applied by outsiders, by which the Oromo were known until recently [1970s]. The term is loaded with negative connotations. The Oromo do not call themselves Galla and they resist being so called.” Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History, 1570-1860*, African Studies Series; 66. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), xi.
7. Among other interpretations, which include Martial de Salviac’s “Sons of Galla” and Antoine d’Abbadie’s “Go Home (for the war is over)” see Martial de Salviac, *Un*

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Peuple Antique Au Pays De Ménélék: Les Galla (Dit D'origine Gauloise) Grand Nation Africaine, (Paris: H. Oudin, 1901), 13 and fn. 3. Unless otherwise noted all translations are mine.

8. For more on her argument see “Introduction: Looking for the Invisible” in Sheree R. Thomas ed. *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (New York: Warner Books, 2000), ix-xiv.
9. Hultin also describes the “Galla” as the invisible men of Ethiopia, but he uses the term in the literal sense. He also summarizes the dominant Ethiopianist discourse of the “Galla” migration as directionless as water. Jan Hultin “Perceiving Oromo: ‘Galla’ in the Great Narrative of Ethiopia” in P. T. W. Baxter, Jan Hultin, and Alessandro Triulzi, *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries* (Lawrenceville, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 1996), 82-3.
10. For more on him and his thought see Teodros Kiros, *Zara Yaqob: Rationality of the Heart* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2005)
11. Various schools of Christianity developed during the reign of the Solomids and most arguments revolved around either the nature of Christ, whether to observe the Sabbath on Saturday or Sunday or the necessity for ordained priests. See Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 205-47.
12. See Figure 1 for the approximate boundaries of this state.
13. Medieval Europeans believed that a rich Christian King named Prester John from a far off land would be able to finally defeat Islam and unite his far off land with Christian Europe
14. See Figure 1, Adal is to the East of Amhara, a region near Harar.

15. Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 30-4.
16. Richard Pankhurst, ed., *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles* (Addis Ababa: Oxford University Press, 1967), 93-7. There is much scholarly debate surrounding Susenyos' relations with the Oromo and the role they played in his ascension to the throne. Harold Marcus gives the impression that Susenyos used the Oromo in order to defeat his Hābāsha enemies, after briefly remarking that he had some dealing with the Oromo when he was younger and Ullendorf does not even mention Susenyos' Oromo relations. Marcus, *A History*, 39-40, Edward Ullendorf *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 72-6. Negasso Gidado relates another interpretation where Susenyos, after his release from captivity in 1585, voluntarily rejoined the Oromo in 1593 and became a Gada leader and raided Gojjam, Shāwa, as well as Gurage and other Oromo groups, eventually marching the imperial center and taking the throne in 1607. Negaso Gidada, "History of the Sayyoo Oromoo of Southwestern Wallaga, Ethiopia, from about 1730 to 1886" (Ph.D. diss., Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University 1984), 47-8. Most of his analysis is taking from Bairu trans. *Asma Giyorgis and His Work*, 187 – 281. As'mé states that the return to the Oromo was not voluntary, rather forced by the death of the emperor and he, being one of the three potential heirs (Yaq'ob, the half *Beta Israelite* (Ethiopian Jewish Person), (1603-7) and Zādāngel (r.1597-1603 (as a child) 1604), would be imprisoned. Susenyos had the support of many Oromo groups, especially the Borana and Māch'a and after Yaq'ob was deposed, he attacked Zādāngel, but was defeated. The nobility then plotted against Zādāngel, who died in a minor battle, and the nobility attempted to create a republic. After hearing about the vacancy Susenyos campaigned and took the

- throne. Gidada’s interpretation also casts the Oromo as more than mere imperial tools. Also see Eloi Fiquet, “L’intervention des Oromo-Wällo dans la dynastie étiopienne salominide sous les règnes de Bakaffa, Iyasu et Iyo’as” *Annales d’Éthiopie* XVII (2000), 137-9; Tsega Etefa, “Pan-Oromo Confederations in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.” *Journal of Oromo Studies* 15, no. 1 (March 2008), 25-8.
17. Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, Updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 39. He also settled Oromo in areas of Gojjam (Mäch’a, Bäso, Jawi and Ilmäna Densa) which are still named after them. See Bairu trans. *Asma Giyorgis and His Work*, fn. 479. For more on the Oromo experience in Gondar during this time see Eloi Fiquet, “L’intervention des Oromo-Wällo,” 139-42.
 18. Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians, The Peoples of Africa*. (Oxford ; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 102-8; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 39-40; Chris Prouty and Eugene Rosenfeld, *Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1981), 164.
 19. Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia: The Era of Princes, the Challenges of Islam and the Re-Unification of the Christian Empire (1769-1855)* (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), 73-90; Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History, 1570-1860*, 84-162.
 20. Manuel Alemeida, *Abba Bahrey*, G.W.B Huntingford and C.F. Beckingham, *History of the Galla (Oromo) of Ethiopia*. with an introduction by Donald N. Levine (Oakland: African Sun Publishing, 1993). Originally published in C. F. Beckingham and George Wynn Brereton Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646, Being Extracts from the History of High Ethiopia or Abassia, by Manoel De Almeida, Together with Bahrey’s History of the Galla* (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1954). For more on *Abba Bahrey* see Mohammed Hassen,

- “The Significance of Abba Bahrey in Oromo Studies: A Commentary on the Works of Abba Bahriy and other Documents Concerning the Oromo.” *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 14, no. 2 (July 2007): 131-155.
21. There is a debate between Ethiopianist and Oromo scholars relative to defining sixteenth century Oromo population movements as migration or expansion, I use migration due to fact that I am examining Abyssinian understandings of the “Galla,” and their view of the movements, is, undoubtedly, a migration. For more on this issue see Herbert Lewis, “The Origins of the Galla and Somali.” *Journal of African History* 7, no. 1 (1966), 32-4.
 22. Hassen, “The Significance of Abba Bahrey in Oromo Studies,” 132-4.
 23. The Oromo migrations or expansions, initially, went to Abyssinia for raiding and finding pastures for their cattle. Only later, did they permanently settle in Abyssinian highlands.
 24. Bahrey, *History of the Galla (Oromo) of Ethiopia*, 44.
 25. *Ibid.*, 52.
 26. According to legend an Abyssinian emperor asked God for enemies to fight, so God sent Grañ to punish his arrogance.
 27. Bahrey, *History of the Galla (Oromo) of Ethiopia*, 54.
 28. Psalm 33:17 is often cited in the chronicles, as a way to make this point. “A Prince is not saved by many men, and a horse is a vain thing for safety, and he will not escape by great strength.”
 29. Charles Beke, “Abyssinia, Being a Continuation of Routes in that Country” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 14, no. 1 (1844): 1-76; James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773, 6 vols.* (Edinburgh.; G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1790); Mansfield Parkyns,

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- Life in Abyssinia; Being Notes Collected During Three Years' Residence and Travels in That Country* (New York,: Appleton, 1856); J. L. Krapf and Ernest George Ravenstein, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours, During an Eighteen Year's Residence in Eastern Africa. Together with Journeys to Jagga, Usambara, Ukambani, Shoa, Abessinia, and Khartum; and a Coasting Voyage from Mombaz to Cape Delgado* (Boston,: Ticknor and Fields, 1860).
30. Manoel de Almeida “The Galla, from the History of High Ethiopia of Abassia” in Bahrey, *History of the Galla (Oromo) of Ethiopia* 56-61, 57.
 31. *Ibid.*, 58.
 32. Almeida’s notation further explains the idea of Oromo “blackness” by stating that they have darker skin because they are Hamites and have had greater mixture with “negroes.” See *Ibid.*, 84.
 33. His main influence Mentewwab, obtained power through her Oromo allies and whose main general was an Oromo. See Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: From the Thirteenth Century to the Twentieth Century* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 94-8, 102-10. Also, see *Ibid.*, 99, for Mentawwab’s genealogical chart. Also, see Figure 1 for the location of Qwara, It is south of Dambya and west of Azaza.
 34. See Figure 1, to the West of Bali and north of Sidama.
 35. Bruce, *Travels*, vol.2, book 3, 412-3
 36. *Ibid.*, 400.
 37. *Ibid.*, 403.
 38. *Ibid.* This belief is also echoed in Antoine D’Abbadie “On the Oromo: Great African Nation Often Designated Under the Name ‘Galla’” Ayalew Kanno trans. *Journal of Oromo Studies* 14:1 (March 2007), 135. Originally published as Antoine D’Abbadie “Sur les Oromo, grande nation Africaine a designe souvent sous le nom

- ‘Galla’” *Annales de la societe Scientifique de la Bruxelles* 4 (1880), 162-188.
39. Ibid, vol. 4, book 6, 228-9.
 40. Ibid., vol. 3, book 4, 271. *Qāñazmach* is a political military title that literally meant the commander of the right flank.
 41. Ibid., vol 2, book 2, 667. Iyoas, himself was a product of a Wällo Oromo mother and he also married an Oromo.
 42. Ibid., 274-5.
 43. Ibid., 294-5.
 44. Salt, *A Voyage*, 460 and he, again, uses Wäldä Sellassé, who knew the Oromo language as the source. He writes, “As far as I could ascertain from the *Ras*, who spoke the language of the Galla and seemed to be intimately acquainted with their history, it appeared that no common bond of union subsists between the different tribes, except that of their speaking the same language; twenty tribes, at least, being known perfectly independent of one another, each ruled by its peculiar chief, respectively at enmity among themselves, and the character essentially varying, according to the districts in which they have settled.” Ibid., 300.
 45. See also, Samuel Gobat who argues that the “Galla” *Ras* Gugsä allied with Oromo groups to the detriment of Ethiopia. Samuel Gobat and Robert Baird, *Journal of Three Years’ Residence in Abyssinia* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1850), 50.
 46. Salt, *A Voyage*, 277, 362.
 47. Shiferaw Bekele gives an especially glowing review of D’abbadie’s work in his reinterpretation of the Ethiopia state during this period based on D’abbadie, see Shiferaw Bekele, “The State in the *Zamana Masafent* (1786-1853): An Essay in Reinterpretation in *Kasa and Kasa: Papers on the Lives, Times and Images of Tévodros II and*

“Galla” in Ethiopian and European Imaginations

- Yohannes IV (1855-1889)* eds. Taddese Beyene, Richard Pankhurst and Shiferaw Bekele (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, 1999), 26.
48. Arnauld Abbadie, *Douze Ans de Sejour dans la Haute-Ethiopie* (Charleston, SC: Bibliobazaar, 2009 [1868]), Book 1, 123-4.
 49. Ibid. See fn. 13 on 197.
 50. Ibid., 140-221, 333-354
 51. D’Abbadie “On the Oromo: Great African Nation Often Designated Under the Name ‘Galla’”, 133-4.
 52. Ibid., 142.
 53. See Figure 2 for the locations of these two areas.
 54. Ullendorf is the most explicit Ethiopianist in this regard, see Ullendorf, *The Ethiopians*, 73, 75.
 55. François Marie Casimir Mondon-Vidailhet ed. and trans., *Chronique de Theodoros II, roi des rois d’Éthiopie (1853-1868) [d’après Aläqa Walda-Maryam]*, (Paris, 1904). This dynasty is also called the Yäjjju, after an Oromo sub-tribe, which is also a territory North East of Amhara (see Figure 1) and begun with rise of Gwangul (d.1788). In the mid nineteenth century, Menen married the puppet emperor Yohannes III and named her son by another Oromo dynasty (the Mammadoch in Wällo) de facto ruler of Ethiopia.
 56. Martino Mario Moreno, “La Cronaca Di Re Teodoro Attribuita Al Dabtarà “Zanab”,” *Rassegna Di Studi Etiopic* 2, no. 1 (1942): 149.
 57. Ibid., 158.
 58. *Däbtära* Zaneb and Enno Littmann, *The Chronicle of King Theodore of Abyssinia* (Princeton, NJ: University Library, 1902), 15.
 59. Moreno, “La Cronaca Di Re Teodoro Attribuita Al Dabtarà “Zanab”,” 161.

60. See Figure 1, Däbra Berhan and Angolala are both located in present day Shewa. Däbra Berhan is located near Dima and Angolala is on the map, and also a garrison city of the Shäwan leader Sahlä Sellasé (1814-47).
61. Moreno, 163.
62. See Figure 1, Azeboo is a neighboring area to Tigray (Tigre) populated by the Raya Oromo, for the most part they spoke Tigrinya, but, generally did not give tribute to the rulers of Tigray. This territory and the Yäjju territory separated eastern Tigray from Amhara areas of Abyssinia.
63. Bairu Tafla, *A Chronicle of Emperor Yohannes IV: (1872-89)* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1977), 117; M. Chaine, “Histoire Du Règne De Iohannes IV Roi D’éthiopie (1868-1889),” *Revue semitique et d’histoire ancienne* 21 (1913): 180.
64. *Ibid.*, 145.
65. *Ibid.*; Chaine, “Histoire Du Règne De Iohannes IV Roi D’éthiopie (1868-1889),” 182, 4. Chaine’s chronicle also indicates that he gave the spoils obtained from the Muslims as tithe to the Virgin Mary at the Church at Axum.
66. The Oromo had a tradition called *wäfa negiya*, which required killing a non-Oromo in order to become a man. For the Hābāsha equivalent see Donald Levine, “The Concept of Masculinity in Ethiopian Culture,” *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 12, no. 1 (1966): 16-22.
67. As’mé Giyorgis was born of a highly educated and religious family. His father and uncle had high positions in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Also, his father was a close friend and agent of a merchant of the Harar – Ankober trade route. As’mé was educated in monasteries, but was converted to Catholicism by Monsignors Massaja and De Jacobis. Ahmed Hassen Omer, “Some Notes of Harar and the Local Trade Routes: A Report

on the View of Ex-Merchants of Shäwa (1839-1935),” *Annales d’Éthiopie* XVII (2001): 142. According to oral traditions collected by this scholar, As’mé gained knowledge of Arabic and Oromo traditions in areas around Harar due to this connection. His father was referred to as “*érgäma*” (an Afan Oromo term for agent). As’mé also performed many services for Menilek’s state, including passing on secret messages between Menelik and his generals as well as reconnaissance work in surveying Harar. Harar is a Muslim city-state, east of Shäwa and its significance lies in its place in Red Sea trade routes, which Zaylä was used by Menilek to import firearms. See Figure 2, for the location of Harar. In addition, he warned Menelik of the infamous Article 17 of the Treaty of Wach’ale, but was seen as traitor and fined. This treaty was the point of contention between Italy and Ethiopia that caused the Battle of Adwa. The Amharic version stated that Ethiopia could use Italy for foreign policy, but the Italian version stated that Ethiopia had to use Italy for all foreign policy, which effectively made Ethiopia an Italian protectorate. For more on this issue see Sven Rubenson, *Wichale XVII: The Attempt to Establish a Protectorate over Ethiopia*. (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1964). Ahmed Hassen Omer, “Some Notes of Harar and the Local Trade Routes: A Report on the View of Ex-Merchants of Shäwa (1839-1935),” *Annales d’Éthiopie* XVII (2001): 142. When the truth came out, he was offered the title of *Näggadras* (chief of merchants), but he rejected it. He was author of many works, but only two remain due to an Italian bombing of his house during the occupation of 1935.

68. Bairu, although generally an excellent translator, translates (አዋላ) as “rove,” which gives the impression that the Oromo are without direction while Wolf Leslau defines it as “to overpower, to overwhelm, to get the

- upper-hand,” which makes more sense due to the fact that all of the actions it describes are things that military dominance made possible. Wolf Leslau, *Concise Amharic Dictionary* (Barkley: University of California Press, 1996).
69. As'mé, 185.
 70. As'mé, 137, fn 166. Another interesting note is the importance of place in the origins of both “Galla” and Hābāsha.
 71. As'mé, 313
 72. This belief is rooted in Hābāsha culture, especially during the nineteenth century see Donald Crummey, “Society and Ethnicity in the Politics of Christian Ethiopia During the Zemana Masafent,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 8, no. 2 (1975).
 73. Debra Sanders, “Identities in Ethiopia: The Role of Images, Symbols, Myths and Stereotypes in Imperial and Post-Imperial Systems” (George Mason University, 2002), 165-6.
 74. This ideology is displayed throughout much of native nationalist rhetoric, including both the American and South African cases. For South Africa see Gerhard Schutte, “Afrikaner Historiography and the Decline of Apartheid: ethnic reconstruction in times of crises” in Elizabeth Tonkin, Malcolm Chapman, and Maryon McDonald, *History and Ethnicity*, A.S.A. Monographs 27 (London; New York: Routledge, 1989). For an example of American nativism see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860 – 1925*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988 [1955]).
 75. His translator also notices this, see Bairu, *Asma Giyorgis and His Work*, 201, fn. 327.
 76. *Ibid.*, 195.
 77. Occasionally the travelers referred to them as “Oriental.”

78. Henri Blanc, “From Metemma to Damot, Along the Western Shores of the Tana Sea,” *Geographic Journal* 39, no. 1 (1869): 36-50; Herbert Weld Blundell and Reginald Koettlitz, “A Journey through Abyssinia to the Nile (Continued) “ *Geographic Journal* 15, no. 3 (1900): 264-72; Oscar T. Crosby, “Abyssinia - the Country and People,” *National Geographic Magazine* 12, no. 3 (1901): 91-102; Edward Gleichen, *With the Mission to Menelik, 1897* ([Farnborough]: Gregg International, 1971); Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia; Being Notes Collected During Three Years' Residence and Travels in That Country*, C.F. Rey, “Abyssinia and Abyssinia of to-Day,” *Geographic Journal* 60, no. 3 (1922); Skinner, *Abyssinia of to-Day; an Account of the First Mission Sent by the American Government to the Court of the King of Kings, 1903-1904*; Herbert Vivian, *Abyssinia; through the Lion-Land to the Court of the Lion of Judab* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969); M.S. Wellby, “King Menelek’s Dominions and the Country between Lake Gallop (Rudolf) and the Nile Valley” *Geographic Journal* 16, no. 3 (1900): 292-304; Herbert Vivian, *Abyssinia; through the Lion-Land to the Court of the Lion of Judab* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1901).
79. d’Abbadie, 119.
80. After the British freed their countrymen from Tewodros’ mountain fortress at Maqdāla in 1865, they did little directly in terms of foreign policy with Ethiopia until the Adwa Peace Treaty of 1884, also referred to as the Hewett Treaty. Most of the relations were in regards to Yohannes’ acquisition of sea port on the Red Sea. The British, however, controlled the affairs of Egypt and mediated in the affairs between Egypt and Ethiopia, after they broke down in the late 1870s. For more on this treaty see Sven Rubenson, “The Adwa Peace Treaty of 1884” *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1969), 225-236.

81. Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia*, 327-56.
82. Blundell, "A Journey through Abyssinia to the Nile (Continued)," 270. Also see, Karl Wilhelm Isenberg, and James MacQueen, and J. L. Krapf. *The journals of C. W. Isenberg and J. L. Krapf detailing their proceedings in the kingdom of Shoa and journeys in other parts of Abyssinia in the years 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842, to which is prefixed A geographical memoir of Abyssinia and South Eastern-Africa by James M'Queen, grounded on the missionaries' journals and the expedition of the Pacha of Egypt up the Nile, with two maps constructed by James M'Queen* London: F. Cass, 1968 [1843]), 193, 202. A notable exception is their view of the Wällo Oromo. *Ibid.*, 323.
83. Blundell, "A Journey," 270.
84. Henry Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia, with Some Account of the Late Emperor Theodore, His Country and People* (London: F. Cass, 1970 [1868]), 290.
85. Henry Aaron Stern, *The Captive Missionary: Being an Account of the Country and People of Abyssinia. Embracing a Narrative of King Theodore's Life, and His Treatment of Political and Religious Missions* (New York: Cassell Pettey and Galpin, 1869), 212.
86. Jules Borelli, *Ethiopia Meridionale: Journal De Mon Voyage Aux Pays Amhara, Oromo Et Sidama Septembre 1885 a Novembre 1888*, vol. 1. Deuxième Partie (Paris: 1890), 210.
87. Gustavo Bianchi, *Alla Terra Die Galla: Narratzione Della Spedizzone Bianchi in Africa Nel 1879-80* (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1886), 290.
88. Reginald Koettlitz, "A Journey through Somali Land and Southern Abyssinia to the Shangalla or Berta Country and the Blue Nile and through the Sudan to Egypt," *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society* 16, no. 1 (1900): 1-30, 28.

89. A. K. Bulatovich, *Ethiopia through Russian Eyes: Country in Transition, 1896-1898*, trans. by Richard Seltzer (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2000), 66. For more on this traveler see Czelslaw Jesmen, *The Russians in Ethiopia: An Essay in Futility*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1958, 95-6.
90. Herbert Vivian presents a traveler’s understanding of Abyssinian conceptions of property. He writes, “Land is not for sale. It may be leased but only with difficulty and at an undue rent. An Abyssinian prefers to make nothing out of his property rather than to alienate it to foreigner.” It appears, in this case, the foreigner was both the European and the Oromo. Vivian, *Abyssinia*, 122.
91. J.G. Vanderheyem, *Une Expédition Avec Le Négus Ménélik: Vingt Mois En Abyssinie* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1896), 93.
92. A military title, literally leader of the vanguard.
93. Paul Mérab, *Impressions D’éthiopie (L’abyssinie Sous Ménélik II)*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1929), 79. Häbtä Giyorgis was a key figure in Menilek’s and rose from the ranks of the keeper of royal livestock to the highest ranking official in Menilek’s army. *Fitawrari* is the commander of the front guard.
94. *Qalad* is a measure of land roughly equivalent to 133 cubits. After land was measured, especially after the conquests of Menilek II, many peasants were dispossessed and the land was reallocated to nobles loyal to Menilek II.
95. *Ibid.*, 125.
96. See Terfassa Digga, “A Short Biography of Onesimos Nesib Oromo Bible Translator, Evangelist and Teacher” (BA Thesis, Haile Sellassie I University, 1973).
97. de Salviac, *Un Peuple Antique Au Pays De Ménélik*, 20.
98. *Ibid.*
99. *Ibid.*, 200.

100.Ibid., 39-53, 345-7.

101.Ibid., 349.

102.This style worked best among the more decentralized agrarian groups. More centralized polities either put up stiff resistance or peacefully submitted. Relative to the Somali and Afar pastoralists, the Hābāsha did not require a large tribute; rather, secure trade routes as paths to the coast went through Afar and Somali territories.

103.J.L. Krapf, *An Imperfect Outline of the Elements of the Galla Language Preceded by a Few Remarks Concerning the Nation of the Gallas and an Evangelical Mission among Them by the Rev. C.W. Isenberg* (London: The Church Missionary Society, 1840), xi.

A GREAT AFRICAN NATION: THE OROMO IN SOME EUROPEAN ACCOUNTS

Tsega Etefa

In the nineteenth century, political and economic developments in the Red Sea basin attracted an increasing number of British, German, Italian, Austrian and French travelers, explorers, diplomats, and missionaries to the Horn of Africa region. These Europeans lived among the inhabitants of the region and learned their local languages, cultures, and political structures. Later, they published diaries, journals, and books which today are useful source materials, particularly for studying developments and processes among Oromo during the nineteenth century. Impressed by many aspects of the Oromo nation — including the

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extent of its territory, the hospitality of the people, the sophistication of their political institutions, and monotheistic religion — several travelers, missionaries and writers reported on the significance of what they witnessed. This led to a “romantic quest” for Ormania, the territory described as the land of Oromo in the European accounts.¹

In this vein, Antoine d’Abbadie and Martial de Salviac, two Europeans who lived among the Oromo in the nineteenth century, gave their published accounts the title, *The Oromo: Great African Nation*.² In so doing, they chimed in the description of Rochet d’Héricourt, the French envoy who visited the Kingdom of Shawa in 1839.³ C.W. Hobley, a British colonial administrator in Kenya from 1894 to 1921, also used the term “great” to describe the Oromo who lived near Malindi in Kenya. The Orma, he wrote, “are a branch of the great Oromo [clans].”⁴

In several European and Ethiopian accounts, the Oromo are depicted as people who arrived in the Ethiopian highlands only in the sixteenth century. Others suggest that the Oromo were warlike people who were ready to kill anyone they found along the route of their expansion. In contrast, European travelers, missionaries, and diplomats who lived among the Oromo in the nineteenth century suggest, based on the oral traditions they collected, that the Oromo were one of the earliest inhabitants of the region stretching from today’s northern Sudan to the entire Horn of Africa region. In addition, they show that, contrary to the views enunciated by some Ethiopianist writers, the Oromo were a peaceful people who welcomed and assimilated strangers and lived with others in peace, harmony, balance, order, and justice.

THE ANTIQUITY OF THE OROMO

For many centuries, the Oromo have occupied a vast territory in northeast Africa. Richard Burton, the British traveler who visited Harar in 1855 writes, "This great African people [the Oromo] are spread over a large portion of Africa, and are quite distinct from the Abyssinians."⁵ According to his account, the Oromo had once lived in the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean coasts and stated that they had contacts with the Persian Empire.⁶ He substantiates this by noting that "the white and black sheep of Ormania (Oromo-land) and of Somaliland" are of Persian origins.⁷ In addition, having visited this part of Africa from northern Somaliland to Zanzibar, he writes that, "The inhabitants opposite Zanzibar are Wuddooa [Africans], but there is reason to believe this part of the coast was formerly inhabited by the Guracha Oromo, or as my instructions style them, the Giagas."⁸ It is also interesting to note that Burton called the Oromo land Ormania, following Krapf who coined it in the mid-nineteenth century.

Herbert Vivian, another British explorer of the early twentieth century, also stated that the Oromo were the most important ancient inhabitants of the region. He wrote, "Of all the subject races in Abyssinia, the Oromos are the most interesting. They come of a very ancient stock, and are reputed to be the bravest of mankind."⁹ Corroborating Vivian's statement J. G. Garson writes: "As representing, according to Professor Keane and other authorities, the older and true indigenous element of Northern Africa, the [Oromo nation] of the [Cushitic] group is of much interest to us."¹⁰ Furthermore, Darrell Bates writes: "The Oromo

were a very ancient race, the indigenous stock, perhaps, on which most other peoples in this part of eastern Africa had been grafted.”¹¹ Other groups, particularly the Somali, have been described as an offshoot of the Oromo. In the words of F.L. James, “they [Somali] must be accepted as a half-caste offshoot of the great Oromo [nation].”¹² As such, these accounts speak to one underlying theme that the Oromo are not recent arrivals on the Ethiopian scene.

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN CONNECTION: A HYPOTHESIS

Some scholars suggest that as one of the Afro-Asiatic speaking peoples, the Oromo formed part of the ancient Egyptian civilization. According to the renowned Egyptologist, Flinders Petrie, the Oromo came down the Nile and founded the X dynasty of ancient Egypt after the III and IV dynasties. They first established themselves at Qau before they embarked on founding a dynasty of their own.¹³ Some writers are even more specific in ascribing Egyptian civilization to a particular Oromo clan. Henry Tomkins suggests some of the inhabitants of ancient Egypt “may most likely be the present Djarsu [Jaarso Oromo].”¹⁴ The Jaarso are a branch of the Oromo found in both the Barentu and Boorana major groups. There is also another suggestion that the group called Arma who reportedly presented themselves before Queen Hatshepsut corresponds to Orma or Oromo. Tomkins contends Orma was an authentic identification of a group of people, insisting that the name Orma or Oroma is derived from Urum, which is a Nubian word for black.¹⁵ Egyptologists also indicate the sphinxes that

are still standing show features that bear similarities to the Oromo. According to Petrie, “It has long ago been remarked that the black sphinxes, later appropriated by the Hyksos, approximated to the Oromo type of Abyssinia.”¹⁶ On some monuments Oromo connections to ancient Egyptian civilization have also been detected by Petrie.

Petrie also tries to link the Uah-ka family of the IX and X dynasties to Waaqa (God) of the Oromo. In his seminal study, *The Making of Egypt*, he posits,

In the tomb of prince Uah-ka B at Qau, in an inner chamber, is painted a scene of the son of Uah-ka, named Senusert; there is no cartouche. As the Uah-ka family were of about the IX or Xth dynasty (the name being unknown either in the VIth or the Xth dynasty), this implies that the XII dynasty Senusert family descended from the Uah-ka family. Here we have then, a link between the Oromo type on the sphinxes and the XIIth dynasty.¹⁷

Cornwallis Harris, a British diplomat who visited Shawa in 1841, also observed that the Oromo hair styles resembled those of the ancient Egyptians. He writes, “the time of all is equally devoted to braiding an infinite to minute tresses, falling over the shoulders after the manner of the ancient Egyptians.”¹⁸ Two comparisons of resemblances between the Oromo styles and ancient Egyptians were also provided by Petrie.¹⁹ Arthur Robinson also suggests that the Kassu group of the ancient Egyptians, Meroites and Aksumites may have been the ancestors of the Oromo.²⁰

These accounts are not mere conjectures. Contemporary scholars also have begun to notice similarities

in worldview between Oromos and ancient Egyptians. Recently Charles Verharen has identified similarities between Oromo and ancient Egyptian philosophies. The Oromo concept of peace in particular parallels those of ancient Egyptians. He writes, “Like ancient Egyptians, the Oromo share the idea that all humans are subject to a universal principle of harmony and order, *nagaa*—from the elected leaders of the *gada* to the lowliest herd boy.”²¹ The Oromo concept of *nagaa*—which means peace, health, balance, order, harmony and justice, corresponds to the ancient Egyptian concept of *maat* which is “peace, harmony, order, balance that must characterize our responsibility to the continuance of life.”²²

Other scholars have noticed some kind of relations between the Oromo and the Meroitic civilization. According to A. Batrawi, “The affinities of the Oromo and Somali to the...and Meroitic populations of Lower Nubia: these are very close, and they may suggest the extension of the Predynastic Upper Egyptian type over a very wide area in north-east Africa.”²³ Charles Johnston also suggests that the Oromo “have arisen from the ruins of the once civilized and extensive empire of Meroe.”²⁴ There are also several words in ancient Meroe which have meanings in today’s Afaan Oromo (the Oromo language). These include Mirgissa, Basa, and Abbu Oda. Mirgissa was located at second cataract of the Nile River and was a frontier post, commercial center and river control point while Basa was known for its lion temples with brick surroundings.²⁵ Mirgissa in Afaan Oromo means to flourish; basa is to reveal, to pay a price, to expel, and Oda is a sycamore tree under which the Oromo gather for assembly. Muham-

mad Megalommatis also identified such words as *nagaa* (peace), and *naga* which means to make local drinks such as traditional beer as having meaning in ancient Meroitic.²⁶ This shows an indication of some form of connections between ancient Meroe and Oromo.

Further west in today's Sudan the Oromo have also been related mainly on linguistic grounds to the Tibu group (The Tibu are also called Teda and today live in Chad, Libya, Niger and Nigeria). According to A. H. Keane, the Tibu belonged to a Cushitic-speaking group which included ancient Egyptian, Afar and Oromo. Of all the members of the Cushitic group, Keane suggests that Tibu words are more related to the Oromo.²⁷ While the suggestion that the Oromo might have actively involved in the civilizations that appeared in ancient Egypt and Meroe is interesting, future research is needed to establish the connections.

THE HORN OF AFRICA

Francesco Alvarez, who was a member of the Portuguese mission that arrived in Ethiopia in 1520, mentions two apparently Oromo names in his books. He wrote: "For in our time, which was a stay of six years [1520-26], there were four Barnagais, that is to say, when we arrived Dori was Barnagais; he died, and at his death the crown came to Bulla, his son, a youth of ten or twelve years of age, by order of the Prester John."²⁸ The *Bahr Negash* is a title for the governor of the Red Sea littoral, or present-day Eritrea. Both Doorri and Bula are typical Oromo names. Doorri is infact one of the names of the *gadaa* grades. Bula literally means "to spend overnight." When the Portuguese mission arrived in 1520, Doorri was already well into his tenure

as *Bahr Negash*. Later, he was succeeded by his son, Bula. Alvarez met these rulers of the Red Sea area, and this is firsthand information that sheds some light on Oromo presence in northern Ethiopia before the first half of the sixteenth century.

There are indications of Oromo settled life in the coastal regions of the Gulf of Aden. In the 1840s Richard Burton explored various ruins presumably of Oromo in northern Somalia. Describing this undertaking, F.L. James wrote in 1885 as follows.

He [Burton] then excavated [an Oromo] grave a short distance off [from Zeila] and about three feet below the surface he came upon a flooring of concrete, on which was the body with its head to the east and its feet to the west. It was so old that the bones and skull fell to pieces in his fingers. In another Oromo grave he found pink coral beads and a woman's hair-pin made of ivory. The flooring of these graves must have been prepared previous to the person's death, as it would take several days for the mortal to set.²⁹

Other Oromo graves were discovered to the east of Berbera. Moreover, at a place called Olok, a few miles west of Cape Guardafui, the French explorer Révoil observed many ruins of houses and cairn-tombs. According to Merid Wolde Aregay,

At Khor Abdahan, just south of the Cape, he [Révoil] came across the remains of a rectangular building whose foundations were cut from the rock, where he also found potsherds and fragments of what he considered to be a Roman type millstone. What the Somali of

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Alleyah, on the Gulf of Aden, regarded as of Oromo make is more surprising. It was the ruin of a two storied construction built with lime and stones.³⁰

Stone mounds believed to be the burial site of ancient Oromo inhabitants were also discovered to the south of Berbera by another European explorer, F. L. James who writes: "On our right we passed a small village near some stone mounds, said to be Oromo ruins; and I believe the Oromos lived in the country a long time ago."³¹

Oromo graves were carefully ornamented and designed indicating the earlier existence of an organized community. They were numerous in number and are divided into two types: small poles and larger types. According to I. M. Lewis, some of the smaller types belong to the Somali³² while the larger types around Mandera and Wajir south of the Juba River are said to be associated with the Oromo.³³ In any case, the renowned archaeologist Desmond Clark attributes most of the graves, cairns, stone houses, wells and ruins to the Oromo people. He writes:

The numerous types of tumulae which occur throughout the Horn are ascribed to the Oromo and known colloquially as 'Oromo Graves'. That the majority of the graves of these people there can be little doubt, but it is not impossible that some may be Late Stone Age, or 'Neolithic' on analogy with those recorded by Monod from western Sahara, and a critical study of these mounds would be of value.³⁴

According to F. L. James, Burton was also informed of a big ancient Oromo city near Djibouti. He writes:

“In one place, on the road to Ras Jibuti, where tradition said there was formerly an immense Oromo city, there was a large knoll formed by loose rocks.”³⁵ Some forty years later, James himself visited an ancient Oromo city in northern Somalia and reported: “Our explorations carried us among what appeared to be the *débris* of a large town with an extensive cemetery attached to it, and from all we could gather the Oromos in bygone age had here built up a real city.”³⁶ In the second half of the nineteenth century Harald George Swayne also concluded: “From ruins, cairns, and graves which have been pointed out to me to be of Oromo origin, I have been led to believe that before the Arab immigrations to what is now called Somáliland, even to the northern coast, was owned by the Oromos.”³⁷ While it needs further research to investigate these ruins it is important to note that the Somali themselves attribute these sites to the Oromo.³⁸

In a recent study, Robert Collins and James Burns have corroborated the presence of Oromo settlement in the East African coast in the remote antiquity. They argue that “The first settlements on the coast were made before the Christian era by Cushitic-speaking pastoral peoples coming from Ethiopia and represented today by the Oromo of southern Ethiopia and the Somali. They are probably the “red men” described in the *Periplus*.”³⁹ According to the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, compiled between 45 and 50 AD, the inhabitants of the East African coast were described as red men who were hunters and keepers of cattle, sheep and goats. Most probably these people were Cushitic speakers including the ancestors of the Oromo. In the words of Desmond Clark, “The Oromo seem to have

controlled the whole of the Horn of Africa since at least the first few centuries of the Christian era, and during the sixteenth century spread inland south and west but subsequently were displaced by the Somalis pressing down from the north, and the main group of the Oromo were forced inland to their present habitat.”⁴⁰

The reason why the Oromo were hemmed in to occupy their present habitats is unclear. The evidence that Cushitic speakers had lived in the entire Horn region in the remote millennia is beyond doubt. Among these people, the Oromo are said to be the most numerous group. In the words of Edna Mason Kaula, “The Cushitic people occupy the east, south, and western plains, and the mountain slopes. Of this varied group the Oromos are by far the most important - and numerous – for they account for half of the Ethiopia’s population.”⁴¹ By the nineteenth century, the Oromo had become militarily strong prompting some European observers to describe them as “the most powerful nation of East Africa.”⁴²

ATTITUDE TOWARDS AND RELATIONS WITH NON-OROMOS

Numerous accounts that present the Oromo as hospitable and welcoming of strangers belie the characterization of them as warlike people. According to D. P. Kidder, “They [the Oromo] are a hospitable people, regard their oaths as holy, and revere old age.”⁴³ Vivian asserts that the Oromo have distinct ideas of honor and hospitality to strangers. He writes: “Once they come to believe that fidelity is a duty in a given case, they are faithful unto death.”⁴⁴ J. H. Phillipson,

who visited the Oromo in Kenya sometime in the first decades of the twentieth century, also observes: “Personally, I have received nothing at their hands except kindness. They have made no excessive demands on my purse, but on the contrary, have been liberal in the extreme, usually welcoming the traveler with a presentation of sheep, goats, and milk—enough, sometimes, to supply the wants of more than twenty people.”²⁴⁵

According to Oromo law, strangers who are willing to be adopted by the former were treated in the same way as any Oromo. There is an adoption ritual led by *abba bokku* (president) of the *gadaa* government. Thus, the Oromo maintained harmonious relationships with the neighboring non-Oromo. Based on observations in the late 1890s, de Salviac describes such relationships: “Now it is unheard of that the Oromo does not have some alliance with the families of the bordering race.”²⁴⁶

In most cases the strangers come to the *abba bokku* wanting adoption into Oromo society. They approach one of the Oromo families to inform their intentions and to direct or accompany them to the assembly. After preliminary acquaintances have been done, the adoption ceremony takes place. The ritual varies from region to region. In one of the rituals described by de Salviac: “The Abba bokku holds out to them the scepter and the thumb, and then lowers it to the top of the head. They declare the newcomer son of the elders and brother of all. There is exchange of presents. The immolation of a sacrifice cements the perpetual alliance. If it is a particular family that adopts, the father presents the thumb to suck and the mother offers her breasts to the adopted.”²⁴⁷

John Trimmingham adds, "Adoption is common and the tie is such that the adopted son enjoys the rights of the first-born even if a son is born subsequently."⁴⁸ The whole clan and the next clan would be informed of the adoption of the strangers by a family. "The Oromo, quickly informed about the new brother whom Providence has sent to them, accept him under the roof of their hut, share with him their milk, their honey and their broth, alleviate his misfortunes, save him from danger, and the whole tribe will take up arms to avenge any injuries which he would have sustained, regarding it as if it was done to the community."⁴⁹

In some cases whole clans were adopted by big and numerous ones for security reasons. Once adopted, they were sure that they would be given the same privilege as the members of the adopting clan and, therefore, protection from attacks by another group. After undergoing these procedures a stranger "enjoys the most stable peace and tranquility."⁵⁰

Observation of nineteenth century European travelers that the Oromo are generous hosts of strangers is confirmed by present day scholars. Herbert Lewis reports that "Shoa Oromo communities are open communities, easy for newcomers to join, composed of people who are, in the first place, cooperating neighbors, not kinsmen or lineage mates."⁵¹ Lewis also describes the Oromo in the Gibee region as having the same flair for hospitality as do the Shawa Oromo. John Hinnant reports that non-Oromo ethnic groups were openly welcomed by the Guji Oromo.⁵² It is very interesting to note that any non-Oromo newcomer is equally welcomed into an Oromo community with all the privileges accorded to any Oromo. The assimilated

outsiders were accorded the right to lead *gadaa* rituals and other ceremonies, including dispute settlement meetings based on the Oromo principle of *qixxee*, equality.⁵³ The only thing required of them is to abide by Oromo customs and be cooperative, which is also much needed in the agricultural societies.

It is important that the Oromo openness and welcoming spirit was not because of the presence of excess unoccupied land among the Oromo. There was competition over scarce resources among the Oromo themselves. Oromo openness and hospitality emanates from the fundamental belief among the Oromo that all humans are the children of God (*Waaqa*) and deserved to be treated with dignity and equality. This belief is enshrined in the Oromo indigenous system of governance which encourages all Oromos to accept, live with and treat others equally. As Donald Levine notes, “The Oromo’s ability to make friends with outsiders and to incorporate them or affiliate with them readily in local communities has been reported for so many times and places that I am inclined to regard it as a characteristic aspect of their mode of relating to outsiders.”⁵⁴

Oromo religion, a belief in *Waaqa*, also teaches its adherents to be open to others. According to Philipson, while the traditional Oromo religion is still functional, “Their religion teaches them to care for strangers bound on an errand of peace, so that their existence in the land of shadows may be the brighter for a record of good deeds.”⁵⁵ The religious practices are part of the *gadaa* government which, on its own, teaches the people to be open and welcoming to all. According to the *gadaa* government, group interactions

follow a pattern of egalitarianism without domineering powers. As Levine put it:

From the agreement of lineage members concerning how a firstborn son disposes of his father's estate to the agreement of gadaa councilors when a new law is to be promulgated, important decisions in the traditional Oromo system are made not by domineering authorities but through the respectful interchange of views among men whose inequalities of status are not stressed. [Starting from the lowest type to big tasks] important activities in Oromo society are carried out not by individualistic competition and bartering but on a highly cooperative basis. These patterns have required individual Oromo of the same olla, gada class, or age set to relate to one another in a friendly, collaborative manner.⁵⁶

Since their early days of contact with non-Oromos, the Oromo have developed a number of mechanisms for establishing relationships with non-Oromo communities. When they started to settle permanently among different communities in their early days of expansion, the Oromo seem to have devised different mechanisms to adapt themselves to the new condition. "When the Oromo went north from their homeland they had to find ways of relating to the peoples near whom they settled once the antagonisms of battle were temporarily or permanently set aside. Their own script contained no mandate to establish a dominion over others."⁵⁷

Instead, they assimilated the peoples they encountered. In northern Kenya, for instance, the Garre are a mixture of Oromo and Ogaden Somali groups.

Another Somali group called Sab or Rahanwin who live in southern Somalia is also a mixture of Oromo and Somali. Wakefield, who collected traditions from the region in the 1860s and 1870s, writes of the Sab: "They are evidently much mixed with Oromo, who formerly occupied a portion, at all events, of this country."⁵⁸ According to Wakefield, the Somali might have moved and settled among the Boorana. Such sections, in addition to the Garre, include the Bon who are locally called Idole or Kocho. They adopted Oromo traditional culture by abandoning their Islamic faith.⁵⁹

For nearly four centuries, the Somali in the Ogaden and Juba and Wabe Shabelle regions have been in close contact with the Oromo. Starting from the Harer region all the way down to lower Juba and Tana Rivers in the south both seem to have competed over "water, grazing, and agricultural land."⁶⁰ Around El Wak (Kenya) this has resulted in a significant Oromo-Somali assimilation, particularly between Warra Dayya Oromo and the Somali.⁶¹ There has also been considerable assimilation between the Somali and Gabra. L. Aylmer writes, "Intermingled with them [Boorana] are to be found many Ajuran Somalis, of the Hawiyah division, and Gurreh, another large division of the Somali race."⁶²

The Boorana, the Ajuran Somalis, the Gurre, Gabra and Sankuye groups intermarry freely, maintain close friendships, and share their villages. Even though the Somalis are largely Muslims, they have developed considerable working relationship with the Boorana Oromo. The Somalis arrived in the Juba region after the Oromo and they were welcomed by the latter. R. E. Salkeld, provincial commissioner in British East Africa

who visited the region in December 1913, writes: “They [the Somali] had been preceded by the Oromos, and these two peoples, who are so closely akin that it is impossible at the present time to tell an Oromo from a Somali.”⁶³

Beyond the Jubba River around Mombasa and Malindi coast of the Indian Ocean, there was also assimilation of the Pokomo, the largest group in the Tana Province of Kenya, into the Oromo.⁶⁴ Among the Pokomo around Tana River Oromo culture is conspicuously apparent. A. Werner observed in the late 1860s that a branch of the Pokomo already had adopted Oromo language⁶⁵ and the Oromo *gadaa* government.⁶⁶ Wakefield and Fischer, who visited them in 1860s, also confirmed that they spoke Oromo.⁶⁷

It is important to note that Oromo and their neighbor’s relationships were not always free of conflicts. Conflicts did occur, for instance, between the Oromo and Pokomo. But the most important thing is that they were both able to solve disputes and live together amicably. Those amicable relationships eventually developed into integration. Describing dispute settlement between the Oromo and Pokomo, Werner writes: “Since that time the Pokomo on the north bank of the river...have remained in peaceful possession of their country, but take good care not to provoke the Oromo, who in the end, also find it to their advantage to refrain from attacking them, as they can at all times get grain from the Pokomo.”⁶⁸ The Pokomo eventually assimilated into the Oromo and adopted Oromo clan names in addition to the Oromo language. L. Krapf who visited the region in the 1840s, observed that the Pokomo understood the Oromo language and they

supplied the Oromo with various trading items such as rice and maize.⁶⁹

Many of the ethnic groups in today's Kenya and southern Somalia have assimilated into the Oromo society accepting their institutions, *gadaa* government, and religion. Linda Giles who conducted research along the Swahili coast of east Africa in the 1990s also observes that Oromo traditional belief, particularly spirit possession, was formerly widely practiced in the region.⁷⁰ Elsewhere, the Oromo openness to strangers led to the intermingling of the Oromo with others and vice versa. In the Harer region the Oromo have adopted Islam as well as the Harari culture. After settlement of their disputes with the Sultan of Harer in 1568, some Oromo groups settled closer to the walled city and embraced Islam. Perhaps Oromo-Hareri intermingling started even much earlier. "Since the thirteenth century, however, they [the Hareri] have greatly mingled with the [Oromo clans], and naturally their earlier characteristics have become less pronounced."⁷¹

CONCLUSION

From Raayya in Tigray to Orma in Malindi coast of Kenya, the Oromo have greatly contributed to ethnic integration, solidarity and peaceful coexistence. In describing the strong presence of the Oromo in the civilizations that appeared all the way from ancient Egypt down to East Africa and the Indian Ocean coast, this paper has shown the need for additional research on ethnonational dynamism in Eastern Africa.

The European travelers, missionaries, and diplomats witnessed the Oromo nation's commitment to maintaining *nagaa* (peace, harmony, balance, order, and

justice) for all. They were convinced that the Oromo were a great nation with advanced institutions in Eastern Africa. Thus, the French missionary who lived among them, de Salviac, was rightly told by his peers in Europe who read his account of the Oromo, “You do not hesitate to qualify them as great African nation.”⁷²

NOTES

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TYING OROMO HISTORY:
THE MANIPULATION OF DRESS AND
ADORNMENT DURING THE
LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Peri M. Klemm

We used to say that we put our identity in the *gaadi*, the leather strap that ties the cow's back legs when milking. This kept our identity hidden to the foreigners that came and tried to destroy it. Nowadays, our traditions are articulated through women's songs, dressing and dancing. Since many of our young men and [male] elders were killed by the Turks and the Abyssinians, it is up to the women to carry along our culture (M.S.S., personal communication, March 1, 2000)

A seventy year old Ala Oromo man, himself a respected elder and spokesperson for his clan, spoke these words to the author in his home in Baabbile, a town located near Harer. He echoed a sen-

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timent that still resonates throughout his community: women, as performers, educators, and icons, are carriers of cultural history. Identifying the markers they carry, interpreting these choices, and explaining how these markers relate historically to a specific adversarial association with Abyssinians will be the focus of this article. This paper examines the use of fiber and leather bindings by Afran Qallo Oromo women. These bindings served as markers of war and proper action during the conquest and colonization of their homeland near the city-state of Harer under Menilek, King of Shawa, in the late 1880s.¹ I argue that Oromo women's dress and what women wore, specifically *barrii*, a waist belt and *maadiicha*, a leather tie became symbols of the social, political, and economic crisis brought about by the Abyssinian invasion.

Afran Qallo Oromo, the largest Oromo group in eastern Oromia situated near Harer, including the clans of Daga (subclans Noole, Jarsoo, and Humme), Ala, Oborra, and Baabbile, describe their forefathers' and foremothers' relationships with the ethnic groups and ruling dynasties of Harer and its regions as constantly fluctuating. Long before the Egyptian Occupation of Harar (1875-1885) which preceded the Abyssinian invasion, each *gosa* or clan placed these neighbors into one of three categories that determined who they considered hostile and with whom they would collaborate. The first category, *fila* or family is designated for those with whom one shares *gosa* blood or those who have been adopted into the *gosa*. The Oromo regard the few emirs of Harar with whom they swore an oath of brotherhood as *fila* thereby creating a binding support network. It was common for Oromo clans who shared

a *fila* bond with the emir to demand from him goods and financial support in exchange for familial allegiances. The second relational category is *amba* or community. *Amba* consists of those with whom one trades, works, and occasionally marries but who are not blood relations or enemies. The emirs and other leaders who took Oromo spouses or married their offspring into Oromo lines and those who developed trade between the walled city and Oromo communities were considered, along with their family and followers, *amba*. This bond was largely based on economic exchange. Finally, the last designated relationship is *diina*, or enemy. *Diina* is further divided into two meanings. One refers to those groups with whom the Oromo were at war in the past but who they have not fought within several generations and with whom, like many Somali clans, they may intermarry. Some Oromo place the Egyptian rulers in this category. A second definition of *diina* refers to those who are characterized as perpetual enemies, who deceive, wound and kill without mercy and who will even target individuals considered sanctified by Oromo law, namely Oromo women, children and the elderly. This latter type of *diina* violates the sacred, breaks all conventions of war and it is of the gravest offense. The Afran Qallo place the *Habasha* (Abyssinian) in this latter category.

Each relationship described above was recorded and passed on to subsequent generations by Oromo oral historians who, along with the leaders of *Raaba-Doorii*, the council of political and military officials of the Oromo *gadaa* government, proscribed the appropriate course of action. As far as dress is concerned, the body was carefully constructed to illustrate each

relationship. Dress, particularly the dress of women in the case of the *diina* relationship, was tactically used by men to solicit the sympathies of the enemy groups, particularly when peace offerings were to be presented by the offending party in order to re-establish harmonious relations. On some occasions from the 1890s onward, warriors would take off their headpieces and put down their weapons in order to wear the central part of a married woman's costume, either her *saddetta* (white cotton dress) or her *guftaa* (black hairnet) (Klemm 2002: 202). The wearing of *saddetta* and *guftaa* was intended to communicate submission, humility, and concurrence after a period of aggression and loss of life. The following three examples illustrate how the dress of a woman, when worn by a man, serves as a visual oath for peace. These examples counter those of women dressing in men's combat attire to follow.

First, historically, Afran Qallo elders state that when council leaders went to Walaabu each year to see the *Abba Munda*, the *Raaba-Doorii* ritual leaders who guarded Oromo law, those that "carried the spoken law," dressed in a woman's traditional dress, *saddetta* (A.S.J. February 16, personal communication, 2000). These men would wrap eight yards of sheeting around their torso and tie the ends over their right shoulder intending to show that, while they were frail and could no longer fight, they nevertheless carried within them broad knowledge of the Oromo constitution. In this sense, a woman's dress suggested that these men were to be respected not for their physical prowess which had long since deteriorated, but for their wisdom which came with old age. Secondly, in the 1970s, the then sixty-five year old *beera* (Oromo law) leader Adam

Wadaayi placed a woman's *guftaa* on his head as he walked to meet his *gosa* near Dire Dawa (S.M.G., personal communication, July 23, 2004). Someone from his *gosa* had killed someone from another *gosa*, and since the individual could not pay the *guma* or blood money, he traveled to his *gosa* head to ask for help. He tied *guftaa* around his hair in order to placate the angry family of the deceased and to renew peaceful relations. In this guise he was successful in begging the *gosa* leaders to provide the obligatory animals of retribution for the deceased's clan.

A final example comes from the Kundhuble, a subclan of the Noole *gosa*. The Kundhuble have a long history of feuding with the Issa Somali. In the 1940s, the Noole war leader, Buraalee Sarsaree, donned a woman's hairnet, *guftaa*, while talking to the assembly of Noole clan leaders (M.S.S., personal communication, March 3, 2000). The wearing of this garment was intended to instill patience and restraint in his followers as they plotted how to mobilize against the enemy. After this meeting, the Noole warriors successfully pushed the Issa from Harmukaa to the town of Aisha located in the semi-desert along the rail tracks to Djibouti.

In each of these cases, the wearing of a married woman's dress or hairnet came to embody a plea for leniency, patience, and peace. Indeed, it is the tying of these garments that is said to secure peaceful action in the wearer. Men donning women's attire is not an unfamiliar phenomenon among other Cushitic pastoralists or groups organized around an age or generational grade system in East Africa. Among the Gabra Oromo in northern Kenya too, male elders become classified as 'women' and hold the responsibility for peace when

they enter into a senior generational grade. They adopt women's dress styles and mannerisms (Wood 1999: 72). It is clear that Oromo women's dress and what women wear convey specific codes of conduct specifically during states of unrest.

The Afran Qallo attempts to placate the Shawa invaders of the late 1800s proved futile, however. Whether such dress tactics described above were employed is not clear. The exchange with Menilek's forces is mentioned by Afran Qallo elders as the most barbaric encounter in the collective consciousness of the Oromo people. It is likely that warriors became quickly aware that these enemies would not succumb to their usual protocols for peace and a *diina* relation formed (A.Y., personal communication, February 20, 2000; S.M.G., personal communication, July 25, 2004). The stage was set for all out warfare. Women, who were customarily restricted from battle, fought with men. Their participation in the rebellion against Menilek's troops and the large loss of life sustained by the Oromo in the east became the impetus for a change in women's dress. In this case, the women who survived began to wear specific articles of dress associated with war during and after the infiltration of the Abyssinian soldiers in order to convey their hostile *diina* relationship with these foreigners. Oromo women successfully communicated this through their increased visibility and movement as travelers and traders.

OROMO WOMEN'S PRESENCE DURING THE ABYSSINIAN INVASION

In 1885, the Mahdist revolt in the Sudan forced the Egyptians to abandon Harer and the Egyptian Pasha

and British consul placed on the throne, Emir Abdullahi Ali Abd al-Shakur (1885-87), who would become the last ruler of the independent city-state. He ruled with an eye toward isolating the town from intruders, including the Oromo, who were perceived as threatening to his dominion. During this time, many of the traders and entrepreneurs involved in commerce who had settled in Harer left for the coast. As a result, the Oromo presence around the immediate vicinity of the walled city grew stronger (Paulitschke 1888b: 208). The presence of women was especially prominent. An estimated two-thirds of the entire Harer population in 1885 consisted of women, a fact that Philipp Paulitschke suggests was equally true on the outskirts of the city where mainly Oromo resided (1888b: 208).²

The reasons for the enhanced visibility of women is likely connected to the following four points. First, the strong agricultural business that had grown up among the Oromo communities outside the wall had been established largely by women. While most Oromo men within a sixty-mile radius of the city had adopted farming as a full-time profession, women traveled to trade their agricultural surpluses in the Harer markets. While special markets for the exchange of livestock were controlled and frequented by men, they existed primarily in neighboring Oromo regions such as Fedis. Oromo women, on the other hand, walked weekly to and from the countryside to the Harer market, where they would have been more visible to foreigners like Paulitschke. Secondly, this period of growing isolationism saw a decline in the merchant economy as foreign traders deserted the town and Emir Abdullahi Ali Abd Es-Shakur reclaimed the age-old institution of slavery.

In 1885 he attacked the surrounding Afran Qallo villages and sold the male captives to slavers heading toward the coast (M.S.S., personal communication, March 3, 2000). Paulitschke mentions that while he was in Harer, the slavers fled with “Galla to smuggle them into the city and take them with a caravan to Zeila and Berbera” (1888b: 261). Coupled with the killings at the hands of the Somali, the emirs, or other *diina* groups, there were literally fewer Oromo men around. Thirdly, it was in 1885 that the *Abba Bokkus*, the *Raaba-Doorii* leaders, began to practice publicly again and the institution of *Raaba-Doorii* was reinstated (Paulitschke 1888b: 313). Men were spending a great deal of time in private trying to restore the generational grade system, perform vital ceremonies, and create new laws, all of which had been put on hold for the ten years of Egyptian sovereignty. Lastly, reports had already been filtering into Harer that the King of Shawa had crossed into the Awash Valley and had ordered his troops to destroy Ittuu Oromo groups they met on the road to Harer in an attempt to bring under control the land and the Oromo themselves (Caulk 1971:10, Paulitschke 1888b: 197). Fearing that their own land and lives might next be in jeopardy, Afran Qallo men might have been directing their attention to the formation of defensive strategies in private settings. For these reasons, Oromo women were more visible than ever before. It was at this time, with Egyptian laws on dress no longer in place and Oromo men’s attentions diverted due to the slaughter of the Ittuu sustained under Menilek, that women’s dress becomes a prominent political statement. In particular, the tying of fiber and leather to the body signals the displacement, enslavement, and

bloodshed experienced by the Afran Qallo community during this period.

MEN'S *HARRII* IN PLACE OF WOMEN'S *SABBATA*

A cloth waist sash called *sabbata* has traditionally been used to harness a married women's dress of white sheeting, *saddetta*, at the waist. As a marker of marriage, it is an important symbol of womanhood for its connections to fertility, land, and history. Oral history speaks of the Great Oromo mother, the primordial mother of all Oromo people, tying this belt during the great Barentuma migration. As she encircled her waist with eight yards of cloth she bequeathed land to her eight grandsons and in the repetition of this gesture, each succeeding generation recognizes the historical role women played in law and governance within *Raaba-Doorii* as they repeat this action (Klemm 2006: 138-139).

When a woman's mother first binds the *sabbata* around her daughter's waist at marriage, she reminds her daughter of this important legend. In general, the *sabbata* has come to stand for the peace, patience, and security associated with motherhood. However, during the time of the Shawan invasion, this emblem of peace was removed and replaced by a men's fiber belt. Oromo female elders I spoke with in 2000 remember stories of their foremothers participating as soldiers and spies in the struggle against the invading Abyssinian army. In one particularly vivid account women climbed the mountains Tulluu Gambisaa, Tulluu Barruu, and Tulluu Ijaa and tied cowhides to the trees. They beat the skins with sticks in order to sound an alert to

Oromo forces that foreign soldiers were coming so that the men might prepare defensive strategies. In this manner, they bravely defended their territory. Those women who were captured by Menilek's forces in the act of sounding the alarm were marched to Anollee in Arsii. There, many were mutilated or killed (A.Y., personal communication, February 20, 2004). During their participation in the war, these heroic women who gave their lives are said to have taken off their *sabbata* as emblems of peace and replaced them with *harrii*. The *harrii*, a reed waist piece plaited for young men by women, had previously been worn during the *Raaba-Doorii* generational-grade period of warriorhood and served as a receptacle for weapons. Both *Raaba-Doorii*, which had been outlawed during the Egyptian Occupation, and the fiber belts, during Menilek's invasion, were no longer in use. Remembered and recounted by the Afran Qallo today, this act, the removal of the *sabbata* and the tying of *harrii*, aroused strong Oromo nationalist sentiment during the conquest and colonization of the Oromo. The gesture not only signified the state of war and the presence of the enemy but also alerted the broader Oromo community that women, who traditionally served as agents for harmonious relations, were now actively engaged in combat with men. While this act was short lived, it signals the significant role dress played during this experience.

After this period, the wearing of *sabbata* resumed and was again associated with a peaceful state of being. Informants told me that today they teach their daughters to bind the *sabbata* tightly as a means of symbolically binding, and thus ensuring, peaceful relations. In this sense, the *sabbata* as a symbol of peace is intended

to serve as a kind of talisman to ward off periods of *diina* warfare associated with *harrii*.

Harri as a sign of warriorhood first for men during *Raaba-Doorii* and later for women during Menilek's invasion is also connected to the modern belts called *sinnaara* used to hold ammunition. After their initial defeat in January 1887 at Battle of Calanqoo, located 60 kilometers from Harer, against Menilek's forces and many subsequent battles with Abyssinian troops, Oromo men who had been acquiring guns since the first decades of the twentieth century, fashioned bullet holsters called *sinnaara* to wear around their waists. Women created a song at this time that compares the *harrii* that their foremothers once wore to the *sinnaara* that men adopted:

Birraa birraa dararti baallii
sinnaara haarri akkami farri

(In the springtime, the leaves blossom
So how's the *sinaara* faring, having replaced the
harrii?)

This passage is intended to reflect upon the condition of the Afran Qallo during the great turmoil of the coming of Menilek when the *Raaba-Doorii* governing system, represented in men's belt, was completely replaced by the rule of foreign weapons, represented by the foreign bullet holster. The *sinnaara*, then, is an icon of modern warfare. This item of dress continues to be worn today by men and women who participate in the Ethiopian National Defense Force or as freedom fighters. While it no longer resembles the reed belt that men and a few women warriors once wore, the *sinnaara*

today is emblematic of past challenges for Oromo soldiers (S. M. G., personal communication, February 25, 2000). In the following section, dress becomes a means with which individuals make sense of the experiences of colonization.

MEN'S DRESS AND THE REIGN OF MENILEK

During the Battle of Calanqoo, nearly 4,000 Oromo and Hareri soldiers under the Emir fought Menilek's 30,000 troops (Rimbaud 1887). The French poet Rimbaud, who was trading armaments in the region, reports:

The engagement scarcely lasted a quarter of an hour...Three thousand warriors were cut up with sabers and crushed in a blink of an eye by the King of Shoa. Nearly 200 Sudanese, Egyptians, and Turcs left with Abdullai after the Egyptian evacuation, and perished with the Galla and Somali warriors. This is why it is said that when the Shoan soldiers (who have never killed any whites) returned, they brought back from Harar the testicles of foreigners (1887).

Mohammed Hassen also reports that the Oromo of Harer "say among those who participated in the battle, none came back without losing either a hand or a leg or penis" (1980: 244). Arsii and Ittuu women, who also participated on the battle front as Menilek marched east, did not fare much better. Informants state that among the Arsii Oromo to the southwest of Harer, Menilek's soldiers mutilated women who participated in the fighting by cutting off their right hand, left leg, and/or right breast (S.R., personal communication, April 4, 2000).

Harming women in this manner was subject to very severe penalties according to *beera*. If the right breast is cut or severed, the breast from which babies most frequently drink, the guilty party must pay the equivalent of one human life.³ Without her right breast, a new mother's babies are more likely to die. The fact that social, political, and economic retribution was denied to the families of the thousands of Oromo men and women killed or harmed in attacks by the Shawan army permanently sealed the invaders as *diina*. These aggressors were, according to the traditions of *beera*, placed into the second categorical distinction of *diina*, a relationship of eternal enemies beyond the reach of reconciliation who target members of society who legally must remain unharmed: women, children, the elderly.

After his victory, King Menilek's soldiers entered Harer and immediately took possession of the settlements owned by the families of those warriors defeated in the Battle of Calanqoo. As a punishment for their resistance, households in the city and the surrounding villages were also fined between 50,000 and 75,000 silver thalers (Hassen 1980: 235). Further, when Menilek returned to Shawa, the Gondari, the nickname of the soldiers left behind in Harer, "resorted to open brigandage, raiding and looting the countryside" (236). The years following the influx of the Abyssinians into Harar were particularly challenging to the Afran Qallo since over 12,000 Abyssinian soldiers and their families and slaves relied for their survival on the tribute and taxes from Oromo communities. Oromo men who did not comply with paying the heavy taxes were dragged by mules. Women could at any moment be forced into servitude, required to use their own grain to make

bread for the soldiers and their families, fetch water for them, and bring them firewood. Rimbaud writes:

Collecting taxes in the surrounding region only happens through raids, in which villages are burned, livestock is stolen, and populations are taken away in slavery. The revenue from the Gallas [Oromo], customs, trading posts, markets, and other receipts, are stolen by anyone who can get at them.... Ménélik completely lacks funds, always remaining in the most complete ignorance of (or indifference to) the exploitation of the region's resources, which he has forced into submission. He only thinks about accumulating guns in order to allow himself to send his troops to levy men from the Gallas (1887).

Driven by this persistent plundering, many Oromo families ceased farming communally and stopped their participation in trade with the coast. In the years to follow, the land tenure system imposed by Menilek forced the Oromo to convert remaining farmland to coffee plantations for exportation. The growing of the *kebat* crop was also launched as a cash crop.⁴ Despite these changes in land rights and land use, the Oromo remained deeply invested in their land. When Ras Makonnen, Menilek's governor of Harer province and the father of the future Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, embarked on a road building project through Oromo land using Oromo laborers this was aptly recorded. Robert Skinner, the first United States envoy to Ethiopia, published the alleged conversations between the Afran Qallo and Ras Makonnen:

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When the fine new highway was projected between Dire-Daouah and Harrar, it became necessary to condemn the land required for its construction. The Gallas waited upon Ras Makonnen, their Governor. Their farms would be ruined, they said; the work must not go on: they could not accept the price offered for their land.

'But it is a good, fair price, is it not?' Said the Ras.

'It is not the price we complain of, most gracious lord; we don't want our farms to be destroyed.'

The Ras ordered them out of his presence, saying that there was but one Governor of Harar, and that he and he alone would say what might or might not be done. The road was constructed and a guard prevented interference with the labourers. (Quoted in Pankhurst 1975: 2)

As land was taken, farmers and their families were forced into tenancy as tribute-paying subjects (*gabbar*). And as livelihoods and land were destroyed, other life-ways were being altered. By 1900, Menilek had banned all meetings of the *Raaba-Doorii* assembly (*chafe*), prayer gatherings, and the celebrated pilgrimage to the land of *Abba Muundaa* in southern Ethiopia (Knutsson 1967: 155). *Abba Muundaa*, the famous Oromo ritual leader, had served for generations as the focal point of pan-Oromo unity (Greenfield and Hassen 1992: 577). Without these cultural and religious practices, the Oromo were left with only Islam as an available organizing ideology. Mohammed Hassen writes:

Deprived of their freedom and political institutions, reduced to the status of landless gabbars

in their own land, the Oromo of Harerghe had no choice but to look to Islam to provide them with an ideological framework and institutional expression in order to survive the shock of violent defeat, loss of land, destruction of their political, cultural and religious institutions, dehumanization, subjugation and economic exploitation. It was this situation which appears to have turned them to Islam *en mass*, as a form of rejection of the colonial order created by Emperor Menilek (2000: 101).

As more and more Oromo turned to Islam as a new, legitimate, non-threatening, and non-colonial organizing principle, they adopted Muslim dress as well. However, while men adopted the imported cloth waist wraps and collared dress shirts that left them indistinguishable from their Muslim Hareri, Somali, and Argobba neighbors, Oromo women maintained their traditional dress, adding only a head scarf in public as a sign of their new religious identity. Oromo women's bodies remained a visual connection to the pre-colonial period. This is most readily apparent among pastoralist communities who were more erratically mistreated by the Abyssinian state than their agricultural counterparts. One Oromo elder recounted:

It wasn't until the Amhara came that they tried to destroy our language, our dancing, and our culture. Oromo farmers were so impoverished that they hadn't the time or resources to recreate their traditions. Only among the pastoralists is a strong sense of our culture still available. A man who practiced his culture during the time of Menilek and Haile Sellassie was arrested and the name of the crime was 'Kuburnakkaa' ('lese majesty' or 'you shamed

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the king?) (R.M.O., personal communication, March 6, 2000).

While many Oromo men turned to Islam, others, particularly among more urban populations, began adopting an Abyssinian/Amhara-centered identity. Along with the acceptance of Amhara cultural practices, name changes, and the use of the Amharic language, Abyssinian ornaments provided some relief from persecution for Oromo men, even if they continued to identify as Muslims.⁵ For example, by foregoing traditional forms of adornment and adopting wooden and metal neck crosses during Menilek's and later, Haile Selassie's rule, Oromo men visually showed their allegiance to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and were therefore allowed access to some of the privileges afforded the ruling Amhara ethnic group. An Afran Qallo Oromo man who traveled frequently to the capital and other Christian urban settlements might adopt highland Christian dress or tie on a cross and baptismal chord in order to "blend in" yet these items were tossed aside when one returned to his Muslim community (A.S.J., personal communication, October 6, 1999). Donham writes that "for those of the frontiers, Christian identity promised an escape from the worst aspects of Abyssinian domination" (1986: 11).

We find then that during this time of colonization, the adoption of an Islamic or Orthodox Christian identity, whether sincere or superficial, was outwardly proclaimed through men's dress. In either case, dress became a highly calculated and communicative indicator of one's faith. Yet, despite these new dress codes for men, we find that both men and women continued

to embrace a deeply significant Oromo act—that of tying leather onto the body.

TYING MAADIICHA

In the quote that begins this article, an image of the leather strap called *gaadi*, used to hold the milking cow's back legs, is evoked. The *gaadi*, a simple tie still used by Oromo who own livestock, is intimately connected to the pastoral livelihood of the first Afran Qallo settlers in and around Harer. In the introductory passage, the notion of an Oromo identity rooted in the past is harnessed or 'hidden' through the tying of the leather thong.

When worn by humans, these same straps of leather fashioned from hide and secured around the wrist, upper arm and neck are called *maadiicha* and are virtually indistinguishable from *gaadi*. Both the *gaadi* and the *maadiicha* leather cord are made from a strip of the thickest skin of a cow, goat, or camel, dyed red in a mixture of boiled bark and herbs. Symbolically, both act as a marker of the value placed on pastoral livelihood. The *maadiicha* mentioned by Paulitschke was intended to be worn by all participants when a female animal was to be slaughtered (1896: 279). Today, Oromo women also wear *maadiicha* tied with a piece of incense at the wrist. Like the leather of the Civet cat, who is known for its musk-like odor, the *maadiicha* with incense is intended to ward off *buda*, those with the evil eye. The idea of *buda*, a foreign concept prior to colonization, resonated for the Oromo as the embodiment of the danger of foreigners from whom they sought to protect themselves through adornment. The modern leather bracelet with incense is efficacious not as a visual deflector like most

talismans, but rather for its pungent smell. Those with the evil eye are said to be repulsed by the odor and flee. During the time of Menilek's colonization, however, *maadiicha* become a symbol of men and women's active participation in warfare.

The *maadiicha* has several symbolic associations that relate to specific historical periods. For example, only one generation ago, *maadiicha*, tied on the left wrist, indicated a woman's status as single; when tied on the right wrist, proclaimed her engagement; when tied on the upper arm, indicated her status as married (Klemm 2002: 206). If worn by a well-respected woman during the time of *Raaba-Doorii* in conjunction with her *siqqee* or *lookkoo*, (wooden scepter), it communicated not only her power but her sacrality. A physical or verbal attack made against her while she carried these items was tantamount to war.

For young men during the time of *Raaba-Doorii*, *maadiicha* worn on the neck, both wrists and upper arm showed a man's status as a hero. The number of pieces he wore at each site is indicative of the number of lives taken either with his weapons or with his own hands. Female warriors also wore *maadiicha* to show their status as killers, but they wore the leather tied on the forehead, called *dbihee*, accompanied by an ostrich feather. If a female warrior merely maimed or cut someone, the leather tie encircled her ankle. To show that her father, brother, and husband were warriors, she wore *maadiicha* on her upper arm.

In each of these cases, *maadiicha* can function as a metonym for the protective power of the slaughtered animal or the death of an enemy. During the rule of Menilek, informants state that the *maadiicha* was worn by both men and women for its talismanic capacity in

the face of much anxiety (M. R. A., personal communication, February 20, 2000). The most potent leather from which to make *maadiicha* during the reign of Menilek came from the dried skin of the horses used by his Amhara soldiers (S. M. G., personal communication, February 25, 2000). In this sense, the destructive ability of the horse and rider is harnessed in the leather tie in much the same way that the *sabbata* is used to keep out potential harm and propagate harmonious relations.

While the *maadiicha* necklace was still being worn during Menilek's reign, a time when clothing of cotton weave had already replaced women's soft leather dresses, it has fallen into disuse today in favor of other types of necklaces, alerting us to the fact that fashion, no less than identity, is always in a state of flux.

CONCLUSION

During the late nineteenth century women revived a historic item of men's dress associated with violence and tied it in place of the *sabbata*. The wearing of *harrü* was later replaced by *sinnaara* by men and less frequently women. Whether wearing *harrü*, *sabbata* or *maadiicha*, made from the skin of the enemy's horse, dress is tied onto the body. This tying is a deliberate act intended to secure the ideology of war on the body, to prepare and protect it from danger, or to alert others to one's intent. Even as new materials, colors, and forms continue to change dress styles for men and women today, the act of tying continues to seal and conceal that which is most revered.

Women describe this historical period in which their foremothers became warriors as a time of great

violence and chaos (Z.A. February 20, 2000, M. R. A., personal communication, February 20, 2000, R. M. O., personal communication, March 6, 2000). An Oromo proverb states: While the father is a tree outside, the mother is the center-post for the house (*Abban muka alaati, ayyoon utubaa manaati*) (Klemm 2002: 196). With the influx of social, political, religious, and economic changes brought about during the Egyptian presence and the Abyssinian invasion of Oromo lands, women's dress and what women wore was strategically used to invoke ethnic connections as well as to signal hostile relationships. The fact that certain dress types, like *maa-diicha*, have survived through the Egyptian upheaval and the ensuing incorporation of Harer into the Ethiopian empire suggests that a woman's decorated body serves as a vehicle through which the past can be selectively invoked, particularly at moments of crisis when identity is threatened.

NOTES

1. Caulk writes that Menilek's invasions of Oromo land in the late nineteenth century "parallel in their consequences the conditions created by contemporary acquisition of distant territories and peoples by the European powers." (1971: 1). The intentional use of the terms 'conquest' and 'colonization' here to indicate the experiences of subjugation under Abyssinia as a colonial state, terms often reserved for European domination and forced rule over non-European nations has since the writing of Caulk become commonplace in scholarly writings on the Oromo. For further justification for the use of the term 'conquest' in this context and the common features of colonialism see Bulcha

- (1988: 35-61). Holcomb and Ibssa devote a chapter to this topic (1990: 1-26), defining colonialism in the Ethiopian context (p.19).
2. Paulitschke estimates the Oromo populations he encountered to be as follows: 40,000 Noole, 60,000 Jarso, 100,000 Ala, 50,000 Ittuu, and 20,000 Anniya (1888a: 50).
 3. While the number of cattle here is based on the Noole *beera*, and therefore approximate since it may change from one region to the next, the value ratio of the woman's breast is fixed among all Afran Qallo.
 4. Prior to the rule by the Ethiopian state, *kbat* was not a widespread crop among Afran Qallo Oromo farming communities (Ezekiel Gebissa 2004:42-7). Hareri tradition states that after the Battle of Calanqoo where many Hareri men perished, "their widowed wives, unable to tend to the chat, took the Kotus [Oromo] as tenants. The Kotus [Oromo] thus had the chat in their hands, and many gave the chat to their relatives to grow; thence the spread of chat on a widespread basis began." (Krikorian and Getahun 1973: 356). Oromo I spoke with maintain that they did chew *kbat* before Calanqoo, but it was reserved for holy men and *wadaja*, prayer ceremonies, where it could only be consumed by men and women over the age of forty.
 5. To be Amhara, as is the case among many ethnic groups, is therefore not a fixed ethnic category based on biological descent but is a fluid cultural construct based largely on language, religion and cultural practice including dress.

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ORATURE, RESISTANCE,
AND NATIONALISM:
A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE
DEVELOPMENT OF WRITTEN OROMO
LITERATURE¹

Mohammed Hassen

With over thirty five million speakers, the Oromo language is the third largest indigenous language in Africa after Hausa in Nigeria and Kiswahili in eastern Africa.² It is also the third largest Afro-Asiatic language in the world after Arabic and Hausa.³ The Oromo language has a rich oral literature deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the *gadaa* system, the traditional democratic political system of the Oromo. According to Fayisa Demie, Oromo “oral literature is rich in folktales, stories, songs, and poems, and [it] is passed from one generation to another by elders.”⁴ It reflects the Oromo view

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of the universe and their place in that universe, and many aspects of the daily lives of its speakers. It is also the treasure house of Oromo history.

Even though much of the recent history of Ethiopia unfolded in the southern parts of the country, mainly on Oromo land, the Amhara and Tigray of northern Ethiopia figured more prominently in earlier renditions of Ethiopian history than the Oromo and other peoples of southern Ethiopia. Of all the many Ethiopian languages, only Amharic and Tigranya have been described as “the virtually exclusive carriers of Ethiopian civilization, literature and intellectual prestige”.⁵ Thematically, written Ethiopian literary tradition reflected an intense anti-Oromo prejudice, which was deeply rooted in the Abyssinian society.⁶ Thomas Zitelmann, who has done extensive work on Oromo studies, contends that the Oromo language had an image of the “devil’s tongue” in the old Christian tradition of the Ethiopian Empire.⁷ This prejudice, despite the fact that the Oromo had complex cultural, religious and democratic political institutions, fabricated unsubstantiated myths and untruths about the Oromo who were arbitrarily relegated to a lower stage of material culture, thus becoming a people who needed the “civilizing mission” of their Abyssinian neighbors.⁸

After the conquest and colonization of Oromia (the Oromo country) beginning in the 1880s, the Oromo language went from being the language of government, business, education, and high culture to being depicted as the language of darkness, ignorance, and backwardness. For the most part, the underdevelopment of Oromo literature is attributable to the Amharization policy of successive Ethiopian govern-

ments over the last one hundred years. These governments both neglected and actively suppressed the development of Oromo literature. As a consequence, the Oromo language remained not only one of the least studied languages, but it also lacked a “developed [written] literature and has less printed materials than any language with a comparable number of speakers.”⁹

Nevertheless, contrary to long held misconceptions, the Oromo were not unfamiliar with the value of the written word. Since the fourteenth century, the Oromo have lived as neighbors among the region’s Christian and Muslim societies, who held written words in reverence. After their conversion to either Islam or Christianity, the Oromo also held written words in reverence. As will be shown later in this article, the Oromo used both Arabic and Ge’ez (an Ethiopic writing system) to develop written religious literature in Oromo.

The influence of Oromo intellectuals has grown steadily since the nineteenth century. Indeed, the development of an educated class among the Oromo, both Muslims and Christians, has been the decisive factor in developing and shaping written Oromo literature. In the course of the development of Oromo literature, the year 1991 saw the birth of a new phenomenon. For the first time “since Ethiopia was forged as a nation”¹⁰ during the 1880s, it was in 1991 that Oromo intellectuals aggressively embarked on producing literature in the Oromo language without fear of retribution. This was occasioned by the collapse of the Ethiopian state which up to that moment had relentlessly suppressed the development of literature in languages other than Amharic.¹¹ The adoption of the Latin alphabet, known as *Qubee* in Oromo, galvanized Oromo intellectuals to

write in their language and became a testament to the empowering production of written Oromo literature.

This article explains why written Oromo literature grew unevenly up to 1974, increased modestly between 1974 and 1990, and more rapidly after 1991. My discussion focuses on how Ethiopian government policies stunted the development of written Oromo literature, and what the educated Oromo did to counter those policies. It will highlight the work of Oromo intellectuals in supporting and providing protection for teaching in their own language, despite the ban on Oromo language as a language of instruction.¹² In this connection, I highlight the work of a remarkable scholar who invented an Oromo writing system for the purpose of teaching in the Oromo language. By force of their ideas and depth of their commitment, the educated Oromo claimed intellectual space for themselves and contributed to the development of written Oromo literature.

TOWARDS WRITTEN OROMO LITERATURE

The origin of writing in the Oromo language can be traced back to the eighteenth century. However, the development of written Oromo literature started in earnest in the nineteenth century. Both Arabic and Ethiopic scripts were used. The Oromo in Wallo were the first to be converted to Islam and to use the Arabic script for writing in the Oromo language. Interestingly, they also used Ethiopic scripts for the same purpose.¹³ Muslim Oromo scholars in Wallo not only challenged the Abyssinian monopoly of literary tradition, but also contributed the development of a literary tradition that became the basis for Muslim education there. Wallo gradually became northern Ethiopia's main center

of learning not only for the Oromo, but also for its Amharic and Tigrinya-speaking populations.¹⁴ In this regard, Wallo parallels the role played by Harer, which served as the center of diffusion of Islam to the southern and southwestern Ethiopia. Muslim scholars not only indigenized Islam in Wallo, but also started an original form of Islamic poetry known as *ajam* (oral or written literature in Oromo or Amharic languages), “which forms an important body [of] literature.”¹⁵

Islamic poetry in Wallo allowed Muslim scholars to inject the Oromo into the world of Islam and made its early history intelligible to them.¹⁶ According to Hussein Ahmed, in Wallo the Oromo “helped to change the status of Islam from that of a religion of disparate communities to that of a dynastic ideology relevant to the entire region.”¹⁷ In other words, Muslim Oromo scholars transformed Islam from being simply a religion into an ideology of resistance against Christian territorial expansion, political domination, religious persecution, and economic exploitation.¹⁸ According to an unpublished manuscript of the late Abba Jobir Abba Jifaar, the last King of Jimma and a noted traditional historian, “Wallo was the land of Muslim saints who were the mountain of knowledge.”¹⁹ Certainly Wallo produced a good number of those who spread Islam among the Oromo living in other parts of Ethiopia. Wallo also produced militant religious leaders, who put up heroic resistance against the Christian forces during the 1870s and after. Among these, Sheik Talhah, a religious leader and a prolific scholar, was the most militant. He was a distinguished teacher, a celebrated organizer, and a brilliant and resourceful leader.²⁰ Just as “Christianity and Abyssinia were synonymous”²¹ for

the Christian leaders of the time, Islam and Wallo were synonymous for Sheik Talhah, who declared jihad in defense of his religion. His jihad initially “achieved spectacular success by inflicting devastating losses in men and property upon the forces of [Emperor] Yohannes’s commanders”.²²

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Muslim Oromo states of the Gibe region (Jimma, Gera, Gomma, Gumma and Limmu) were using the Arabic script widely for writing in the Oromo language.²³ At the time, the Oromo language was the language of correspondence for all the Oromo kings and queens and it was also the language of education, law, high culture, business, and governmental administration. Until the conquest and colonization of Oromia, the Oromo language remained the language of government in thirteen Oromo states within the region of what is today Ethiopia. There were six Muslim Oromo states in Wallo (the Arreloch, the Warra Himano, the Yajju, the Qaalluu, the House of Gattiroch and the Boorana),²⁴ two in Wallaga (Leeqaa Naqamtee and Leeqaa Qellam).²⁵ The Oromo language was also the language of governance among the numerous small Oromo “*gadaa* republics” in southern Ethiopia. During the nineteenth century the Oromo language was the lingua franca of trade in many parts of southern Ethiopia.

Muslim Oromo scholars produced a very limited literature in their own language. These scholars had an exceptional reverence for Arabic, the language of the Qur’aan and of the Prophet. Accordingly most of their religious literature, including poetry, was written in Arabic. In Wallo, Muslim Oromo scholars produced religious literature in Amharic language. The use of

Arabic and Amharic languages for production of religious literature deprived the Oromo language of a golden opportunity to develop its own written literature. Even so, both religious and secular poetry were produced in the Oromo language itself.

Poetic verses in the Oromo language deal with “the glorification of the deeds and characteristics of particular saints, the Prophet Muhammad, and Allah”.²⁶ The most celebrated Muslim saint among the Oromo was the famous thirteenth century Islamic standard-bearer, Sheik Hussein of Bale, whom the Oromo call Nur Hussein. The following song, which depicts death and the grave in lugubrious pictures, is an example of religious poetry that venerates Nur Hussein.

When my soul will...depart from my body,
And the angel looks at her
And will say to her ‘turn to your path’
When my fate will be discussed
Mercy! Oh Nur Hussein!
When I will be wrapped with funeral sheet
When they transport me [to my grave]
When I will be separated from my friends
When I will be thrown away alone
Mercy! Oh Nur Hussein!²⁷

Secular poetry was also produced among the Oromo especially in the Gibe region. The following song is an example of secular poetry, which the Afkala, as Oromo merchants were known in the region, sung during their regular marches up and down the course of the Gibe River and beyond. The song depicts how the Oromo merchants viewed poverty.

In summer then even make the dust rise;

In winter they even trample the mud!
If they talk with the dark maiden,
And smile upon the red maiden,
Poverty will never leave them.
Poverty is a terrible disease;
It penetrates the sides,
It bends the vertebrate
It dresses one in rags,
It makes people stupid;
It makes every desire remain in the breast;
Those who are long [tall] it shortens;
Those who are short it destroys wholly.
Not even the mother that has borne [the poor
man] loves him any longer!!
Not even the father who has begotten him any
longer esteems him.²⁸

Oromo oral literature is very rich in songs. According to Sumner, the universe of Oromo songs covers “the totality of the physical world, man, animals, plants and trees, material inorganic things plus the world of artificial objects; artifacts, food and beverage, clothing.”²⁹ Love songs that express joy and sadness and “the infinitely varied shades of emotions from desire and hope to frustration and despair” hold a place in the universe of Oromo songs (Ibid. 373). The variety of expressions of love songs is only matched by their beauty and elegance. The following is an example of a long song, in which a singer pours out the inner feelings of his heart for his lover, depicting her beauty.

Her ankle looks like a cleaned root,
Her waist is slim like a whip knot
Her breasts are sharp as a spear edge,
Her fingers are as soft as whip leather,
Her waist is as soft as the master’s bed,
Her teeth are as white as cow milk,

Orature, Resistance, and Nationalism

Her lips are as thin as a cup's edge.
Her nose resembles the bamboo flute.
Her eyes aren't different from the morning sun.
The hair on her head is as long as her veil,
What a beautiful girl she is!
By what magical spell does she rob me from
my sense!³⁰

According to Enrico Cerulli, who worked extensively on Oromo literature in the early 1920s, the type of religious poetry that developed among the Muslim Oromo is similar to Muslim literature found in east Africa.³¹ He goes on to suggest the factor that hindered the flourishing of religious poetry in the Oromo language—another reason why written literature did not develop adequately among the Oromo—was the difficulty of reading the Oromo language written in either Arabic or Ethiopic scripts. Since the Arabic script consists of consonants only, it is unsuited to writing the Oromo language, which has six basic vowel qualities. It was probably because of this problem that the Muslim Oromo scholars in Wallo used Ethiopic script in addition to Arabic, even though Ethiopic script has its own shortcomings for representing the Oromo language phonetically. The difficulty of reading the Oromo language written in Arabic and Ethiopic scripts convinced one prominent Oromo scholar to declare both scripts impractical for alphabetizing the Oromo language and subsequently invent his own writing system. This will be described further below.

The first European who seriously tried to write in and about the Oromo language using the Ethiopic script was a Protestant missionary, Johann Ludwig Krapf, who lived among the Oromo from 1839 to

1842 in what is today the Shawa region. Krapf, who knew both Amharic and Oromo, tried to prepare religious literature using the Ethiopic script. He wrote:

I had hitherto used the Amharic characters [Ethiopic script], but observing that the [Oromo] language is not a Semitic one, that writing in Amharic has many inconveniences and that perhaps the Word of God may go forth from the [Oromo] to the whole of Abyssinia. I thought it would be better to use the Latin characters. I know that in using foreign characters I shall be opposed by the Abyssinian priests, who wish nothing else but the Ethiopic to be circulated.³²

Cerulli, the great Italian scholar who contributed immensely to several aspects of Oromo studies, expressed the shortcomings of Ethiopic script. He wrote: “To express the sounds of [Oromo] language with letters of the Ethiopic (Ge’ez) alphabet, which express very imperfectly even the sounds of the Ethiopian language, is very near impossible. Reading [Oromo] language written in Ethiopic alphabet is very like deciphering a secret writing.”³³

The Ethiopic script has three major shortcomings when used for the Oromo language. First, the Ethiopic script has only seven vowels as opposed to ten vowels of the Oromo language. What is more, vowels of the Ethiopic script “do not have sound representation for the Oromo language.”³⁴ Second, there is a difference in consonants and glottal stops. Finally, there is the problem of germination. In short, the Ethiopic script does not include some of the major phonological distinctions in the Oromo language, that is to say it fails to

express some particular sounds in the Oromo language. In the words of the late Professor Andrzejewski, a leading expert on the Oromo language, Ethiopic script

does not show the germination of consonants and it is ill-fitted to represent the vowel sound. In Oromo there are six basic vowel qualities and in five of them three degrees of length are distinguished, thus requiring either 16 vowel symbols or six vowel symbols together with special devices for indicating three degrees of length in five of them. Accordingly, either the present script has to be modified or an even more drastic change would be the change-over to the Latin script.³⁵

As he anticipated, when the two Christianized Oromo assistants of Krapf, namely *Debtera* Zeneb and Christian Rufoo³⁶ translated *the New Testament* into the Oromo language using the Latin alphabet, the Amhara priests were outraged.³⁷ In 1842, the Amhara priests and their leader, King Sahle Sellassie of Shawa “objected to the use of the Latin alphabet on the grounds that it will open the country for European Christianity.”³⁸ The 1842 attitude was nourished by the desire to establish the Shawa Amhara Empire.

Another person who contributed to the beginning of scholarship on the Oromo was Karl Tutschek, a German law student. According to Mekuria Bulcha, “Tutschek was employed in 1838 as a tutor of four young ex-slaves....one of them was an Oromo named Akkafedhee.”³⁹ Tutschek learned the Oromo language from Akkafedhee and two other Oromo ex-slaves who arrived in Germany sometime between 1839 and 1840. Based on the materials he gathered from the three

Oromos, “Tutschek was able to complete by 1843 his first draft of [an] Oromo-English-German dictionary.”⁴⁰ After Karl Tutschek’s untimely death, his manuscripts were organized and published by his brother in 1844 as *The Dictionary of the Galla Language* and *A Grammar of the Galla Language*. The books “introduced the Oromo language to the European world of scholarship.”⁴¹ Tutschek also collected 208 poems from his Oromo associates, transcribed them, “intended to translate them into German and to explain them, but he died before starting this work.”⁴²

ONESIMOS NASIB AND THE GROWTH OF OROMO LITERATURE IN WALLAGA

Onesimos Nasib was born around the mid-1850s in Ilu Abba Bor (Illubabor) in western Ethiopia. While young he was captured and sold into slavery. Freed at the age of 16, he was educated at a Swedish Mission School in Massawa and later in Sweden.⁴³ Onesimos started his career teaching at a Swedish mission station near Asmara and translating scriptures. In this effort, he was joined by other young Oromo freed slaves. Among those who joined him was a remarkable woman named Aster “Ganno” Salbana, who, according to Bulcha (1993) “play[ed] an important role in laying the foundations of Oromo literature and introducing modern education and missionary work in Oromoland.” Together, they produced a spate of publication that laid a strong foundation for the development of literature. According to Bulcha: “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 trans-

lated seven books, two of them with Aster “Ganno” Salbana. He also compiled an Oromo-Swedish dictionary of some 6,000 words.”⁴⁴

In 1894, Aster and Onesimos published the 174-page *Jalqaba Barsiisaa* or the *The Oromo Reader* which contains a collection of 79 short stories. The Oromo team collected a large vocabulary with the aim of completing a dictionary and “a draft of a comprehensive Oromo grammar was prepared”⁴⁵ The crowning achievement of Onesimos was nevertheless the “complete translation of The Bible into the Oromo language in 1899.”⁴⁶ It remained the standard work and consequently “his translation of the scripture is regarded by historians and linguists as a great intellectual feat and a remarkable accomplishment for a single individual”⁴⁷. For the Amhara clergy and governors in Wallaga, however, the Bible in the Oromo language was much more than religious literature. This was because “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.”⁴⁸

Without a doubt this evangelical team could be regarded as the founders of written Christian Oromo literature. Through their work, they demonstrated the richness and wealth of the Oromo language, the mark of its maturity to meet the spiritual, educational and philosophical needs of its speakers. What makes their contribution even more significant is the fact that they were instrumental in the introduction of modern Western education among the Oromo. Aster and Onesimos returned to Oromoland in 1904 and opened a school in Najoo in Wallaga. Their school

formed the foundation for formal education in *Afaan Oromoo*. As Bulcha (1993, 12) observes, “though a very humble start, this was quite a significant achievement as it occurred [four] years before the first public school was opened elsewhere in the Ethiopian Empire, even in its capital city Addis Abeba.”⁴⁹

Education in their mother tongue appealed to and captured the imagination of every sector of the Oromo society in the region. It awakened the conscience of the rich and the powerful to provide protection and sustenance for the teachers, which, in turn, created an unquenchable thirst for education among the Oromo. It motivated the people to mobilize their resources to build schools and demand more teachers.

The success of modern education among the Oromo in Wallaga caught the Amhara clergy and governors by surprise. As the leading Protestant evangelist and an educator in Wallaga, Onesimos quickly became the target for persecution. To the Amhara clergy and political authorities in Wallaga, he symbolized Oromo defiance and rejection of their language, religion, education, and culture. Considering him “a ‘wrong’ example and a ‘bad’ influence upon the subjects,” the Amhara clergy closed down Onesimos’ school and sentenced him “to loss of all his property and imprisonment in heavy chains.”⁵⁰ Emperor Menilek freed Onesimos from imprisonment but forbade him from continuing with his teaching. He was not even allowed to teach his own children.⁵¹

Fortunately a period of succession struggle in Addis Ababa (1909-1913) led to the relaxation of restrictions imposed on the use of Oromo literature. This was followed by the short reign of *Lij* Iyassu (1913-1916), the

first Oromo prince to sit on the Ethiopian throne in the twentieth century, during which the Amhara clergy's opposition to the use of Oromo literature abated somewhat. What is more:

In 1916, Lij Iyassu 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 Lidya opened a school for girls. The relaxation of restriction on the use of Afaan Oromoo for missionary and educational and religious work also meant a wider circulation of Oromo literature in Wallaga.⁵²

This was made possible partly because of the comparatively liberal policy of *Lij* Iyassu and partly because the relatively autonomous Oromo governors of Wallaga showed considerable interest in the continuation of modern education in the Oromo language. They supported the Swedish Evangelical Mission, which provided education in the Oromo language.⁵³

After the deposition of *Lij* Iyassu in 1916, the pressure from the Amhara clergy and political authorities to stunt the development of written Oromo literature increased. This was because literature in the Oromo language was seen by the Amhara political establishment as a symbol of a proud Oromo identity. Bulcha has written that, from the Amhara elite's perspective, "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."⁵⁴

During the short-lived period of the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941), there was significant progress in the development of Oromo literature. Oromo folktales, grammar books and dictionaries were published. The Italians even introduced an Oromo radio program and allowed the Oromo language to be used for instruction in primary school level and in the court system all over Oromo territory. The Italians undertook these measures in a futile effort to weaken Oromo resistance. Their effort, of course, did not dampen Oromo resistance or buy them Oromo loyalty.⁵⁵

Upon his return to power in 1941, the first thing Emperor Haile Selassie did to counter Oromo nationalism was to stop Oromo language radio programs and ban the use of the Oromo language schools and in the court system. In the new political dispensation,

Amharic was promoted as the sole national language of the empire and all other national languages, particularly the Oromo language, 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.⁵⁶

The Amhara ruling elite created one obstacle after another to prevent Oromo children from being edu-

cated even in Amharic language itself. Ironically, this was the same ruling elite that produced the imperial ideology of Amharization. Emmanuel Abraham, who served as the Director General in the Ministry of Education from 1944 to 1947, was accused of educating “only the [Oromo].” Emmanuel Abraham was one of the most successful Oromo who was the most loyal servant of Emperor Haile Selassie. He educated five times more Amhara than Oromo. And yet he was accused of educating only the Oromo.⁵⁷ Evidently, the Amhara ruling elite were not interested in creating an educational system to which all Ethiopian children had equal access to modern education. It was a system which was meant to advance mainly the interest of Amhara children. This was cultural chauvinism at its height. Its poisonous tentacles suffocated the development of the Oromo language. And it was precisely during this period that a brilliant Oromo scholar produced a spate of literature that enriched Oromo literature and invented an Oromo language orthography.

SHEIK BAKRI SAPALO: A SCHOLAR AND NATIONALIST

A recently published collection of Oromo poems includes some of Sheik Abubaker Usman Oda's—1895-1980 and popularly known as Sheik Bakri Sapalo—poems.⁵⁸ The power and beauty of his words, the depth of his knowledge, and his love for and dedication to the cause of his people have earned him the title of “Father of Revolutionary Oromo Poetry”⁵⁹ and made him a model for other writers to emulate. We catch a glimpse of Oromo history since the 1950s through the works of a man whose poetry,

philosophy, writing, teaching, and activism are essential to our understanding of the Oromo struggle and the development of written Oromo literature.

Abubaker had an excellent command of the Oromo, Arabic and Somali languages. He also spoke Amharic, some Hareri, and the Italian language, which he learned during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. He even taught himself how to read English.⁶⁰ He spent a total of twenty years acquiring advanced Islamic education in different parts of Harerge in eastern Ethiopia and through distance learning with Al-Azhar University of Cairo.⁶¹ After becoming sheik (teacher-scholar), Abubaker began teaching at Sapalo, his home villages, where he first established his reputation as someone deeply concerned with improving the political status of the Oromo, their cultural life, and the development of their language. As noted elsewhere,

In addition to religious education and philosophy, his teaching ranged over geography, history, mathematics, astronomy, Arabic and the composition of writings in the Oromo language. Besides teaching all the subjects in a comprehensive Islamic education, he also began to attract considerable attention to himself as an outstanding Oromo poet, and it was through the widespread appreciation of religious poetry that his name or at least a version of it came to be known over a very large area.⁶²

His teaching career spanned more than half a century and it took him to many places among the Oromo in Harerge. His travelling schools attracted students from far and near, while his poems, which still

move the Oromo to tears of joy, established him as an able literary figure. He had a mobile library, which was carried by camel wherever his travelling school went. An avid reader, his library included books on Islamic studies, science, mathematics, history, Arabic poetry, socialism, and world revolutions. He spent most of his time reading, contemplating, writing, and teaching mathematical treatises, Arabic poetry, and historical books. He translated algebra and geometry into the Oromo language.

Sheik Bakri Sapalo was a scholar of international stature and a prolific writer. Some of his major works, which deal with secular as well as religious subjects, were written in Oromo. Unfortunately, none of them were published because of the prohibition the Ethiopian government had imposed on Oromo language up to 1974. Of his eight major works, one is a study of the geography and demography of the Harerge region; the second is the study of the *gadaa* system; the third a study of Oromo history; three works deal with Islamic teaching; and the remaining two works were the biographies of his two main teachers, who had a profound impact on his intellectual growth.⁶³

Sheik Bakri's literary work expressed the aspirations of the Oromo people and served as the road map for those who sought radical social change. Some of his writings were consciously composed to raise Oromo political consciousness to end suffering and make the Oromo agents of their own liberation. His writings were infused with strong passion for the freedom and dignity of his people. Another aspect of Sheik Bakri's writings emphasized the importance of social revolutions and national liberation struggles. For instance, he

wrote powerful poems on the 1952 Egyptian revolution, the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis, the Algerian and Vietnamese revolutions⁶⁴.

Expressed under the guise of Islamic teaching, even his religious poems were wrapped in political message. They appealed directly to the Oromo to join hands against the oppressor. One of his poems called on the Oromo to join him in his jihad, which he framed, not as a religious war, but as a struggle for the development of Oromo language and culture, and for the freedom and human dignity of the Oromo people. In the eyes of his opponents, however, his call for jihad evoked the specter of an Islamic menace. This, coupled with Sheikh Bakri's growing fame and news of the invention of the Oromo alphabet which had spread among the Oromo in Harege, Bale and Arsi alarmed Ethiopian authorities and propelled them into action. According to Shantam Shubissa, who was close to Sheik Bakri and has first hand information about this development:

Top Amhara officials in the city of Dire Dawa asked him why he did not use the Ethiopian writing system. Is it to oppose our writing system that you invented your own writing system? Shaykh Bakri told the officials that he does not oppose the Ethiopian writing system, but added that it is not suitable for writing in the Oromo language. Shaykh Bakri was asked why he was writing in the Oromo language. He answered it by saying that he wanted to educate the Oromo about Islam in their own language. Since the Oromo do not know Arabic and Amharic languages, he wanted to teach them in the language they understood.⁶⁵

His answers did not satisfy the Amhara officials, who banned the use of the new alphabet and subjected its inventor to ten years of house arrest. By so doing, the Ethiopian authorities temporarily killed the chance of the new Oromo alphabet becoming a widely used and workable writing system in Harerge or other parts of Oromia.

However, the Ethiopian authorities were not able to stop, much less kill, the militancy of Sheik Bakri as a revolutionary scholar. Under house arrest, he continued to attack with his pen the oppressive Ethiopian system, which in his eyes victimized and dehumanized the Oromo. In one of his letters in his own orthography, Sheik Bakri indicted the Ethiopian administration and predicted the eventual victory of the Oromo revolution.

May this reach our children, respected key-men of the revolution...and the brave people who are in league with [you]. God be with you. ... What I want to assure you of is that you and I are engaged in a jihad[ic struggle]. I am fighting with prayer, even as you are fighting with weapons of war. Have no doubts that the objects (for which you are fighting) are well known and widely accepted. It is apparent that many people are engaged in [this] jihad day and night. Moreover, God is my witness that I have been in a jihad of prayer every night for twelve years. Indeed, for the last twenty-three years I have been earnestly teaching the people about these things. God inspired me to speak about everything you are now engaged in, and He as shown me what will come hereafter.... We have no doubt that the [enemy] will be defeated.⁶⁶

From the content of this letter it is clear that Sheik Bakri was a revolutionary nationalist who was influenced by the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist socialist ideas that swept the continent of Africa in the late 1950s and the 1960s. As an Oromo nationalist and militant scholar, he was far ahead of his time and a thorn in the side of imperial regime, which subjected Sheik to ten years of house arrest, though he was not banned from teaching and writing. Through his poetry, he encouraged Oromos to be assertive and self-reliant in their quest to develop their language as the following translation of one of his poems shows.

The language of others, he [Haile Selassie]
develops and respects
He uplifts them, along with his own, in radio
broadcasts
If they [Oromo] rise up and bravely fight
The enemy will be crushed and scattered, and
will then dissipate
All closed doors shall open up [before them]
and so will every Iron Gate⁶⁷

When the government of Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in September 1974, it must have been a moment of joy for Sheik Bakri Sapalo, as it was for the overwhelming majority of educated Ethiopians.⁶⁸ It was this hopefulness which probably inspired the outpouring of his numerous poems between 1976 and 1977. Sheik Bakri used the pages of *Bariisaa* (the first legally established weekly Oromo newspaper in Ethiopia) to widen the influence of his revolutionary poems. His poems became the model for other writers who flooded the pages of *Bariisaa* with exhilarating revolutionary poems on Oromo aspiration for freedom,

equality and self-rule. These themes are exemplified in following translation of his poem published in *Bariisaa*.

Knowing one's history opens all closed doors
For it is from history that we learn our past
independent course
Why enslave yourself for fear of human beings
Your forefathers were kings yesterday
But you have lost everything, when it is your
turn today⁶⁹

Following the Ethiopian victory over the invading Somali army in early 1978 in the Ogaden, “narrow nationalism” was declared as the main enemy of the “revolution.” Subsequently, unprecedented terror was unleashed against the Oromo in Harerge. Under the pretext of liquidating “narrow nationalists” and “reactionary” religious leaders, the Ethiopian military regime threatened to execute Sheik Bakri as it had so many prominent Muslim scholars in Harerge in 1978. He escaped with his wife to Somalia, where he died on 5 April 1980, aged eighty-five.⁷⁰ Perhaps it is not out of place to end this section with an extract from the closing lines of Sheik Mohammed Rashad's obituary poem:

Bakri is the very life of our countrymen
Consider his work and learn!
Let his spiritual greatness be in your heart
To be with you forever!
He died for the faith you embrace
He died for the country you love
One who dies for his country does not ever die
He is never lost from the heart of his people.⁷¹

Indeed Sheik Bakri's nationalist poems are still recited by Oromo nationalists. His prolific writings on a range

of subjects have made immense contribution to the development of Oromo literature.

NATIONALISM, SETBACKS, AND PROGRESS

Despite the selfless efforts of individuals such as Onesimos Nasib, Aster “Ganno” Salbana, and Sheik Bakri Sapalo, written Oromo literature made only uneven progress up to the 1970s. For instance, between 1842, when Krapf used the Latin alphabet for writing in *Afaan Oromoo*, and 1974, when the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) made the historic decision to adopt the Latin alphabet for writing the Oromo language, the scanty literature written in or on the Oromo language did not use the *qubee* script. European scholars wrote many dictionaries, grammar books and commentaries on literature.⁷² Ethiopian officials, who were unable to prevent European scholars from writing books about the Oromo people and their language, still discouraged the use of these books for educational purposes. From 1942 to 1972 “[*Afaan*] Oromo was denied any official status and it was not permissible to publish, preach, teach, or broadcast in Oromo. In court or before an official an Oromo had to speak Amharic or use an interpreter. Even a case between Oromos, before an Oromo-speaking magistrate, had to be heard in Amharic.”⁷³

Throughout its existence, Emperor Haile Selassie’s regime did everything to undermine the growth of written literature in the Oromo language. Consequently, “Oromo literature was not only banned, but most of what was already available was collected and destroyed.”⁷⁴ The period from 1942 to 1974 was also the time when the program of de-Oromoization was intensified, through the educational system, cultural

institutions, and governmental bureaucracy. As Bulcha observes, “The school was designed to inculcate Ethiopian patriotism in Oromo children by stripping them of their language, their culture and their identity. It remains 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.”⁷⁵

In the schools, nothing positive was taught about the Oromo as a people, their history their culture, or their way of life. Oromo children were not only “‘fed’ negative biases against everything that was Oromo,”⁷⁶ but they were also made to feel that their culture and history were not worthy of study. In other words, Emperor Haile Selassie’s policy toward the Oromo assumed a multi-dimensional thrust, banning Oromo literature while simultaneously intensifying the program of Amharization through the school system.

Ironically, it was the educated Oromo, those who were supposed to have been Amharized, who first formed an organization to challenge Emperor Haile Selassie and expose the hollowness of his Amharization policy. This defiance created an opportunity for the growth of Oromo literature. From this perspective, nothing is more central to the growth of Oromo literature than the birth of Oromo national movements. In fact, it is almost impossible to separate the growth of Oromo literature from the growth of Oromo nationalism. Oromo nationalism found organizational expression in the Macca-Tuulama Association (1963-67). The formation of this association was a milestone in modern Oromo history, because it clearly articulated the basis of Oromo nationalism, the identity of the Oromo nation, and aspirations of the Oromo people.

From the time this association was formed, the growth of literature on Oromo society and its history, culture, and language assumed a new dimension. For example, there was one attempt to write the history of the Oromo for which the author was executed.⁷⁷ Poems and dramas were produced in the Oromo language. The leaders of the association “addressed meetings in the language of the Oromo which had been proscribed in public.”⁷⁸ Some members of the Association produced underground papers such as *Kana Beektaa?* (*Do You Know This?*) and *The Oromo: Voice against Tyranny*.⁷⁹

Young educated members of the Macca-Tuulama Association clearly realized that colonization not only deprived the Oromo of their past but also stunted the growth of their literature. They organized underground Oromo study circles, in Finfinne (Addis Ababa) which took up the task of cultivated Oromo literature seriously. The underground study circles became a school not only for the study of Marxism (the dominant ideology among the educated youth in Ethiopia in those days) but also for the discovery of Oromo identity. This movement was connected with the formation OLF in 1974, which in turn was the real turning point in the use of the Latin alphabet for the Oromo language. The political program of the OLF “issued in October 1974, states its objective: To develop the Oromo language and bring it out of [the] neglect that colonialism has imposed upon it.”⁸⁰ For the first time since the colonization of Oromia, the revival of the Oromo language and the cultivation of its literature became an integral part of the struggle for self-determination. Thus after 1974, the question of an alphabet for writing in the Oromo language was

no longer a matter of using either Ethiopic or Arabic or even the Oromo script of Sheik Bakri for writing in the Oromo language. The Latin alphabet was adopted to revolutionize the production of literature in Oromo.

Between 1975 and 1980 several new journals appeared in the Oromo language using the *qubee* alphabet. In 1980 alone twelve different books for teaching *Afaan Oromo* in elementary school were produced by the Oromo Relief Association (ORA). Over one hundred thousand copies were produced in 1980 for educational purposes. During the military rule (1974-91), the use of Latin in Oromo literature was limed to areas controlled by the OLF. The collapse of the Ethiopian military regime in May 1991 and the OLF participation in the Transitional Government of Ethiopia created a propitious political environment that occasioned an explosive growth of Oromo literature. The Latin alphabet which the OLF had been using since 1974 was transformed in 1991 into *Qubee Afaan Oromoo*, which gained popularity with remarkable speed. According to one observer, "the choice of the Latin alphabet not only facilitates the teaching-learning process, and guarantees the steady growth of the language, but also contributes to the psychological liberation of the Oromo people."⁸¹ It also had a huge implication for the future of Oromo literature.

In 1993 and 1994, eight million copies of fifty-eight textbooks were published in the Oromo language.⁸² There is no doubt whatsoever that encouraging progress has been made in the development of the Oromo language since the 1970s. This can be shown in five areas. First, there has been progress in the publication of dictionaries, to mention just a few, which includes,

Gene Gragg's *Oromo Dictionary*,⁸³ Tilahun Gamta's *Oromo-English Dictionary of 1989*,⁸⁴ and his 2004 *Galme Afaan Oromoofi Afaani Ingilizii, (Comprehensive Oromo-English Dictionary)*,⁸⁵ Mahdi Hamid Muudee's *Oromo Dictionary Volume I*,⁸⁶ Elias Aberra's *Oromo Medical Dictionary*.⁸⁷ Ibssa Guutama's *Qooqaa Addaa Afaan Oromoo (Special Oromo Dictionary)* of 2004,⁸⁸ Tamene Bitima's *A Dictionary of Oromo Technical Terms* of 2000,⁸⁹ and Ton Leus's *Aadaa Boranaa: A Dictionary of Boranaa Culture* published in 2006.⁹⁰ Secondly, progress was also made in the publication of grammar books in the Oromo language. These include, *Hirmaata Dubbii Afaan Oromo* produced by the Oromo Students Study Group in Europe in 1973.⁹¹ The group "made a major contribution both to our knowledge of the Oromo grammar and to the discussion on how the Oromo language should be written. They were pioneers in developing and using the Latin alphabet."⁹² The book goes beyond its contribution to the knowledge of Oromo grammar. It was the first major work in the Oromo language written in the Latin alphabet and published before 1974. It also likely influenced the OLF's decision to adopt the Latin alphabet for the Oromo language. Other published books in the field of grammar include Jonathan Owens' *A Grammar of Harer Oromo*,⁹³ Abdul-samad Muhammad's *Seerlugaa Afaan Oromo*,⁹⁴ Tilahun Gamta's *Seera Afaan Oromo*⁹⁵ and Abiyyuu Galataa's *Galma Afaan Oromoo*.⁹⁶ Catherine Griefenow-Mewis and Tamene Bitima have published on the Oromo language in German scholarly production.⁹⁷

The third area of progress was in the publication of Oromo oral literature. In this regard, Claude Sumner of Addis Ababa University has made seminal

contribution. In the first volume of his *Oromo Wisdom Literature*,⁹⁸ Sumner not only explores the richness of Oromo oral literature but also the source of its vitality. He writes: “It is very clear that the typical images of Oromo oral literature are taken mostly from the life and work of a pastoral and agricultural society, like, ‘animals’ and farm life, they are also taken from family life and social...gatherings and from the necessities and hazards of human life, like clothing and illness.”⁹⁹

In the second volume,¹⁰⁰ Sumner classifies Oromo songs according to literary genres: “love songs, heroic ‘historical’ pastoral, festive and religious, satirical, gnomic songs, and songs belonging to multiple literary types.”¹⁰¹ Of the numerous songs that fill the pages of his book, it is love songs, “whose variety of expressions is only matched by their beauty.”¹⁰² Sumner writes of the love songs genre:

Through its sincerity, its moving personal tone, its occasional hyperbolic character, it appeals strongly to the human heart. Lovers cannot sleep at night; they admit their utter failure, they cry, they even hiccup for pain. Love reduces a girl to thinness; it is a sickness without medicine, an agony. It is compared to wood burning in a fire, to pangs of child-birth.... love is all leaves and no root. Tears fill five or nine cups!¹⁰³

In his third volume of *Oromo Wisdom Literature*,¹⁰⁴ Sumner gathered ninety-two Oromo folktales, translating them into English from Oromo French, German, Italian languages. He systematically identifies Oromo folktale into “[a] historic legend- mythic legend- aetiological tale-table.”¹⁰⁵ This demonstrates the original-

ity of the Oromo folktale and Oromo tradition of storytelling. In the process Sumner has enriched our knowledge and deepened our appreciation for Oromo oral literature.

An able Oromo writer, Mengesha Rikitu, has published *Oromo Folk-Tales*¹⁰⁶ which includes eighteen short stories. In his *Oromo Oral Treasure for a New Generation*,¹⁰⁷ he preserves “some of the riches and wisdom of the elders for future generations.” His *Oromo Language Lesson*¹⁰⁸ offers lessons in Oromo literature written in the Latin alphabet. Mengesha Rikitu’s greatest contribution to our knowledge of Oromo literature is his latest book, *Oromia Recollected*¹⁰⁹ which epitomizes the richness of Oromo culture. He states that “the Oromo elders’ knowledge is a valuable resource, comparable to a library, and when the Oromo family or community loses an old member, it is like part of a library being destroyed.”¹¹⁰ He goes on to say that:

In Oromo culture, speech and song[s] are the dominant modes of artistic expression. Prayers and blessings are commonplace and constitute important features of daily life. Poems are recited or sung at all social gatherings; at religious festivals, weddings, birth-ceremonies feasts, co-operative works and are also important in daily work. Myths and tales are told at parties or when the family is gathered in the evening.¹¹¹

In terms of publication of Oromo oral literature, the book of Fr. George Cotter and the Maryknoll Fathers is a welcome addition to the growing literature both in *Afaan Oromo* and English language.¹¹²

The fourth area of progress is in publication of novels and short stories in the Oromo language. I do not claim to do justice to this genre without producing an annotated bibliography of these books. Here I focus only on selected works of Dhaba Wayyessa, a prolific author who has published two novels and numerous plays. His two novels are *Gurraacha Abbayaa*¹¹³ and *Godaannisa*.¹¹⁴ *Gurraacha Abbayaa* is based primarily on the Gumuz nationality, who live around the Abbay River (the Blue Nile) which is known among the Oromo in the region as Abbayaa. The novel deals with Gumuz culture and their way of life. It is the work of love, adventure, vendetta, hatred, etc. among the people in their daily interaction with each other. It is a tragic story of how innocent individuals can be victims of traditional values and suffer for crimes they did not mean to commit. By far the most significant of Dhaba Wayyessa's works in this genre is *Godaannisa*, which is based on the hardships of life—treachery, betrayal, and deprivation. Both of Dhaba's novels express his profound knowledge of the Oromo language, the beauty of which he was able to harness to produce a powerful novel. Without a doubt Dhaba Wayyessa has emerged as the finest author and playwright in *Afaan Oromoo*.

The fifth area of transitory progress was in the start of new magazines in *Afaan Oromoo*. They included, *Gada*, *Biiftu*, *Madda Walaabuu*, *Odaa*, and *Urjii*. Unfortunately, the publications which flourished between 1992 and 1997 have now disappeared because of governmental pressure. For instance, *Urjii* magazine started only in 1997 and closed down in the same year when its editors were detained by the government. The disappearance of those magazines has been a setback

for the development of an Oromo literary culture and a terrible blow to the standardization of the Oromo language itself.

On balance, between 1991, when the *qubee* alphabet was adopted and 1997, when the Ethiopian government banned several publications, Oromo literature experienced a renaissance of sorts. According to Kifle Djote,

Even more works of translation, as well as essays and novels have been completed, and piles of manuscripts are laying everywhere awaiting publication. Oromos everywhere are flocking in unbelievably great numbers to attend evening language classes on the use of Qubee and on Oromo history and culture. The impact this is having within society is such that even non-Oromos are gradually being convinced to join and attend classes themselves of their free will. This is the simple phenomenon and comes as vivid illustration of how Oromo language, despite everything, is making its influence felt within society. It is interesting to note that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church itself has of late organized a church choir of Oromo singers.... This is a dramatic departure from the past when the Oromo language was considered too profane to be used by the church. Recent developments have also prompted Protestant churches to conduct services and sermons in Oromo language.¹¹⁵

Despite governmental pressure, encouraging progress has been made in the development of the Oromo language since the 1970s. The new Oromo literature cultivates a feeling of pride and a sense of belonging to a nation. Overall, Oromo literature since 1991 reflects the joy and sorrow, the strength and weakness, conflict

and harmony, unity and diversity of Oromo society. Critically examined, the new literature expresses profound Oromo yearning for a return to the *gadaa* democracy, the egalitarian ethos of Oromo society, and the deeply revered moral values of commitment to justice, self-discipline, and human dignity. Collectively, it also articulates Oromo aspirations for self-determination. The focus of the new literature is on the Oromo as a people, the greatness and tragedy of their history and their place in the future political landscape of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

NOTES

1. A good deal of information for this article is based on my previously published papers: "A Brief Glance at the Torturous Development of Written Oromo literature," in *The Road Less Traveled: Reflection on the Literature of the Horn of Africa*, ed. Ali Jimale Ahmed and Tadesse Adera (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2008), 207-244; "A Brief Glance at the History and Growth of Written Oromo Literature," in *Cushitic and Omotic languages: Proceeding of the Third International Symposium*, eds. Catherine Griefenow-Mewis and Rainer M. Voigt (Koln: Rudiger Koppe Verlag, 1996), 249-270; and "Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo (1895-1980): A Prolific Scholar and Great Oromo Nationalist," *Journal of Oromo Studies* 10:1 & 2 (2003): 135-178. I am deeply indebted to Ezekiel Gebissa for editing and improving the argument of this article.
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12. Tamene Bitima, *A Dictionary of Oromo Technical Terms* (Kolan: Rudiger Koppe Verlag, 2000), 11.
13. Hussein Ahmed, "Clerics, Traders and Chiefs: a Historical Study of Islam in Wallo (Ethiopia) With Special Emphasis on the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, UK, 1985), 388-389.
14. Mohammed Hassen, "Islam as an Ideology of resistance among the Oromo in Ethiopia" *American Journal*

- of Islamic Social Sciences. Special Issue Islam in America* 26: 3 (2009): 91.
15. Alula Pankhurst, "Indigenising Islam in Wallo: *Ajam*, Amharic verse written Arabic Script," in *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 2, eds., *Babru Zewde*, Richard Pankhurst and Taddese Beyene (Addis Abeba: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1994), 259.
 16. Hassen "Islam as an Ideology," 92.
 17. Ahmed, "Clerics, Traders and Chiefs,"119.
 18. Mohammed Hassen, "Islam as Resistance Ideology among the Oromo in Ethiopia: The Wallo Case, 1700-1900,"in *In the Shadow of Conquest: Islam in Colonial Northeast Africa*, ed. Said Samatar, (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1992), 77.
 19. Abba Jobir, "History of the Kingdom of Jimma, Other Gibe States and the Oromo," (Unpublished and undated manuscript in the author's possession), 11. The author of this article interviewed Abba Jobir Abba Dula, the last King of Jimma, on June 11 and 12, 1982 in Mecca, Saudi Arabia).
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 22. Ahmed, "Clerics, Traders, and Chiefs," 344.
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 24. Ahmed, "Clerics, Traders and Chiefs," 268-272.
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 34. Demie, "Special Features," 25.
 35. B. W. Andrzejewski, "Some Observations on the Present Orthography of Oromo." *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Joseph. Tubiana (Rotterdam: A.A. Balkema, 1980), 127.
 36. Gustav Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: The Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Uppsala: EFS forlaget, 1978).
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 38. Mohammed Hassen and Richard Greenfield, "The Oromo nation and Its resistance to Amhara Colonial Administration" *Proceedings of The First International Congress of Somali Studies*, eds. Hussein M. Adam and Charles L. Gesheker (Atlanta: Scholar Press, 1992), 555.
 39. Bulcha, "Language, Ethnic Identity," 9.

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Claude Sumner, *Oromo Wisdom Literature Volume I, Proverbs: Collection and Analysis* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation 1995), 5.
43. Bulcha, "Language, Ethnic Identity," 10. In my brief discussion of the development of written literature among the Oromo in Wallaga, I have drawn heavily on the pioneering works of Makuria Bulcha, who has enriched our knowledge of Oromo society and widened or understanding of the Oromo language policy of the successive Ethiopian governments through his book and a number of published articles in *The Oromo Commentary* and the *Journal of Oromo Studies*.
44. Bulcha, "Language, Ethnic Identity," 10.
45. Ibid., 11.
46. Ibid.
47. Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers*, 385.
48. Bulcha, "Language, Ethnic Identity," 11.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid, 12.
51. Ibid, 13.
52. Ibid, 14.
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54. Bulcha, "Language, Ethnic Identity," 13.
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57. Abraham, *Reminiscences*, 64.

58. Mahdi Hamid Muudee, *Walaloo Bariisaa* (Atlanta: Sagalee Oromoo Publishing Co., 1996), 135-147.
59. *Ibid.*, 148.
60. Interview with Muhammad Abraham Waday (popularly known Shantam Shubissa), 50 years old. May 31 and June 1, 1998, Atlanta. He also gave me some inaccessible poems of Sheik Bakri Sapalo. I am indebted to him for this and much more. I use this name hereafter.
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62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*, 552.
64. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
65. Interview with Shantam shubissa, June 1, 1998.
66. Hayward and Hassan, 565.
67. Mahdi Haamid Muudee, *Oromo Dictionary, Volume 1, English-Oromo* (Atlanta: Sagalee Oromoo Publishing Co., 1995), XXVI. For more of Sheik Bakri's revolutionary poems, see *passim*.
68. Hayward and Hassan, 584.
69. Aliyi Khalifa, "The Life and Career of Sheikh Bakrii Saphalo (1895-1980), (BA senior essay, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 2000), 49.
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85. Tilahun Gamta, *Galme Afaan Oromoofi Afaani Ingilizii, Comprehensive Oromo-English Dictionary* (New York: Karrayyuu Publishing, 2004).
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87. Elias Aberra, *Kuussagale Surrogoricchaa [Oromo Medical Dictionary]* (Kuopio, Finland: Kuopio University Printing Office, 1995).
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95. Tilahun Gamta, *Seera Afaan Oromoo* (Finfinnee: Addis Ababa, 1995).
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99. Claude Sumner, *Oromo Wisdom Literature Volume I, Proverbs: Collection and Analysis* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation 1995), 352.
100. Claude Sumner, *Oromo Wisdom Literature Volume II, Songs: Collection and Analysis* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 1997).
101. Sumner *Oromo Wisdom Literature*, 1997, 36.
102. *Ibid.* 30.
103. *Ibid.* 33.

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“PUTTING DOWN”
WOMEN WITH MALE ORATORY:
AN ANALYSIS OF AN ORAL POETIC FORM
AMONG THE BOORANA OROMO

Fugich Wako

This paper analyzes a form of Boorana oral poetry known as *dhaamaa* that is normally performed by men to speak about women whom they deem to be ‘miscreant.’ The genre is ideally recited in order to ridicule women during the *korma-korbeessaa* (bull/he-goat) ritual. This ritual that contextualizes *dhaamaa* is carried out either by the age-set (*harriyaa*) or the entire eligible male population within a locality (*dbeeda*). According to Leus (1995), *korbeessa harriyaa* is a he-goat sacrificed by members of the same age group when they come together to celebrate the unity of the age-set. On the other hand, *korbeessaa dbeeda* is the he-goat killed to ask for *kayo* (good luck) by the people of a particular area. Whether performed by the age-set or the men in a particular location, the overrid-

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ing feature is that the rite of the bull/he-goat is a male activity that primarily serves as an act of supplication, seeking the blessing of *Waaqa* (the Oromo supreme deity) for the members of the community.

As in other ritual performances, the participating group is first separated from the society and acquires its own individuality. Its members do not re-enter society until after the performance of rites, which removes that temporary individuality and reintegrates them into the society (see Van Gennep 1960:39). This male ritual excludes females and as part of this exclusion and separation, the ritual is held overnight. Male heroic songs are sung, where the heroic deeds of men who have killed trophy animals and human enemies are recounted and lauded in keeping with the ethos of manhood in the Oromo culture.

Male heroes, who are the envy of society, paint their faces with ochre at this ceremony as a mark of their heroic accomplishments. The ceremony thus serves, in part, to separate the male and female worlds, not just at the biological level but also at the social one. As in other societies, such a separation is a symbolic means of highlighting both social differentiation as well as bringing together distinct and opposing segments of the community (Brandes 1980). The ochre decorated man is deemed to be more masculine than his fellow effeminate men who have not been associated with martial heroic acts. In the past, having emasculated an enemy by cutting his genitals to demonstrate bravery, he is a more complete, fulfilled and irreproachable male, who can be relied upon to carry out masculine tasks of asserting and defending maleness, a notion that *dhaawaa* depicts.

After nightlong celebration, jesting, feasting, and singing heroic songs, the participants take the bull/he-goat out into the bush in the morning during which time some men go into a trance. After performing the necessary rites, the party returns to the village to perform a form of ritual assault. It is at this juncture that, traditionally, a hero from the age-set encircles the village astride a horse or mule to perform *dhaamaa*, an insulting verbal art form aimed at ridiculing women who are considered to be errant in their ways.

By far the most offensive of men’s verbal play directed at women, *dhaamaa* is a form of licensed insult aimed at women who have denigrated men. It is meant to shame the woman targeted by highlighting her dirtiness, ugliness and unattractiveness or irresponsible social behavior. In the past, the performer normally rode on a horse and encircled the village uttering the invective directed at a woman who may have arrogantly defied and insulted men.

Dhaamaa is often confused with *dhaaduu*, a similar but different genre among the Boorana. The similarities are with regard to the fact that both genres are performed by men on an occasion that demands that men assert their manliness. Both genres are indeed poetic in nature and both allude to women although the extents to which they are focused vary. The main difference, however, is in the central theme of each of the genres. *Dhaaduu*, as observed by various authors, is a poetic oral genre that narrates personal achievement. Aneesa Kassam (1986:199) refers to it as ‘rhetorical bravado.’ When a young man feels he has been insulted, usually by a woman, he goes off in a rage to obliterate the insult. In the *dhaaduu* he takes revenge on the woman

and insults her directly or indirectly in his turn, often in a rather obscene manner. In my own work (Wako 2002), I define *dbaaduu* as a personal narrative of men who in a creative way are boasting about their martial achievements. I view it as an aesthetic speech genre which emphasizes manly achievements where valor is praised, courage is upheld and cowardice is condemned. Paul Baxter (1986) has also alluded to *dbaaduu* in his analysis of Boorana oral poetry by giraffe hunters. The differences, however, are obvious to the practitioners of the Boorana cultural ways. Unlike *dbaawaa*, a man cannot recite *dbaaduu* before a woman, but only in the company of his fellow men. However, in the process of the recitation of his *dbaaduu*, he may mention in passing a woman, whose belittlement of him at one time or another, had inspired him to take up the task of asserting himself. On the other hand *dbaawaa* is simply about women and is never uttered to men. Similarly, in the course of reciting his *dbaawaa*, the man may refer to his bravery, but it is not the main focus of the genre. Contemporary *dbaawaa* however, has been dynamically transforming, a point I shall return to later. But let me first contextualize the genre theoretically.

The genre under discussion falls under what in conventional oral literature classification may be termed as joke or play. The studies on jocular forms date back to the psychologically steeped works of Herbert Spencer (1910) and Sigmund Freud (1916). They viewed joking as the socially accepted articulation of the repressed elements in the individual's unconscious. Spencer regarded laughter in terms of the need to expend energy and find relief from strain, while Freud averred that joke breaks down control,

releasing the unconscious without control, hence creating enjoyment and freedom. Modern psycho/social studies (Goldstein 1976, Chapman & Foot 1977) are grounded in the understanding that humor is an instrument of social influence, a way of self-disclosure as well as social probing since it is assumed that when the target of a joke laughs and starts his own joke, an intimate relationship has been struck.

The second strand of joke/play theory posits that joking is an important expressive means for channeling and managing potentially hostile points of social interaction. In this set of ideas, joking is conceived of as a social art form that strengthens and promotes social solidarity by safely venting aggressive feeling. The most influential proponent was the British anthropologist, Radcliffe-Brown (1940:195), who defined the joking relationship as “a relation between two persons in which one is permitted by custom and in some instances required to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence”. He observed that jokes in African communities were couched in insults and obscenities, making it a peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism. His contemporaries (Griaule 1948; Mayer 1951; Beidelman 1966) sought to establish the place of joke in African societies following his lead. For them, joking relationships created and sustained an alliance between different societies through mock insult that replaced real tribal war (Griaule 1948:20), or represented a sign of real friendship and cordiality (Mayer 1951:243).

Since *dhaamaa* is mainly performed at a rather auspicious and hence licentious social occasion of *jilla* (festival) which in scholarly circles have been studied

in terms equivalent to ritual (Turner 1969) or carnival (Bakhtin 1968, Gilmore 1998), theoretical postulations in these mold are beneficial to the analysis of this genre. Turner (1969) argued that all societies have pressure points, nodes of stress where individuals' alienation from their fellows collect. For Turner, societies impose authority and hierarchy on members, the regimentation then generate psychological tension, which requires periodic remedy. A similar point was raised earlier by Gluckman (1963:112), who argued that rites of rebellion act like a thermostatic device in tribal African societies by re-establishing the dynamic equilibrium of social order threatened by inner tension. Brandes (1980:208) suggests that carnival-like celebrations that are ordinarily perceived as highlighting social differentiation may be viewed equally well as bringing distinctive and opposing segments of a community together, thus serving as a latent mechanism for letting off steam and stabilizing the status quo.

Bakhtin (1968), on the other hand contends that the carnival celebration was marked by suspension of all hierarchical precedence and temporary liberation from the prevailing truth, a kind of overthrow of prevailing social structure. It is a moral and social inversion, where folly is the negative element of debasement and destruction and a positive element of renewal and truth converge.

An insightful analysis is that of Mary Douglas, who views humor as undermining social order, suspending or subverting forms of authority (1968, 1975). Contrasting it with what she calls ritual rite that imposes order and harmony in society, she suggests that joke disorganizes because "it attacks sense and hierarchy"

(1975:102). Douglas maintains that jokes represent a temporary suspension of social structure through denigration and devaluation of ordained patterns.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF *DHAAWAA*

Let us examine the following text as an example of *dhaawaa* that has been censored by the community, or at any rate toned down:

Akaana silaa,
Abba gurra qabadhi
Ayya gurra qabadhi
Ta cheera fokko inqamne,
Gad bai chaqafadhi
Gurra eegee si kaa,
Uddu na dura qabadhi

It is like this,
Father shut your ears,
Mother shut your ears
The one without respect,
Come out and listen
I shall insert ear and tail into you
Bring your buttocks to me

What the speaker does is to forewarn his audience, at least the ones he holds in high esteem that he will indulge in obscenities directed at “the one without respect” (line 4), meaning the miscreant woman who is lacking in respect for Boorana tradition. He invites her to witness or be present at the insults directed against her while he politely excludes the elderly members of society from listening to the invective. The insult directed at the woman targets her sexuality and it is couched in a carnal mode. As a way of demeaning her, the defiant woman has to be subjugated through male penetration.

Among the Boorana, in the past, successful hunters cut the tail and ear of the game animal killed as a symbol of success and in heroic challenge. Such hunters claimed to insert these parts of the animal into their adversaries. The woman is being defied to become a victim of this act. My consultants inform me that the community has banned such licensed performances because of their highly offensive attitudes towards women. It is now virtually impossible to record a live performance of this verbal art form. Fortunately, during my fieldwork in northern Kenya in 2001 for a larger project (Wako 2003), I came across a taped version of *dhaamaa* in Isiolo town in northern Kenya at small shop call 'Waan Digo Dansa,' literally 'Some Small Good Thing,' The shop specializes in the collection and sale of Boorana traditional songs from rural and urban areas. This particular cassette was brought, according to the shop owner, from Ethiopia. It is this version that I have selected for analysis in this paper.

Like all genres of oral literature, *dhaamaa* is dynamic and continually undergoes transformation in both form and content. One notable change is that the current version of *dhaamaa* is more generalized: it deals with issues affecting the Boorana community as a whole, and generally views women as a collective group whose actions can be evaluated and commented upon rather than identifying specific individuals to be subjected to the insults of offended men. This is shown by the way the performer in the poem below chides the women for exploiting their husbands economically under the disguise of the spirit possession known as *ayyaana*. In this recitation, he laments the impact of modernity and the way it has brought equality between the sexes.

He blames the Ethiopian *Derg* government’s policy on equality, the times in which “we are now living,” and the *ayyaana* cult as the culprits that have delivered victory to the women in contravention of the Boorana patriarchal traditional ways of life.

This oral poem was performed by Bontooraa Barraaqoo from Tertalle who contextualizes his *dhaamaa* thus:

Nami beeku na jaala haasa an ammo tephiiiti
haasa
Ak isin inwalale tephiiin hasofti
Nu korbeesi nu qaale ka Taadhi Jaattaani Bar-
raaqoo
Atu na beeta an Bontoorraa Barraaqoo
Gangeen an dhaawaan bae ta Halake Waaqoo
Gangee maqan Boora an akaan dhaawaa bae
An wakor Waaqo, galach Reero
Ijjole Karayyuu, qaqalo Sabbo
Ijjole Maalbbe, oboolles Qaabbee
Maandha Sakalaat, gurach Guyyaatu
Adda Guyyot, sooddaa Guyyo Qancooroot
Machi wakora
Macholen nam lama, nu machiin nam jaa
Karayyuu machiin warr Geddo Jillo
Tertaalle machiin Tunne Duub Jillo
Goges Boorana shanan machiin nu lubba Jillot
Mega machiin Gololch Boorruut
Tertaalle machiin Godaana Boorruut
Gar Tertaalle kesa machiin nuu ilman abba
Boorruut
Wakor machiin lama, tok machawaa ana
Machawaan Jaarsoo Lakhe Jaattaanin Naadho taa
Jaattaanin bulcha keena kibi Yaballo taa
Bulti lafa jalate nadheen kori isi baar arra qae
Mabarra taa

Waan bulti teessani hima tanaf korraa Boora
abbo Lakhe taa

People who know can recite after me; I am
going to recite to the tape recorder.
The tape “will recite, as it does not forget”
Taadhii Jaattaanii Barraaqoo donated the
he-goat that we slaughtered
You know me, I am Bontoorraa Barraaqoo
The mule I rode for *dhaawaa* is that of Halake
Waaqoo
The name of the mule is Boora; this is what I
performed in *dhaawaa*
I am from the wakora Waaqoo age-set, the
hero of galalcha¹
I come from Sabbo moiety, son of Kararayyuu
clan
The son of Maalbee, brother to Qaabaalee
Younger brother to Sakala, the dark son of
Guyyaatuu
Elder brother to Guuyyoo, brother-in-law to
Guuyyoo Qaancoorroo
The hero of the wakora age-set
Heroes are of two kinds, we are six heroes
Among the Karrayyuu clans, the family of
Geddo Jillo Aгаа are heroes
In Tertaalle Tunne, Duub Jillo is a hero
In the five Boorana generation set lines, our
Jillo Aгаа is a hero
In Mega, the hero is Gololch Boru
In Tertaalle, the hero is Godaanaa Boorruu
In the mountain of Tertaalle the heroes are we
the sons of Boorruu
There are two heroes in the wakora age-set,
one of them is I
The heroic son of Jaarssoo Lakhe Jaattaani
stays in Naadho
Jaattaani, our leader, stays in Yaballo

“Putting Down” Women with Male Oratory

They are happy with the state of governance,
womens’ meetings today are held at Mabarra²
venues

I want to talk about your lives that is why I
am sitting on the saddle of the mule of father
Halake

In this recitation, the speaker prefaces the performance by situating it within its immediate context. The occasion is one at which his age-set had slaughtered the he-goat belonging to *Taadhii Jaattaanii Barraaqoo* (line 3). The man speaks of his family, age-set, and martial achievements with the overt object of underscoring his own enviable position within this community. This serves as a kind of preemptive preface, as he is going to say provocative things about women, and he would like to assert his own credentials.

The recitation itself, a fine example of transition from tradition to modernity, evinced in the mode of transmission, is nostalgically defending “the ways of our fathers”. The speaker tacitly uses the tape recorder as a gadget that is free from faulty memory and in that sense more reliable than that of an ordinary man. He clearly understands the wider audience that the recorded recitation may reach and to this extent he is conscious of the fact that he is addressing the entire Boorana. Yet he uses the same product of modernity to chastise women for attempting to benefit from modernity. Before the introduction of the tape recorder, the kind of recitation with which he lambasts women was more or less a village affair confined to a small locality and known mostly to the age-mates and the women to whom he addressed the poem.

The speaker parades the Boorana regional and local heroes and centers himself as being one of them (lines 14-19). Each of these heroic allusions is condensed, telling their own stories familiar to the general Boorana community in fairly significant ways. For example, the family of Geddo Jillo alluded to in line 14 is the priestly clan or lineage from which the *Qaalluu* has descended from time immemorial, and Gololch Boorruu who is alluded to in line 17 was a former paramount chief who was infamous for his administrative astuteness. This reputation has been captured in many cattle songs sung by men and women (as *weedhuu* and *sirba looni* respectively), often displaying him as inimical to cattle on account of his uncompromising tax collection methods that forced people to sell their stock in large numbers.

But what is common in all these references is that the speaker draws on the male experiences and constructs men's heroism. By excluding women from the roll of the heroes in the community, the speaker metaphorically underscores the 'bigness' of the men and the 'smallness' of the women subtly without having to actually express this distinction. Hear his lament when he fears that this 'bigness' is under threat from other quarters that appear to support women:

Mabar higiti nu tolche
Qixxee bara nu tolche
Waan bara dhufe dabru nam gara jaabaat obsee
Gissen walqixxee jennan jirman nut gamtani
Idhaanide nura Jaataanin dhoowe
Jaataanin bulcha keena
Niitiin tam dhirsa jedha
Guddo aada Booranaat dhoowa

“Putting Down” Women with Male Oratory

Commune villages we are forced into them
Equality is brought by modern times
The times that have come to pass are endured
by men
When it was said that people are equal, you
want to beat us with tree stumps
Jaattaani restrained them away from us
Jaattaani our leader
believes that the wife belongs to her husband
He follows the Boorana culture

Although this oral artist primarily addresses the relationship between men and women, he also makes the subject of his concern: the unfair government policies that patronize the community by mapping out their social relationships for them. The performer attributes what he considers to be a violation of the Boorana culture that gives equal status to men and women to the government of Ethiopia and to modernity. At the same time he lauds the then provincial governor of Boorana province, the late Sebastian Jaattaani Ali³ for protecting Boorana culture from the threat of the unfavorable government policy and the vagaries of modernity.

The speaker uses the historical context of governance in his country to assess what he sees as a turning point in gender relations that threatens men's power and authority over women. Thus line 1 refers to the village commune system borrowed from the Soviet Union in the 1970s and applied to rural Ethiopia where the speaker resided. From the speaker's sentiments, it is quite clear that the system was an unpopular one decreed from above. Along with this forced way of living and in fact a necessary adjunct of communism, was the whole gamut of equality [mis]understood and executed by overzealous enthusiasts of the regime

in return for military assistance from the Kremlin. Boorana resentment of the system and the notions of equality that it promoted between the sexes are conjoined as if to say that the system came to the aid of women. But these seemingly defeated men appear to take solace from Jaattaani Ali, who though a leader in the same system, served as a vanguard of the cultural dictates of “Boorana culture”. In Jaattaani’s self-stylized ways, whatever the government stance on gender may have been, women belonged to and were subordinate to their husbands, a position that gave hope to the dejected male who bemoan the loss of power over women and threat of inflicting a beating on them (lines 4-6).

SITUATING WOMEN’S ‘DEVIANCE’ WITHIN BOORANA HISTORY

The speaker in the *dhaawaa* under review harnesses history as a device to locate what to him was the emerging tendency of women’s deviance from Boorana ways of life through time. Using the *gadaa* chronology in summing up the events, the speaker lists some of the ways in which women deviated from the conventional Boorana culture:

Gaaf shiftom gadaa Goobbaa
Eegi alat baate lakifte
Garayyun goobbu tahe
Abban beeku lakise
Gadaa Jillo Aгаа
Nadheen Boorantiti lakifte
Yo manguddoon hasoftu
Nadheen duri tak korate

“Putting Down” Women with Male Oratory

Gadaa Buullee Dhadacha korate walt baate
Gafasile woma hinduubane kaate
Gadaa Guuyyoo Boorruu nadheen Boorana
taate
Gadaa Agaa Addi garayyu banda taate
Gadaa Jaldeessa Liibani ta maan guutu taate
Gaf gadaa Madhaa kara afur gargari baate

During the banditry in Goobbaa’s reign
Women came out in support but withdrew
The lovers became multitude
The one who cares abandons them
In the period of Jillo Agaa’s reign
Women abandoned Boorana ways of life
As elders tell us
Women gathered for a meeting once
During the reign of Buullee Dhadacha they
gathered
They did not make any resolutions
In the reign of Guuyyoo Boorru they became
proper women for Boorana
In the reign of Agaa Addi they became mis-
tresses for *banda*
During the reign of Jaaldeessa Liiban they were
devoted to building huts with tufts of grass
During Madhaa’s reign, they split into four
ways

Save for one *gadaa*, (that of Buulle Dhadacha, line 9) which was between ca. 1776-1784, the speaker gives a fairly recent and accurate overview of the Boorana social history spanning half a century from 1936 to 1984. Although for purposes of poetic convenience he did not follow the chronological order of events, a recollection of the various *gadaa* reigns referred to reveals a fairly ordered recounting of the events and the women’s role as perceived by the speaker. A re-

ordering of these events begins with the period of Agaa Addi's reign that falls in 1936-44; a period during which, the speaker contends women became the mistresses of the Italian *banda*⁴ (line 12).

To understand the significance of this criticism, one must put it within the context of the historical event of the time. The Boorana who were then living on both sides of the Kenya-Ethiopia border were mainly drawn to the Ethiopian side for the purposes of watering their livestock. While an agreement was brokered and a memorandum of understanding put in place with the Ethiopian authorities as early as 1904 (Oba 2000: 93), the Italian invaders found themselves under no obligation to respect that arrangement. They, therefore, employed the ruthless *banda* irregulars from the Boorana's traditional nemesis, the Somali. They created havoc, looted stock and killed without discrimination (Oba 2000:102). Being mistresses to a group that had visited such mayhem on the Boorana community was thus regarded as base and contemptible. Women were ridiculed for being the willing victims of irregular troops (*banda*) from outside the community. The import of this criticism is that women in the eyes of Boorana have failed to pass what Gilmore in another context has called the test of "moral beauty construed as selfless devotion to national identity" (1990: 145).

In the period that follows, glossed as the *gadaa* of Guuyyoo Boorruu (line 11), which falls between 1944-52 in the Gregorian calendar, the speaker recalls that women conformed to the societal conventions as obedient wives with which he has no complaint. In the period 1952-60, the reign of Madhaa (line14),

however, they are said to have split into four different ways, which the speaker elaborates below:

Taan karra ayyaana kaate
Taan karra arjala kaate
Taan karra nagada kaate
Taan karra Safara kaate

Some took to the *ayyaana* ways
Some took to goat-herding
Some went into trade
Some adopted the Somali lifestyle

The speaker holds that by choosing to follow these divergent and alien ways, women abandoned and betrayed the Boorana traditional lifestyle. *Ayyaana* is associated with islamicized Oromo groups, goat herding is a specialty of the Rendille people, and commerce and Islam in the Boorana parlance are regarded as identity markers of the Somali people.

Line 13 comments on the events of Jaaldeessa Liiban’s reign (1960-68). The speaker underscores the fact that women were dedicated to building a certain type of house with a grass tuft on the top, which are more enduring than the simple structures built from grass and sticks. As Labelle Prussin (1995: 60) points out regarding the nomadic women of which the Boorana ones are a part, much of the woman’s creativity is directed towards setting up the physical requirements for a household, and hence the domicile is the scene of both her creativity and control. Much of the work involved in transforming the natural environment into a built environment is consequently in her hands. The main thrust of such an observation is that

the temporary house is an indicator of the willingness to migrate at short notice in search of grass and water for the sake of livestock. By insisting on the building of a relatively permanent type of house, the women are imposing a sedentary life-style on the Boorana, ill-suited for their cattle that depend on pastures availed by the rains. The prioritizing of a permanent structure defies what Prussin (1995: 44) has called the essence of nomadic architecture, whose assemblage of materials and technique derive from the same natural world. Furthermore, housing structures also define people, and a case in point is that the Boorana are called the people of grass *warraa buyyoo*, while their Gabra neighbours are called *warraa daasee*, the people of the mat (Tablino 1999), purely on the basis of the material from which their housing structures are constructed. By building the houses with a shaft on top copied from the more sedentary Amhara and Burji, women pose, in the estimation of the speaker, a threat to the Boorana identity.

The years 1968-76 fall in the era when Goobbaa Buulle was at the helm of the Boorana *gadaa* (line 1). This was also the period when Kenyan Somalis, desiring to join their kinsmen in independent Somalia, clamored for the northeastern Kenya region to secede after Kenya became independent from British rule. They shared the region with Somalis who were ardent proponents of the secession movement, whilst the majority of the Boorana did not share the sentiments of this secessionist script. This lack of sympathy on the part of the Boorana to the Somali cause, led to a protracted ethnic war between the two. According to the report by Hoskyns (1969:33), the Kenya government accused the Somali government of carrying out a campaign

of terrorism and banditry in Kenya’s Northeastern Province, armed aggression and military provocation in support of their Somali kinsmen in Kenya.

The ‘Somalization’ project under the slogan, “Somali is our language, Islam is our culture” (Hoskyns 1969:21), necessarily excluded the Boorana who neither speak the Somali language nor practice Islam in any significant way. The contention about banditry is an allegation that women, out of some misplaced sympathy for the Somali, tended to participate in it on the Somali side, something the speaker criticizes as treacherous. In view of the atrocities committed by the *banda* in the 1930s and also the traditional enmity that has persisted between them over grazing rights, it was unthinkable for the Boorana, women included, to support the Somali agitation. By contending that women supported the Somali bandits, the speaker imputes to women the perfidy of being an internal enemy that the Diido Gaawaalle legend so vividly captures and charges them with. (Diido was a legendary Boorana hero who was slain by Oboolloo, a man from the Arssi Oromo who became the lover of his wife. She betrayed her husband by revealing to her lover the time when Diido was normally unarmed. Privy to the information, Oboolloo attacked the unsuspecting gigantic man. When the latter appealed to his wife to bring him his spear and shield, the treacherous wife rolled it along to the advantage of the enemy and Diido was thus rendered vulnerable chasing after the shield and his enemy finished him off. The story became proverbial for women’s untrustworthy nature.)

In the reign of Jillo Aгаа, (1976-84) as indicated in line 5, the speaker accuses women of flouting the

Boorana culture. In Ethiopian history, this was the time when there was massive civil unrest and a peasant revolution culminated in the overthrow of the feudal system presided over by Emperor Haile Sellassie (Tareke 1991:123), just two years previously before Jillo Aгаа had been handed the scepter. During this turbulent period, Ethiopian enthusiasts of the new system sought to overturn all forms of authority. This applied not just to the feudal lords, but also touched in fundamental ways on other types of inequality based on age, sex, lineage and economics. It was a period robust with the rebirth of mass culture and the decline of aristocracy and other forms of authority. In this enthusiasm, university students were deployed in droves to condemn the old feudalists and their beneficiaries and to promote people power along the Marxist-Leninist lines.

Although the authorities purportedly embraced the tenets of this leftist ideology, their interpretation and execution were left in the hands of people who did not care to understand and grasp their local applicability. Thus such absurd pronouncements as men and women are equal, were bandied about without any moderation or qualification. Even more absurd and taken at face value, was the issue of property. It was rumored that a man with two or more wives was required to give up all except one, a man with two or more houses would forfeit all except one and a man with many cattle would be required to retain only a few and redistribute the rest. These unqualified utterances in the service of some misunderstood form of communism, although not executed with the same rigor as they were uttered, reached such intimidating fervor that oral artists recorded them as important events in Boorana social

history. Embedded in these oral records were dominant themes that tended to imply that “they [the Boorana] were tired of being patronized and obliged to adopt foreign ways” (Baxter 1994:171). Echoes and streaks of patronage that induce fear and frustration are apparent throughout this *dbaamaa*, of which the contentions made in these lines are a fine example:

Ta kara Safara baate
Mata filate yaate
Mata Dargiin yakite
Aar nadheen diraan waal qixxe taate

The ones who adopted the Somali ways
Combed their hair and went along
Their egos were spoilt by the *Derg* regime
Today women are equal to men

In the Boorana traditional culture, women wear hairstyles that imbue them with identity as married, unmarried, widowed, newlywed and mothers of sons. Hairstyles are hence symbolic codes of a woman’s social status in the society that appends ritual significance to them as a way of expressing group norms. In contradiction of this norm, the speaker contends that those women who adopted the Somali ways of life wore their hair by simply combing it without braids, something that the Boorana regard as socially abominable. In line 3, the performer exploits the polysemous word, *mata* (hair, head, ego, will) to underline his lament about the alien imposition of equality between men and women. The line claims women’s egos were inflated by the *Derg* regime, which empowered them to violate and challenge the patriarchal traditional authority among the Boorana.

THE ROLE OF *AYYAANA* CULT IN WOMEN'S 'DEVIANCE'

Although the Ethiopian *Derg* government was portrayed as having played a pivotal role in eroding the powers of men over women, it is those women who followed the *ayyaana* ways that capture the speaker's imagination the most. It is here that the speaker brings out what, in his view, is wrong with "women being on top" to use Natalie Davis's (1978) phrase. These reversals of women's position and fortunes in the Boorana society are made possible by an invocation of a quasi-religious cult that stirs respect and fear in its followers and detractors. What then is the place of *ayyaana* cult in the men/women relationships? To begin with, men see the cult as women's way of aligning with a seemingly emancipative force for negotiation and reclaiming of some space of their own from male dominance. Thus the men are wary of the cult on which women draw, as observed in another context, 'to cope with the most oppressive aspects of their lives without directly challenging the codes of the mainstream system' (Trawick 1999:64).

The *ayyaana* cult has its own oral history among the Boorana. According to interviewees, the first Boorana person to introduce the *ayyaana* cult was a man call Waario Garsee Chiichoo during the *gadaa* of Madha Galma. In the Gregorian calendar this falls between 1952 and 1960. Oral sources reveal that Waario Garsee himself brought the spirit from a people they call Waata Wandoo, a local group of the Waata hunter-gatherers who are full members of the Oromo society, and not a gipsy tribe as Webster (1944:5) maintains. Apparently, this Waata individual stumbled on the *ayyaana* cult during the *mudaa* (anointing) celebration in

commemoration of Sheikh Hussein of Baale among the Arssi, which he enthusiastically embraced. The *mudaa* consisted of a pilgrimage of people who were the Sheikh’s family of believers, praying together and asking for blessing by offering gifts mainly sacrificial lambs to the saint’s successors. The cult of Sheikh Hussein of Baale is a well-known one in Ethiopian Oromo literature. The cult is an Islamized version of the *Qaalluu* rituals, hence the idea of *mudaa* pilgrimage. It forms part of the religious syncretism that has taken place. According to Mohamed Hassen, the *mudaa* ceremony which is performed at eight-year intervals in honor of the *qaalluu* is similar to the ceremony in which Muslims make a pilgrimage to Sheikh Hussein’s tomb (Hassen 1992:81). Andrzejewski (1972) has also written about Sheikh Hussein and the hymns in his praise. In their songs the *ayyaana* cultists among the Boorana pay homage to Sheikh Hussein of Baale, thus accentuating the historical claim. The famed Boorana seer, Areeroo Boosaroo in one of his predictions relating to *ayyaana* said:

Madhaki gadaa Madha
Nami maaratu diide due
Nami marate fayye
Aari liqimsaa tahe
Maratan yuuba biyyati tahe

In the confusion of Madha’s reign
Those who refused to be mad died
Those who accepted madness were healed
Smoke become part of the diet
Mad men became seers for the community

Areeroo Boosaroo thus saw *ayyaana* spirit-possession in terms of confusion, ailment, and mental derangement. Those who accept and abide by the rules of the spirit, which entailed, among other things, celebrating it by hosting it lavishly with the material stuff it desires, survived its catastrophe, while those who resisted it died. The *ayyaana* spirit and by extension those who practice it are sustained by fire in its various forms. Those on whom the spirit has descended are known to lick live coal as part of its therapy, and their foods are mainly those that are cooked on fire. The Boorana, being proud owners of cattle who live on the product of their livestock such as milk and blood, denigrated things that are cooked, as 'things of pot and fire'. The *ayyaana* cultists on the other hand, have to eat meat and treat with smoke those who are inflicted, and in this sense they lived with 'smoke as a diet.' The reference to 'smoke as diet' alludes also to the burning of incense used to appease the *ayyaana* spirit. The last line alludes to the ways in which those who are possessed by the *ayyaana* spirit purport to foretell the future when in fact they are mentally ill patients, in contrast with Areeroo Boosaroo's prophecies which are taken as credible to date in spite of the passage of time.

Initially, the *ayyaana* spirit possession was regarded as an ailment and dangerous to the person upon whom it has descended, but with the assistance of *ayyaana* experts and the enticements through gifts such as the ones mentioned above, the spirit is pacified and the person can resume his/her normal life. But in general the Boorana do not like it. Women claim that god brought about the *ayyaana* spirit although they add that their husbands think they brought it upon themselves.

Often, illnesses that have nothing to do with *ayyaana* spirit such as tuberculosis and HIV-AIDS are associated with *ayyaana* spirit especially when the person is not responding to the conventional treatment. Because the cultists find the patient an opportune client to exploit for material gains, they embrace him and prescribe all manner of outlandish remedies such as the blood of a he-goat of a certain color, a cockerel, or a lamb. The afflicted person is asked to buy beads, rosaries, alcohol, perfume and the like for the spirit. Since an average Boorana finds it problematic to sell his cattle to obtain these materials, they detest *ayyaana* and avoid it completely. Some even go to the Christian clergy to have the spirit exorcised and cursed in the name of Christ. But as I have already indicated, women are deemed to have a soft spot for it and together with a few men, whom the Boorana regard as idlers after easy consumption, make it flourish within the community. Because of the ensuing tension and differing opinion about the *ayyaana* spirit possession, men ridicule women’s tendencies to accommodate *ayyaana* spirits at the expense of the men.

In the lines below, the speaker bemoans the women’s use of *ayyaana* cult in staking their claims in the social-economic life of the community in a way that turns the tables on the men:

Ta karaa ayyaana baate
Hori dhirsā goodate
Cuufti abboti karraa taate
Suurreen maanguddo jilla taate
Yo bobbaan gariba dhuuftu
Dibbeefi bajjoolen yaate
Korma waranan qaqalte

Gaf ayyaani jabate
Kayyon dhiir iraa baate

The ones who followed the ayyaana ways
Divided their husbands' property
They became owners of cattle
Their turbans were like those of the elders in
ceremony
When they see the ayyaana cult procession
They carried drums and sticks
They slaughtered bulls with spear shafts
When ayyaana become entrenched
Grace and good fortune leave men

In the speaker's estimation, the ownership of property is a preserve of men from which women are excluded. Like men, they wear head turbans and carry staffs normally carried by male elders. They subscribe to the cult, which they host by slaughtering bulls in its honor. By slaughtering bulls with a spear shaft, (line 6), women profane the community's rites of bull- and he-goat-slaughtering (*korma-korbeessa*), which conform to certain specifically laid down ritual procedures. The breaking of these ritual requirements has the effect of destroying the power, grace and fortune of men. The speaker's complaint about the *ayyaana* spirit seems to arise from the fact that it undercuts male power either by taking away their economic power or by destroying their more ephemeral power and grace through ritual profaning. The cult, like the government system discussed, appears bent on overthrowing men's hegemonic powers and installing women on top, a reversal the speaker resists through clinging to cultural institutions such as the *Gummii Gaayoo* law-making assembly.

“Putting Down” Women with Male Oratory

It is important to observe that the *ayyaana* cult plays a very important role in the lives of women. They pay a large amount of tribute to it and are bent on convincing their husbands to be part of the cult movement. Women’s glorification of *ayyaana* is observed:

Ayyaan qalluu jeetti
Afaan qala dhiirsan abba maddaba jeetti
Yo bobban gariba dhuuftu
Abbaan biirii wakata
Ayyaan galchite boro abba maddaaba
Dhaagon wan guute jeetti
Araqe malan dhuudi
Moriso bita jeetti
Hori malan qaalti
Holan fagago jeetti
Shito malan dibbati
Shigijiri bita jeetti
Shigijirin hawaje
Jaattaani Ali fan
Ayyaani hinjiru dubbin tuun dabba jeette

They say ayyaana is a spiritual leader
In the language of ayyaana, they call their husbands “father of the cult”
When the procession of ayyaana comes
The husband refuses money
They call ayyaana upon themselves
They claim money is plentiful in the house
They want to drink alcohol by deceit
They demand the purchase of alcohol
They want to slaughter livestock by deceit
They demand for the slaughter of sheep
They want to apply perfume by deceit
They demand for it to be bought
Using government orders,
The likes of Jaattaani Ali

Decreed that *ayyaana* is nonexistent and the demands were unjust

In these lines, the speaker mentions the deceitful ways in which women use the *ayyaana* cult. This entails the employment of strange terminologies and the reassigning of names to persons and objects to make them appear mysterious. These changes of names are made apparent in the reference to *ayyaana* as “*qaalluu*”, a term the Boorana reserve for their spiritual leader. The legitimacy of the Boorana *qaalluu* derives from the myth of divine origin where it is believed that he descended from heaven and was received by the Boorana reverently. By attributing the name to the *ayyaana* spirit, the cultists are abrogating his divinity to the spirit and thus substituting it for an alternative power structure to which they subscribe. Interestingly, the *ayyaana* leaders are predominantly men, but women, without doubt, are the majority followers. Part of the reason why *ayyaana* appeals to women is that being itself dependent on celebration and festivity accompanied by music and dance, it releases the women from the dominance of men and the mundane household chores that dull their lives.

In the view of the performer, using their tricks women co-opt men with the affective and fictitious reference given to husbands, *abba maddaba* (father of the cult, line 3). Other names that have been transformed are those of sheep, alcohol, perfume, and money, all of which are material things women desire, but which, due to their close control by men, are out of their reach. In this renaming, the speaker suggests that women use a wily deceit as a way to accessing the

prohibited. The ram is required for meat, while alcohol is used for pleasure and perfume for sweet smell. But as a moderator of the excesses of government policy seen above, Jaattaani Ali intervenes and saves the community from the confusion the *ayyaana* cult has created. Jaattaani is instrumental in educating them about the nonexistence of *ayyaana* spirit, (line 15). To Jaattaani and the men folk, *ayyaana* spirit is nothing more than a women’s invention to unjustly access the community’s wealth in the custody of men.

The performer builds his case by raising doubts about the genuineness of women’s involvement with the *ayyaana* cult. This involvement is shown to be pretentious and as serving to access the desired property and pleasure denied them by men. The following passage further illustrates this:

Ayyaana qalan bite
Qaalaa qaqala jette
Maqum horii Boorana
Keesaa anchaf fixee
Ayyaanan gargarate
Abba dhiibu keesa bafate
Maqum dhiibu abba waratu
Maqa gore bafate
Abba nafan diidooftiif
Gaf ayyaani jabate
Yo fula dhiira bul qonqot nu gog jette
Abba bira yaate
Jimman afaa ibida jalat jarati

Ayyaana they celebrate
Saying they slaughter for *ayyaana* sacrifice
From all Boorana livestock
They finished the male ones
Under *ayyaana* pretences

They oust their husbands from the bedroom
The entire marital bedroom
They name them *ayyaana* consort place
In avoidance of their husbands
When *ayyaana* floods the area
Saying when they sleep with husbands their
voices will dry up
They leave their husbands
The elderly ones erect beds near the fireplace

In these lines, the performer intensifies the degree of his suspicion of the cult under whose pretext women wasted Boorana male livestock. Yet, it is truly a common practice for women possessed by *ayyaana* spirit to demand the slaughter of animals, a demand that must be met because of the life threatening nature of the spirit possession. Under the disguise of *ayyaana*, women and the men who pretend to control the spirit, exert pressure on livestock populations and threaten the survival of the family herd in the way the speaker underlines. Understandably, tension breeds in the society between the husband who controls the family wealth as a matter of course and the wife who is an immense contributor to its creation.

However, the greatest discomfort on the part of the men as far as *ayyaana* is concerned, is its use to deny them sexual access to their wives. This goes hand in hand with the possible sexual liaison of the women with cult leaders who are usually men. There are telling associations in what the performer says as encapsulated in the ejection of the husband from the matrimonial bed and the conversion of the space into an *ayyaana* consort place. The performer accuses the women of erecting beds near the fireplace in contravention of the common practice to preempt their husband's sexual

advances. All these are done under the cloak of the *ayyaana* cult, which seems to be beyond the questioning of the men as matters in the spiritual rather than the secular domain. The performer is critical of this romantic liaison with *ayyaana* cultists for it portends male loss of mastery over women’s bodies, which as husbands they assume they own and control.

Changing the subject, the speaker in the same vein condemns women who acquiesce to sexual advances for commercial gains as evident in the following lines:

Safarti shain biiti
Sidaamti daadhiin biiti
Yo bobaa Safaraa ciiftuu
Nadheen nagaa Boorani fuud diidi
Sidaam nut argate nadheen gaf
Jabaan Harsilasse dhiira sodachu diide

Somali entice them with tea
Amhara entice them with alcohol
When they are under the arms of Somali
Women refuse to respond to Boorana greetings
They had Amhara on their side women during
The reign of Haile Sellassie⁵ stopped fearing men

A major feature of *dhaawaa* is the portrayal of women as flirtatious persons who fall prey to foreign men. They are shown as easily transferable instruments of sexual gratification. Gullible and attracted by social trappings such as money, drinks, tea, and profits, women are shown as romantically complicit. It is such relationships that are tainted by the cash nexus that are despised, because in the speaker’s view, it not only brings shame upon the women themselves, but also tars the community’s honor. Thus sexual overtures using

material enticements by men alien to the community such as the Sidama⁶, and the Somali are recounted and resented as a way of protecting the community's own social and moral terrain. Women who accept lovers outside the community are sharply criticized for promiscuity and morally compromising themselves as easy recipients of suggestive sexual liaisons. The last two lines allude to the role of the Emperor Haile Selassie, Ethiopia's late monarch, in giving support to women, something that essentially subverted and weakened men's authority over them.

To the Boorana, the imperial Ethiopia's subjugation of the entire community is regarded as making a woman of them. This is why the government policy on gender equality was construed as an outrageous suggestion implying further loss of manhood. A story is told of an old man by the name Kiyya Waamoo⁷, who when told of the gender equality policy of the *Derg* regime replied, "O whatever you say, it shall fail at night". This witty remark summarizes the community's understanding of gender equality in a sexist sense or as Gilmore puts it in another related context "in terms of men's idealized view of the place of women" (1998:129). The remark by Kiyya Waamoo has since become quotable, proverbial, and an offhand dismissal of the gender project by its opponents. In the perspective of the speaker, being on top in the coital position is analogous with being on top in social relations, which is enacted in the individuals' private lives. The government has no way of altering these relations. As Brandes (1980: 206) indicates, the prevalence of dominance and submission as a theme in folklore in

part reflects the severely unequal distribution of power among opposing sex and status groups.

In the following lines, women are described as roving opportunists who throw their lot in with all manner of men to satiate their sexual desires:

Dirro Konsoot jirti
Yo Konso misingaan bau
Jimaan afaan katamaa jirt
Tertaalle Jis jirt
Jiisa nyaati yo kinnisi lafaat buu
Cuuftii fula soroobduu jirt

In Konso women are found around Dirro
When in Konso the millet ripens
The elderly ones rush to the market
In Tertaalle they are found around Jis
Eating honey when the bees are in season
They all flock to the honey gatherers' sides

According to the speaker, whether it is the Somali, the Konso⁸ or the Sidama, women's romantic complicity with these men borders on expediency and opportunism. Even among the Boorana, women succumb to the dictates of the stomach by aligning themselves opportunistically. So sexually provocative are women, that they could follow honey-gatherers, Konso men, or traders for material gains when conditions are favorable for these groups of men (line 2 & 6). The performer employs what Gilmore (1998:44) has called gastro-sexual imagery where sexual hunger becomes a pretext for hunger for food. In this case, the women travel to the market in Konso when the millet ripens to satiate their hunger at the expense of Konso men. The oral poetry thus doubly derides lovesick women who

have converted the market into a site for seeking food and consorts.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I examine the performer's closure of his *dhaawaa*, which takes the form of an appeal to the Boorana to broadcast his message further:

Dubbi taan amalle gumiin Gaayyotu
Ak kiyya dhuugefaatee akanum duubate
Nadheen aada Boorana lakifte jeette
Anin dubbi gafas akan dhaawaa bae
Boorani ufi naa dhuugefaatee
Akanan tephii keesa galchinne
Me hasaa
(Audience laughter)
hori buul jaal kiyya

In this speech the law-making assembly at Gaayyo
Agreed with me and discussed in the same terms
They concluded that women have abandoned
Boorana culture
I then performed this *dhaawaa*
Boorana agreed with me
Then I recited it into the tape recorder
So recite further on to others
(Rejoinder, laughter from the audience)
“live long and prosper my friend”.

In this closing speech, the speaker draws on the authority of the *Gummii Gaayoo*, an eight-cycle assembly of the Boorana that reviews the laws and customs of the community in light of the events that may have occurred in that period of time. One of the most important functions of *Gummii*, among others, is to rescind or reinforce customs, and resolve contentious

issues that people bring to its attention. To contend that the assembly agreed with him in expressing their discontent of the tendency of women to deviate from the community’s mores, the speaker strategically legitimizes his claim, purporting to have the support of the institution that the *gummi* assembly represents. In short, he perceives himself as giving voice to a matter that has been of great concern to the entire community. That is why he is confidently urging his audience to “recite on” as a kind of crusade against women who have “abandoned the ways of our culture.” Through this clarion call, he reinvents *dhaawaa* and uses it to serve the larger project of defending male culture that is also construed as Boorana culture. In the perception of the speaker, the women are not just antagonistic to his age-set, but more importantly to the entire Boorana community with its age-old judicial-cultural structures to which their defiance has alienated them. Judging by the way in which his men folk congratulate him, he has succeeded in implicating women as social offenders, using masculine oratorical wit.

NOTES

1. The word is a synonym for Sabbo moiety, and is normally invoked as an identity marker to situate the speaker as a hero in a situation where competition is implied between the two exogamous, Goonna and Sabbo, groups of the Boorana.
2. This is Amharic word for village commune, which was common in socialist Ethiopia in the 1980s.
3. A provincial governor in Ethiopia’s Boorana province in the 1980s under a regime presided over by the leftist dictator Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam, Jaattaani Ali was

regarded as a hero by the general Boorana populace. Persons alleged to have been agents of the government of Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi assassinated Mr. Ali in 1992 in Nairobi after the fall of the *Derg* regime. He had taken refuge in Kenya following the spate of anti-Oromo raids around the same period in the border areas of Moyale in northern Kenya.

4. These are Italian irregular army recruited mainly from the Somali tribe in Ethiopia in the Second World War.
5. Emperor Haile Sellaissie was the Ethiopian head of state until he was deposed in 1974. The Boorana have the knack of naming events after the person in power in the era the particular event occurred. The practice is a spillover from their *gadaa* system.
6. The Boorana refer to the Amhara and the people of central Oromo who speak Amharic as Sidama. Since they were in power in Ethiopia, they are represented in a dual way as an ethnicity and the government.
7. Kiyya Waamoo lived in a place called Irdar in southern Ethiopia and the remarks were made in 1979 in one of the public meetings in the presence of the government officers.
8. A small community of Oromo stock renowned for their farming activities and intensive labour. They live in close proximity to the Boorana to the north at a place call Gaar Konso (Konso Mountain).

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OBITUARY:
FATHER PAUL TABLINO (1928-2009)

Paul Baxter

Paul Tablino died in Nairobi from a heart attack on Monday, 4 May 2009. As he had wished his body was flown back to Marsabit where he was buried at the Maria Mfariji shrine, close to the Gabra amongst whom he had spent so many happy and productive years. Around two thousand people attended his funeral.

Paul Tablino went to Kenya in 1960 to teach biology at the Seminary in Nyeri, but soon became entranced by the cultures of the people of the pastoral areas of northern Kenya and spent as much time there as he could. In particular he was attracted to the Gabra; a branch of Borana Oromo camel herding people who straddle the international frontiers. They probably number about fifty thousand of whom thirty five thousand live in the Marsabit district of Kenya. In 1963 the Roman Catholic Church obtained permission to start a mission in Marsabit which Paul Tablino joined. Over

the years the mission extended and established itself at North Horr and Maikona, two important Gabra dry season well complexes, where Paul Tablino spent more and more of his time. He became increasingly fascinated by the complex and subtle religious beliefs, rituals and celestial calendars of the Gabra and, especially, the interconnections that their intellectual constructions had with daily life and with the [gadaa] system. He told me that one of the first things he learned was that, if he was ever to understand anything about Gabra culture, he must become a learner and listener and forget that he had come to Kenya as a teacher. That humble passion to learn endured to the end and is a feature of all his publications. Paul's duties often required him to travel as a consultant to other missions and to spend time among other neighboring pastoralists, such as the Rendille, but he always got back to the Gabra as soon as he could.

Paul Tablino's major monograph is *The Gabra: Camel Nomads of Northern Kenya* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1999, [2005]). Though still not as widely read as it merits, it is a major contribution to our knowledge of Oromo cultures. It contains a full bibliography of the Gabra, including Tablino's other publications and local publications in Borana (produced or helped by him) which have been published in Marsabit. The book was reviewed in the *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Volume 8, Numbers 1 & 2 (July 2001). Besides his major monograph, Paul Tablino published no less than twenty articles and book chapters both in English and Italian. His contribution to our understanding of Oromo cultures is greatly appreciated.