THE JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

Volume 28, Number 1

2022

Editor
Bedassa Tadesse, University of Minnesota Duluth, USA

Associate Editors
Asebe Regassa Debelo, Dilla University, Ethiopia
Ayantu Tibeso, Independent Researcher and
Oromo Documentary Project

Editorial Advisory Board
Mekuria Bulcha, Malardlen University, Sweden
Bichaka Faysissa, Middle Tennessee State University, USA
Ezekiel Gebissa, Kettering University, USA
Guluma Gemeda, University of Michigan- Flint, USA
Mohammed Hassen, Georgia State University, USA
Bonnie Holcomb, George Washington University, USA
Asafa Jalata, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, USA

JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

Publication of the Oromo Studies Association

The Journal of Oromo Studies (JOS), is a leading scholarly publication of the Oromo Studies Association (OSA). Issued twice a year, the journal publishes articles pertaining to all areas of Oromo Studies past, present and future, including topics related to the Oromo diaspora worldwide. Its interdisciplinary scope and approach offers readers a critical view of the socioeconomic, political and cultural achievements of the Oromo people in their interactions with the people of the Horn of Africa.

Reflecting the diverse interests of OSA members, the journal emphasizes multidisciplinary and embraces variety by publishing articles that allow both the specialist and the general reader to gain far-reaching insights and a thorough understanding of the Oromo people and the Horn of Africa region.

All manuscripts submitted for publication consideration must be original works that have not been published previously and are currently not being considered by any other publication outlet. Submitted article are evaluated by scholars who are experts in the field. The journal's editorial team is committed to communicating editorial decisions within a reasonable period to authors.

Published articles do not necessarily reflect the views of OSA or its officers. Individual authors are responsible for the views, data and interpretations presented in the articles.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Individual	$35
Institutional	$55
Single Issue	$20

Add $20 annually for shipping.

Send in US currency payments and subscription requests to:

Oromo Studies Association
P O Box 5152
Salisbury MD 21802

Make checks or money orders out to the Oromo Studies Association.

CONTENTS

Main Articles

THE OROMO MOVEMENT FOR *GADAA/SIIQQEE* RENAISSANCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY 1

Asafa Jalata

STATE VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL SUFFERING OF THE OROMO IN ETHIOPIA: TORTURE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE EXPLORED 29

Assefa Tolera Sori

FOSTERING HEALTHY SOCIAL POLICIES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: EMPLOYING OROMUMMAA AS A FRAMEWORK OF THINKING 65

Begna Dhugassa

A SPOTLIGHT ON ETHIOPIA'S ECONOMIC IDIOSYNCRASIES 91

Ayele Gelan

HUMAN-BIRD INTERACTIONS: AN EXPLORATION OF OROMO CULTURAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH THE NORTHERN GROUND-HORNBILL 123

Addisu Asefa

Journal of Oromo Studies_#28.indb 3 7/13/2023 5:10:40 PM

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND THE QUEST FOR PEACE IN THE ETHIOPIAN FEDERAL SYSTEM 145

Temesgen Thomas Halabo and Taddesse Berisso

Book Reviews

GUFO OBA. *HERDER WARFARE IN EAST AFRICA: A SOCIAL AND SPATIAL HISTORY*. WINWICK: THE WHITE HORSE PRESS. 2017. PAPER. 357 PP 165

Fatuma B. Guyo

THE NORTHERN OROMO AND THE ABYSSINIAN STATE: A REVIEW OF *THE OTHER ABYSSINIANS* 169

Guluma Gemeda

THE OROMO MOVEMENT FOR *GADAA/SIIQQEE* RENAISSANCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Asefa Jaleta

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Abstract: This paper identifies and describes the essence and characteristics of the *gadaa/siiqqee* system (Oromo democracy) before the colonization of the Oromo and the incorporation of their country, Oromia, into Ethiopia, and why the Oromo are currently struggling for the renaissance of indigenous Oromo democratic institutions.[1] It specifically demonstrates how the indigenous Oromo values and democracy can be reinvigorated and adapted to the current condition of Oromo society to revitalize the Oromo national movement for national self-determination, sovereignty, and egalitarian democracy and to build an Oromia democratic state, which can be independent, or which can be an integral part of a confederal or federal multinational democracy. The paper further explains that this kind of struggle is an uphill battle because the Oromo people are the colonial subjects of the Ethiopian state, which is supported by the global powers and the imperial interstate system, and they do not have the freedom of association, organization, and expression within the Ethiopian Empire.

The paper has six sections. In the first section, it provides background information on the Oromo people, their indigenous democratic institutions, and the evolution and development of the *gadaa/siiqqee* system. The second section explains the processes of decentralization and centralization of the *gadaa* system. The major challenges to the system are identified and explained in the third section. The essence and characteristics

Journal of Oromo Studies_#28.indb 1 7/13/2023 5:10:41 PM

of the Oromo democratic tradition is explored in the fourth section. The fifth part explains how the Oromo movement is struggling to restore the *gadaa/siiqqee* system. The final section explores ways of practicing *gadaa/siiqqee* principles and developing national *Oromummaa* (Oromo national culture, identity, and nationalism).

Keywords: Oromo, *gadaa/siiqqee*; *gadaa/siiqqee* renaissance, egalitarian democracy, Oromia, Oromo nationalism; and national *Oromummaa*.

Background

The Oromo people are the largest national group in Ethiopia today. They are estimated at 60 million of the 115 million people in Ethiopia alone. Although they are the largest population group, they are a political minority because they have been the colonial subjects of Ethiopia since the last decades of the nineteenth century. The Oromo have been denied any genuine political representation; they have been ruled by the successive regimes of the Amhara-Tigray ethnonational groups that have been supported by Western powers (see Jalata 2005a; Holcomb and Ibssa 1990). Prior to their colonization, the Oromo people were independent and organized both culturally and politically using the democratic institutions of *gadaa* and *siiqqee* to maintain their security and sovereignty. The historical legacy of Oromo political leadership is the sovereignty of the Oromo people experienced under the *gadaa* government and an egalitarian framework. The design of *gadaa/siqqee*[2] as balanced social and political institutions worked to prevent exploitation and political domination in Oromo society. Consequently, under the *gadaa/siiqqee* system Oromo society enjoyed relative peace, stability, sustainable development, and political sovereignty despite the lack of a written language and a low level of technological development.

Before its colonization, Oromia was a sovereign country in the Horn of Africa under the *gadaa* republic (Baisa 2014, 1971, 1993; Lepisa 1975). The Oromo people began developing and utilizing their democratic system more than 4000 years ago (Jaaraa and Saaddoo 2011, 61). The Oromo oral tradition indicates that the original center of *Abbaa Gadaa*, the president of the Oromo assembly known as *caffee*, and the center of *Abbaa Muda*, the leader of Oromo indigenous religion known as *Waaqeefannaa*, was Abbaya or Mormor (ancient name for the Blue Nile) until it moved to Odaa Nabee in the 5th century A. D. (Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau (OCTB) 2006: 74). A few Oromo branches

such as Galan and Yaya settled for many centuries on both sides of the Blue Nile, the northern part of the Shawa Plateau, before Christian immigrants began to arrive between the 11th and 13th centuries (Bulcha 2016; Hassen 2015). Obviously, the deeper understanding of the origin and development of *gadaa/siiqqee* civilization requires further archeological, cultural, and historical studies, which require an Oromia state power and abundant economic resources.

Gadaa: Decentralization and Centralization

The *gadaa* system evolved through the processes known as *cinna* (decentralization based on extended clan families) and *haroomisa* (ongoing renewal and reorganization of *gadaa* at the national level) (OCTB 2006). The center of *gadaa* gradually moved to Odaa Nabee (near Fifinnee). Currently, there is not enough information on the renewal of *gadaa* at Odaa Mormor and its eventual movement to Odaa Nabee. According to the Oromo oral tradition, the central *gadaa* system, *caffee* (Oromo assembly) was practiced at Odaa Nabee from the 5th century A. D. to 8th A. D. (OCTB 2006). The 8th century A. D. was characterized as the year of *cinna gadaa* (decentralization) and 1116 A. D. was called the year of *haroomsa gadaa* (renewal, centralization, and consolidation) (OCTB 2006: 52). The Oromo were facing both the Muslim and Christian empire builders who were competing with each other on the issues of religion, land, and other economic resources in the Horn of Africa. The Muslim empire builders, who started in the late 10th century, and the Christian empire, which consolidated after 13th century, engaged in religious and political wars destabilizing Oromo society for many centuries (OCTB 2006, 94–95). When the Abyssinian Christian kingdom attacked the Tulama Oromo, the Muslim Somali empire builders attacked the Oromo branches who were living in the area that is currently called Somalia (OCTB 2011).

Between the 13th and 14th centuries, the attacks on the Oromo people by Abyssinian Christians from the North and by Muslim Somalis from the South East intensified (Jarraa and Saaddo 2011). Both groups wanted to dismantle the Oromo identity, culture, religion, and the *gadaa/siqqee* system, and to take over the Oromo country. These external pressures created instability that negatively affected the efficient functioning of the *gadaa/siqqee* system in the Tulama Oromo (Northern Shawa) and instigated the movement of the Oromo toward the south, and the decentralization of the *gadaa/siqqee* system into clan-based autonomous administrations.

These factors facilitated the transfer of the center of the *gadaa/siqqee* system from Odaa Nabee to Odaa Roba and then to Madda Walaabuu (the stream of liberty), located in Bale (Jarraa and Saaddo 2011). From around 1316 to 1378, Odaa Roba started to function as the center of an Oromo politico-religious system by replacing Odaa Nabee, subsequently the center was transferred to Madda Walaabuu in 1450 (Jarraa and Saaddo 2011). In the same year, the *Abbaa Muda*, the main Oromo religious figure, moved to Madda Walaabuu (OCTB 2011). After the decentralization of the *gadaa* system at Odaa Nabee because of the external pressure from the Christian kingdom, "the total *gadaa* revival was successfully completed at the Odaa Roba 'caffee' center in 1316. It should be noted here that . . . the movement of *gadaa* revival took place at Odaa Mormor, Odaa Nabee, Odaa Roba and Madda Walaabuu shows that two different institutions were working for a common goal. When *gadaa/siqqee* revival took place at Odaa Nabee, it served as the center of both politics and religion for the Oromo clans living in the area" (OCTB 2011: 56).

The renewal movement of the *gadaa/siqqee* system occurred at Odaa Roba in Bale by replacing "Odaa Nabee, which had been a politico-religious center for several hundred years before the fourteenth century," and "Odaa Roba had become a new holy politico-religious center of the Oromo people at large that had been periodically visited by the various representatives of Oromo groups from all directions for such celebrations like *Jilaa Gada* and *Mudaa* [pilgrim]" (OCTB 2011: 90–91). Gradually the politico-religious center of Odaa Roba moved to Madda Walaabuu for reasons that are not clear at present. The Bale Oromo living around Madda Walaabu also started to reorganize and reconsolidate their power beginning in the 11th century (Jarraa and Saaddo 2011: 104). The general assembly of the Oromo nation was held between 1518 and 1519 for six months at Madda Walaabuu to discuss and deliberate how to liberate the Oromo country from the Christian and Muslim invaders; delegates from different parts of the Oromo country participated on this assembly (Jarraa and Saaddo 2011). Particularly, the Tulama Oromo sent delegates of twelve people led by Dachaasa to Madda Walaabuu (Jarraa and Saaddo 2011). The main question Walaabuu Jiloo, *Abbaa Gadaa* of Madda Walaabuu, asked at the general assembly was "Maal Taana?" ("What are we going to be?") After thorough discussions and deliberations for six months, the general assembly defined the enemies of the Oromo people as those Christian and Muslim empire builders who attacked the Oromo people in their own country and killed them, took their lands

and other resources, and forced them to abandon their culture, religion, and identity.

The assembly also passed major resolutions mobilizing the entire nation in an effort to liberate their country (Jarraa and Saaddoo 2011). The Oromo people still remember the name Madda Walaabuu because they began the defensive and liberation wars there in the early sixteenth century. The history of Madda Walaabuu demonstrates that the most significant revival and reorganization of the *gadaa* institution occurred there at the beginning of 16th century (Jarraa and Saaddoo 2011: 96). Beginning in the 16th century, the renewal and reorganization of the *gadaa* system involved fundamental changes; these changes included rules, regulations and objectives. There were two main objectives: "Firstly, it was aimed [at] defending the *gadaa* system and the Oromo people from the pressure of Islam. Secondly, the change was sought to reinforce the military power of the people and enable them to regain their old area of settlement lost as the result of the incessant wars of the Christian and Muslim states . . .. The changes in . . . the formulation of new rules and regulations were, therefore, actions of paramount importance in order to realize those objectives" (OCTB 2011: 96). Consequently, the Oromo decided "at least one Butta military campaign to be launched every eight years in all directions in order to regain the old settlement areas of the Oromo people who were forced to desert and unite them with their kinsmen that remained behind. [It] was [also] decided to strengthen Muda religious pilgrimage made to the seat of the Qallu every eight years" (OCTB 2011: 96–97).

In 1522, the Oromo started their resistance struggle to recover their lost homeland. This was before the Muslims seriously confronted Christian Abyssinia/ Ethiopia in 1527. The Muslims destroyed Christian rule and established their own under the leadership of one Ahmed Gragn for more than a decade in the Horn of Africa. The Oromo were caught in the wars of the Christian and Muslim empire-builders, and according to Darrel Bates (1979: 7), "The [Oromo] . . . had suffered in their time from both parties and were waiting in the wings for opportunities . . . to recover lands which had been taken from them." The wars between Christians and Muslims endangered the Oromo's survival as a people. With the renewal and reorganization of *gadaa*, the Oromo carried out *butta* wars every eight years, when power transferred from one *gadaa* grade to the next. In the beginning of the 16th century, when they began to intensify their territorial recovery through the *butta* wars, all Oromo were under one *gadaa* government. The ability of the *gadaa* system to

reconsolidate the people both militarily and organizationally enabled them to recover their lost territories and accommodate their increased population and stock (Legesse 1973). Their movement and recovery signaled their survivability (Ta'a 1986). The Oromo fought twelve *butta* wars between 1522 and 1618, recovering and reestablishing the Oromo country that is called Oromia today (Ta'a 1986).

External and Internal Challenges to the *Gadaa* System

In the course of their continued movements and their liberation struggle, different Oromo groups gradually established autonomous *gadaa* governments. At the same time, various Oromo groups kept their relations through the office of *Abbaa Muuda* (the father of anointment) (Ta'a 1986) and formed alliances or confederations during times of difficulty (Etefa 2012). However, the development of class differentiation within Oromo society in northern, central, and western Oromia, external factors—such as Turko-Egyptian colonialism in eastern Oromia between 1875 and 1885 and European and Ethiopian colonialism—the emergence of an Oromo collaborator class, and the spread of Islam and Christianity undermined the political, military, and ritual/spiritual roles of the *gadaa* system. Both internal socio-economic changes and external interactions with neighboring peoples slowly facilitated the emergence of class and the *moottii* system (kingdom) in some Oromo areas. As some Oromo extended clans moved to far-flung regions and interacted with Abyssinian and Omotic kingdoms and Nilo-Saharan societies and as they settled and engaged in farming and trade, they developed class differentiation that gradually led to the transformation of the *gadaa* system into the *moottii* system (hereditary chiefs) in northern, central, and western Oromia. With the development of class differentiation, the egalitarian democratic system was challenged and replaced by the *moottii* system in some areas.

Constant wars led to the evolution of the *abba dulas* (military leaders) to hereditary *moottiis* (autocratic leaders). In the 18th century, the Wallo Oromo had replaced the *gadaa* administration with that of kingdoms. In the Gibe region, the *moottii* system developed through confiscation of land, collection of booty, tribute and market dues, and through the establishment of hereditary rights to ownership of property and political office in the 19th century. The emergence of powerful autocratic leaders and their private armies led to the control of marketplaces, trade routes and land, and the development of an agricultural economy that led to further class differentiation and the formation of the *mootti* system (Hassen 1990).

The egalitarian democratic *gadaa* system was incompatible with the new *moottii* system due to the fundamental changes in the landholding system. In other words, the emergence of class differentiation and the rise of the Oromo kingdoms suppressed the *gadaa* system in some parts of Oromia. For example, in the Gibe region, five Oromo states—Limmu-Ennarya, Guma, Jimma, Gera, and Goma—emerged between the 17th and 19th centuries (Lewis 2001). Here in the 17th century, the differentiation of wealth went beyond the wealth of cattle when the *sorressa* (the wealthy merchant and landlord class) emerged. With the emergence of this wealthy class, the principle of adopting the conquered populations as "equal" through the *mogassa* process ended; the institutions of slavery and *qubisisa* (tenancy) emerged. The emergence of a hierarchical structure reduced the egalitarian aspects of the *gadaa* to religious rituals.

The *moottii* continuously accumulated wealth with incomes he extracted from tribute on the land and its products, and from commerce. This produce extraction enabled the *moottii* to create and maintain regulatory institutions like a military, bodyguards, and courts. Also, the emergence of *moottii* systems in Leqa-Naqamte and Leqa-Qellem, western Oromia, was actually based on the initiation of warfare and appropriation of rights to land and labor, control of trade and marketplaces. Externally, the *gadaa* system was attacked and weakened in eastern Oromia by the Turko-Egyptian and Harari conspiracy. The interethnic alliance and interdependence between the Harari, residents of the walled city of Harar, and the eastern Oromo was shattered when a faction of the former invited the Turko-Egyptian power to colonize the Hararge region in 1875. Between 1875 and 1885, the Harari retained their position and accumulated wealth at the cost of the majority of Oromo under the Turko-Egyptian rule (Jalata 2005 [1993]). Similarly, in the regions presently called Sidamo, Arssi, Bale, Illubabor, and Gamu Gofa and in some parts of Shawa, the *gadaa* system was suppressed by the alliance of global imperialism and Ethiopian colonialism (Jalata 2001). The capitalist penetration of the last decades of the 19th century laid the economic foundation of the modern Horn states, followed by the occupation of strategic positions by European powers along the Red Sea littoral.

The Impact of Colonialism and Imperialism on Oromo Institutions

Generally speaking, the partition of the Horn of Africa in the last decades of the 19th century, the alliance between European imperialists—namely

France, England, and Italy—and the Ethiopian warlords, and the colonization of Oromia ended Oromo statehood and sovereignty, which the Oromo national movement is currently struggling to restore (Jalata 2019; 2020). As an egalitarian system, *gadaa* did not compete well with hierarchical social systems that engaged in the extraction of economic surplus and political oppression by building a permanent professional bureaucracy, expanding formal education, and developing limited technological capabilities. The intervention of the Ethiopian and European powers through military, mercantile, colonial, and neo-colonial forces in Oromo society demonstrated the challenge the Oromo political leadership has faced as the result of an externally imposed exploitative and oppressive social system. Because of the external influence and the internal weakness of the *gadaa* system after its decentralization, autocratic and hereditary chiefs emerged by overthrowing the democratically elected leadership in some parts of Oromia.

The imposition of the Ethiopian colonial system and the emergence of the Oromo collaborator class have denied the Oromo the opportunity to openly rebuild their national institutions and organizations. Consequently, the Oromo have faced monumental external and internal challenges in rebuilding their national organizational or institutional capacity that could have helped them reestablish the rules of the game and build strong national organizations that could have effectively mobilized them to successfully carry out the national projects of liberation, egalitarian democracy, and sustainable development. The Ethiopian colonial state partitioned Oromo society physically and mentally, and the Oromo national movement has yet to destroy the foundations of these divisions. These divisions have undermined *safuu* (Oromo moral and ethical order) and the rules of the game that they previously lived by. Consequently, some Oromo individuals and groups have become the agents of the colonial system to benefit themselves and their colonial masters. The Ethiopian colonial state has used brute force and developed elaborate ideological mechanisms such as Ethiopianism and racism to prevent the Oromo people from rebuilding their independent national institutions, organizations, and leadership.

Being assigned to the status of colonial subjects and second-class citizens by the Ethiopian colonial and racialized state, the Oromo cultural and political resistance to Ethiopian colonization never halted. Various Oromo groups continued to challenge Ethiopian settler colonialism and Habasha (Amhara-Tigray) racism to regain their freedom and independence.

There were numerous local uprisings in different parts of the Oromo country (Oromia). All of these forms of resistance took place without a central national organization. Scattered Oromo resistance movements continued into the 1960s, when all the struggles merged to form the Oromo national movement. The brutality and depredation of colonial rule failed to crush the Oromo human spirit, erase their cultural memory or dampen their commitment to individual and collective resistance to colonial domination. A few elements of the Oromo educated class clearly understood the impact of Ethiopian colonialism on Oromo society by familiarizing themselves with Oromo history, culture, values, and various forms of the Oromo resistance to Ethiopian colonialism. These individuals facilitated the emergence of the Oromo national movement by developing national *Oromummaa* (Oromo national culture, identity, and nationalism) (Jalata 2007). The emergence of the Macha-Tuulama Self-Help Association (MTA) in the early 1960s (Jalata and Hassen 2014) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in the early 1970s marked the development of national *Oromummaa* and its national organizational structures (Jalata 2010). Beginning in the 1980s, by replacing the main organization's Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology, national *Oromummaa* based on the *gadaa/siiqee* principles has emerged as the central political ideology of the Oromo national movement led by the OLF.

The histories of Oromia and Ethiopia demonstrate that ignoring the cultural capital of indigenous democracies such as that of the Oromo called the *gadaa/siiqqee* system and imposing an authoritarian/ethnocratic/racist state on various national groups has produced continuous economic, sociocultural, and political crises. Without critically and thoroughly addressing and solving these complex problems, the Oromo national movement cannot adequately achieve its political, cultural, and economic objectives. The struggles of the MTA and the Oromo OLF are consolidated by the recent *Qeerro/Qarree*-led Oromo national movement. Currently the commercialization and fragmentation of Oromo ideologies and politics by different Oromo political organizations and the absence of strong national organizational capacity are the two major pitfalls of the Oromo national interest. At the same time, the availability of political opportunities such as politicized collective grievances; the existence of the OLF and other independent Oromo political organizations; the increase of political consciousness among students and others; the cultural renaissance initiated by the MTA and students; the further development of national *Oromummaa*; and the introduction of technological

innovations such as social media including mobile phones, the Internet and Twitter, radio, and satellite television have galvanized the Oromo people in general and the youth in particular to engage in the clandestinely organized and systematically networked peaceful protest movement that mobilized almost all sectors of the Oromo society (Jalata 2019; 2020).

The Oromo youth movement has far-reaching consequences for the Oromo national struggle and politics. It has already demonstrated that the foundation of the Ethiopian colonial state has been built on a shaky foundation that cannot survive a determined and organized Oromo revolutionary force. For the first time since their colonization the Oromo people, under the leadership of *Qeerroo/ Qarree*, have demonstrated that they are capable of dismantling Ethiopian settler colonialism and its political structures. Particularly, the Oromo youth have changed the potential of the Oromo nation for collective action by uniting most sectors of Oromo society. As a consequence of the recent Oromo protests, politically conscious Oromo and others have realized that it is only a matter of time before the Oromo nation achieves its political objective of national self-determination and egalitarian democracy. Farsighted political activists and serious nationalists have realized that without building strong national institutions and organizations protests or revolts alone cannot dismantle the Ethiopian colonial state. Developing new political strategies, building broad-based alliances, and working on building strong national institutions and political organizations are absolutely necessary to bring the Oromo national struggle to fruition. The Oromo youth protest movement has created conducive conditions for these factors. The political agenda of combining the principles of national self-determination and egalitarian multinational democracy had temporarily resulted in creating consensus among the Oromo and Amhara youths and others to remove the Tigrayan-led authoritarian-terrorist regime (Jalata 2016).

At the same time, the series of protests created a serious crisis in the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) and led to the stepping down of the president of the Regional State of Oromia, Muktar Kedir (2014–2016), and his replacement by Lemma Megersa in October 2016. The election of Lemma Megersa was a special event because for the first time the OPDO elected its leader without asking for permission from its creator and master, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which dominated the Ethiopia government. So, we can say that the *Qeerroo/Qarree* movement liberated OPDO. As we can see below, once Abiy Ahmed emerged as the leader of OPDO and became

the prime minister of Ethiopia, he allied with the neo-*nafxanyas* to abort the Oromo national movement. As the *Qeerroo/Qarree* peaceful movement consolidated its political base in Oromia and extended its solidarity to other regional states, such as the Amhara youth movement known as Fanoo and the Gurage movement known as Zarma, and the Sidama youth movement called Ejjetto. As economic boycotts intensified in Oromia between June 5, 2016 and February 6, 2018, the TPLF/EPRDF regime declared another State of Emergency on February 16, 2018: "This is Ethiopia's second state of emergency in two years and it came a day after Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned. The election of a new prime minister is expected early next week."[3]

The Oromo peaceful movement assisted the OPDO to empower itself and to negotiate with the EPRDF to appoint its member, Abiy Ahmed, to become the Prime Minister of Ethiopia on April 2, 2018. Abiy Ahmed served in the Ethiopian military and rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and directed the Information Network and Security Agency, which is responsible for cyber-security and control of the Internet. He emerged as Chairman of the OPDO/EPRDF and controlled the apparatuses of the Security and the Military. However, his lack of concern for the Oromo was demonstrated by the displacement of 1.2 million Oromo and the killings of hundreds of them in the Ethiopian-Somali Regional State. Also, the Gumuz people from Benishangul killed many people and expelled more than eighty thousand Oromo from their region. Furthermore, within a short time, Abiy has demonstrated that he is the leader of the neo-*nafxanyas* (colonial settlers)[4] by establishing military command posts in Western, Southern and Central Oromia to terrorize, imprison, and kill thousands of Oromos by claiming that his army, the police, and the militia are fighting the Oromo Liberation Army. The neo-*nafxanaya* government of Abiy has been engaging in state terrorism and genocide than the OPDO/EPRDF regime while masquerading as an Oromo-led government because Abiy is speaking *Afaan Oromoo* speaking *nafxanya*.

The Essence and Main Characteristics of *Gadaa/Siqqee*

Recorded history demonstrates that between the 16th and the mid-17th centuries, all of the Oromo people lived under one *gadaa* administration (Baissa, 2004: 101; Jalata, 2005: 20). In the *gadaa/siqqee* republic, the Oromo people were organized around political, economic, social, cultural, and religious institutions. According to Lemmu Baissa (2004: 101), "*Gadaa/Siqqee* government comprised a hierarchy of triple levels of

government: the national, the regional and the local. At the Pan-Oromo level, the national government was led by an elected *luba* council [leaders] formed from representatives of the major Oromo moieties, clan families and clans, under the presidency of the *abbaa gadaa* and his two deputies . . . The national leadership was responsible for such important matters as legislation and enforcement of general laws, handling issues of war and peace and coordinating the nation's defense, management of intra-Oromo clan conflicts and dealing with non-Oromo people." By the mid-17th century, with an increased population and extended territorial possessions, different Oromo groups started to form autonomous *gadaa/siqqee* governments (Baissa 2004; Jalata 2005a). While establishing autonomous local governments, the Oromo groups formed alliances, federations, and confederations to maintain their political and cultural solidarity and to defend their security and interest from their common enemies (Bulcha 1996: 50; Etefa 2008).

The case of the Tuulama Oromo group demonstrates that "autonomous local governments were answerable to the overall *gadaa* of the main branch" (Etefa 2008: 21). However, as explained above, as some Oromo branches moved to far-flung regions and interacted with other peoples and as they settled and engaged in farming and trade, they developed class differentiation that gradually led to the transformation of the *gadaa* system into the *moottii* system (autocratic kingdom). Constant wars led to the evolution of the *abbaa dulas* (military leaders) into hereditary *moottiis* (leaders) in northern and western Oromia. In other words, the emergence of class differentiation and the rise of the Oromo kingdoms suppressed the democratic essence of the *gadaa/siqqee* system in some parts of Oromia. As a result, during the second half of the 19th century, the Oromo people found themselves ill equipped to unite and effectively defend themselves from the Ethiopian colonial system mainly as the result of the decentralization of *gadaa* and the emergence of the *moottii* system.

However, it was the Ethiopian colonial state that effectively suppressed or destroyed a functioning *gadaa* system in most parts of Oromia. Despite the internal challenge and the external attack on the *gadaa* system, the system has been the foundation and pillar of Oromo society with its principles remaining as the hallmark of the Oromo nation. *Gadaa* has three interrelated meanings: it is the grade during which a class of people assumes politico-ritual leadership, a period of eight years during which elected officials take power from the previous ones, and the

institution of Oromo society (Legesse 1973; 2006). The *gadaa* system has the principles of checks and balances (such as periodic transfer of power every eight years and division of power among executive, legislative, and judiciary branches), balanced opposition (among five gadaa grades), and power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs to prevent power from falling into the hands of despots. Other principles of the system have included balanced representation of all clans, lineages, regions and confederacies, accountability of leaders, the settlement of disputes through reconciliation, and the respect for basic rights and liberties.

There are five *gadaa* grades; each has different names in different parts of Oromia as the result of the population expansion of the Oromo and their establishment of different autonomous administrative systems. For example, in central Oromia, these five grades are called *itimakko*, *daballee*, f*oollee*, *dorooma/qoondala*, and *luba*. Oromo males are involuntarily recruited to both age-sets and generation-sets or *gadaa* grades. Male children join age-sets as newly born infants. Males born in the same eight-year period belong to an age-set. But they enter into the system of *gadaa* grades forty years after their fathers, and since one grade is eight years, fathers and sons are five grades apart. Male children can join advanced grades at birth and may join men or old men who are considered to be members of their genealogical generations. Older men mentor young males in teaching rules and rituals, but the former treat the later as equals since there is no status difference between the two groups in a *gadaa* class (or grades). Between the third and fourth *gadaa* grades, boys become adolescent and are initiated into taking serious social responsibilities. The ruling group has responsibility to assign senior leaders and experts to instruct and counsel these young men in the importance of leadership, organization, and warfare. Young men are also trained to become junior warriors by taking part in war campaigns and hunting large animals; they learn the practical skills of warfare, military organization, and fighting so that they can engage in battle to defend their country and economic resources. As Paul T. Baxter (1978: 177) notes, the Oromo have used age-sets because generation-sets "cannot be an efficient means to mobilize troops, and a quite distinct organization based on closeness of age . . . exists for that purpose."

The rule of law is the key element of the *gadaa* system; those leaders who violated the law of the land or whose families could not maintain the required standard of the system were recalled before the end of their tenure in the office. *Gadaa* leaders implemented the laws that were made by

representatives of the people; Oromo democracy has allowed the Oromo people through their representatives to formulate change or amend laws and rules every eight years. The *gadaa* system accepted the Oromo people as the ultimate source of authority and believed nobody was above the rule of law. *Gadaa* officials were elected by established criteria by the people from the *qoondala* grade and received rigorous training in *gadaa* philosophy and governance for eight years before they entered the *luba* grade (administrative grade); the main criteria for election or selection to office included bravery, knowledge, honesty, demonstrated ability to govern, etc.

Today some aspects of *gadaa* still exist in some Oromo regions. In the Boorana Oromo community, for example, the Gumii Gaayyo (the assembly of multitudes) brings together most important leaders, such as living *Abbaa Gadaas* (the president of the assembly), the *qaallus* (spiritual leaders), age-set councilors, clan leaders and *gadaa* councilors, and other concerned individuals to make or amend or change laws and rules of every eight years. In August of 1996, the 37th Gumii Gaayyo Assembly was held to make, amend, or change three kinds of laws that the Boorana Oromo classifies as cardinal, customary, and supplementary laws (Huqqa 1998). The Gumii Gaayyo assembly has a higher degree of ritual and political authority than the gadaa class and other assemblies because it "assembles representative of the entire society in conjunction with any individual who has the initiative to the ceremonial grounds," and "what Gumii decides cannot be reversed by any other assembly" (Legesse 1973: 93). However, under the Ethiopian colonial system, the surviving *gadaa* does not have the sovereignty it used to have.

During the *gadaa* era, Oromo women had the *siqqee* institution, a parallel institution to the *gadaa* system that "functioned hand in hand with gadaa system as one of its built-in mechanisms of checks and balances" (Kumsa 1997: 119). If the peace between men and women was broken, a *siqqee* rebellion was initiated to restore the law of God and the moral and ethical order of society. The *gadaa* and *siqqee* institutions greatly influenced the Oromo value system in pre-colonial (pre 1880s) Oromo society. These two institutions helped maintain saffu (Oromo moral codes) in Oromo society by enabling Oromo women to have control over resources and private spaces, social status and respect, sisterhood and solidarity by deterring men from infringing upon their individual and collective rights. Recognizing the importance of the *gadaa* system, Oromo nationalists are struggling to restore the system.

The Struggle for *Gadaa/Siiqee* Renaissance

Some core Oromo nationalists assert that without refining and adapting some elements of the original Oromo political culture of *gadaa/siiqqee*, Oromo society cannot fully develop national *Oromummaa*, which is necessary to achieve national self-determination, statehood, and democratic governance. Recognizing that Oromo identity and peoplehood are an expression of Oromo national culture, some Oromo nationalist scholars have started to study the cultural and religious foundations of Oromo society to critically understand the whole essence of Oromo society. Such scholars believe that studying, understanding, and restoring the original Oromo social and political institutions by refining and adapting them to contemporary conditions are practical steps towards unifying and consolidating the Oromo national movement. These nationalists have already started to develop national *Oromummaa* ideals based on original Oromo cultural foundations.

The Oromo national struggle has initiated the Oromo cultural movement based on the following Oromo concepts: *Oromummaa*, *gootummaa* (bravery and patriotism), *walabummaa* (sovereignty), *bilisummaa* (liberation), *gadaa/siqqee* (popular Oromo democracy), *nagaa* (peace), and *kao* or *kaayyo* (prosperity and peace). Furthermore, core Oromo nationalists assert today that all concerned Oromo should participate in revitalizing the Oromo national movement by applying some elements of *gadaa/siiqqee*, aiming at establishing a future Oromia state, sharing sovereignty with others, implementing internal peace within Oromo society, and promoting peace with Oromia's neighbors. They also note that the Oromo national struggle has now reached a level where it requires mass mobilization and participation in order to succeed. In this mobilization, they recommend the struggle to use the ideology and principles of *gadaa/siiqqee* democracy enshrined in *Oromummaa* to mobilize the entire nation spiritually, financially, militarily, and organizationally to take coordinated political and military actions.

Also, a few Oromo scholars suggest that Oromo political organizations need to use Oromo political wisdom and experience in order to build national organizational capacity and to throw off the chains of Ethiopian colonialism. They also recommend that after bringing together *gadaa/siiqqee* experts and Oromo intellectuals who are familiar with the Oromo democratic traditions, the Oromo national movement should start to formulate procedures, strategies, and tactics for building a national assembly with supreme authority called *Gumii* Oromia.

At this national *Gumii*, they suggest representatives of all Oromo sectors, all serious and independent Oromo liberation fronts and organizations should carry out their national obligations. This national *Gumii* must be modeled after the Gumii Gaayyo:

> In Oromo democratic traditions, the highest authority does not reside in the great lawmakers who are celebrated by the people, nor the rulers who are elected to govern for eight years, nor hereditary rights, nor the age-sets and age-regiments who furnish the military force, nor the *abba dula* who lead their people in battle. It resides, instead, in the open national assembly, at which all *gadaa* councils and assemblies . . . active and retired are represented, and *warra Qallu,* the electors, participate as observers. The meetings that take place every eight years review the conduct of the ruling *gadaa* council, punish any violators of law, and remove any or all of them from office, should that become necessary. In such sessions, a retired *abba gadaa* presides. The primary purpose of the meetings of the national assembly, however, is to reexamine the laws of the land, to reiterate them in public, to make new laws if necessary, and to settle disputes that were not resolved by lower levels in their judicial organizations (Legesse 2006: 211)

The *Gumii Gaayyo* is an expression of the exemplar model of the unwritten Oromo constitution. Reframing and transforming the unwritten Oromo constitution into a new national constitution based on Oromo democratic principles require absolute commitment from Oromo nationalists and their organizations. As Asmarom Legesse (2006: 255) asserts, "Oromo democracy is not perfect: if it were, it would not be democratic. Like all democratic institutions, it is the product of changing human thought that must always be re-examined in relation to changing historic circumstances." The underlying assumption is that by establishing the National Assembly of *Gumii* Oromia, Oromo nationalists and organizations of the Oromo national movement aim to frame a written Oromo constitution by adapting older Oromo political traditions to new circumstances while also learning from other democratic practices. Those who promote the idea of building *Gumii* Oromia recommend that the Oromo national movement needs to address three major issues. The first issue is to further develop national *Oromummaa* to its fullest capacity

by overcoming its unevenness and deficiencies. This will strengthen the Oromo national organizational capacity.

Between the time when the Oromo were colonized and until Oromo nationalism emerged, Oromoness primarily existed on personal and the interpersonal levels since the Oromo were denied opportunities to form national institutions. Expressed Oromoness was targeted for destruction; colonial administrative regions established to suppress the Oromo people and exploit their resources. As a result, Oromo relational identities have been localized and not strongly connected to a collective Oromo national identity. The Oromo were forcibly separated from one another and prevented from exchanging goods and information with one another for more than a century. They were exposed to different cultures (i.e., languages, customs, values, etc.) and religions and adopted an array of them. Consequently, today there are Oromo who have internalized these externally imposed regional or religious identities because of their low level of political consciousness or from their political opportunism. The Oromo people who did not develop national political consciousness confuse clan, regional, or religious politics with Oromo national politics. Historically, Oromo political weaknesses primarily started to emerge as Oromo in some parts of Oromia moved away from belonging to one *gadaa* republic to forming autonomous *gadaa* governments. These weaknesses and the emergence of class stratification in western, central and northern Oromia resulted in the development of the *moottii* systems (kingdoms). Some of these leaders collaborated with the Abyssinian/Ethiopian colonial system rather than defend the interest of the Oromo people during the second half of 19th century.

Overcoming these political weaknesses by building Oromo national organizational capacity is only possible when national Oromummaa as a national vision energizes and unites the entire Oromo nation. As an element of culture, nationalism, and vision, national *Oromummaa* has the power to serve as a manifestation of the collective identity of the Oromo national movement. The basis of national *Oromummaa* must be built on the overarching principles that are embedded within Oromo traditions and culture and, at the same time, have universal relevance for all oppressed peoples. The main foundations of national *Oromummaa* are rooted in the rights of individual and collective freedom, social justice, popular democracy, and human liberation, which are built on the concept of *safuu* (Oromo moral and ethical order) and are enshrined in *gadaa/siqqee* principles. As the ideology of the Oromo national movement,

national *Oromummaa* enables the Oromo to retrieve their cultural memories, assess the consequences of Ethiopian colonialism, and give voice to their collective grievances. National *Oromummaa* enables the Oromo people to form alliances with all political forces and social movements that accept the principles of national self-determination and multinational democracy in the promotion of a global community that will be free from oppression and exploitation.

As a national project and the central ideology of the Oromo national movement, *Oromummaa* enables the Oromo to mobilize diverse cultural resources, interlink Oromo personal, interpersonal and collective (national) relationships, and assists in the development of Oromo-centric political strategies and tactics that can mobilize the nation for collective action empowering the people for liberation. As a global project, *Oromummaa* requires that the Oromo national movement be inclusive of all persons operating in a democratic fashion. This global *Oromummaa* enables the Oromo people to form alliances with all political forces and social movements that accept the principles of national self-determination and multinational democracy in promotion of a global humanity that will be free of all forms of oppression and exploitation. In other words, global *Oromummaa* is based on the principles of mutual solidarity, social justice, and multinational democracy. The foundation of *Oromummaa* must be built on overarching principles that are embedded within Oromo traditions and culture and, at the same time, have universal relevance for all oppressed peoples. Although, in recent years, many Oromo have become adherents of Christianity and Islam, the concept of *Waqaa* (God) lies at the heart of Oromo traditions and culture. In Oromo traditions, *Waqaa* is the creator of the universe and the source of all life. The universe created by *Waqaa* contains within itself a sense of order and balance that is to be made manifest in human society.

Although *Oromummaa* emerges from Oromo cultural and historical foundations, it goes beyond culture and history in providing a liberative narrative for the future of the Oromo7.8611 in nation as well as the future of other oppressed peoples, particularly those who suffer under the Ethiopian Empire. Those Oromo who endorse and glorify *Ethiopianism* and clan/regional politics are undermining *Oromummaa* in order to enjoy power and material benefits at the cost of the Oromo nation and other peoples. Without recognizing the centrality of *Oromummaa* for the national struggle, the Oromo cannot develop a victorious consciousness that equips them with the knowledge of liberation. *Oromummaa* as an

intellectual and ideological vision places the Oromo man and woman at the center of analysis and at the same time goes beyond Oromo society and aspires to develop global *Oromummaa*. Understanding Oromo society with its complex democratic laws, elaborate legislative traditions, and well-developed methods of dispute settlement, the Oromo national struggle can present a new perspective for African and world politics. The Oromo and other oppressed peoples can ally with one another on regional and global levels by exchanging political and cultural experiences and recreating the ideology of pan-Africanism from "below" and7.8611 in global mutual solidarity based on the principles of popular democracy and an egalitarian world order. *Oromummaa* challenges the idea of glorifying African monarchies, chiefs, or warlords that collaborated with European slavers and colonizers and destroyed Africa by participating in the slave trade and the project of colonization.

Those African(ist) scholars who degrade African democratic traditions just as their Euro-American counterparts devalue the Oromo democratic system and consider indigenous Africans such as the Oromo primitive and "stateless." Challenging the view of Euro-American racist and "modernist" scholars, Asmarom Legesse (2000: 30) asserts that "since monarchy was in decline in most Europe, and the transition to democracy became the epitome of Europe's highest political aspirations, admitting that some varieties of democracy were firmly planted in Africa in the 16th century when in fact they were not fully established in Britain, the United States and France until the 17th or 18th century would have made the ideological premise of the 'civilizing mission' somewhat implausible. The idea … that African democracies may have some constitutional features that are more advanced than their European counterpart was and still is considered quite heretical."

The second issue deals with the necessity of building a strong national movement that will lead to the formation of an independent Oromia state that can share sovereignty with other peoples. As other nationalisms, Oromo nationalism has two edges, one cutting backward, and the other forward. The Oromo national movement should reconsider Oromo culture and history and recognize its negative aspects and avoid them. As the formation of different autonomous *gadaa* governments and the emergence of the *moottii* system contributed to the defeat of the Oromo people in the second half of the 19th century, the political fragmentation of Oromo society will perpetuate the defeat of the Oromo nation in the 21st century. Without coordinating and consolidating the

Oromo national movement, the Oromo cannot effectively confront and defeat the Ethiopian colonial system.

The third issue is that while consolidating the Oromo national movement, it is necessary to build political alliances with other peoples who are interested in the principles of national self-determination and multinational democratic rule. Although the priority of the Oromo national movement is to liberate Oromia and its people, the movement has moral and political obligations to promote social justice and democracy for other peoples who have suffered under the successive authoritarian-terrorist governments of the Ethiopian Empire. Therefore, the Oromo movement needs to build a political alliance with national groups that endorse the principles of national self-determination and multinational democracy. A democratic Oromia could play a central role in a multinational democratic state because of its democratic tradition, the size of its population, geopolitics, and abundant economic resources. The Oromo national movement should demonstrate to Oromo society and their neighbors that the Oromo nation is serious about statehood, sovereignty, and democracy for the Oromo as well as other peoples.

Practicing *Gadaa/Siiqqee* Principles and Developing *Oromummaa*

In their history, the Oromo have lived under two forms of socio-political orders: The first one was sovereign, democratic, more or less peaceful and secure although not perfect. The Oromo liberation ideology and theoretical model must emerge from these socio-cultural and historical foundations. Before they were colonized during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Oromo were governed by an egalitarian democratic order called the *gadaa/siqqee* system that encapsulated all aspects of Oromo cultural, political, military, social, and economic, religious, and philosophical perspectives. According to Mannheim (1936, 85–86), "Knowledge, as seen in the light of the total conception of ideology, is by no means an illusory experience, for ideology in its relational concept is not at all identical with illusion. Knowledge arising out of our experience in actual life situations, though not absolute is knowledge, nonetheless. The norms arising out of such actual life situations do not exist in a social vacuum but are effective as real sanctions for conduct." The second one has been a colonial order characterized by terror, physical and mental genocide, political slavery, illiteracy, and impoverishment.

By committing "the genocide of the mind," (Moore 2003) the intellectual perspectives of the colonialists and imperialists have misled Oromo intellectuals and nationalists to ignore their indigenous socio-cultural foundations and borrow the theoretical and ideological models of the East or the West that have less relevance for the Oromo situation. Since the Oromo people have not been adequately represented in academic, media, and government institutions, their voices have been muzzled and hidden and most people, including Oromo students, are still misinformed and know little about the Oromo and their institutions. Explaining the similar conditions of indigenous Americans, MariJo Moore (2003, xv) argues that the colonialists and their descendants have committed "genocide of the mind" on the surviving indigenous Americans "to destroy and/or misrepresent the histories, futures, languages, and traditional thoughts of Native peoples." Similarly, the Habasha colonialists not only occupied the Oromo country, but they have also controlled the Oromo mind and framed the way Oromo think, act, and behave. Consequently, some Oromo still identify themselves with Ethiopians knowingly or unknowingly and work against the Oromo national interest ideologically, politically, militarily, and culturally.

Oromo nationalists need to achieve total mental liberation by overcoming the devastating effects of the genocide of the mind that Ethiopian colonialism and global imperialism have imposed on them. After studying many forms of civilizations, I have reached the conclusion that national *Oromummaa* that is based on the best elements of the *gadaa/siqqee* civilization, worldview, egalitarian democracy, and justice for all can help Oromo nationalists to overcome the ideological and theoretical confusions that attempt to hijack or abort the Oromo struggle for liberation, sovereignty, peace, and security. Since there are many external and internal forces that directly or indirectly stifle the development of national *Oromummaa* through undermining the renaissance of *gadaa/siqqee*, what should the genuine Oromo nationalists do? The *gadaa/siqqee* system is the central source of Oromo politics, philosophy, wisdom, worldview, moral values, ethics, laws, and customs from which national *Oromummaa* flows and develops as the intellectual, ideological, and theoretical powerhouse of the Oromo nation. Since Oromo nationalism is not yet fully grounded in this system, it is confused by alien ideologies and theories that contradict Oromo fundamental values and democratic principles.

Because of such confusion and the lack of a clear ideological and theoretical approach, the Oromo national movement is currently stifled and

misused by misguided Oromo elements and other forces that are against the Oromo national interest. However, those genuine and determined Oromo nationalists are engaging in the liberation struggle, defending Oromo institutions, and providing the values that have allowed a new generation of activists and leaders to challenge the Ethiopian colonial system. Consequently, the Ethiopian rulers commit wide scale levels of human rights violations on the Oromo and others. These abuses are testament to the fear that is in the hearts of the Abyssinian leadership. But imprisonment, torture, death, and suffering did not prevent Oromo nationalists from fighting for the rights of their people. Therefore, I am convinced that Oromo nationalists who are determined to advance the Oromo liberation and emancipation must return to the source of the *gadaa/siqqee* civilization that still survives in the minds and hearts of the ordinary Oromo. As Amilcar Cabral (1973, 61) notes, "the question of a 'return to the source' or of a 'cultural renaissance' does not arise and could not arise for the masses of these people, for it is they who are the repository of the culture and at the same time the only social sector who can preserve and build it up and make history."

Since the Oromo society has been the repository of *gadaa/siqqee* principles and practices, between 1991 and 1992, when the OLF appeared on the Ethiopian political platform by joining the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian Transitional Government, hearing about democracy and *gadaa* and seeing *odaa* (Sycamore) on the OLF flag, the majority of the Oromo supported this organization claiming *kayyoon deebitee* (our freedom returned). Unfortunately, the OLF had not yet developed the necessary organizational capacity to use *gadaa/siqqee* principles and practices in organizing and empowering the Oromo people to struggle for their liberation and emancipation. Using these weaknesses as a political opportunity and fearing the Oromo political potential, with the support of Eritrea and the West, particularly the United States, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and its surrogate organizations attacked the OLF and diminished its capacity, humiliated the Oromo people, postponed the Oromo liberation and emancipation, and continued Ethiopian colonialism under the Tigrayan leadership.

Although significant progress has been made in developing national *Oromummaa*, the Oromo national movement must now focus on the mental liberation of the Oromo people to fundamentally break the colonization of their minds and enable the entire society to own and engage in their own liberation and emancipation project rather than being passive

observers and reluctant supporters. This is only possible by fully developing national *Oromummaa* by restoring *gadaa/siqqee* principles, building civic organizations, and improving Oromo political culture. National *Oromummaa* is above the individual, regional, and religious identities; it is the foundation of Oromo survival, and without it, the Oromo cannot practice their culture and religions freely and promote their national interests. Based on the accumulated past traditions, knowledge, and wisdom, *Oromummaa* also introduces an ideological and theoretical innovation and facilitates the emergence and development of new cultural elements. In reviving the best Oromo cultural elements and diffusing "a critical form of truths already discovered" Oromo nationalist intellectuals have a central role; such committed scholars must unearth the Oromo past and provide critical theoretical guidance for the development of *Oromummaa*. Antonio Gramsci (1985, 330) asserts that there should be "between the intellectuals and the simple [ordinary people] as there should be between theory and practice. That is, if the intellectuals had been organically the intellectuals of those masses, and if they had worked out and made coherent the principles and the problems raised by the masses in their practical activity, thus constituting a cultural and social bloc."

The Oromo recognize the values of competence, intelligence, hard work, moral authority, patriotism, bravery, self-sacrifice, respect for the rule of law, and achievements; these values emerge from their *gadaa/siqqee* traditions. However, they are dwindling in the contemporary Oromo society. History demonstrates that all *gadaa/siqqee* leaders emerged based on these values and other criteria, and these values and other criteria are also very important for now and the future. Unfortunately, some of these qualities are missing in most Oromo intellectual and political leaders today. These Oromo leaders are challenged to maintain organic unity with fellow Oromo to further flourish *Oromummaa* through developing political consciousness, coherent ideology and theory, and worldview. It is very clear that Oromo intellectuals and political leaders have been pulled away from their people by the colonization of their minds, and they lack critical knowledge, experience, wisdom, and expertise of organizing their people.

In order to further develop their national *Oromummaa* and knowledge and skills for establishing organic unity with their society, Oromo intellectual and political leaders and other activists should overcome their internalization of victimization, alienation, arrogance, individualism,

and appreciate and promote team or collective work by replacing the knowledge for domination and self-aggrandizement by the knowledge for liberation, which is congruent with *gadaa/siqqee* values and principles. The restoration of such values and principles for liberation and emancipation are the product of "heroic courage and contributions of thousands of largely unsung heroes and heroines." We know a few names of those leaders who ignited the fire of national *Oromummaa* by sacrificing their precious lives, but we do not know the names of thousand Oromo nationalists who have been killed or assassinated, tortured, punished by life imprisonments, crippled or blinded, and raped by the enemies of the Oromo people.

The main roadblock for restoring *gadaa/siqqee* principles and values and further developing national Oromummaa is the Ethiopian colonial government that has imposed political slavery on the Oromo by denying them the freedom of organization and association for more than a century. But the Ethiopian government did not or does not have absolute power to prevent the Oromo people from organizing themselves because Oromo nationalists could create the Macha-Tulama Self-Association in the early 1960s openly and the Oromo Liberation Front in the early 1970s clandestinely, and the Oromia-wide *qeerroo/qarree* (Youth) protest movement between 2015 and 2018. Hence, the Oromo have the power to organize national civic and political organizations in Oromia openly and clandestinely, despite the brutality of the Ethiopian political system, and in the diaspora openly and intensify the Oromo national struggle for total liberation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Oromo national movement needs to refine and adapt some central aspects of the Oromo democratic heritage in order to facilitate a fundamental transformation in Oromo society and beyond. Retrieving the best elements of Oromo democratic traditions and establishing a politico-military organization are necessary to overcome the current political challenge the Oromo nation faces from the current Ethiopian government, its Oromo clienteles, and its global supporters, which are all hindering the reemergence of Oromia statehood, sovereignty, and democracy. Refining and adapting the central elements of Oromo democratic traditions and developing national and global *Oromummaa* can help the Oromo nation attain internal unity and peace and external solidarity with regional and international powers that recognize and accept

the principles of national self-determination, sustainable development, regional and global peace, and multinational democracy. The survival of the Oromo nation requires restoring the *gadaa* system, consolidating the Oromo national struggle, and mobilizing the entire Oromo nation to dismantle the Ethiopian terrorist government and recreate a sovereign Oromia state that can be an independent state or an integral part of a sovereign multinational democratic state in the Horn of Africa.

References

Adugna, Abebe. 2006. "A Comparative Welfare Analysis of Ethiopian Regions: The Case of Oromia," *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, 13 (1 & 2): 1-18.

Baxter, P. T. W. 1978. "Boran Age-Sets and Generation-Sets: Gadaa, a Puzzle or a Maze?" in *Age, Generation and Time*, edited by P. T. W. Baxter and Uri Almagor, (London: C. Husrst & Company), pp. 151-182.

Baissa, Lemmu. 2004. "The Oromo Gadaa System of Government: An Indigenous African Democracy," edited by Asafa Jalata, *State Crises, Globalisation and National Movements in Northeast Africa*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 101-121.

Bulcha, Mekuria. 1996. "The Survival and Reconstruction of Oromo National Identity," *Being and Becoming Oromo. Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*, Eds. P. T. W. Baxter, Jan Hultin, Alessandro Triulzi (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), 48-66.

Etefa, Tsega. 2008. "Pan-Oromo Confederations in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 15 (1): 19-40.

Fossati, Bruna, L. Namarra, and Peter Niggli. 1996. *The New Rulers of Ethiopia and the Persecution of Oromo: Reports from the Oromo Refugees in Djibouti*, (Dokumentation, Evangelischer Pressedienst Frankfurt am.

Hassen, Mohammed. 2002. "Conquest, Tyranny, and Ethnocide against the Oromo," *Northeast African Studies* 9 (3): 15-49.

Holcomb, B. and S. Ibssa. 1990. *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*, (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press).

Holcomb, B. 1999. "Oromo in the World Community," *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 6 (1 & 2): 1-48.

Human Rights Watch. 2005a. "Suppressing Dissent Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region."

17 :(7) A. https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/ethiopia0505/, accessed 12/20/2020.

____. 2005b. "Ethiopia: Overview of Human Rights Issues," http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/01/13/ethiop98 33. htm.

Huqqa, Gollo. 1998. *The 37 th Gumii Gaayo Assembly*, (Addis Ababa: The Norwegian Church Aid).

Jalata, Asafa. 2005a. *Oromia & Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-2004*, Second Edition, (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press).

____. 2005b. "State Terrorism and Globalization: The Cases of Ethiopia and Sudan," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, volume 46, issue 1-2, February-April, pp. 79-102.

____. 2007. *Oromummaa: Oromo Culture, Identity & Nationalism.* Atlanta: Oromia Publishing Company.

____. 2020. *The Oromo Movement and Imperial Politics: Culture and Ideology.* Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

____. 2019. *Cultural Capital and Prospectus for Democracy in Botswana and Ethiopia.* London: Routledge.

Jalata, Asafa and Mohammed Hassen. 2014. *The Macha-Tulama Association: Its Importance in Oromo History.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Printing Press.

Kumsa, Kuwee. 1997. "The Siiqqee Institution of Oromo Women," *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 4 (1 & 2).

Legessee, Asamrom. 1973. *Gadaa: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*, New York: Free Press.

____. 2006 [2000]. *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System*, (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press).

Endnotes

1 The first version of this paper was presented at the International Conference on Intangible Heritage (initiated by UNESO), 30 May/ 1 June 2009, Pico Island, Azores, Portugal

2 https://medium.com/gendered-violence/how-an-ancient-institution-in-ethiopia-flips-gendered-violence-on-its-head-5b53ea7189e5; https://www.opride.com/2014/10/14/wayyuu-siinqee-and-gora-among-the-arsi-and-guji-oromo/

3 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/ethiopian-lawmakers-approve-state-of-emergency/2018/03/02/af1f9b88-1e0a-11e8-98f5-ceecfa8741b6_story.html

4 Menelik, the Amhara warlord, colonized the Oromo and other peoples with the help of England, France and Italy during the Scramble of Africa and established settler colonialism and its institution known as the *nafxanya-gabbar* system. He terrorized and colonized the Oromo and others to obtain slaves and commodities such as gold, ivory, coffee, musk, hides and skins, and lands. Menelik controlled slave trade (an estimated 25,000 slaves per year in the 1880s), and owned with his wife 70,000 enslaved Africans, and became one of the richest capitalists in the region and the world: "The Abyssinian ruler had extended the range of his financial operations to the United States, and [was] a heavy investor in American railroads … with his American securities and his French and Belgian mining investments, Menelik [had] a private fortune estimated at no less than twenty-five million dollars" (*New York Times*, November 7, 1909). The colonialists, mainly the Amhara rulers, conquered the Oromo and others by using guns (nafxi) and established a system of controlling them through dispossessing their lands and exacting their labor and agricultural products. The colonial settlers---soldiers, clergymen, and administrators, all known as *nafxanyas*---exploited *gabbars* (semi-slaves) who were coerced to provide them food, labor, tribute, and tax revenues both in cash and kind. A *ras* (a head of a group) or *dajazmach* (war leader) could receive 1,000 *gabbars,* a sub-governor 200 or 300, a *fitawrar* (another war leader) 300, a *kangazmach* (lower war leader) could 150, and ordinary soldiers, depending on their ranks, 20, 15 or 10. The colonialists also created intermediary *nafaxanyas* in Oromo and other conquered societies. The Amhara-led colonial government claimed absolute rights over three-fourths of the Oromo lands and provided portions for its officials and soldiers in lieu of salary. One fourth of the land was granted to the Oromo collaborators, who became the agents of the *nafaxanya* state. Despite the fact that some changes occurred in the Ethiopian Empire during 1974, 1991, 2018, the *nafxanya* of all kinds, including the Amhara, Oromo, Tigre, who have come to power continued to protect the same system by promoting the Amhara language in particular and Habasha (Amhara-Tigray) culture in general and institutions. The current regime led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is characterized as the neo-*nafaxanya* government because it tries to modernize the Ethiopian state by glorifying Menelik.

Journal of Oromo Studies_#28.indb 28 7/13/2023 5:10:49 PM

STATE VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL SUFFERING OF THE OROMO IN ETHIOPIA: TORTURE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE EXPLORED

Assefa Tolera Sori

Addis Ababa University

> *Oromo women who had come to visit their relatives were searched by male prison guards and subjected to humiliating treatment. The guards would touch their private parts and ask them if they [were] circumcised. How can I tell you all the insults we suffered during those visits? (Hawani's Story,* Debella and Kassam, 1996:31)

Abstract: This study explores the intricate relationship between systemic/institutionalized state violence and social suffering in Ethiopia. More specifically, it explores state violence perpetrated against the people in the form of torture and sexual violence and how this results in social suffering beyond the pain and suffering individual victims of the violence experience. This work is based on a data generated through the author's personal observation of the developments on the subject matter over the last three decades, informed by rights organizations reports, journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, articles published on advocacy websites, local newspapers and survivors' interviews aired on different radio stations and TV channels. The paper argues that Ethiopia was created and maintained through violence despite the changes in governments/rulers/regimes. People's quest for equality and justice are suppressed through institutionalized state violence perpetrated against

Journal of Oromo Studies_#28.indb 29 7/13/2023 5:10:49 PM

the people in their homes, workplaces, the streets and more so in its notorious torture chambers of *Ma'ikelawi* and *Jail Ogaden*, focused upon in this work not only for their notoriety as centers of human suffering but also for the relative availability of reports covering the experiences of former detainees/prisoners of these facilities. Torture, sexual violence (rape and gang-rape of female prisoners/detainees) by military and security personnel, disappearances, detention without charges including in unknown prisons, and extrajudicial killings are the hallmark of Ethiopia. The article argues that state violence inflicted upon the suspects or those convicted on bogus grounds, is double edged sword, namely to make the suspects suffer for the for the alleged offence and also to scare them off against future involvement in any activity considered subversive by the government. At the wider level, however, it is to secure decile subjects and suppress critical citizenry through massive infliction of violence and social suffering. Beyond the motives, types and severity of torture and other degrading treatments inflicted upon people, the cases presented here shed light on the link between personal experiences of pain and suffering and the broader social suffering discourse. Despite all these sufferings, the people's quest for equality and justice never stops because, to paraphrase Tesfahun Chemeda's last words in a court room when he was delivered a life sentence, *it is impossible to stop someone from fighting to death for his/her rights*.

Key words: torture, sexual violence, state violence, social suffering, Oromo, and Ethiopia.

1. Introduction

The history of Oromo's quest for justice is as old as the Ethiopian empire, created in the late 19th century with a colonial expansion of the Abyssinian King, later Emperor Menelik II (1844-1913) to what is today called the Broader South[1] (Baxter, 1978; Melba 1980; Keller, 1988; Holcomb and Ibsa, 1990; Bulcha, 2011; Kebede 1999; Zewde 1991). But resistance against the autocratic imperial system took a more organized form during the last decades of Emperor Haile-Selassie I (1892-1975) rule, with a popular slogan of '*land to the tiller*!' as a flagship of the quest for equality and justice, and finally led to the fall of the last monarch and the coming to power of the military junta, the *Dergue,* in Sept. 1974. Despite its initial reform measures such as abolition of serfdom, expansion of education and health services to the hitherto marginalized rural areas,

the *Dergue* too turned authoritarian and violent regime. Since peoples' quest for justice was hijacked by the military, resistance, including armed struggle by several liberation fronts, started against the *Dergue*, which was in turn toppled in May 1991 by the EPRDF[2] and other insurgent groups, mainly the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) established in July 1991.

Unable to dissociate itself from the country's violent political culture, the EPRDF failed on its promises of democratizing Ethiopia and gradually became like its predecessor in designating liberation fronts, its former comrades in arms such as the OLF and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), as terrorist organizations. Frustrated by its loss of significant parliamentary seats in the 2005 general election, EPRDF turned more violent, i.e., killed hundreds of anti-government protesters, incarcerated opposition politicians and thousands of their supporters. The fear of another loss in the next general election forced the EPRDF government to issue three draconian laws, i.e., the *Anti-terrorism Law (Proc. No. 652/2009)*, *Charities and Societies Law (Proc. No. 621/2009)*, and the *Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Law (Proc. No. 590/2008)*. As planned, the EPRDF and allied parties won 99.6% and 100% of the 547 parliamentary seats in 2010 and 2015, respectively. The EPRDF turned more authoritarian and violent than the erstwhile regimes in spite of its external appearance as a champion of democracy and a strategic partner of the US in the war against international terrorism, especially Al-Shabaab in Somalia.[3]

EPRDF's authoritarian, unjust and violent system of government provoked sustained resistance that eventually led to the falling apart of the ruling coalition in early 2018. The epicenter of the resistance against the tyrannical government was Oromia, the region that bore the brunt of the 27 years of state violence and social suffering[4] and naturally also played a key role in the collapse of the regime. What is interesting about Ethiopia is despite regime changes, or the ideology they follow, intolerance to dissent, the use of institutionalized state violence to suppress the quest for equality and justice and secure docile subjects that result in immense social suffering are the hallmark of the country.

Within the broader understanding of the nexus between state violence and social suffering, this article examines state violence in the form of torture and sexual violence that resulted in the immense social suffering among the Oromo in the last three decades. The article draws examples from the experiences of torture and sexual violence victims

in Ethiopian prisons/detention centers and engages with broader social suffering discourse. The victims are suspected supporters of insurgent groups or supporters/members of registered opposition parties, mainly OLF and ONC/OPC[5], and those who experienced torture and sexual violence in the hands of Ethiopian military and security personnel, particularly in two notorious torture chambers of *Ma'ikelawi* (the Federal Crime Investigation Center located in Addis Ababa) and *Jail Ogaden*[6] (officially known as Jijiga Central Prison, located in Jigjiga the capital of Somali Regional state). The cases shed light on the motives, types and severity of torture and other degrading treatments, the pervasiveness of rape and gang rapes, and more importantly how personal experiences of pain and suffering link with the broader social suffering discourse.

2. State violence and social suffering: theoretical Lenses

Ethiopian Empire was created through colonial expansion in the late 19th c. (Bulcha, 2011)[7] and like all colonial projects, it was characterized by the infliction of violence on the colonial subjects (Jalata, 2016; Holcomb and Ibsa, 1990; Haji, 1982; 1995; Donham and James, 1986). Ethiopian Empire was created through violence and maintained through the infliction of widespread state violence despite the changes of rulers and regimes. Oromo scholars assert that Abyssinian rulers inflicted upon the Oromo and other colonized peoples both the *physical or overt violence* (economic exploitation/class oppression) and *epistemic violence* (the cultures, languages and histories of the colonized people denied their worth by the educational system, in the writing of history, and in the courts of law) (Bulcha, 2011:3). Bulcha posits "*epistemic violence* is institutionally framed and "pedagogically" executed by state-run educational systems: it attacks the self-esteem of the dominated groups by disparaging their cultures and collective identities. It denies them worth. …it is the combination of the two forms of institutionalized violence that had *politicized identity in Ethiopia* and led to the development of Ethno-national movements" (ibid.3).

Though given different names (Ethiopian Empire until 1974; People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE), 1974-1991; and Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), since 1991) under different regimes, in essence Ethiopia remained the same, i.e., continued inflicting violence on its 'nationals' with the "aim to assimilate the non-Amhara peoples and put an Abyssinian cultural and linguistic stamp on Ethiopian identity and state" (Bulcha, 2011:9). This fact forced the colonized nations such as the Oromo engage in an organized political resistance

and fight for respect, equality and justice, in what Frantz Fanon (1959 cited in Bulcha, 2011) called "the native's violence", the moment when the "oppressed decide to be their own masters" (Bulcha, 2011:3). The Oromo movement with the above political objectives was seen by the *Dergue* [all regimes for that matter] as "doubly subversive because it stood for a different sort of moral order to that of the Amhara elite, which explains why the regime used its cruelest and crudest forms of violence against any signs of distinctive Oromo identity" (Baxter et al 1996:13). It is these kinds of violence that resulted in immense social suffering among the Oromo in Ethiopia.

Social suffering and related issues have been the subject of major works such as *Social Suffering* (Kleinman et al 1997), *Violence and Subjectivity* (Das et al 2000), and *Remaking a World: violence, social suffering, and recovery* (Das et al 2001).[8] In their 1997 work, Kleinman and colleagues applied the term 'social suffering' to a wider sphere of reference, namely any situation in which experiences of pain, trauma and disorder take place as a result of 'what political, economic and institutional power does to people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems' (p. ix).

Kleinman (2006, cited in Wilkinson, 2012:148) "presents his work as a contribution to a new 'anthropology of subjectivity' that aims to expose the shifting social grounds of moral experience and its bearing upon the myriad ways in which individuals struggle to make sense of their lives while beset with the task of forging and maintaining relationships with others". In another work, Kleinman and Fitz-Henry (2007:55) call upon social scientists to bring a renewed focus to 'the particularity of experience' so as to "affirm that our subjectivities and the moral processes within them are forever in flux – not static, abstract, biologically fixed, or divorced from political, social and economic processes, but fluid, contingent and open to transformation". Kleinman maintains that it is in the context of 'ordinary lives' that we stand to apprehend the moral dilemmas and political possibilities afforded under present conditions of modernity; and that this is where we must start to engage with the task of building better social worlds (Wilkinson, p.9).[9] Here a priority is placed on documenting human experience in social context and importance is placed on the effort to attend to the varieties of social practice that create our world. Kleinman advocates a critical anthropology that works from experience 'on the ground' to question how local practices might gather the force to change social structure and cultural process (ibid.).

Further articulating this point, Wilkinson (2012:148-9) explains how empirical social research, and ethnography in particular, serves "as a means to bring the evidence of lived experience to bear upon theoretical terms of analysis and public debate", on the one hand, and "as a component of a "reflexive" process whereby practitioners are sensitized towards the moral values and political investments that shape their professional conduct and genres of writing" on the other. Despite a long history of state violence in Ethiopia (e.g., see Jalata, 2016:115-131; 1993; Hassen, 2002) and unimaginable degree of pain, trauma and suffering people experience, there is very little, if any, research done to document and analyze the lived experience of the survivors and those directly or indirectly affected. Rather, what is common is the politically charged and short-lived campaign against the erstwhile regime by the incumbent (e.g., *Dergue* against Haile-Selassie, EPRDF against the *Dergue*) to mobilize popular support and seek political legitimacy irrespective of how it came to power. There was no attempt to systematically study those atrocities with the objective of understanding the lived experiences of survivors of state violence (individual and collective), redressing those injustices, learn from it and move forward on a new path as a society.

This article attempts to explore how the survivors of state violence, family members/close relatives, and the communities in which the tragic violence was committed by state military and security forces (police, special forces, prison guards, etc.) struggled to come to terms with the pain, trauma and loss and move forward not only in spite of the loss but also in the face of imminent danger, or the 'ecology of fear' (Das and Kleinman, 2000:6). As the article focuses on social suffering and individual experiences, it is important to examine the relationship between pain experienced by individual members of the community and social suffering. Although some argue that it is impossible to see the affliction of the multitudes, this argument does not hold because, as Morris, writing on holocaust, incisively put "The holocaust cannot accurately be described as the suffering of a single Jew repeated six million times" (1997:38). Not being able to see this link is attributed to 'ideological blindness', inability to share the consciousness of a fellow creature (ibid. p.39). Suffering is not a "raw datum, a natural phenomenon we can identify and measure, but a social status we extend or withhold" (Morris, 1997:40). This work was initiated because suffering "Once encountered…it may be used to illuminate corners of human experience too dark to even imagine before" (Schwarcz, 1997:141-2). As Schwarcz rightly notes "One man's skillfully

conveyed suffering becomes a map on which others can locate their disillusionment as well" (p.131).

3. Methods

This work is based on the author's engagement with the issues under discussion and his personal observation of the developments in relation to the subject matter at least over the last fifteen years. The analysis presented here is informed by various sources, including rights organizations reports, journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, articles published on advocacy websites, e.g., https://advocacy4oromia.org/, newspaper articles, mainstream media reports, as well as survivors' interviews aired on different radio stations and TV channels. Furthermore, focused informal discussions and critical reflections on resistance movement, state violence and experiences of pain and suffering with different people were a good source of inputs. The paper has also benefitted from the comments of colleagues and family members.

4. The nexus between torture and social suffering

Art. 18 of the FDRE Constitution prohibits the use of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Torture is absolutely prohibited under International Conventions and Covenants such as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), the ACHPR and the ICCPR, to which Ethiopia is a party, as well as under customary international law.[10] The Convention against Torture (CAT) defines torture as:

> any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity (Art.1).[11]

Under CAT, torture can include acts carried out for a broad range of purposes, including interrogation, intimidation and punishment

(HRW, 2018:23).[12] Article 19(5) of the FDRE Constitution also states "persons arrested shall not be compelled to make confessions or admissions which could be used in evidence against them. Any evidence obtained under coercion shall not be admissible."

However, state violence, including torture, is an everyday practice executed by government military and security forces under the EPRDF government. Human rights abuse, violence, disappearances, detention without charges including in unknown prisons, extrajudicial killings and torture are the hallmark of Ethiopia for critical eyes and human rights watchdogs such as Amnesty International (IA), Haman Rights Watch (HRW), Human Rights League in the Horn of Africa (HRLHoA), and Oromia Support Group (OSG) over the last three decades. For instance, HRW (2018:13) reports:

> Torture remains a serious and very underreported problem across Ethiopia. Human Rights Watch receives regular reports of torture in places of detention country-wide. This includes police stations, prisons, military camps, and various unmarked places of detention. Other NGOs and various media outlets have also reported on torture over many years. Torture is pervasive across Ethiopia's security and intelligence institutions, but some of the most brutal torture occurs at the hands of the Ethiopian military and, since 2010 in Somali Region, at the hands of the Liyu police.

In its '*Because I am Oromo*' report, AI (2014:11) summarizes methods of torture frequently reported by former detainees:

> Frequently reported methods of torture were beating, particularly with fists, rubber batons, wooden or metal sticks or gun butts, kicking, tying in contorted stress positions often in conjunction with beating on the soles of the feet, electric shocks, mock execution or death threats involving a gun, beating with electric wire, burning, including with heated metal or molten plastic, chaining or tying hands or ankles together for extended periods (up to several months), rape, including gang rape, and extended solitary confinement.

Ma'ikelawi and *Jail Ogaden* are the two most notorious torture chambers where systemic and institutionalized human rights violations

are the state sanctioned modus operandi. AI (2014:81) reports the following on the severity of torture in *Ma'ikelawi*: "A foreign journalist who temporarily shared a cell in *Ma'ikelawi* with an Oromo detainee accused of supporting the OLF told Amnesty International the man was being forced to write down everything he knew about the OLF, as part of his confession. But as he did not know anything about the OLF he was asking his cell-mate if he knew anything he could write." HRW (2018) summarizes its report with the following quote from an interview (August 2017) it held with a 42-year-old Mohamed who spent five years without charge in *Jail Ogaden*: "*Jail Ogaden* is unthinkable. From the moment you are put there until the moment you are released, you do not know if you are alive or dead. You are tortured and humiliated day and night, you are starved, [and] you can't sleep because there's so many people" (p.1).

AI documents one peculiar form of torture widely practiced against male detainees in *Ma'ikelawi*. This form of torture, i.e., plastic bottle filled with water tied around and suspended from the penis or genitalia of suspects may be unique to Ethiopia, is practiced in almost all crime investigation/detention centers across the country. In this report, AI documented six male former detainees reported having been repeatedly subjected to this extreme form of torture. For instance,

> One man interviewed by Amnesty International said his brother had had to have 70% of his penis removed after release from detention as a result of being subjected to this treatment:[13] 'Because of the torture carried out on his private parts, the parts had become decayed. The doctors said that if we did not remove the diseased part it might spread to the rest of his body so it was necessary to cut off his private parts.' (2014:87)[14]

Similarly, six former detainee men interviewed by HRW (2018) described "having their genitals (penis and/or testicles) tied to heavy weights, water bottles, or bottles of sand when they were prisoners at *Jail Ogaden*. Some said this occurred in front of other inmates while others said it occurred during individual interrogations". Another former detainee of *Jail Ogaden* reported a slightly different but more cruel and inhuman form of this practice "They [prison officials] did many things to me - they electrocuted [applied electric shocks] my testicles, they tied wire around them". A young woman detained at a military camp for

several years with her two sisters because of her father's alleged affiliation with the OLF and forced to act as labour for the soldiers, showed AI disfiguring and extensive scarring that covered her entire stomach. She said: "Two soldiers did this. They came at night into the room and tied up our hands and made us lie down on our backs. They put coals on our stomachs. Our clothes melted on us. We screamed but the soldier didn't care" (2014:86). These are a few examples presented to highlight the routine application of different forms of torture to give the readers the glimpse of the level of cruelty with which prisoners are treated in Ethiopian prisons/detention centers.

Another form of torture used against male prisoners is forcing them to rape fellow female prisoners. This puts the male prisoners under "serious physical and psychological abuse stemming from humiliation and shame when they were pressured to rape female prisoners" (HRW, 2018). A. Y., a 31-year-old man and former prisoner said:

> They [prison officials] used to order men who were prisoners to rape female prisoners. If they refused, they would threaten to kill them. They would point pistols at them and put the pistol in someone's mouth. When it happened to me, they brought me out of the room. There was a woman there I had never seen... I refused so they threw me on the ground and started to beat me, soldiers walked over me, and I fainted (p.30).

The Oromia Support Group of Australian Unit (OSGA)[15] reported the introduction of a new form of torture, which is spending several hours in standing positions, sometimes up to 15 hours. It is called "Silent Torture" said "to have been adopted by the EPRDF for it does not leave behind any physically noticeable symptoms" (HRLHA Press release No-15).[16] The level of cruelty of torture exercised for several months or even years, eventually costs the lives of prisoners/detainees. The late Gadisa Hirphasa, an Oromo prisoner of Conscience and one of the many victims of such an abusive security structure, wrote in Amharic on the wall of the dark prison cell of the notorious *Ma'ikelawi*: '*kenena kekasashe manew wenjelegna* (roughly, '*who is a criminal, me or my accuser?*') wondering why security personnel exercise an unimaginable level of cruel treatment on innocent people like him. He was a 4th year Civil Engineering student in Addis Ababa University in 2004 when he, along with other over 350 Oromo students, was dismissed from the University for

his alleged "unlawful" political activities.[17] Immediately after that, he was arrested and imprisoned for two years and three months until he finally succumbed to the unbearable beating and repeated torture in high security prisons of *Ma'ikelawi* and Qaliti on March 28, 2006, before even receiving hospital treatment.[18]

Figure 1. Gadisa's writing on his prison cell wall

This photo was taken on September 6, 2019 when the Supreme Court President and the then Attorney General visited *Ma'ikelawi*, reportedly converted into a Museum, for its inauguration as a new facility.[19] Apparently Hirphasa carefully inscribed his message on his cell wall so that it will remain there for several years [whether or not he leaves the cell alive], the reason why the writing had not been erased despite the renovation of the Center and a fresh yellow paint of the wall.

Female prisoners/detainees are at the receiving end of the cruelest and degrading form of torture in Ethiopian prisons/detention centers. They are routinely subjected to more dehumanizing forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment specific to their gender, in addition to all forms of torture inflicted upon all prisoners/detainees. For instance, an Oromo woman arbitrarily detained without charge for nine months in a military camp in Shinile in Shinile Zone of the Somali Regional State, told AI: "During the interrogation, I was thoroughly beaten. I cried for help saying that I was not guilty and should not be killed. One night three men came to my cell and said that I was being taken for interrogating but they just took me to a room and all raped me. After that, they

just threw me back into the cell. I was not the only one – they would do the same to the other women there." (2014:88)[20]

Almost by way of testifying to the pervasiveness of rape in detention centers, another woman shared her personal experience with AI (2014) stressing that hers was not an isolated experience but something that takes place regularly and to every woman detained in military camps arbitrarily and incommunicado – outside the protection of the law. "I was raped by three men – one after the other. I remember them very clearly and can identify them. Rape happened several times over the nine months. This was not unique to me, the other women in the cell had the same experience. There were so many soldiers in the camp and they were all taking advantage of the situation. They had no shame." (p.88)[21]

These reports are silent on the family life, marital status and whether or not these women had children before their arrest. Nonetheless, the *shameless* military and security personnel make *humiliation* a daily experience of these otherwise respected mothers, grandmothers, wives, aunts, sisters and daughters. It is deliberately inflicted upon them, both to satisfy the barbaric sexual lust of the military officers and prison guards and to punish them either for their commitment to fight for equality and justice, or for telling the truth [unwillingness to confess to things they were innocent of] that they in fact do not have any affiliation with armed political organizations which the government had designated as terrorists.[22] As one former female detainee intimated to AI (2014:88), "Rape is used as a form of torture against the victim to threaten her or her relatives, as punishment for the alleged activities of her relatives or to coerce her into giving information."

Former detainees also reported that they were released under strict conditions, i.e., if unrest or political activities such as demonstrations, expressions of local grievances or OLF activity happens in that area, the individual in question would be held responsible. One former detainee told AI: "After six months, they released me from the military camp after forcing me to sign to very strict conditions – including that if there was any trouble in the village, they would hold me responsible" (2014:70). For some people, this was not a condition but a direct threat: "The soldiers said that if something happened, the first one to be shot in the head would be me"[23] said another AI's interviewee. These conditions are forward looking. Not only the conditions, but also the torture, cruel and inhuman or degrading treatments of detainees are forward looking because they are less about punishment for what one might have done than a

warning against future involvement in any activity deemed subversive by the government. For instance, in 1997 OSG (cited in Jalata, 2016:122) reported: "A 7-month pregnant woman in Robe, Bale[24], was arrested and beaten…She miscarried and later died in custody. When relatives went to claim her body, they were told to replace the remains with a living relative. When asked to explain, the TPLF soldiers said, 'She died with OLF objectives still stuck in her brain and we could not get what we wanted from her'." If the whole purpose of her suffering in detention was to punish her for the alleged offence, i.e., advancing OLF objectives, the TPLF soldiers would not have demanded a replacement with a living relative for the remains of a woman who died in custody. Rather, the goal was to terrorize the whole family and community, and secure docile subjects and suppress critical citizenry.

Kefyalew Tefera, a third-year university student, had been shot and arrested by security forces while going home for a vacation and came out of prison after 12 years of incarceration with both of his legs amputated. He narrates his story.

> After that [both of his legs cut-off] before even my wound healed, they took me to the Police Commission and then to *Ma'ikelawi* Interrogation Center. In *Ma'ikelawi* they tortured me constantly. The pain was the kind that a human being cannot imagine. ***They pierced my wound with a sharp iron. They repeatedly stabbed my wound.*** They tied my hand and hanged me and waited for me for 24 hours in three shifts. They were beating me constantly with a baton on my head, slapping me. Until recently my wound was bleeding. I was tortured in such inhuman torture for 9 months. Many people were tortured in the same way. ***What makes mine different is that they cut both of my legs and yet tortured me in the wound.*** When they take me to the bathroom two of them held my hands pushing me and throwing me on the floor. They took me only during night when nobody can see what they were doing. After 9 months they took me to Qalittii prison in a dark room with both my hands tied. There I found six other prisoners whose hands were also tied like me."[25]

Physical punishments, cruel and inhuman treatments such as these are meant to leave a memory that can hardly be erased from peoples' minds, i.e., dissenting and non-compliance will result in more severe

punishments, including loss of life. Writing on the 'creditor' and 'debtor' relationship and the implication of its default, Nietzsche (1989 cited in Das 1995:182) argues punishments are less about the past than the future. He contends that non-compliance results in indignity and torture upon the debtor and this creates memory through the infliction of pain, "most remarkably, the direction of this memory is not the past but the future…" (Das, 1995:183).

Ma'ikelawi has an underground section called *Chelema bet* (dark house) by the inmates, where detainees are kept in solitary confinement and tortured for several months. One former detainee intimated the following to AI (2014:91): "In that underground, you even want to hear the sound of the shoes coming. Because there is no sound and you are alone. When they come, it is only for two reasons, food or punishment. You only know it's morning because they give you tea and bread. That's the only way you count the days. And if they say 'out' you know it's evening and you are going to be beaten."[26] From this quote, we see the detainee's dilemma, i.e., locked up in a dark solitary confinement room, desperate to hear the voice of people, the 'sound of the shoes coming', which though temporary, is a sigh of relief. On the other hand, he knows that the only people who come to his room are his torturers. At least, based on this quote, one would argue that even if the sound of the shoes coming signals the arrival of his torturers, be it as he might enjoy a sigh of relief until the routine torture begins. Reflecting on his personal experience at the notorious *Chelema Bet*: Cell 8 in *Ma'ikelawi*, an Oromo former detainee, Caala Hailu, writes:

> Cell 8 is one of the cells in the block called Chelema bet, meaning "dark house." Everyone fears of being put in this cell, because it is not more than 1×1½ meters wide. My hands and feet were shackled ... The cell was completely dark… freezing cold. I did not have a mattress to lie on, and nothing to cover me with. I only had the clothes I was wearing. I was only given food – dried bread and tea – on a very limited number of occasions. This was the prison diet. I was not allowed to go to the toilet except on one occasion when they allowed me to go on the way to the interrogation room. I was not eating enough to defecate.[27]

This story bears witness to the many aspects for which *Ma'ikelawi* in general and *Chelema bet* in particular are notorious, namely detainees of

experience of all forms of torture, inhuman and degrading treatments, including even 'not eating enough to defecate'.

Abdu. M, aged 28 at the time of interview, a former prisoner of *Jail Ogaden* told HRW (2018:29) how he had been exposed to the routine but the most severe and dehumanizing form of torture. His case shows the multiplicity of layers of torture, pain and suffering one is likely to experience in Ethiopia's detention centers/prisons: (i) he and his wife were imprisoned in the notorious *Jail Ogaden*; (ii) he was kept in solitary confinement in complete darkness for about three years, tortured and his testicles electrocuted; and (iii) his wife had been raped in prison and gave birth to a child conceived from this abusive relationship, and he knew all of these while still in prison. This case might sound peculiar, but it is only part of the systemic and routinely practiced 'torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment' (HRW, 2018) inflicted upon the detainees/prisoners to make them suffer the consequences of their perceived/actual participation in dissident activities and a warning against future involvement in activities considered 'anti-peace and anti-development' by the government. What makes this case different though is the husband knew his co-prisoner wife had been raped and gave birth to a child from that violent relationship. From the victim woman's perspective, it is even worse, as she struggles with a lot of perplexing issues, i.e., what to do with a child born from such a violent relationship, or 'fruit of violent sexual encounters' (see '*The Enigma of Rape Victims*' section below), image of her husband in the community, future relationship, and her tarnished image as women are expected to be morally clean and sound.

A story we chose to discuss before closing this section is that of the late Tesfahun Chemeda, a Civil Engineer graduate of Addis Ababa University in 2001. In 2005 Chemeda fled to Kenya for his safety because of the policy of persecution and surveillance imposed on him by the EPRDF government. He sought protection from the UNHCR office in Nairobi explaining his position, and got accepted and recognized as a refugee. However, for unknown reasons, he and his colleague in skill and refugee life, Mesfin Abebe, were arrested and forcibly handed over to the Ethiopian agents by the Kenyan authorities on April 27, 2007,[28] in what could amount to 'extraordinary rendition'.[29] Once in the hands of the Ethiopian agents, they were taken to *Ma'ikelawi*, where they were interrogated under severe torture for 15 months. Chemeda and Abebe disappeared in detention until charged with terrorist offences [euphemism for OLF membership] in December 2008. On March 31, 2010 Chemeda

was sentenced to life imprisonment and Abebe a death sentence, which was later commuted to life imprisonment.[30]

Chemeda had been in solitary confinement at Qaliti prison for nearly two years after he was transferred there from Ziway[31], where he had been experiencing severe beatings on daily basis. The beatings were so severe that Chemeda repeatedly requested and needed medical treatment which he was denied and eventually succumbed to the torture impact on Aug. 24, 2013.[32] Early reports about the circumstances of his death are unclear. Prison authorities are unofficially claiming that he committed suicide.[33] Others suggest that Ethiopian officials murdered him because they could not break his spirit even after years of torture. The OLF, in a press release, said Chemeda was subjected to years of severe torture which led to his eventual death.[34] AI (2014:99) reported the following on prosecution, treatment in prison and circumstances surrounding Chemeda's death:

> In August 2013, Tesfahun Chemeda, an Oromo engineer, died in Kaliti Federal prison. The cause of death was unconfirmed. Chemeda had been forcibly returned from Kenya in 2007, where he had had refugee status. He was subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment for membership of the OLF. He was reported to have been subjected to prolonged solitary confinement in detention. A friend of Tesfahun Chemeda who had visited him in 2012 told Amnesty International he had reported to her about being subject to repeated torture in detention.

Chemeda was certain of his fate in the hands of Ethiopian authorities and was quoted by one of his Oromo refugee friends, who visited him for the last time in a police custody in Nairobi: "we will be handed over to the Woyane [Ethiopian] regime, forget about us and focus on organizing the Oromo youth so that the Oromo struggle can reach its final destination."[35] Since their detention and trials are closed to public, very little is known about Chemeda's detention life and if he had challenged the court during the bogus trials. However, he is believed to have said the following in Afaan Oromo (Oromo language) when he was sentenced to life imprisonment: "*Yoo mirgako nadhowwattan, mirgakoof utuun falmadhuu du'u nandhowwattan*" (*If you deny me my rights, you can't deny me fighting to death for my rights*).

Irrespective of what exactly happened to Chemeda during the last few moments of his life, the government cannot be absolved of respon-

sibility. After the end of Apartheid rule and the formation of the new government of the ANC, South Africa initiated what was famously called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and one of the stories of loss and grieving told at the TRC hearing resembles the tragic death [killing?] of Chemeda. This case was that of Neil Aggett – "unionist, medical doctor, and conscientious objector – who was found hanging in his cell on 5 February 1982" (Ross, 2001:258). Ross paraphrased, Elizabeth Floyd's (spoke on 2 May 1996), one of the witnesses, testimonies:

> We were well aware of what we were up against…. The question really for everyone was, was he killed in interrogation and hung up or did he in fact take his own life? She added that even if Aggett had killed himself, the state was still responsible for having pushed him to the point where suicide seemed to be his only option. Floyd told the Commission about the effects of torture practices commonly used against detainees. These included sleep deprivation, solitary confinement, and electric shocks. She described the inquest into Aggett's death, its finding that he had committed suicide and that "legally, no one was to blame". She described a chronology of violence that included changes in torture practices over the thirty-four years that the Commission investigated. She made a clear and precise connection between Aggett's death and the systems that underpinned apartheid, and linked the violent treatment of detainees to practices of inflicting pain used elsewhere in the world (ibid.).

Agget's death in detention was not an isolated case but an addition to the long list of similar deaths in Apartheid South Africa where "The suicide label was one used with great creativity by the security police at the height of the repressive period" (Ramphele, 1997:111). There are similarities between the death [killing?] stories of Chemeda and Aggett. It matters very little if in deed both had committed suicide, since taking their lives was the only option they had because, as Floyd testified on Aggett's death, they "pushed him to the point where suicide seemed to be his only option".[36]

Chemeda fled the country for his safety although country that granted him political asylum collaborated with the autocratic EPRDF government in the commission of the crime by kidnapping and forcibly returning him to Ethiopia, where he was given life sentence, suffered

in different notorious prisons for six years, with all kinds of torture exercises, including solitary confinement, beatings, denial of medical treatment, and food and sleep deprivation. Akin the situation in Apartheid South Africa, Chemeda's death [killing?] in prison was not the first because several Oromo youths have perished in Ethiopian prisons and detention centers for which the police always accuse the victims saying 's/he committed suicide' or 'was killed while attempting to escape from prison'. In his open letter addressed to Mark Simmonds, the UK Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Africa), Dr. Trevor Truman, OSG Chairman, noted "This is not the first time young Oromo men have been killed in detention. For example, Alemayehu Garba, partially paralyzed with polio, was shot dead with 18 others in Kaliti prison in November 2005".[37] In a Press Release titled '*Oromo Nationalist and Prisoner Mesfin Itana In Danger of Losing His Life*'[38] (October 23, 2008), OLF expressed its grave concern on life threatening situation of Itana in *Ma'ikelawi*:

> .. the beating and torture of Mr Mesfin Itana continued even when he is severely ill, inflicting a deadly wound on his forehead, and he is forced to have three other surgeries on his head just recently. Consequently, Mr Mesfin Itana is on the verge of losing his life in prison, just as so many Oromo prisoners died in Kalitti detention center and many other jails in Oromia and elsewhere in the Empire. It is to be recalled that several Oromo prisoners such as Mesfin Mosisa, Wako Tola, university students Alemayehu Gerba, Gadisa Hirphasa, Morkata Iddosa, and many other Oromo prisoners lost their lives in detention centers in exactly the same situation as a result of an unbearable beating and torture. Our reporters from Finfinnee alarmed that Mr Mesfin Itana will very likely lose his life soon in the hands of TPLF/Wayyaanee forces.

What these stories indicate is the systemic and institutionalized practice of state violence, the classic example of which is the killing of a polio paralyzed Garba under the pretext of a "reaction to an escape attempt"[39] from a well-fenced maximum security federal prison. The 'suicide' argument does not hold water because, as Ramphele (1997:111) argued writing on South Africa, "Suicide is regarded by most people in the black community as cowardly way of life. Heroes do not commit suicide. They

are supposed to confront hardship, torture, and tribulations of war with courage". Likewise, among the Oromo, heroes do not take away their lives, but give it away to defend their people and the cause they stand for. For instance, Haji Adam Saddo, one of the trailblazers of the Oromo struggle for equality and justice, said "*Lubbuun gaafa dhalatte duute; sodaa haqa irraa hin dabin*" (*After all, the soul is mortal; do not tell lies due to fear of death*).[40] Apparently in a language echoing Haji Adam Sado, when sentenced to life imprisonment for no crime he committed excepting alleged membership of the OLF, as stated above, Chemeda said: "*If you deny me my rights, you can't deny me fighting to death for my rights*", that disproves the 'suicide' thesis.

5. The enigma of rape victims

> It is in the nature of a victim not to be able to prove that one has been done a wrong. A plaintiff is someone who has incurred damages and who disposes of the means to prove it. One becomes a victim if one loses these means (Lyotard, 1988:8, cited in Das, 1995:174). Das, therefore, posits "A struggle on behalf of the victim must always be a struggle to restore these means" (ibid.)

As briefly discussed under the foregoing section, in Ethiopia's prisons and detention centers, rape is a new normal which female prisoners/detainees experience on a daily basis. AI (Oct. 2014:87) received reports from women that torture by an act of rape is used as a form of coercion or punishment, and also as a result of security services exploiting situations where women are held arbitrarily, incommunicado and sometimes in unofficial places of detention – which all place the women beyond the protection of the law and at heightened vulnerability to sexual violence. The perpetrators are military officers and prison guards, although male detainees might also rape female detainees with the order of prison administration as a punishment for the female detainees' refusal to 'confess'.[41] Several women reported they have had children as a result of rape and two women who were visibly pregnant during interviews told AI that their pregnancies resulted from rape by security services in detention or in their homes. The first victim said: "That was the time when I was raped while in detention. It was not during interrogation. Two people came at night and raped me."[42] The second also confirmed "I was raped several times during the month. It was more than one person at

one time - it might be three or four soldiers. One would rape me and the other would stand and wait."[43]

The actual or perceived presence of insurgent groups in a given area is a fertile ground for the widespread practice of rape/gang rape in Ethiopia. It is used as a form of torture against the victim to threaten them or their relatives, to humiliate and demoralize a woman and the people, as punishment for the alleged activities of her parents or to coerce her into giving information.

> Pre-trial rape in detention centers, Military camps, and unofficial prisons against women is one of the frequent patterns of abuse by the security agents, soldiers and police officers of the government involving commanding officers. It is often intended to terrorize the population, break up families, and destroy communities. In rural areas where armed forces against the regime are operating, after any combat the soldiers collect young girls and women and gang rape them in front of their relatives, fathers, brothers, and husbands.[44]

Despite the difficulty of getting enough information on rape cases committed on female detainees/prisoners,[45] some human rights reports contain few but compelling evidences that rape is a daily traumatic experience of female prisoners/detainees in Ethiopian prisons/detention centers. For instance, in its report '*We are Like the Dead'* issued on *Jail Ogaden*, HRW (2018)[46] quotes a certain Halima H, a 26-year-old woman and former prisoner as saying: "Most nights, some women are taken out of the prison. But not all return. But if you return, you have been to Gidib[47] and have been raped. They all tell us" (p.37).[48] The rapists are *Liyu* police[49], Ethiopian Defense Force (EDF) personnel or prison guards. On the psychological impact of rape on female prisoners, Amina. H. another former prisoner woman said: "You would hear screams all the time. When people came back to the room, you see them shaking, shivering and crying… Every night I was scared because I wondered if I would be next" (p.39).[50] Former detainee women interviewed by AI in its '*Because I am Oromo'* report emphasized the pervasiveness of such incidents and said they have been "raped by two or more perpetrators. Most women who reported rape in detention said it occurred on repeated occasions". In addition to individual rapes where women are taken away by prison guards from their cell one at a time, there is also a situation where

several women were raped at the same time. Hodan. D., a 40-year-old woman and former prisoner, said: "Once they lined up seven women and raped them, I saw all this. They called specific people out of the room. They were raped in an area where you can see [the rapes] and hear their screams" (HRW, 2018:38).[51]

Senior military and prison officials not only facilitate rape of prisoners, but they too rape them. One former *Liyu* police officer told HRW that he used to go to *Jail Ogaden* to "get some ladies" for Abdirahman Labagole, the head of the *Liyu* police. "He told me to bring him some ladies that were in the jail. Just any ladies. We are just free to enter and take people, there is no process for us" (p.37-8).[52] What is even more perplexing is that prison officials claim they rape female prisoners to do them a favor. One woman said: "He [Shamaahiye][53] raped many people from our room. He would come and before he would take them out would say '***I am doing this for your humanity***'" (p.38).[54] Another woman added: "I was there when he [Shamaahiye] ordered the military [Liyu police] to rape the girls. He was saying this in front of a group of women: '***You are our donkeys, even God cannot save you from us***'. And then they took some away. I was raped by one of those [Liyu police] men several weeks later" (p.38).[55]

An Oromo political activist Mrs. Samiha Osman, who currently resides in the US, presented a paper on human rights violation in Ethiopia to the European Parliament, Brussels, on October 12, 2017. Samiha brought up the case of an Oromo former prisoner woman, *Aaddee*[56] U.D. a resident of Colorado, USA, who had been sexually abused in Ethiopian prisons by members of the Ethiopian defense force [between 1993 and 2005] as follows:

> In our communication, she said: 'I was raped at every place of prisons now and then by six to ten armed forces every day'. They repeatedly gang-raped her every night until she could no longer walk. She told, they inserted broken beer bottle into her genital body. She subsequently developed a fistula and has urinary incontinence currently using diapers for her daily life.[57]

These testimonies are just the tip of the iceberg of the traumatic experiences of female detainees since in almost all detention centers in Ethiopia, rape and gang rapes of female detainees are something sanctioned by the security and military structures. Samiha comments on the

systemic nature of such inhuman activities in Ethiopian security structure: "Twelve years later [after *Aadde* U.D had been released in 2005] the same government committed the same atrocities to many Oromo women during the state of emergency in 2016/2017". Female detainees are not only sexually abused and exploited, but also verbally abused. The expressions such as '*I am doing this for your humanity*' and '*You are our donkeys, even God cannot save you from us*' will never go away and make their recovery from these traumatic experiences a daunting task. It is mind-boggling to think how these women cope with these tragic experiences, not only of gang rape they experienced in detention facilities, but also how they relate to their children born/would-be born from those violent sexual encounters. There is an Oromo proverb, *Saani ibidda dhalee, arraabuf hin guba, dhiisuf ilmo saati* (roughly, *a cow gave birth to a fire, to lick it is a fire, to leave it is her offspring)*, used as an expression of a dilemma and pain caused by an enigmatic circumstance such as this one. What if these women were married like the one who had been in *Jail Ogeden* with her husband, mothers of grownup children, a girl [e.g., the commander of the military ordered the Liyu police to rape the girls] never had a sexual debut? Women are expected and encouraged to be morally clean and any infringement on their physical and moral purity brings dishonor to the family. What we know about these women is that they were released from detention following the 'promised reform', which the EPRDF government was forced to pledge in 2018 by way of responding to a popular resistance movement in which the Oromo youth, the *Qeerroo*, paid heavy sacrifices between 2014 and 2018.

A few questions are in order to further explore about the post-detention life of rape victim former prisoner/detainee women. What happened to them when they left the prisons/detention centers where they had experienced barbaric acts of sexual violence? What were their pre-detention family statuses? How were they received by their families and relatives? Did they tell anyone what had actually happened to them in prisons/detention centers, including rape and gang rape? How did they deal with their pregnancies from rape in prisons? If they have been gang raped, do they really bother who actually might have fathered their (would-be) children? Or, does it matter at all, because that child is 'undesirable' anyway? How about their health status, in the face of HIV and other STIs, the risk of developing an obstetric fistula, especially those who had been gang-raped on several occasions for a long period of time? Any, support of some sort? These are some of the questions one would reasonably ask

to make sense of the trajectories of the lives of women abused in prisons/detention centers and had immensely suffered as a result of the psycho-social trauma they have experienced personally. For some of them, also because of the shame they brought to their families and relatives by bringing home, borrowing from Das (1995), the 'fruits of violent sexual encounters', i.e., children born from the abusive sexual congress.

Writing on Hindu women recovered from Pakistan after the terrible violence during the Partition of India in 1947, Das (1995:78) notes "Women in the early stages of pregnancy were taken to Jullundur for 'medical treatment', an euphemism for abortion, thus obliterating the signs of undesired sexual congress". The HRW report (July 2018) withheld the location of the interview it held with the former detainee/prisoner rape victim women. From AI's (2014) report, we learn that at least all the women whom we have quoted above had already fled the country and were interviewed in the country where they sought asylum, Kenya and Sudan. What we do not know, however, is why they fled the country. It could be because they feared for their lives since most of the prisoners/detainees were released under strict conditions to never contemplate getting involved in dissident politics. It could also be a means of running away from their traumatic experience of detention centers where they had been raped, often gang-raped, by soldiers, prison guards, and military officers who would order their subordinates to '*bring them some ladies that were in the jail'.* Some of these women either got pregnant or gave birth to a child from such a violent sexual encounter. Since we did not have the means of asking '*why they fled the country',* we are left only with a speculative exercise. It could be all of the above, and whatever the case it might be, the system is so violent and *people are left with no choice but to flee*.

Imagine a woman saying '*You would hear screams all the time', or '… you can see [the rapes] and hear their screams*' terrified by her fellow female prisoner's screaming while being raped. Having witnessed all of these cruel, inhuman and degrading treatments, it is only natural for a woman with this experience to say *'Every night I was scared because I wondered if I would be next*'. These experiences of pain and suffering resist erasure from memory, but also, as one Indian woman, recalling her experience of abduction and rape during the riot that accompanied the Partition of India, confided to Das (1997:84) "it was dangerous to remember". For Ethiopian rape victim former detainee/prisoner women, one way of distancing themselves from this traumatic experience is to flee the country

that had inflicted such a horrific torture, pain and suffering on its nationals by its military and security personnel in its prisons/detention facilities.

What if they did not tell their tragic prison experiences to anyone, i.e., they were silent, because: (a) the social environment to which they return is not accommodative of this; (b) replaying the memory of violence inflicted upon them is tantamount to a relapse of the pain they went through at the time; (c) of the 'inexpressibility of some experiences of horror and pain' as Langer (1995, 1996) posits writing on Holocaust experiences;[58] and (d) as Das argues, writing from the point of view of violence unleashed on women during the Partition of India, "silence too is a legitimate discourse on pain – if it is acknowledged" (Ross, 2001:272).

> Showing how some women create silence of their experiences of violation, Das points to new constructions of agency. In her formulation, agency does not lie in language competency but in the refusal to give experience words, in the ability to do something with the experience (i.e., to hold it inside, silent). As she comments elsewhere, "In reading history we must learn how to read silences, for the victim rarely gets an opportunity to record his or her point of view" (Das, 1987:13, cited in Ross, 2001:272).

There is not much literature to review on such an enigmatic condition of women. In her analysis of the experiences of women 'abducted and sexually violated during the widespread riots accompanying the Partition of India in 1947', Das (1995) argued that, from the Indian point of view, Hindu and Sikh women abducted by Muslims in Pakistan would be recovered and return to their original homes, while children born to a 'wrong father' through 'wrong sexual unions' and thus considered as 'fruits of sexual violence' are left in the camps under the protection of the state because they 'should be invisible' (p.77). The issues stressed in this process are the "notion of national honour and of the preservation of the 'purity' of the populace" (p.68). In a situation where the recovered Hindu or Sikh woman returned home with her child born from a 'wrong father' through 'sexual violence', Das argues "women were torn between their older children, who were 'correctly' born, and an infant who was the fruit of violence" (p.77). Unfortunately, we know very little, if any, on the family life, whether or not they have been reunited, what happened to their children/pregnancies from sexual violence, how that has

impacted their reunion with their families, etc. What we surely know is that AI interviewees have already fled the country and the information on the whereabouts of HRW informants was not disclosed, which in both instances indicate the family honor and personal shame issues are of high stake for these women.

While reading the HRW (2018) and AI (2014) reports on female detainees' sexual violence in Ethiopian prisons and detention centers, I started wondering why did the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association *(EWLA)*,[59] which won its reputation advocating and seeking justice for sexual violence victim women and girls, co-founded and managed for many years by the current President of the Ethiopian Supreme Court, chose silence on this matter? How about the Supreme Court Chief, now at the apex of Ethiopia's justice system? Is she silenced by the highest position she was appointed to by PM Abiy, and chose not to initiate criminal inquiry on prison/detention center rape cases, the new normal and a daily experience of female detainees? Unfortunately, not unexpectedly though, what we are witnessing here is the cooptation and silencing of the justice system into the corrupt and oppressive political system, the effect of which is sweeping under the rug of the pain and suffering of the victims of state violence.

6. Conclusion

This article began with an opening quote from '*Hawani's Story*' which introduced us to the pain, suffering and dehumanizing treatment family members experience when they go to prisons/detention centers to visit a family member, a relative or a friend detained on suspicion of involvement in dissident politics. Throughout this work, we have seen that the detainees experience, contrary to the provisions of the FDRE Constitution (Art.18) and International Conventions and Covenants to which Ethiopia is party, all sorts of degrading and dehumanizing treatments such as torture, rape, gang rape, giving birth to a child from rape in prisons/detention centers, verbal abuses (e.g., '*I am doing this for your humanity*'), amputation of legs, and prisoners death [killing?].

The ethnographic evidences show the nexus and the intricacy of the relationship between state violence and social suffering. Seen from the outside, it seems the pain and suffering looks like individual and personalized. A closer look, however, unravels the systemic way in which state violence is exercised to inflict pain and suffering both on the detainees

and their families for the former's perceived/actual involvement in dissident politics. There are two issues here. First, at the detainee's level, it is meant not only to punish him/her for the act he/she was accused of doing, but also to ensure he/she wouldn't contemplate of doing anything deemed 'illegal' per government's definition of it. Second, to make the family and relatives suffer and subjected to dehumanizing treatment, e.g., rape of women in front of their relatives, killing children in front of their parents, female relatives of detainees searched by male prison guards who often deliberately touch their private parts and say to them 'are you circumcised?', etc. Commenting on the reaction of the Conference participants when Hawani's story was read in Gothenburg, editors of '*Being and Becoming Oromo*' wrote: "some of the Oromo participants wept quit tears both for Hawani and for themselves. Their own painfully repressed recollections, of home, of shared sufferings and of lives as exiles were stirred that a period of intense but vibrant silence followed" (Baxter et al, 1996:13).

The materials also show that widespread use of state violence is to quell peoples' quest for equality and justice and, in the long run, to secure docile subjects and suppress critical citizenry. The purpose of torture and degrading treatment is not to punish the suspect for the alleged offense, but secure final subservience of the larger public. As this study shows and Das (1995:138) also incisively posited:

> Pain and suffering, however, are not simply *individual* experiences which arise out of the contingency of life and threaten to disrupt a known world. They may also be experiences which are actively created and distributed by the social order itself. Located in individual bodies, they yet bear the stamp of the authority of society upon the docile bodies of its members. Thus, we need to examine, the social mechanisms by which the manufacture of pain on the one hand, and the theologies of suffering on the other, become the means of legitimating the social order rather than being threats to this order.

This means, torture and degrading treatments are forward looking rather than meting out punishment for the past wrong doing. By making both the detainee and their families and relatives suffer, the environment of fear is made to reign on a given population. Defining state terrorism as "a systematic governmental policy in which massive violence is practiced

against a given population group", Jalata (2016:118-9) posits its goal is "eliminating any behavior that promotes political struggle or resistance by members of that group".

Prison and detention center rapes/gang rapes of women are becoming a new normal as several women came out of prison/detention with children born from this violent sexual congress. This experience tarnishes the image of the direct victim (former detainee woman) and leaves huge stain on the family honor and social standing because women are expected and believed to be morally clean and sound. Besides this, we know very little, if any, about these women, i.e., whether or not they have been reunited with their families, how and if they have been received, what happened to their children seen as 'fruits of violent relationship' and therefore 'undesirable'? Did they tell anyone their prison life tragic stories, or run away with it?

Nevertheless, at least from the reports we were able to review, it was evident they preferred *silence* because it too speaks louder to an attentive listener, which should be our role as researchers. Even if they run away, as most of AI's interviewee former detainee women did, can they leave their stories behind, run away from it? Or just run away with their baggage of pain, trauma and suffering, because it is inscribed in their memories? In such a situation, the distinction between past and present collapses because the passage of time is incapable of healing all wounds[60] and as Daniel (2000:353) argues "When the past facts return in memory and in experience only to reactualize themselves, the past does not enter the flow of time in the full sense". This reminds us of the Holocaust survivors' experience which, as Langer posits, becomes "an event to be endured, not a trauma to be healed" (1997:58).

There is no historical record where the quest for justice is successfully suppressed forever. In spite of massive state violence, the quest for equality and justice continues and such a determination terrorizes the perpetrators. Commenting on the futility of the government's attempt to secure docile subjects and the nexus between individual pain and suffering and social suffering, Das (1995) said: "Let me immediately add that I do not believe individuals simply submit to these experiences without resistance; but I do affirm that a theory of suffering must break away from the traditional mode of conceptualizing suffering – as an intellectualist problem of theodicy alone. Instead, we need to look at the way in which the dialectic of the individual and the collective develops in the context of pain and suffering" (ibid.).

If one-day justice is served in Ethiopia, we will be able to know what exactly happened to the lives that perished in the hands of Ethiopian security forces, whether in prisons/detention centers, streets, at their homes or workplaces. It is to be recalled that the highly touted *reformist*[61] PM Abiy also admitted: "Our constitution doesn't allow it, but we have been torturing, causing bodily damages and even putting inmates in dark prison cells... These were terrorist acts committed by us, and using force just to stay in power is a terrorist act too"[62] when he addressed the parliament in June 2018, three months after ascending to power. Emphasizing the need to look forward, Tefera (discussed above) said: "I hope we will build a system where people no longer face extrajudicial punishment. I hope to see the rule of law prevails in Ethiopia."[63] Unfortunately, Tefera's hope faded away in less than six months of PM Abiy's, the 2019 World Peace Laurate, ascendance to power. In May 2020 AI issued a report titled '*Beyond Law Enforcement*' in which it documented horrendous human rights violations including "extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, forced evictions, and destruction of property" (p.5). AI reported one horrendous case of extrajudicial killing that took place in Adadi *Kebele* of East Guji Zone of Oromia where the EDF soldiers shot and killed Ariti Shunude, a 32-year-old businessman, and a father of three at a public gathering because his mobile phone rang in the middle of a public meeting.

> On 13 August 2019, kebele officials called residents of the kebele for a meeting. During the meeting, one of the phones collected rang and the soldiers asked who the owner of the phone was. Ariti responded saying that the phone belonged to him. The EDF soldier ordered him to come to the front and he obeyed. Then the soldier told Ariti to turn around. As soon as Ariti's back turned towards the soldiers, the soldier shot him in his back with two bullets. They killed him in front of the crowd (AI, 2020:19).[64]

In spite of the re-emergence of brutal form of state violence even under the leadership of the reformist PM Abiy Ahmed, people's quest for equality and justice does not stop as the late Gen. Waaqo Guutu, prominent among the pioneers of Oromo national struggle, famously said '*we will uproot injustice once and for all, if not, we will raise a generation of freedom fighters to fight on*'.

References

Addis Standard, Special Edition: *Failed politics and deception: Behind the crisis in western and southern Oromia.* March 2020.

Amnesty International, 2020. Beyond Law Enforcement: Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia.

____. 2014. Because I am Oromo: Sweeping Repression in the Oromia Regional States of Oromia.

Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE), 2018. *Ethiopian political Prisoners and their accounts of Torture.* Geneva: Switzerland.

Austrian Red Cross, ACCORD, *Ethiopia: COI Compilation*, November 2019.

Baxter, P.T.W, 1978. Ethiopia's Unacknowledged Problem: The Oromo,' *African Affairs*, 77(308) p.83-296.

Baxter, P.T.W., Hultin, J. & Truilzi, A., 1996. *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries*. Uppsala: Nordic Institute of African Studies.

Baxter, P.T.W., Hultin, J. & Truilzi, A., 1996. 'Introduction', In *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries*. Uppsala: Nordic Institute of African Studies. p.1-25.

Bulcha, Mekuria, 2011. *Contours of the Emergent & Ancient Oromo Nation: Dilemmas in the Ethiopian Politics of State and Nation-Building*. Cape Town, South Africa: CASAS Book Series No.84.

Daniel, E. V., 2000. 'Mood, Moment, and Mind' in Das, V., Kleinman, A., Ramphele, M., Reynolds, P., *Violence and Subjectivity*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. Pp.333-366.

Das, V., 1987. "The Anthropology of Violence and the Speech of Victims." *Anthropology Today* 3, no. 4:11-13.

____. 1995. *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

____. 1997. 'Language and Body: Transactions in the construction of pain'. In Kleinman, A. Das, V. and Lock, M, (eds) *Social Suffering*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. Pp.67-91.

Debella, Hawani & Kassam, A. 1996. 'Hawani's Story'. In Baxter, P.T.W., Hultin, J. & Truilzi, A., 1996. *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries*. Uppsala: Nordic Institute of African Studies. P.26-36.

Donham, D & James, W., 1986. *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

FDRE, *The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, 1995.

_____. *Anti-terrorism Law (Proc. No. 652/2009)*,

_____. *Charities and Societies Law (Proc. No. 621/2009)*

_____. *Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Law (Proc. No. 590/2008)*.

_____. *Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Establishment, Proclamation No. 210 /2000*.

Haji, Abbas, 1995. 'Arsi Oromo Political and Military Resistance against the Shoan Colonial Conquest (1881-6). In *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, II (1&2), p.1-20.

_____. 1982. 'The History of Arsi:1880-1935'. B.A Thesis, Department of History, Addis Ababa University.

Hassen, Mohammed, 2002. "Conquest, Tyranny, and Ethnocide against the Oromo." *Northeast African Studies* V. 9, no.3:15-49.

Human Rights Watch, 2018. "*We are Like the Dead": Torture and other Abuses in Jail Ogaden, Somali Regional State, Ethiopia*. Printed in the United States of America.

Holcomb, B. & Ibssa, Sisai, 1990. *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa.* Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press.

International Bar Association, 2009. *Extraordinary renditions: Human Rights Institute background paper*. London: www.ibanet.org

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

_____. 2016. *Phases of Terrorism in the Age of Globalization: From Christopher Colmbus to Osma Bin Laden*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kebede, Messay. 1999. *Survival and modernization— Ethiopia's enigmatic present: A philosophical discourse*. Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press.

Keller, E. 1988. *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to Peoples Republic*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Kleinman, A. 2006. *What Really Matters: Living a Moral Life Amidst Uncertainty and Danger*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kleinman, A. and Fitz-Henry, E., 2007. 'The Experiential Basis of Subjectivity: How Individuals Change in the Context of Societal Transformation'. In J. Biehl, B. Good and A. Kleinman (eds) *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, pp. 52-65.

Langer, L., 1991. *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

_____. 1995. *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____. 1996. "The Alarmed Vision: Social Suffering and Holocaust Atrocity". *Daedalus*, 125, no. 1:47-67.

_____. 1997. 'The Alarmed Vision: Social Suffering and Holocaust Atrocity'. In Kleinman, A. Das, V. and Lock, M, (eds) *Social Suffering*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. pp.47-65.

Levine, D., 1974. *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois, 1988. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Melba, Gada, 1980. *Oromia: Introduction*. Khartoum. Publisher not given.

Morris, D. B., 1997. 'About Suffering: Voice, Genre, and Moral Community'. In Kleinman, A. Das, V. and Lock, M, (eds) *Social Suffering*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. pp.25-46.

Nietzsche, F., 1989. *On the Genealogy of Morals* (translated by Walter Kauffman and R.J. Hollingdale). London: Vintage Books.

OSGA- individual UPR Submission-Ethiopia- November/December 2009. https://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session6/ET/OSGA_ETH_UPR_S06_2009.pdf

Ramphele, M., 1997. 'Political Widowhood in South Africa: The Embodiment of Ambiguity'. In Kleinman, A. Das, V. and Lock, M, (eds) *Social Suffering*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. pp. 99-118.

Ross, F. C., 2001. "Speech and Silence: Women's Testimony in the First Five Weeks of Public Hearings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission". In Das, V., Kleinman, A., Lock, M., Ramphele, M., and Reynolds, P., 2001. *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery*. Berkley: University of California Press. p. 250-280.

Schuck, P. H., 1987. *Agent Orange Trial: Mass Toxic Disasters in the Courts*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Schwarcz, V., 1997. 'The Pane of Sorrow: Public Uses of Personal Grief in Modern China'. In Kleinman, A. Das, V. and Lock, M, (eds) *Social Suffering*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. p. 119-148.

Wilkinson, I., 2012. 'Social suffering and human rights'. In *Handbook of Human Rights*, Thomas Cushman, (ed.): Routledge: 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abington, Oxon OX14 4 RN. Pp. 146-154.

UN, International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, August 30. https://www.un.org/en/observances/victims-enforced-disappearance

Zewde, Bahru. 1991. *A history of Modern Ethiopia: 1855–1974*. London: James Currey.

Endnotes

1 This name is used to refer to all the regions in Ethiopia excepting Tigray and Amhara regional states, which both constitute what is historically called Abyssinia.

2 The coalition of four organizations, i.e., Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO) and Southern Peoples Democratic Movement (SPDM).

3 https://www.csis.org/analysis/ethiopia-and-global-antiterrorism-campaign. Accessed, Oct.12, 2018@15:15hrs.

4 For detail discussion on this, see AI, 2014:18.

5 Oromo National Congress (ONC), later changed to Oromo Peoples' Congress (OPC), now called OFC after a merger with the Oromo Federalist Movement (OFM).

6 *Jail Ogaden* is known as a torture chamber of the ONLF and OLF supporters or suspected members. The former detainees interviewed for HRW's 2018 report were largely from both groups though, as was practically possible, only those who identified themselves as Oromo were included in this work.

7 For a debate on whether the Abyssinian expansion was a "reunification" – "an ingathering of the related peoples of Greater Ethiopia" (Kebede, 1999; Levine, 1974), or a colonial expansion (Baxter, 1978; Melba 1980; Keller, 1988; Holcomb and Ibsa, 1990), see Bulcha, 2011, chap. 6.

8 For brief account of the occasional reference in the literature to 'experience and event of "social suffering"' which goes back to the late eighteenth century, see Wilkinson, 2012, p.146. From the 1990s, however, it has been formally incorporated within the language of social science.

9 https://www.academia.edu/2521946/Social_Suffering_as_an_Approach_to_Human_Understanding, accessed October 09, 2018: @14hrs.

10 Convention against Torture (CAT), http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CAT.aspx.

11 https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CAT.aspx

12 Article 9(4) of the Ethiopian Constitution (1995) provides "All international agreements ratified by Ethiopia are an integral part of the law of the land."

13 This may have been due to necrosis – death of cells, caused by infection. AI interview with medical forensics expert, 26 June 2014.

14 Amnesty International interview, Oromo, m, Nairobi, Kenya, 27 July 2013. The victim of this treatment was present at the interview but did not speak, according to his brother because he continues to suffer from mental trauma from his experiences during detention.

15 A Human Rights organization working in line with its mother Organization, Oromia Support Group (OSG).

16 OSGA- individual UPR Submission-Ethiopia- November/December 2009. https://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session6/ET/OSGA_ETH_UPR_S06_2009.pdf

17 One Day with a Hero | Oromia & Oromo Affairs (wordpress.com)

18 https://www.facebook.com/546450542230057/posts/one-day-with-a-hero-the-article-written-by-girma-tadesse-2019-on-shagar-journal-/1230810827127355/

19 On the occasion, the Supreme Court President said "this place is open for the public today and there are no detainees here now. There were human rights violations here but it is going to be changed into a museum." The Attorney General on his part said: "we shall take lessons from past mistakes and comply with national and international laws." https://www.ena.et/en/?p=9550

20 AI interview, Oromo, f, 33, Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya, 1 October 2013.

21 AI interview, Oromo, f, Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya, 30 April 2014.

22 OLF, ONLF and Ginbot-7 were declared terrorist organizations by the Ethiopian parliament in June 2011 (AI, 2014, 9) as per the provisions of Proc. No. 652/2009 '*Anti-Terrorism Proclamation*'.

23 "In many situations, Oromos are assumed to support the …OLF-labeled a terrorist organization by the Ethiopian Government- unless they actively express support for the ruling party." https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/ethiopia_upr.pdf.

24 Bale is one of the administrative zones in Oromia Regional state and it is where the Oromo armed resistance movement started in the 1960s by Gen. Waaqo Guutu, Col. Aliyi Chirri, Haji Adam Sado and others.

25 https://www.facebook.com/ONNRoom/videos/price-of-freedom-kaffalo-taffaraas-memoir/401685923675385/

26 AI interview, Oromo, m, 19, Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya, 28 April 2014.

27 https://advocacy4oromia.org/witnesses/my-experience-of-maekela-wi-the-notorious-investigation-centre/

28 https://advocacy4oromia.org/goals/short-biography-martyred-tesfahun-chemeda-1976-2013/

29 Under international law, it means "the secret transfer of suspects from one country to another without legal protection such as extradition laws and treaties" (International Bar Association, 2009:53).

30 https://oromianeconomist.com/tag/engineer-tesfahum-chemeda/

31 Qaliti and Ziway are among the many Federal prisons, the former located in Addis Ababa and the latter in Ziway town, located approximately 130km south of Addis Ababa.

32 https://advocacy4oromia.org/goals/short-biography-martyred-tesfahun-chemeda-1976-2013/

33 "Tesfahun's sister, the only visitor he had seen for years, was denied the body pending "further medical examination". She had seen him earlier this week and reported no changes in his attitude or demeanor." https://oromianeconomist.com/tag/engineer-tesfahum-chemeda/

34 https://www.opride.com/2013/08/25/oromo-activist-tesfahun-chemeda-dies-in-prison-while-serving-life-sentence/

35 https://www.opride.com/2013/08/25/oromo-activist-tesfahun-chemeda-dies-in-prison-while-serving-life-sentence/

36 The police often say "Detainees slipped on pieces of soap in showers and died, they jumped through barricaded windows whiles under constant guard, some were supposed to have starved themselves to death, whilst shaming brain damage from mysteriously sustained head injuries" (Ramphele, 1997:111).

37 https://www.opride.com/2013/08/25/oromo-activist-tesfahun-chemeda-dies-in-prison-while-serving-life-sentence/

38 http://www.oromoliberationfront.org/News/2008/All%20Oromos%20to%20Get%20Mobilized.html

39 https://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session6/ET/OMRHO_ETH_UPR_S09.pdf

40 International Journal of English and Literature - thematic functions of oral literature in the speeches of legendary oromo heroes in bale zone, oromia (academicjournals.org)

41 In fact, rape as a form of punishment is not limited to prisons or detention centers in Ethiopia. "The Ethiopian army rapes its citizens by forcing the

victims. … the victims include girls from age 13 to housewives and pregnant mothers. Raping is part of the moral warfare waged by the Ethiopian repressive army to dehumanize the subjects. On the other hand, raping is a reflection of moral bankruptcy on the part of the system." (OMRHO Human Rights General Report for 2019 @http://ayyaantuu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FinalOMRHORReport2019.pdf, p.23.)

42 AI interview, Oromo, f, Nairobi, Kenya, 26 July 2013.

43 AI interview, Oromo, f, Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya, 2 October 2013.

44 https://advocacy4oromia.org/our-rights/speech-by-mrs-samiha-osman-presentation-on-european-parliament-organized-by-sub-committee-on-human-rights/

45 "Despite a broad spectrum of sexual violence in Ethiopia, there is a strong limitation to get enough information in Ethiopia. This is because of the fear of social exclusion by society, which will bring serious consequences. In addition to this, survivors are silent because they felt they would never achieve any redress. Indeed, no individual perpetrators such as a soldier or security officer ever been held to account." https://advocacy4oromia.org/our-rights/speech-by-mrs-samiha-osman-presentation-on-european-parliament-organized-by-sub-committee-on-human-rights/

46 https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/04/we-are-dead/torture-and-other-human-rights-abuses-jail-ogaden-somali-regional, accessed, 30.04.2020, @20:35hrs, local time, Addis Ababa.

47 The water reservoir on the outskirts of Jigjiga.

48 HRW interview with #62, October 2017, location withheld.

49 The *Liyu* ("special" in Amharic) Police was created in 2007 by the Ethiopian authorities for the Somali region as a counterinsurgency force against the ONLF. https://www.africanews.com/2019/ 09/05/ethiopia-s-controversial-liyu-police-ditch-bullets-for-rubber-batons/

50 HRW interview with #61, October 2017, location withheld.

51 HRW interview with #48, June 2017, location withheld.

52 HRW interview with former Liyu police officer #75, March 2018, location withheld.

53 Senior prison official Shamaahiye Sheikh Farah [commonly known as Shamaahiye].

54 HRW interview with #74, March 2018, location withheld.

55 HRW interview with #75, March 2018, location withheld.

56 *Aadde* is an Afaan Oromo equivalent of Mrs. The full name of this rape survivor former detainee woman is withheld to protect her anonymity, despite Samiha's use of full name in the report.

57 https://advocacy4oromia.org/our-rights/speech-by-mrs-samiha-osman-presentation-on-european-parliament-organized-by-sub-committee-on-human-rights/

58 It is important to note the difference between Das's (1995; 1997) use of *silence* as 'legitimate discourse on pain, if it is acknowledged' and Langer's 'inexpressibility of some experiences of horror and pain' (1996; 1995; 1991). In the case of Das, 'silence is an act of conscious agency', while Langer argues the massive violences, as in Holocaust experience, are not knowable in common language and that time is fractured in such a way as to make experience unrepresentable' (Ross, 2001:272).

59 *EWLA* is a non-profit and non-partisan organization established in 1995 by a group of Ethiopian women lawyers with the overall objective of promoting the legal, economic, social, and political rights of Ethiopian women under the FDRE Constitution and the relevant human rights conventions.

60 Langer (1997:55) makes distinction between chronological and durational time while discussing the experiences of holocaust survivors, where the former relates to sequence of events ('flows until we channel between the permanent banks of historical narrative'), and the latter relates to 'out of time' memory, 'which cannot overflow the blocked reservoir of its own moment in memory and hence never enters what we call the stream of time'.

61 PM Abiy won the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize for his reform program and for the peace agreement with Eritrea. Shortly after receiving the Peace Prize, he turned the most notorious dictator, and even went to the extent of waging war on Tigrai Regional State, one of the nine regional states in the Federation. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/nov/08/the-guardian-view-on-ethiopia-a-tragedy-in-the-making?fbclid=IwAR1mlmT1B1WG0pkMR4KKsoqgDJCEKklA9QvmmVWm-qQriZPkiAySBTp4nn0

See also '*Having Made Peace Abroad, Ethiopia's Leader Goes to War at Home*' @ https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/04/world/africa/ethiopia-abiy-tigray.html

62 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/6/19/ethiopia-pm-security-agencies-committed-terrorist-acts

63 https://www.voanews.com/africa/ethiopian-lost-his-legs-prison-rebuilds-life-free-man

64 AI, 2020. Beyond Law Enforcement: Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia.

FOSTERING HEALTHY SOCIAL POLICIES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: EMPLOYING OROMUMMAA AS A FRAMEWORK OF THINKING

Begna Dhugassa

Toronto Public Health, Canada

Abstract: Imposed frameworks of thinking disempower, and hinder the development of public health, and create pathological social problems. Using the anti-colonial theoretical model of examining the impacts of imposed ideologies and practices, is paper proposes *Oromummaa* as a theoretical framework of thinking that can foster resiliency, empower people, and find a culturally acceptable and economically feasible solution to social problems in the Horn of Africa.

Introduction

Oromumma is the pillar on which the Oromo peoplehood has been founded and flourished. The literal meaning of Oromummaa is Oromo-ness, which represents the Oromo national and cultural identity. The term also goes beyond its literal meaning. It encompasses worldly views and framework of thinking of the Oromo people indispensable in the making of their identities and aspirations. For the Oromo people, Oromummaa is an episteme that has served them in setting ideas, ideologies, and principles necessary in constructing their social, cultural, economic, political making and their relationships with the social

Journal of Oromo Studies_#28.indb 65 7/13/2023 5:10:57 PM

world and ecological systems. It can be argued that all moral and ethical standards, social policies, and legal theories of the Oromo sprang from Oromumma. It is the core foundation of the Oromo civilization from which their democratic, equitable, and sustainable cultural knowledge has flourished. Unfortunately, after colonization of Oromia in the 1880s, the Horn of Africa started to get ravaged with an endless war, widespread human rights violations, instability, famine, diseases, and environmental degradation. The need to solve these problems call for the desire to aptly explore and employ a framework of thinking that fosters healthy politics, and creates equitable and sustainable social conditions.

In the Ethiopian social and television media circles, voices promoting imperial agendas, inequality, monolithic views, and upholding undemocratic values are rampant. To this end media outlets openly propagate hate speech and even call for genocide, masking it under a "unitary agenda". Imperial ideologies and hate speeches are turning the country into the chaotic state it is today. The Agaw, Gumuz, Qimanti, Oromo, and Tigray people have been- and still are being collectively attacked because of their identities. Those who perpetuate hate speech and killings openly promote "the past Ethiopian glory" and *Ida'amuu* – a rhetoric advanced by the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, and worrisomely leading the country to becoming "a failed state".

Instability breeds social tribulations; it creates and aggravates public health problems. In failed states, chaotic social conditions are created, and in those situations, no institution remains safe. Built infrastructures, such as health care facilities, schools, water supplies, sewage systems, electric transmissions, roads, and other essential social structures, are either destroyed or damaged - rendering them dysfunctional. When built social structures become dysfunctional, people intensively use natural resources, which leads to the degradation of natural resources. Under such tumultuous conditions, the necessities in life become scarce and a deterioration of public health conditions is imminent. Public health professionals need to act proactively, advance social justice and peace and tackle the root causes of instability.

The core objective of public health is to provide the common good for the whole population. In the Western world, public health conditions are better developed among the more equitable societies and countries. For example, in 2020, life expectancy in Canada was 80 years for males and 84 years for women. However, life expectancy is 76 years for males and 81 years for women in the USA. However, the USA pays more than

Canada per person per year in health care. This means equitable societies are harmonious and healthier. In pursuance of achieving a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, dreamed of by the WHO (WHO,1948), the Horn of African people must assert their rights to determine their affairs and identify their needs, realize their aspirations, guarantee food security and widen their choices in life. Asserting collective and individual rights is essential to coping with emerging political instability and environmental deterioration. Our efforts to protect, promote, and restore population health are hindered by chaotic social conditions. Consistent with health promotion ideas, which enable people to increase control over and improve their health (WHO,1998), public health professionals need to advance a healthy social order.

The Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed's rhetorical speeches center around the idea of *Ida'amuu (Afan Oromo)* and *Medemer (Amharic)* which effectively amounts to totaling – assimilating and centralizing the power. Yet, for the international audience, the PM translates the term as though it means "synergy." The word synergy comes from a Greek word, which means working together. The concept of synergy implies that working together is advantageous. Indeed, in synergetic conditions, the combined effect of two is greater than the sum of their parts, making unity a more desirable idea. Examples of synergetic and value-creating interactions are found in biological, physical, and social world. In nutritional sciences, it has long been known that combining plant protein such as beans and animal protein - meat in meal planning- makes the protein more complete, financially feasible, and environmentally friendly. In public health, it is evident that the social determinants of health work synergistically.

Synergy is also possible in social relations. If the interests of groups are not diametrically opposing, and the behavior, social interactions, and cultural dynamics of groups are matching, making value-creating cooperation is possible. If groups' interests are complementary, mutually supportive, and reinforcing, value-creating collaborations are achievable. For example, partnerships and cooperation between agriculturalists and cattle breeders can be synergetic.

This may enhance the interaction of two or more socio-economic-political and cultural capitals of sovereign ethnic/national groups and add to their combined effects of value creation and competitive privilege. The motto of the city of Toronto is "diversity is our strength," and diversity has been encouraged. Advancing diversity creates different social

experimental groups and helps everyone learn from each other and adopt the best practices. On the contrary, totaling diverse cultural groups of people via assimilation, centralizing power, hinders the growth and development of experimental social groups. Such a policy stunts knowledge construction, limits opportunities for synthesis, and the development of problem-solving skills.

When a groups' interests are not complementary, mutually unsupportive, or not reinforcing one another, collaboration becomes an arithmetical operation totaling a mixture of positive and negative numbers. Adding positive and negative numerals [for example, 12+(-8)] may not necessarily yield a larger and better outcome as it may, instead, amount to subtracting the positive value by the amount of the negative quantity. Thus, expecting synergetic effects of interaction between those who advance imperial and colonial ideas and those who adhere to empowering and equitable ideologies is naïve. Unless comparable and compatible framework of thinking is developed, unity as a likely outcome remains imaginary. Fostering synergy necessitates challenging the frameworks of thinking that are backward and disempowering, and promote ideas that support equity, diversity, and sustainability.

In Ethiopia, human rights violations are widespread, the gaps between the rich and the poor widen daily, and extreme poverty is high. These make the country politically unstable. The Ethiopian government is more engaged in waging unnecessary wars than fostering social transformation. At no time in Ethiopian history, the government has made adequate effort to improve people's living standards its priority. The policies of the Ethiopian government often gravitate more toward controlling the people's aspirations than improving their living conditions. Unhealthy politics and social policies are stunting social transformation, consuming needed resources, and making the country and region unsustainable. This needs to change.

Objectives

Understanding that knowledge is socially constructed and built on past experiences, the primary objective of this paper is to explore how imposed knowledge and an imperial framework of thinking disempowered people in the HA and hindered the advancement of social justice, equity, and public health, and has created what Farmers called pathological social conditions (Farmer, 2003). The secondary objective is to provide Oromummaa as a theoretical framework of thinking and foster diversity, equity, unity, and sustainable development.

Framework of Thinking

What are the significances of studying the framework of thinking?

Ideology [framework of thinking] has shaped the very sofa on which I sit.
-Mason Cooley

Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell.
-Edward Abbey

The above two quotes exemplify that ideology, the framework of thinking, inform societies and guide their daily activities. Some frameworks promote constructive ideas, and as Edward Abbey clearly stated above, others advance unhealthy and unsustainable values. The framework of thinking that advances imperial ideas such as inequality and injustice also fosters environmental degradation.

A theoretical framework provides the structure and the theoretical underpinning of this study. The theoretical underpinning of the research offers the assumptions on which the research questions are framed, data collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Theoretical assumptions help address why the research problem under study is relevant and how the research questions are framed (Neuman,1994). Applying the theory of knowledge construction and synthesis, closely looks at the root causes of complex social problems in the HA and provides policy directions.

Knowledge is socially constructed and distributed (Berger & Luckmann,1966). Knowledge and power are intertwined (Dugassa,2012). Social realities are continuously constructed or created by social actors (Esterberg, 2002). This makes our understanding of phenomena dependent on our interests, socio-cultural values, and prior knowledge. Knowledge construction is an ongoing process built on the foundation of past experiences. Imposing one knowledge and framework of thinking on another hinders knowledge construction and synthesis. One of the methods colonial powers have used to weaken the colonized is through the imposition of their knowledge on the colonized people (Said,1979). Imposers invalidated the experiences of the colonized group.

Knowledge construction is a dynamic meaning-making process. In public health, this results when we capture, classify, verify, organize, analyze, interpret data and comprehend and contextualize it effectively (ASTHO,2005). The effectiveness of knowledge construction is dependent on the ability to have accurate information, use the appropriate framework of thinking, and make accurate analyses and interpretations. This necessitates envisioning and searching a framework of thought that

promotes equity, diversity, unity, sustainability, and culturally acceptable social policies for the people in the HA.

If we carefully look at the growth and development of public health sciences, we see that knowledge construction looks like a spiral. Knowledge of how microorganisms reproduce and infectious diseases spread brought about the realization that individuals and communities could prevent and develop early detection methods. This was instrumental to the sciences of sanitation and sanitary reform. Accumulated knowledge grew into filtration and chlorination of water, pasteurization of milk, and better food preservation. When the discharges from factories, chemical, and mining industries polluted the environment and people learned of the public health impacts of those pollutants, they realized that chlorination of water and pasteurization of milk was not adequate.

This led to the development of environmental health sciences (Rosen,1993). During World War I, scientists noticed that many men and women suffered from nutritional deficiencies and were growth-stunted and unable to serve in the military. This necessitated the development of nutritional sciences and the need for food security. Lately, we have come to deeply understand that toxic social environments are as hazardous as biological and chemical pollutants (Rutty and Sullivan,2010). Social needs informed researchers, and policymakers are making efforts in the realization of social goals. In Ethiopia, unhealthy socio-political environments have hindered the capacity to control biological and chemical contaminants, address chronic food insecurities (Dugassa,2004), advance health promotion, prevent toxic social settings, and foster resiliency (Dugassa, 2008a).

It has been widely demonstrated that social cohesion creates the foundation for sustainable and equitable social development. Poverty and diseases are deprivations that result in part from social exclusions and human rights violations. As a result, the World Health Organization (WHO), Adelaide Charter of health promotion (WHO, 1988) proposes the need to include health in all policymaking. The charter reaffirms that political decisions can impact economic and social inequities. Through policies, inequitable societies shape unhealthy living and working environments. Individuals who see inequitable social structures as acceptable see nothing wrong with the system and do not address all forms of inequities. The Adelaide Charter explicitly mentioned the need to trace the deepest roots of public health problems and proposed the need to reevaluate the frameworks of thinking on which societies are constructed.

The document suggested the need for policymakers to focus their ways of thinking on social innovation, political acumen, valuing partnerships, seeking mutual gain, citizenship, and the community at the center, creative problem solving and utilizing 'champions' or advocates and outcomes focused on. In all its forms, the framework of thinking that advances imperial theories and violence need to be challenged. Challenging ideas and ideologies that foster the disempowerment of people and violence need to be seen as part of a public health intervention.

Why should we be interested in the framework of thinking?

First, the framework of thinking is relevant because public health and social justice are closely intertwined. They result from the deep ferment of ideology --- the framework of thinking of researchers and policymakers. Public health is a public good and just. It is one of the pillars of peace. The efforts we make to advance healthy social relations, justice, and stability are part and parcel of enhancing public health conditions. Just as in public health ideas, we can think of the ways colonialists propagate the agendas through formal and informal schooling they utilize to disempower their colonies. One of the damages colonialists often commit is brainwashing people and convincing them that their social problems result from their faults, or are caused by nature-referred to as "colonialism of mind (Dugassa, 2011)." The colonialists frame ideologies and identities and convince the colonized people to die as well as to kill, protect and advance that ideology and identity they imposed. For example, the word Eritrea and Ethiopia come from Greek words. Ethiopia – αἴθω + (*aitho* "I burn" and ὤψ *ops* "face") which means the land of burned face people. Consistent with the empire builders› motives, as the author was drafting this paper, Abyssinian elites called a demonstration in which they saluted Ethiopia-ness and condemned Oromummaa – the indigenous Oromo identity and framework of thinking. The condemnation of Oromummaa is the imposters making.

Second, substantial evidence showing knowledge in public health is socially constructed exists (ASTHO, 2005; Dugassa, 2012). As societies strive to understand and solve their social problems, they come up with workable solutions. Given that knowledge is a social construct, it can be argued that what is authentic and valid for one group may not be true for others. This means knowledge needs to be constructed locally or contextualized. On this basis, it can be shown that Ethiopia's social problems emerge from the framework of thinking and ideologies adopted by

the country's policymakers. This imported and un-contextualized knowledge created unhealthy socio-political relations between different ethnic/national groups. Ethiopian socio-political problems are spilling over into the Horn of Africa countries. Public health practitioners and researchers specialized in knowledge construction in public health have professional duties to critically examine the theories and practices that guide the Ethiopian government social policies in Oromia. Those professionals need to work having in mind the works of the German physician and political activist and the founding father of social medicine, Rudolph Virchow, who taught us that politics should be "a social medicine."

Third, social constructionists have long argued that health and diseases are distributed socially rather than biologically (Bury and Gabe, 2004). If health and diseases have sociological origins, leaving the study of health and disease to clinical medicine alone makes social problems just bio-medical issues. This makes our understanding of health and illness incomplete and disease prevention and treatment ineffective. As a public health researcher and practitioner, in my work, I focus on looking upstream and identifying the social causes of the problems rather than addressing them at the downstream levels.

Establishing the social causes of public health problems in Ethiopia is essential in promoting health and preventing diseases. The founding father of social medicine, Rudolph Virchow, who practiced medicine, researched the social causes of the typhus epidemic in Upper Silesia – an area predominantly Polish but ruled by Germans.

Later on, he became a politician. Based on his works and political experiences, he eloquently elaborated on the relationships between politics and health when he said, "medicine is a social science, and politics is nothing else but medicine on a large scale." He pointed out what the role of medicine should look like when he said, "Medicine, as a social science, as the science of human beings, should point out problems and attempt their theoretical solutions; the politicians, the practical anthropologist, must find their means for their actual solution."

Furthermore, when he said, "the physicians are the natural attorneys of the poor, and social problems fall to a large extent within their jurisdiction" he provided theoretical reasons for contemporary public health practitioners and researchers of the need to go beyond biomedical care and advocate for social reforms and address the social conditions of the marginalized and the poor (Taylor and Rieger, 1985). Unfortunately, the Ethiopian government has denied the Oromo people the ability to

develop their leadership (Bulcha, 2006; Dugassa, 2012a), which has prevented them from making politics "a social medicine."

Fourth, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2008, 2010) reports on the social determinants of health and the WHO health promotion (WHO,1986) reports showed that public health problems go beyond biomedical terms. When the report said, "Social justice is a matter of life and death. It affects the way people live, their consequent chance of illness, and their risk of premature death," it provided me with theoretical and practical reasons for pursuing fairness and social justice. The health results from complex social and biological interactions, and this necessitates advancing the idea of incorporating health promotion ideas in all policies. When the WHO (2008) report explicitly says, "we watch in wonder as life expectancy and good health continue to increase in parts of the world and in alarm as they fail to improve in others," this view necessitates contextualizing the issue in the HA and ask critical questions having in mind the most marginalized groups like the Gumuz people in Ethiopia.

Fifth, violence is a public health problem and preventable. Acts of violence are caused by biological, environmental, systemic, and social stresses, and most of those factors are modifiable (APHA,2018). Violence is contagious, like infectious diseases. Early exposure to violence and extreme poverty makes a person likely to become involved in violence. Violence hinders the development of public health. In Ethiopia, human rights violations are widespread. Most of the human rights violations perpetrated by the government are unreported. If they are reported, they are presented as if they are desirable and widely propagated on public media. This has normalized killings and torture. For example, on several occasions on public television, the Ethiopian prime minister used violent language when he said, "**አንገቴይቀላል** – prefer to beheaded, **ግንባራቸውይፈርሳል እንጂኢትዮጵያአትፈርስም** Ethiopia will not split apart, but their front heads will split ". Other media outlets are taking those violent statements and delivering them to their viewers and listeners as bravery. These violent words used by the prime minister are theoretically and practically informing the viewers that those acts are normal and acceptable. Although the prevention of violence is possible, it requires thoughtful actions. Prevention will start when a paradigm shift occurs in the way the Ethiopian government understands social problems, begins to regard human rights, and communicates in a language that advances peace, equity, diversity, and harmony.

Sixth, health promotion is understood as the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their choices in life and health (WHO,1948). As framed in the WHO objectives, to achieve a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing, individuals and groups must identify and realize their aspirations, satisfy needs, and change or cope with the environment. This necessitates closely analyzing the ideologies and framework of thinking that have been guiding Ethiopian policymakers.

What types of frameworks of thinking have been tested in the HA?

The people in the Horn of Africa have been subjected to slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. They have been conditioned to abandon their framework of thinking and adhere to imperial ideas. The first foreign frameworks of thinking they have tested were imperial/colonial thinking. The imperial idea normalized racial/ethnic/religious hierarchies, exploited human and natural resources, and invalidated the culture, identity, and perspectives of the indigenous Horn of African people. Knowledge is power and invalidating indigenous knowledge disempowered and dehumanized them (Dugassa,2008). The imperial ideological impositions have conditioned the people to promote foreign ideology- as if their destiny was the same as the colonizers. This made the people of the HA dependent on charity givers. Likewise, because of their worldviews and skin colors, the imperial idea twisted their identity and subjected them to poverty and diseases.

The word Eritrea and Ethiopia come from Greek words. Those words have existed in Greek for over three thousand years. The first time Greek travelers saw black people, they assumed their faces were burnt and named them aithoops ("aitho" burn" and ops "face"), which we can translate as black people. The word Eritrea comes from the word "eruthrós," which means red. The Greeks noted red algae on the Red Sea (Encyclopedia Britannia). Because these terms are derived from the same word, biological science students also refer to red blood cells as erythrocytes. The word Sudan is an Arabic word that means the land of blacks. In all these cases, identity was framed by foreign imposers. Identity framing intends to define who the group was, are and who they need to be. Identity encompasses members' experiences, culture, and worldview. Imposers twist the identity of groups in order to defame and define who they were, who they are, and who they want to be-it

undermines their own experiences. Imposed identity defames the group and has an impact on their self-esteem. Hence, identity is an issue that we cannot blindly accept or turn away from. Adopting the identity and frameworks of thinking set by foreigners without critically reflecting on them are not healthy choices.

A few more examples are relevant. The Ethiopian and Oromia capital, Addis Ababa / Finfinne, is metropolitan. Many churches and mosques in this city, but no single indigenous Oromo religious prayer places- Galmas- are available. The Oromo indigenous religion – Waqeffanna- has been suppressed not because it advances inferior morality and ethic; it promotes the Oromo indigenous worldview, drawing attention consistent with social and environmental justice (Dugassa, 2021). Furthermore, the Oromo people have been denied to make their language the official language in their capital. Why? The reason is, as was the case in the past, so in the twenty-first century, the imperial ideas and ideologies guiding the Ethiopian socio-cultural policies. In the twenty-first century, the Ethiopian government tells us to celebrate imperial ideas and ideology and kill those who refuse to celebrate. The assassination of famous Oromo musician Hacaalu Hundessa on June 29, 2020, is a good example. Ethiopian government policies are contrary to the public health agenda of enabling people to critically look at their social conditions and removing social conditions limiting their choices.

Second, during the Derg era, attempts have been to see if the socialist-communist framework of thinking would help to assimilate different ethnic/national groups in Ethiopia into the Amhara culture and solve the longstanding ethnic/national questions. Socialism divides society into friendly and enemy camps, enabling the leading motives of the government the elimination of political opponents. In addition, communism frames poorness as progressiveness and being wealthy as reactionary, normalizing poverty and making it appear desirable. Centralized planning made the whole society passive receivers and followers, effectively hindering creativity, hard work, and the accumulation of wealth.

Third, under the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) rule, Ethiopia has tried to see if the neo-liberal ideas would work. Capitalism legalized corruption and the exploitation of human and natural resources. Under the TPLF, capitalism made a few Tigray elites wealthy. This has created a society where a few rich people talk loudly, and most people are conditioned to listen. Poor Oromo farmers are massively evicted from their homes and farms, and the rich further enrich themselves and

enjoy luxurious lives. Most people are conditioned to live in poverty and die from easily preventable diseases and displacement (Dugassa, 2018). None of the imported ideologies and frameworks of thinking are equitable, democratic, and sustainable. They are not comparable to the culture and worldview of people in the HA. They all have created unhealthy social conditions and social relations.

The Abiy Ahmed government adopted hybrid policies. As he puts it in his book ida'amu – totaling- he tried to reinvent and revitalize the imperial ideas of centralized command. To make his ideas palatable and guarantee control of the empire he accidentally inherited, he adopted the intrigues he had learned from the TPLF. He has been using those intrigues against the Oromo political activists and his teachers – the TPLF leadership. Abiy Ahmed hired Eritrean mercenaries to subdue his opponents in Tigray and Oromia region. Those mercenaries are widely involved in indiscriminate killings, lootings, and raping women. Some observers described those crimes as "unfolding of ethnic cleansing." The intent to hire mercenaries and allow mass killings and lootings comes from the intention to control, exploit and dominate. Those socially and morally unacceptable and environmentally unsustainable policies are part and parcel of the colonial agenda. From the history of war and public health, we know that instability leads to the breakdown of vital social structures and creates favorable social conditions for infectious diseases and food insecurities (Rosen, 1993). The instability created by the Abiy government is making fertile ground for other pathologic social conditions. In Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa region, where food insecurity is widespread, the ongoing conflict makes famine imminent.

If theories inform practice, those imported foreign ideologies and frameworks of thinking are responsible for the contemporary social-economic problems in Ethiopia and the HA. Scholars agree that for the people in the Horn of Africa, the right course of action is framing their social agendas in their own frameworks of thinking and adopting the indigenous identity to the HA. Indeed, when Albert Einstein said, "we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created it," by the statement, he said that the foreign framework of thinking that created pathologic social relations and conditions would not provide Ethiopia and the HA with working solutions. It is necessary to revitalize, construct and synthesize knowledge locally, build on accumulated experiences and enhance problem-solving skills.

In the next section, Oromummaa– the Oromo framework of thinking- as a basis that can provide workable solutions to the Horn of African social problems.

Oromummaa – the Oromo Framework of Thinking

As stated above, the literal meaning of Oromummaa is Oromo-ness. Oromumma goes beyond the expression of identity. It encompasses the worldviews and a framework of thinking of the Oromo people – things that are indispensable in their worldview and aspirations. For the Oromo people, Oromummaa is a deeply settled episteme that is the foundation for their ideas, ideologies, and principles used in constructing the social, cultural, economic, political making of the Oromo people and their relationships with the social world and ecological system.

The Oromo people have developed unique values that are deeply settled in the Oromo episteme and guide their daily lives. We generally refer to these complex values as Oromummaa. The core national question of the Oromo people is the right to collectively define who they were – i.e., socially, economically, politically, culturally, and environmentally, who they are, and who they want to be. To understand who the Oromo people were, we need to look back to the institutions they developed and the ideas and ideologies they advance. The Oromo people were the people of Gada (Legesse, 2006) - where democracy and the rule of law were granted. They were the people of Siiqee (Kumsa, 1997) - where gender equity is advanced. They were the people of Qaalu, where harmony with divine power, social, and natural environment is asserted (Dugassa,2021). The ideas and ideologies that the Gada, Siiqee, and Qaalu institutions adhere to are democratic, equitable, ethical, and sustainable.

To answer the second question, who the Oromo people are now, one needs to examine their experiences under successive Ethiopian regimes from the 1880s to the present. The Ethiopian authorities legalized attacking and invalidating Oromo institutions, and they fostered building colonial ideas and ideologies. The policies of those regimes eroded the social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental capacity of the Oromo people. They have created structural inequality- which is unsustainable, and an obstacle to fostering social transformation. Because it is unsustainable and inequitable, the Oromo people are struggling to bring necessary changes. The theories and practices that the Gada, Siiqee, and Qaalu institutions advance are democratic, equitable, ethical, and sustainable. Those ideas are consistent with the principle of enabling people

and fostering healing wounds and community resiliency. The Oromo people can revitalize this accumulated wisdom and enhance their capacity to transform Oromia and beyond.

Oromo people have developed harmonious social and ecological relationships. If we closely look at the emblems of the Oromo people, on the one hand, we see the Odda tree and, on the other, a flag with black, red, and white colors. Odda trees feed and shade big and small animals and plants, representing peaceful, just, and harmonious living. For those reasons, the Odda tree has a deep and sacred meaning. Some of the epistemic significances of the Odda tree are that it advances the need to shade, feed the weak, and the need to live in harmony with the social and natural world. For the Oromo people, the color black has deep spiritual meanings. It represents holiness, purity, complexity, and the unknown future. The color red symbolizes love, care, unwavering commitment, and bravery. The color white represents the known past and the admiration of the courage of the ancestors.

Making meaning is a dynamic process. The ability to see and understand reality is the building block of community resiliency and the propensity to manage challenges and thrive. As such, the Oromo people have developed "Oromummaa" a framework of thinking that helped them succeed and which is superior to the foreign and imposed frameworks of thinking discussed above. In the Oromo framework of thinking, nagaa (peace) and fayya (health) are interwoven. The concept of peace is not separable from haqaa (social justice), tasgabbi (social order), and having harmony with divine power (Dugassa, 2021). In the Oromo perspective, to be personally at peace there needs to be peace in the family, among neighbors, a stable social order in the community, and peace in the natural environment and harmony with divine power. The Oromo people deeply value peace and consider any covert and overt assaults on peace a direct attack on personal health, community health, and environmental health.

For the Oromo people and their worldview of Oromummaa, the concept of peace goes beyond the absence of war; it includes social justice and having a dignified and worthwhile life. For them, social justice is about freedom from fear, social insecurity, structural inequality, known risks, poverty, and social incoherence. The concept of peace in the natural environment represents "environmental health." When they refer to social order and harmony with divine power, they imply healthy social relations, stability, social cohesion with the natural world, spiritual health, equitable society and law, and order (Dugassa,2021). Suppose we

interpret the Oromo concept of peace in terms of human rights language; in that case, it is about ensuring the right to live in a healthy environment, having a dignified life, guaranteed social security, and a right to health. The Oromo concept of peace consists of progressive social ideas and offers the framework of thinking that can transform the Horn of African society and guarantee stability.

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) leaderships further flourished Oromummaa and made unity, diversity, and equity more cohesive. They made Oromummaa transcend religious affiliations and regional diversity. The OLF leaderships made Oromummaa deeply sink and settle in the hearts and minds of Oromo men, women, young and old. They made Oromummaa the moral standard on which all Oromo individuals were judged. For example, in 1982, the OLF leadership- that happened to be Muslims, Christians, and Waqefataas- was captured by the Siad Bare government of Somalia. In captivity, those armed forces asked the OLF leadership to separate according to their religious affiliation. The OLF leadership refused to be divided and was killed. Refusing division, they all gave their precious lives and were buried in one grave in a place known as Shiniga. In the history of humankind, not many individuals have sacrificed their lives for the unity of purpose. What makes the sacrifice of the OLF leadership a unique human experience is they took a collective position and collectively sacrificed their lives and established the highest moral standard – Waada Shiniga –the Shiniga Unwavering Commitment or Oath. That is the moral standard of Oromummaa. They set the moral standard on which those alive and not yet born should be judged.

Oromummaa provides deep, settled, and unwavering moral principles that value universal human aspirations, i.e., fairness, dignity, and decency. Without romanticizing it, Oromummaa is inclusive, democratic, equitable, and environmentally sustainable. Oromummaa accepts unequivocally to be equal and different. The framework of thinking we adopt matters whether or not we build a society where bigotry is the norm or equity is the standard. Oromummaa flourishes through collective efforts, creating equal opportunities and responsibilities. Fostering Oromummaa is a necessary step to bring unity, equity, and diversity. Oromummaa can facilitate social transformation in the HA.

How do frameworks of thinking inform, guide, and shape societies?

The work of German sociologist and philosopher Max Weber may help u answer the question. Max Weber (1864-1920) explored the role of protestant ethics and the development of capitalism in Western Europe.

He looked at the relationships between the rise of capitalism and the protestant ethos of self-control.

According to him, the protestant reformation led to cultural change, which fostered the development of capitalism. Weber's work presents the cultures we create, inform, and guide social directions (Weber, 2003). Concepts are the building blocks of theory and practice (Neuman, 1994). For these reasons, culture is understood as a force that guides societies, provides them directions, and gives standards members should abide by.

The theories that societies develop inform their practices, and at the same time, their practices guide their theories. Let me bring in another fascinating piece of historical evidence to add to our current understanding of the meaning. The ancient Egyptians believed in life after death. They believed that as long as the body is maintained intact, the person will come back to life. Believing in the resurrection, they developed the chemical technology needed to mummify and preserve the dead body and furnish the tomb with everything needed for life. They developed and used the chemical compound natron - a mix of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate. The same idea informed them of the need to construct pyramids to house and preserve dead bodies. Not only that, but they also developed technology for preserving foods for a long time (Canadian Museum).

Second, observation of people (embedded social researchers) may be informative. A man of Muslim background and a Japanese woman who met in a graduate studies program in theory and policy studies class got married. Soon after, they decided to visit their families. When they decided to marry, they knew the challenges they would face from each family and community member—because all cultures make the members see things from their angle. In their plan to visit their families, they planned that the woman would dress modestly without entirely abandoning her Japanese culture and participating in the family activities. The man was to dress modestly, reflecting the Islamic culture, and join in the daily Japanese family activities. After two weeks of staying with the husband's family, they flew to Japan. After the trip, they openly discussed their observations. One of the points they both agreed on was that the husband's family's home was fully furnished. In the wife's thinking, however, the home of her husband's family was cluttered. In the family of Japanese women, things were different. In the husband's view, however, the house of his wife's family was not furnished. In the observation of the husband, the Japanese family talked more about emptiness. His family

prays for full grace, and her family prays for emptiness (not upholding anger). In their social gatherings, the wife's family talked about how they looked after their small gardens and pets, what they have tried, their challenges, and opportunities. In the family of the man, they talked about the grace of God and children. They concluded that two distinct religious ideas informed members on how they ought to furnish their homes and what they discussed the most.

Frameworks of thinking and cultural ideas are like a computer program that informs what the members of the society think and do. Our cultural beliefs tell us how we design our plates, chairs, homes, and dress codes. This includes social policies and cultural norms that give direction and meaning to life. The framework of thinking that societies set helps members to analyze the past, understand the present, and envision the future from their perspectives. For the Oromo people, Oromummaa is the framework of thinking that gives them direction in times of uncertainty, hope in despair, and meaning in life. The concept of Oromummaa is the accumulated knowledge of the Oromo people, and it is inclusive, democratic, equitable, and environmentally sustainable. Oromumma is the social and cultural capital, the foundation on which other capital can be built. It informs members to embrace other people the way they are. Oromummaa does not see diversity as a threat but as a strength. Attacking the Oromo framework of thinking- Oromummaa- is attacking the Oromo peoplehood. Attacking Oromummaa is an attempt to hinder the development of the framework that can potentially bring social transformation in the HA.

Oromos identify themselves as the people of Gadaa, Siiqqee, and Qaalluu. When Oromos say they are the people of Gadaa, they are referring to a society where democratic, transparent, and accountable governance is guaranteed. When they say they are the people of Siiqqee, they mean they are a society where gender equity is profoundly fostered. When they say they are the people of Qaalluu, they imply that social and environmental justice has been ethically and morally developed. Indeed, for the Oromo people, peace and health are intricately intertwined. From the Oromo perspective, personal, family, community peace, health, and harmony with the divine power are interwoven with environmental health. For the Oromo people, peace has a sacred meaning. In their daily prayers, they say "*bunaa fi nagaa hindhabiina*" - the literal meaning is "always have coffee and peace." For them, peace has profound meaning; they continuously advance personal peace, peace in the community,

natural world, and harmony with divine power. Consistent with their worldview, the Oromo people have developed a democratic, equitable, sustainable culture and a conflict resolution culture. Oromo people used Oromummaa as the method of analyzing the past, seeing the present, and predicting the future. As I have stated earlier in one of the OSA's newsletters, the generation of our grandfathers/great-grandfathers say in their gerarsa the following:

Afaan Oromoo	**English**
Akkam tanee akkas taneee?	How did we become the way we are now?
Moofaa uffatu taanee	We became impoverished who wear ripped clothes
Doofaa ufgaatu tanee	We became foolish, illiterate, and ignorant
Fayya, dhukubsatu tanee	We were healthy, but now we are sick
Beeka walaala tanee	We were knowledgeable, now we became uninformed
Otto qabnuu deega tanee	While we have plenty we became impoverished
Akkam goonee tanuree?	What can we do about it now?
Kaam gooree jalaa banuree?	How can we overcome these burdens?

What can we understand from the *gerarsa* (poem)? If we carefully look into its content, it represents the way the Oromo people articulated the indignity, poverty, diseases, evictions, forced migrations, famines, tortures and imprisonments, free labor, taxation without representation, forced religious conversions, and delegitimizing Oromo institutions and Oromo word views, that they have experienced under consecutive Ethiopian rulers. It was the way the Oromo elders communicated to the generation to come and which instructed them to think and envision the future direction.

After their conquest, Oromo social institutions and leaderships were attacked and stopped from developing another (Dugassa, 2012a). The Oromo people continued to experience forced religious conversion, poverty, illiteracy, injustice, and denial of access to clean water and adequate foods. The Macha and Tulama Self Help Association (MTSHA) was

formed to answer the human rights questions the generations before them have asked and the socio-political questions they had at the time. They came up with uniting and organizing the Oromo people and promoting Oromummaa as the working solution. The leadership of the MTSHA did not invent Oromummaa, but they revitalized it and applied it when they reached out to non-Oromo nationals. When the MTSHA leaders were imprisoned and killed, the founding fathers of the OLF realized that uniting and organizing the Oromo people was not good enough. They realized that arming the Oromo people theoretically with Oromummaa and building the defense force was necessary. The OLF leadership also closely worked with non-Oromos and proved that Oromummaa adheres to diversity and equity.

During Haile Selassie's time, the political question of the Oromo people was mainly framed as "land for tillers." In 1974, Oromo political demands led to the demise of the Haile Selassie regime. Those changes benefited the Oromo people and others. During the military government, the Oromo people experienced widespread conscription into the military, evictions, political persecutions, homelessness, displacement, forced migration, environmental degradation, and second-class citizenship. The refusal of the Oromo militia to serve the Ethiopian military government made the Ethiopian army tremble, leading the TPLF to take power. Oromummaa promotes fairness, social justice, and equality, and in all three regimes' cases, it had played a significant role in their demise.

In many ways, the TPLF/EPRDF government was not different from its predecessors. The displacements that mostly occurred locally during the Menelik and Haile Selassie times during the TPLF rule reached all continents. Recently the framework of thinking of Oromummaa reached its peak and made the TPLF/EPRDF meltdown slowly and sent them back to their base in Tigray. This has created an opportunity for the current Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. He who sincerely believes in imperial ideas was born and grew up among the Oromo people. Initially, he presented himself as an Oromo and mimicked having Oromummaa and won the Oromo people's support and controlled the empire that subjugated the Oromo people. After that, he started to implement and advance imperial ideas.

Societies decide on their framework of thinking in order to understand and explain their realities. They also use it to protect their interests, widen their choices, and thrive in a changing world. In a competing global world, the need for a framework of thinking is becoming essential.

Indeed, there is competition for material resources and knowledge, and even frameworks of thought. In this competing global world, the Oromo people need to develop Oromummaa as a tool to fully identify their immediate necessities, aspirations, and needs of the Horn of African people. Oromummaa is a valuable tool to correct the past, guide the present, and shape the future. To envision a better future, all societies in the HA need to reflect on the past. The dominants need to acknowledge the wrongs of the past and the privileges the colonial system offered them. Acknowledging the past and present wrongs will heal the wounded souls and help to establish trust. Those conditions are necessary to envision an equitable, democratic, and fair society.

In the Oromo people's efforts to liberate, empower themselves, and enhance problem-solving skills, the Oromo Studies Association (OSA) has played a significant role. As a scholarly association, the OSA provided theoretical reasons for Oromo politicians to frame their social policies and political agendas consistent with Oromummaa. The OSA has contributed to making Oromummaa the leading framework of thinking in the Oromo liberation struggle and provided theoretical reasons for institutional building and nation-building. Credit goes to a leading scholar like Jalata who has enriched the idea of Oromummaa in his works (Jalata, 2007, 2012).

Discussion

Knowledge and power are intertwined. The colonizers used their machine-gun killing power to validate their knowledge. They also used their knowledge to validate their power. Colonial knowledge has propagated structural inequality. On the contrary, Oromumma is a progressive, inclusive, equitable, and sustainable framework of thinking, and it can be used to transform Oromia, Ethiopia, and the HA. To make it work, the Oromos need to assert their rights and reclaim the political space they need to hold in the region. First, the Oromo people need to assert their collective rights by all means possible. During and after the struggle for their emancipation, the Oromo people need to practice Oromummaa and further promote their ideas. Empowering Oromo people will mean their worldviews and knowledge are validated. It also means they can allocate human and natural resources to identify their social problems and address them.

Second, the Oromo people are widely reclaiming and revitalizing Oromummaa and their indigenous institutions. Ideally, the Gada, Siiqee,

and Qaalu institutions will work together synergistically. The sum of the three institutions is more powerful than each of them separately. If the Oromo people choose to revitalize one institution without the other, they will lose those synergetic effects. Those institutions carry with them the accumulated wisdom of the Oromo people. Wisdom is the highest form of knowledge and power. Revitalizing the accumulated knowledge of the Oromo people will help them build their capacity. Oromo people need to reclaim and revitalize the Waqefaana, Siiqee, and Gadaa institutions. Solutions to the Oromo people's social problems will be found upon further building on their accumulated wisdom. Building Oromo indigenous institutions is a significant step forward in finding those solutions.

Third, if the Oromo people assert their collective rights today, they will inherit many social problems. Resulting from successive Ethiopian regimes' overt/covert actions, the environment of Oromia is now highly degraded, and moral corruption is widespread. Not only that, poverty, illiteracy, and disease have been normalized. To revitalize the natural environment, heal the wounded souls and uplift morality, prevent diseases, guarantee food security, and attain the highest possible literacy level and health, the Oromo people need to use Oromummaa as the leading framework of thinking.

Conclusions

The above analyses lead us to make three clear-cut conclusions:

First, legitimizing an imposed framework of thinking is tantamount to advancing a wrong agenda. Expecting positive results from a negative agenda is impossible. On the contrary, celebrating Oromummaa have the potential to foster social transformation in the Horn of Africa and bring peace and stability for it is a framework that is democratic, equitable, sustainable, and inclusive at its core. Oromummaa can be instrumental in effectively correcting past wrongs, healing the wounded souls, and shaping the future of the Horn of Africa. Indeed, correcting the wrongs and healing wounded souls in Oromia can provide sound evidence to others and provide theoretical reasons to seek local remedies and social medicine for the Horn of Africa. Oromummaa provides a framework of thinking that encompasses social and environmental justice and fosters cross-fertilization of ideas that are instrumental for developing problem-solving skills. It offers a starting point for reflection of the past and present, learning and envisioning a better future, setting directions for social renewal and revitalization. Oromummaa helps us to reorient the ways in which we think,

understand public problems, and solve them. It is instrumental in settling disputes in the community and living in harmony with the natural world.

Second, although Abiy Ahmed claims his book reverses the idea of importing ideologies for a renewed Ethiopian political ideology, it does the opposite: revitalizing not only old but also rotten imperial ideas. The Oromo and Amharic terms of the book "Ida'amu" and "Medemer" respectively mean totaling. However, to sugarcoat it, Abiy translated the title of his book as though it means synergy. Totaling is a theory derived from the imperial assimilationist agenda. Abiy Ahmed has openly stated that he is working to bring back the good old days of Ethiopia- the imperial past, renovate the monuments of kings who were responsible for genocide (De Silviac,1901/2005), and the slave trade in Ethiopia (Bulcha,2002). Totaling does not foster the empowerment of people or synergy. The number of political prisoners and rampant political executions committed during the short tenure of Abiy proves that the Prime Minister's totaling theory is no different from the old imperial approach. It does not foster diversity, equity, and sustainability. It does not heal the wounded souls, nor prevent poverty and diseases. The theory is contrary to the health promotion agenda of empowering people to control their own social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental affairs and widen their choices in life.

Third, in its constitution, the WHO states "…. the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being" – a deeply cherished principle among public health professionals. Improvement in population health occurs when people attain peace and security and work cooperatively. Advancing Oromummaa is tantamount to promoting equity, diversity, and sustainability. It provides a theoretical framework of thinking necessary to achieve these fundamental human needs - 'the highest attainable standard of health".

References

Ahmed, Abiy (2021) Ida'amu, Finfinne/Addis Ababa.

APHA (2018) Violence is a Public Health Issue: Public Health is Essential to Understanding and Treating Violence in the U.S. https://apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2019/01/28/violence-is-a-public-health-issue (Retrieved on May 27, 2021)

ASTHO (2005) Knowledge Management for Public Health Professionals, Washington DC.

BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved April 24, 2021, from BrainyQuote.com Website: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/mason_cooley 395850. Mason Cooley is a sociologist and his work is influenced by Darwinian Theory.

Bury Michael and Gabe Jonathan (2004) The Sociology of Health and Illness, Routledge, London

Berger Peter, and Luckmann, Thomas (1966) The Social Construction of Reality, Anchor, New York.

Bulcha, Mekuria (2006), Conquest and Forced Migration: An Assessment of the Oromo Experience (in Editor) Hameso, Seyoum and Hassen Mohammed (Ed), Arrested Development in Ethiopia. Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy and Self-Determination, The Red Sea Press Inc., Trenton, NJ

Bulcha, M. (2002). The making of the Oromo Diaspora. A historical sociology of forced Migration. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Kirk House Publishers.

De Silviac Martial 1901/2005 An Ancient Great African Nation. The Oromo. Translated by Ayalew Kannno. Father Martial de Salviac Missionary (O.M. CAP) Paris.

Dugassa, Begna (2012) Knowledge Construction: Untapped Perspective in Pursuit for Health, Sociology Mind, Vol. 2, No.4 pp362-372.

Dugassa, Begna. (2012a). Denial of leadership development and the underdevelopment of public health: the experience of the Oromo people in Ethiopia, The Journal of Oromo Studies, Vol. 19, Issue 1-2, p139-174.

Dugassa, Begna (2011) Colonialism of Mind: Deterrent of Social Transformation- The Experiences of Oromo People in Ethiopia Sociology Mind, Vol.1, No.2, 55-64.

Dugassa, Begna. (2018). The Significance of Collective Rights to Public Health Development: The Case of Oromia Regional State in Ethiopia, American Journal of Public Health Research. 6(5), 203-214.

Dugassa, Begna (2021) The Public Health Significance of Religious Imposition: The Experience of Oromo People in Ethiopia, Journal of Religion and Health 60:974–998.

Dugassa, Begna. (2008). Indigenous Knowledge, Colonialism and Epistemological Violence. The Experience of the Oromo People Under Abyssinian Colonial Rule, a thesis submitted in conformity with the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department

of Theory and Policy Studies in Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

Dugassa, Begna. (2008a). Colonial Trauma, Community Resiliency and Community Health Development. The Case of the Oromo people in Ethiopia, Journal of Health & Development, Vol 4, No. 1-4, p43-63.

Dugassa, B. (2004). Human Rights Violations and Famine in Ethiopia. The Journal of Oromo Studies, Volume 11, Number 1 and 2, pp47-68.

Edward Abey Quotes. (n.d) Brainy Quote.com. Retrieved April 24, 2021, from BrainyQuote.com Web site: https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/edward-abbey-quotes. Edward Abey is an environmentalist.

Canadian Museum of History , Mysteries of Egypt, https://www.historymuseum.ca/cmc/exhibitions/civil/egypt/egcr06e.html (Retrieved on January 3, 2022

Einstein, Albert Quotes (n.d) Brainy Quote.com Retrieved April 24, 2021, from Brainy Quote.Com Web Site https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/albert-einstein-quotes

Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/search?query=eritrea, Retrieved on April 24, 2021.

Esterberg, Kristtin (2002) Qualitative Methods in Social Research, McGraw Hill, Boston.

Farmers, Paulo (2003) Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor, University of California Press, Oakland, California.

Health Statistics https://www.statista.com/statistics/274513/life-expectancy-in-north-america/ (Retrieved on January 26, 2022.

Jalata, Asafa (2007) OROMUMMAA: Oromo Culture, Identity, and Nationalism, Oromia Publishing Atlanta, Georgia.

Jalata, Asafa (2012) Promoting and Developing Oromummaa, Sociology Publications, and Other Works. https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_socopubs/83

Kumsa, Kuwee (1997) The Siiqqee Institution of Oromo Women, The Journal of Oromo Studies, Vol. 4, No. 1& 2, 115-152

Legesse, Asmarom (2006) Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System, The Red Sea Press, Inc, Trenton, NJ.Mason Cooley Quotes. (n.d.).

Neuman, Lawrence (1994) Social Research Methods, Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

Rosen, George (1993) A History of Public Health, Expanded Edition. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Rutty, Christopher and Sullivan, Sue (2010) This is Public Health: A Canadian History. https://cpha.ca/sites/default/files/assets/history/book/history-book-print_all_e.pdf, Retrieved on April 24, 2021

Said, Edward (1979) Orientalism, Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, New York.

Smith, Linda (1999) Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples, Zed Books Ltd, London.

Taylor, R. and Rieger, A. (1985). 'Medicine as Social Science: Rudolph Virchow on the Typhus Epidemic in Upper Silesia'. International Journal of Health Services, 15(4): 547-559.

Weber, Max (2003) The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism, Dover Publication.

WHO (1948) WHO Constitution, https://www.who.int/ governance/eb/who constitution_en.pdf (Retrieved on April 26, 2021)

WHO (1986) The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. https://www.who.int/teams/health-promotion/enhanced-wellbeing/first-global-conference WHO (1988) Adelaide Statement II (2017) on Health in All Policies. Adelaide: World Health Organization, Government of South Australia; 2019. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.Neuman, Lawrence (1994) Social Research Methods, Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, Second Edition, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

WHO (1998) Health Promotion Glossary. https://www. who.int/health-promotion/about/HPR%20Glossary%201998.pdf

WHO (2008). Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health The Final 252 American Journal of Public Health Research Report of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants

WHO (2010) A Conceptual Framework for Action on the Social Determinants of Health, https://www.who. int/sdhconference/resources/ConceptualframeworkforactiononSDH_eng.pdf

Journal of Oromo Studies_#28.indb 90 7/13/2023 5:11:01 PM

A SPOTLIGHT ON ETHIOPIA'S ECONOMIC IDIOSYNCRASIES

Ayele Gelan

Economic Public Policy Research Program (EPP); Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), Kuwait

Abstract: *Ethiopia's economic idiosyncrasies have received hardly any attention at all levels in Oromo or Ethiopian studies.*[1] *The fact that Ethiopia is a desperately poor country seems to have caused researchers to gloss over the issue, with a tacit understanding that Ethiopia's economic problems are obvious; hence, it may not require any in-depth study. However, the root causes of lack of social progress in Ethiopia can be found deep-seated in varieties of lop-sided patterns of economic development. It is not just Ethiopia's economy has numerous structural unevenness, but the imbalances are interrelated, forming synergy and keeping the economy at low level equilibrium poverty trap. In this paper, I would argue that Ethiopia's political and economic reform is very unlikely to succeed unless the authorities address major critical bottlenecks in the first instance. The authorities may try to perfect the arts of economic policy formulation, but standard policy prescriptions are unlikely to pull out the country from this quagmire in a poverty trap. Proceeding to standard economic policy reforms without addressing the fundamental imbalances would be analogous to trying to erect a high-rise building without bothering to undertake a proper clearance of debris and necessary excavations on the site. This paper will identify a few peculiarities in the Ethiopian economy then proceed to in-depth discuss of the ramifications of each idiosyncratic features in turn.*

Introduction

In a nature documentary series, *Wildest Africa,* the third episode was devoted to Ethiopia. In that episode Ethiopia was depicted as land of

Journal of Oromo Studies_#28.indb 91 7/13/2023 5:11:01 PM

extremes, with a unique blend of natural environment, including mesmerizing topography and diverse flora and fauna, many of them found nowhere else in the world. Little did the producers of that documentary know that Ethiopia's social and economic landscapes are as unique and extreme as its natural environment? The peculiarities in the country's social domain have been vastly documented, often portrayed in divergent and diametrically opposite viewpoints on Ethiopian history.

Ethiopia's economic idiosyncrasies have received hardly any attention at all level, in Oromo as well as Ethiopian studies. In Ethiopian historiography, it has been customary to throw everything to do with economic matters under the rubric "Ethiopia is a poor country". This comes with a tacit understanding that Ethiopia's economic problems are well known and hence this does not deserve any in-depth analysis.

The fact, however, is that the root causes of lack of social progress in Ethiopia can be found lying deep-seated in varieties of lopsided patterns of economic development. It is not just Ethiopia's economy has numerous structural unevenness, but these are interrelated, forming synergy among themselves and keeping the economy in a poverty trap. Clearly, the economic imbalances are at least partly derived from political and social inequalities, which are rampant in the country. This seems to have led to some logical fallacy in Ethiopian studies, manifested in an established linear and sequential thinking that addressing political and historical injustices would come first then sorting out economic issues would follow.

In this paper, I would argue that Ethiopia's political and economic reform is very unlikely to succeed unless the authorities pay enough attention to the country's economic peculiarities. No matter how the authorities try to perfect the arts of economic policy formulation, standard policy prescriptions are unlikely to pull the country from the current stalemate in poverty trap. Proceeding to standard economic policy reforms without addressing the fundamental imbalances would be analogous to trying to erect a high-rise building without a proper site clearance, excavations and removals of the debris.

This paper will concentrate on three most important idiosyncrasies in the Ethiopian economy: the low wage curse, center-periphery and urban rural imbalances. The paper is structured in that order, focusing on in-depth analysis of each of these idiosyncratic features in turn and drawing their ramifications in influencing the direction of Ethiopia's economic reform. The discussion in this paper heavily borrowed from various

essays published in Gelan (2018). The most fundamental economic imbalanced discussed in that book are grouped together, categorized and the analyzed at much greater depth.

1. idIosyncracy #1: the Low wage curse

1.1. How Low is Ethiopia's Wage Rate?

In *Ethiopia's low wage is a curse, not a blessing* (Gelan 2018, pp…), it was established that Ethiopia has an exceptionally low wage economy. The salaries of an elementary school teacher and a chief high school principal in Nairobi are about seven and thirteen times the salaries of teachers in the same career level in Addis Ababa. Ethiopia's current non-mandatory minimum wage currently stands at less than US$17, which miserably compares with the current statutory minimum wages of US$120 in Egypt and US$148 in Kenya.

Yet a comparison of cost of livings across the world puts Ethiopia at an index of 49 (with New York as 100), the corresponding figure for Nairobi was 47, two points lower than that of Ethiopia (Gelan 2018, pp.190-202). This analysis was taken further in a recent report entitled *Made in Ethiopia: challenges in the garment industry's new frontier* (Barrett and Baumann-Pauly, 2019) established that Ethiopia's factory workers were paid on average US$26 per month. This was compared with statutory minimum wages of thirteen other countries from different parts of the world. It was not only that Ethiopia was situated at the bottom of the list but also Ethiopia's figure was about a 4th of the next lowest figures, Bangladesh and Mynmar, each with US$95. Using harvest season price of teff, then the quantity of teff required to replace bare minimum of energy for an adult factory worker would cost at least US$42, about $17 more than the wage the worker earns. Of course, the worker would need several times more expenditure to cover the cost of processing including fuel to cook the teff, accommodation, transport, clothing, and other social obligations (Gelan 2019).

1.2. Blessing Turned into a Curse

The role of domestic market size in economic development was articulated by development economists as early as 1960s. The focus of balanced growth theory was synchronized investments in different sectors of the economy with a view of expanding the size of the domestic market (Nurkse 1961). With the advent of the structural adjustment program of

1980s, sponsored by the World Bank and IMF, the focus shifted entirely from interconnections between components of the domestic sectors in developing economies towards the external sectors, namely production for exports. In the latest decade, however, the pendulum has shifted to recognition of the position held by development economists during the post-independence years. The intellectual backing for the latest thinking is rooted in the endogenous growth theory (Romer 2011). Following the ascendency of endogenous growth theory, some of the multi-lateral agencies have openly distanced themselves from the misleading and excessive emphasis on export-oriented development strategy. Developing countries are being encouraged to adopt policies that enhance domestic demand (UNIDO 2017 and UNCTAD 2013).

Ethiopia's industrialization strategy has been inspired neither by the balanced growth theory nor by the endogenous growth theory. It seems Ethiopia is stuck with the bankrupted excessive export orientation mostly promoted by the Bretton Woods agencies, the World Bank and IMF. The unfortunate reality of this misguided development strategy has been that Ethiopia has succeeded neither in promoting exports nor in exploiting large domestic market advantage. In this context, we often hear regret that Ethiopia has remained poor although it is blessed with natural resources. However, we rarely recognize that Ethiopia is also blessed with another resource: population! Multi-lateral agencies, donors, and policy practitioners regularly complain that Ethiopia's population is growing too fast and this is becoming a burden on the economy. No denying that unfettered population growth can lead to pressure on public services, e.g. education, health, housing etc. However, what seems to be lost in this argument is that large population also means big market size. The undue emphasis on population growth as a burden seems to have hidden the positive element in the demographic narrative, turning the blessing to a curse!

It should be noted that the Ethiopian authorities have adopted many costly endeavors simply because of their overzealous commitment to export oriented development strategy. Farmers had to be evicted from their ancestral lands to give way for flower farms or industrial parks, both meant to produce exportable products. The authorities had to entice foreign firms to come to Ethiopia promising cheap labor. The authorities have called cheap labor as Ethiopia's comparative advantage. It seems the authorities were oblivious to the fact that, by committing themselves to offer labor at such excessively cheap or almost free rate to foreign firms,

they effectively killed the domestic market, the purchasing power of residents. This can be illustrated by the relationships displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Circular flow of Income

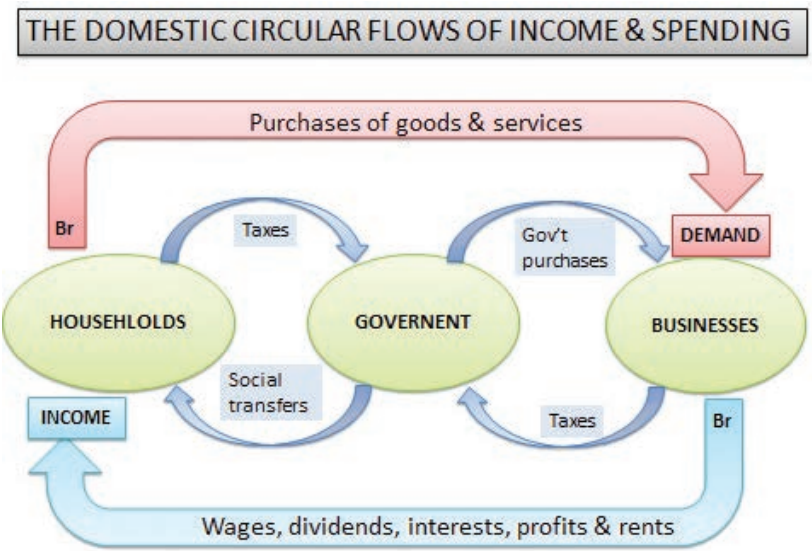


Figure 1 represents a highly concise and simplified version of what is called circular flow of income. An economy is made up of institutions that interact in different markets. Three institutions are presented in Figure 1 (the foreign sector is omitted to simplify the analysis): households, government, and business (the circles shaded light green).

- *Government* collects **taxes** from households and businesses, pays households **social transfers** (directly or indirectly), purchase goods from businesses).
- *Households* supply factor inputs (labor, land, capital) to businesses and receive **income** (wages, dividends, interests, profits and rents). Money flows from businesses to households (the lower arrow, shaded in light blue).
- *Businesses* supply goods and services to households, who in turn **spend** the very income they received from businesses, creating **demand** for goods and services that is products of the businesses.

The circular flow of income concisely displays the relationships between household income and demand for goods and services. The engine of economic growth lies in the linkages and interdependences between households and businesses. On the one hand, businesses depend on factor supply by households, labor services is the most important factor of production. On the other hand, business profitability critically depends on household capacity to pay for goods and services. The purchasing power of households crucially depend on income they earned on their factor services. The paradox with Ethiopia's low wage policy is that the authorities have been oblivious to the fact that paying low wage means reducing business profitability. Of course, there is an illusion that the businesses will sell their products abroad that means dependence on income or purchasing power of foreign households, not that of domestic households. Negligible proportion of businesses manage to penetrate foreign market. The bulk of Ethiopia's businesses depend on domestic markets as outlets for their products and services. The fallacy of Ethiopia's wage policy is that it assumes as if all producers are exporters. The policy they designed to promote exports (by cutting their costs) prevails and applies to all sectors in the economy.

Consequently, the links between household income and demand for domestic goods has remained broken for long time. The low wage policy has dumped down household income, and demand for goods and services. This created a gloomy prospect among the business community, who would cut down on investment, employment and then production. Businesses produce just enough for the small market. This means operating at less than full capacity with all the adverse implication on economies of scale. If most businesses produce at less than their full capacity, then cost per unit of every unit of output each firm produces becomes unnecessarily higher than if production occurred at optimal levels. Business profitability as well as household welfare suffers. Government would raise lower taxes than possible if level of household income and business profitability were higher. Ultimately, the economy remains stuck at low-level equilibrium, i.e., operating at less than full capacity. This is exactly what seems to be happening to the Ethiopian economy.

1.3. Labor Income Share in GDP

Labor income occupies a central place in domestic demand based economic policies. It is becoming increasingly common to stress the role of labor income in determining performances of domestic markets. Lavoie

and Stockhammer (2012) provide interesting discussion on theories and policies on wage-led growth. The motivation for shifting attention to wage-led growth in recent years lies in increasing recognitions that profit-led growth policies of the previous decades have led to catastrophic failures. The envisaged trickle down has remained unrealized. Inequalities in the developed world and poverty in the developing countries have become rampant.[2] Wage and nonwage incomes (profits, interests, dividends, and rents) constitute total income of households. Although we displayed only one aggregate household unit for illustration purposes, the reality is that households are classified by income groups. The bulk of wage income goes to poor households (low-income group) while nonwage income goes to rich households. Wage earners spend a large proportion of their monthly incomes on goods and services.

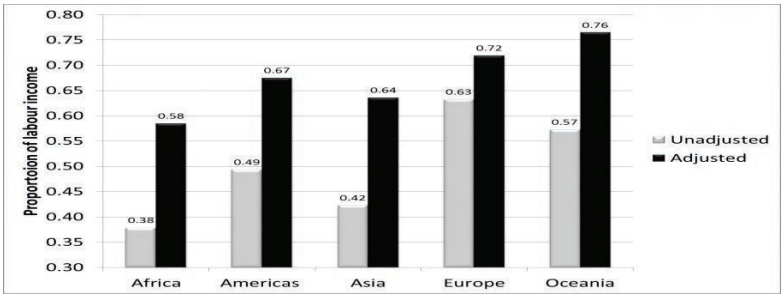
The non-wage income earners, on the other hand, allocate a good proportion of their income to savings, which in the jargon of circular flow of income is referred to as "leakages". Saving is referred to as leakages because it represents the amount of income that has been diverted away from continuous circulation in the economy, away from being spent on goods and services, and deposited with domestic or foreign banks. It is the job of government policy to minimize leakages and maximize spending. This does not mean governments actively engage in discouraging savings, but by promoting investment, so that what has leaked away would be injected back into the economy. The trick is to make sure that total spending is unaffected while the composition of spending may vary, investment spending (on capital goods) by business owners and household spending (on consumer goods and services).

Since there is no guarantee that saving would always be converted to investments, government policy should ensure that enough has been allocated to wage earners who are certain to spend on goods so that demand for goods and services will remain strong. The share of labor income in gross domestic product (GDP), that is to say in total income in the country, indicates the extent to which government actively protect welfare of households, thereby ensuring demand for goods and services would remain vibrant.

Guerriero 2012 computed average share of labor income in GDP using panel data for covering many countries in the world and spanning a over two decades of time period. The findings of this study is summarized in Figure 2. The unadjusted figures (blue bars) represent share of labor income without accounting for self-employment, whose incomes

would need to be split between labor and non-labor components. The adjusted figures (red bars) presents labor income shares after accounting for self-employment. Labor income share in GDP is the lowest in Africa (38% unadjusted and 58% adjusted) and the highest share in Oceania (Australia and New Zealand) where it reaches as high as (57% unadjusted and 76% adjusted). In general, the share of labor income in GDP is higher in developed countries than in developing countries.

Figure 2. Labor share in GDP averages (by region)



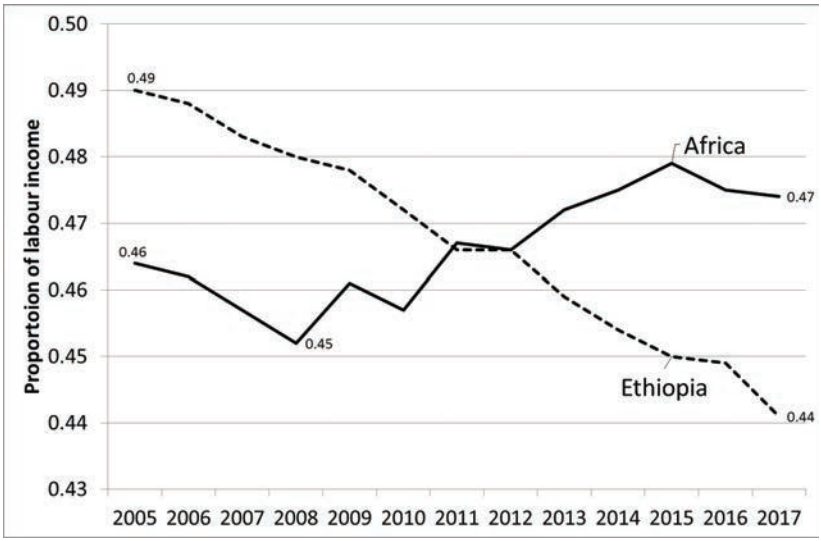
Source: Guerriero, 2012

This brings us back to facts we already know that developed countries have a much more solid and sound wage policies. The motivations for wage policies in advanced economies are many folds. The first one is related to social objectives, ensuring that citizens get decent wages for decent works, and their welfares are protected. The second sources of motivation lie in economic rationales, rooted in the circular flow income discussed earlier: the recognition that consumer spending is an engine of growth. Consumer spending is often used as barometers of economic health; supermarkets being regularly monitored to check changes in sells of products.

It would be interesting to know the relative position of Ethiopia in the context of data presented in Figure 2. Unfortunately, Guerriero 2012 analyzed the panel data by grouping countries into continents. In her follow up study (Guerriero 2019), where an updated panel data was using country-by-country comparisons, Ethiopia not included in that study. Consequently, we resort to indirect methods of extracting information regarding how the situation in Ethiopia compares with that of other countries in the world. We can obtain this information by using labor income share in GDP reported by the International Labor Organization (ILO). In the ILO dataset, we find relevant data for both Ethiopia

and the average for Africa. Given that we already know how the Africa compares to the rest of the world, then the relative position of Ethiopia within Africa would give us information on indirect relative position of Ethiopia's labor income share in GDP relative to the rest of the world.

Figure 3. Changes in labor share in GDP (2005-2017)



Source: plotted using data from ILO 2019a

Figure 3 plots share of labor income in GDP for twelve years (2005-2017). According to ILO database (ILO 2019a), labor income share in Ethiopia's GDP was 49% in 2005 slightly higher than the corresponding figure for Africa (46%). Between 2005 and 2017, there was a secular downward movement in labor income share in Ethiopia, reaching 44% in 2017. On the contrary, labor income shares in the rest of Africa have actually increased, particularly between 2008 and 2017.

ILO 2019b states that labor income share they report is comprehensive, covering employment and self-employment income. Therefore, it should be underlined that the 44% labor income share in GDP for Ethiopia covers both compensation of employees (for employed work force) and imputed share of labor income for the self- employed labor force. This would mean that this estimate covers the estimated labor income of the entire agricultural labor force as well as the rural and urban informal sectors.

1.4. The Anomaly with Ethiopia's Wage Structure

This section brings together key points raised in relation to Ethiopia's first economic idiosyncrasy – the exceptionally low wage! A stage was set by discussing how abysmally low wage level in Ethiopia is. It was established that Ethiopia's low wage is not just a concern with equity but also macro-economic inefficiency, the low wage is bringing down the entire economy with it. Ethiopia was also benchmarked with the rest of Africa and the rest of the world by using share of labor income in the country's GDP. Ethiopia's peculiarity lies not so much with the extent of low wage rate but the manner in which Ethiopia's wage policy has to be formulated.

Ethiopia's low wage has attracted the attention of the international community. This has given rise to background works on finding a solution to this economic malaise of Ethiopia. For instance, as far back as mid-2017, the ILO tendered for consultancy service a proposal for a background study a minimum wage study in Ethiopia (ILO 2017). The findings of that study was supposed to be made public by early 2018, although this has not yet been made public as far as we are aware. As a follow up from the ILO sponsored consultancy report, "the Ethiopian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs drafted a labor proclamation to establish a Commission to set a minimum wage... The proclamation will not set a minimum wage rather establish a Commission that set a base wage across time depending on the economy, cost of living and other factors in order to avoid the hassle of revising the proclamation repeatedly" (Capital Newspaper, May 13, 2019).

There seems to be a consensus among donors, multilateral agencies and the Ethiopian government that Ethiopia's low wage curse could be done away with by simply introducing a legally bindinFigure 6.
Ethiopia's Extremely Skewed Wage Distribution

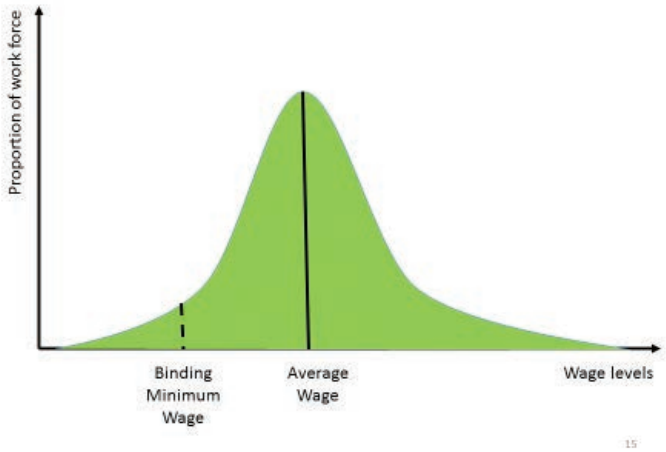
g minimum wage. This indicates that the authorities are oblivious to the peculiarity of Ethiopia's wage structure. Minimum wage is a mechanism to deal with a normal situation, but Ethiopia's wage situation is rather abnormal. Hence, setting a minimum wage would not go anywhere near to fixing Ethiopia's low wage curse.

The rest of this section is devoted to llustrating how tricky it would be to address Ethiopia's wage troubles by introducing a minimum wage. I will do so using diagrammatic expositions (Rutkowski 2003).

I start with a wage distribution for an ideal situation, a society in which wage distribution is not biased in any direction. Figure 4 shows such a wage distribution. The vertical axis represents the proportion of

the work force, and the horizontal axis shows the wage rate. In this ideal case, the wage structure is represented by a normal distribution in which the average wage is just in the middle (denoted by the solid vertical line), with half of the population earning more than the average wage and the remaining half below the average wage. In the case of normal wage distribution, all measures of central tendency overlap (mean, mode, and median are equal). The distribution is normal, equally tailing out to the left and to the right, that is to say, no degree of skewedness to use statistical jargon.

Figure 4. Ideal Wage Distribution

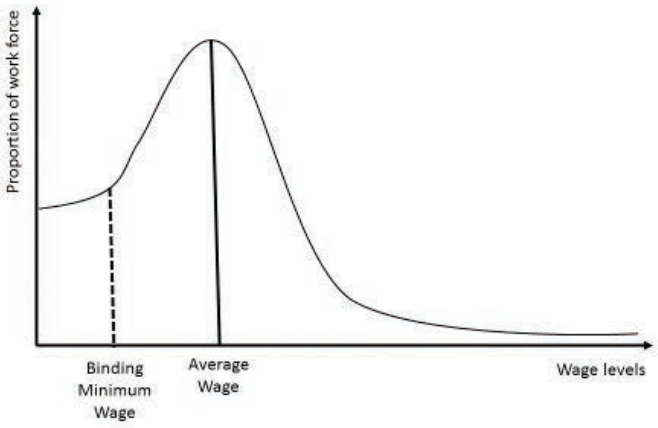


> Even in this normal social policy concerned with equity requires introduction of a minimum wage, so that those that are left behind would be pulled up, closer to the average wage. Hence, the authorities would introduce binding minimum wage (shown by the broken vertical line) below which it would be illegal to pay. That way the authorities would solve the problems of equity and fairness. Therefore, legally binding minimum wage becomes effective.

As indicated, the ideal case can serve only as a point of reference otherwise such an ideal wage distribution does not exist in real economies. It is often the case that wage distributions are skewed to the right, that is to say, tailing out to the right, implying much greater than half of

the workforce earn low wages and smaller proportion of the work force earn higher wages. Such a typical wage distribution that applies to most economies is displayed in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Typical Wage Distribution (Right Skewed)

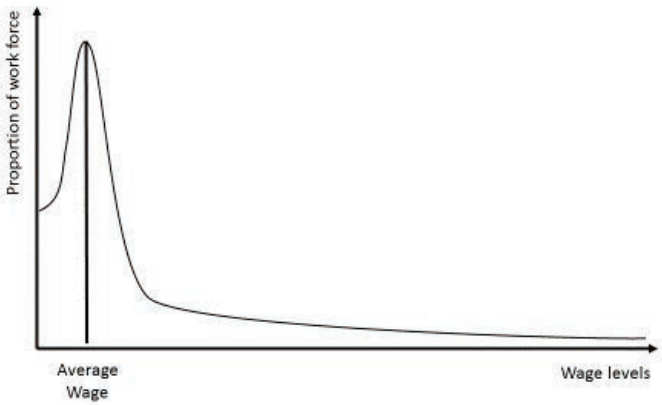


As before, the vertical axis represents percentage of the workforce and the horizontal axis denote the wage level. The vertical line represents average wage, this time average being represented by the mode (that is to say the amount of wage received by the highest proportion of workers). In such rightly skewed wage structure the arithmetic mean gives a distorted measure of average wage, large wages received by a few (the right tail of the distribution) gets a bigger weight and hence mean is much greater than the mode, a deceptive average. The third measure of average, median, that is to say the level of wage that divides the wage distribution into two equal halves, would be greater than the mode but less than the mean. As before, the broken vertical line represents a hypothetical level at which a normal society with the typical wage distribution displayed in Figure 5 would set a legally binding minimum wage.

Unfortunately, the case of Ethiopia is not normal. In order to compare and contrast with a normal case, Ethiopia's wage distribution is displayed in Figure 6. From our discussion in section 3.1, Ethiopia's wage distribution is extremely skewed to the right. The majority of the work force receive extremely low wage. Negligible proportion of the work force fall in high-income category. Notice that Ethiopia's average wage (the

solid vertical line in Figure 6) is slightly lower than the minimum wage level in a normal economy (depicted above in Figure 5).

Figure 6. Ethiopia's Extremely Skewed Wage Distribution



In *Ethiopia's low wage is a curse, not a blessing* (Gelan 2018, p. 194), it was shown that Ethiopia's average monthly wage was $65 which is considerably lower than the corresponding monthly average wages of most African countries (e.g. Uganda $106, Egypt $174, Tanzania $216). It was also shown that Ethiopia's minimum wage (not legally binding) was $17, sharply contrasting with legally binding minimum wage rate in Egypt ($120) and Kenya ($148). It follows that Ethiopia's average wage is about half of Egypt's minimum wage and considerably lower than 50% of Kenya's minimum wage (ibid., p. 193). This reality is mimicked in Figure 5 and Figure 6. Ironically, Addis Ababa ranks first in cost living index in Africa. Cost of living in Addis Ababa currently stands at about 60% of that of New York City, considerably larger than that of neighboring countries; Nairobi (38.5%), Dar Es Salam (36%), Kampala (35%), and Cairo (32%) (Numbero 2021).

The ILO and Ethiopia's Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs have recently prepared the groundwork for the introduction of legally binding minimum wage in Ethiopia. However, it seems they are unaware of the reality on the ground; the immensity of the matter they are dealing with. The wage structure is stuck extremely skewed to the right the average wage situated so close to zero. This renders the whole idea of trying to

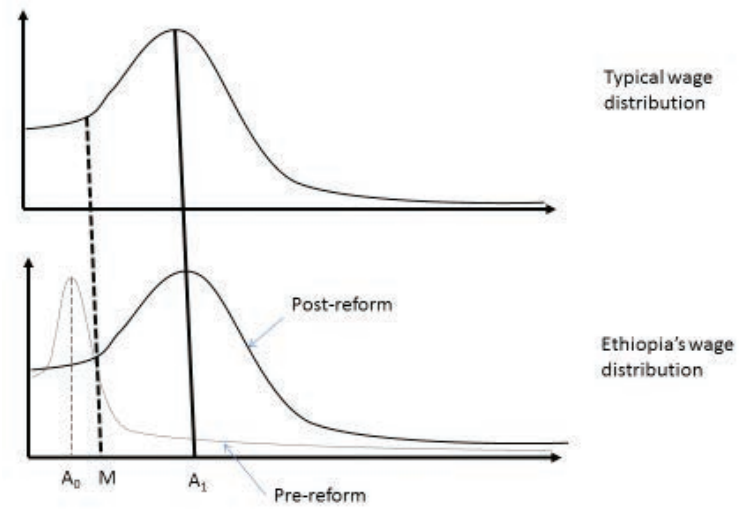
introduce minimum wage to be an utterly meaningless exercise. If the authorities insist with introducing a minimum wage, then definitely they would end up doing something strange.

The bottom line is that the authorities are expected to set a minimum wage, which is enough to meet subsistence requirements, a living wage. The Global Wage Coalition sponsored a study on the case of horticulture in Ziway, 164 km South of Addis Ababa (Melese, 2017). It was estimated that living wage in Ziway would come to birr 3,367 ($116 at the current exchange rate), which is greater than Ethiopia's average wage reported earlier, that is $65. In the context of Figure 6, we would be required to draw a vertical bar (position of minimum wage) to the right of the vertical solid line in Figure 6. However, minimum wage is supposed to fall way below the average wage. What else can be done? Ultimately, Ethiopia would like to have wage structure that aligns with those prevailing in the neighboring countries. Ethiopia cannot afford to continue with business as usual scenario, the odd one out in the region. In that case, an appropriate wage policy for Ethiopia would be to revamp the entire wage structure. This would mean pushing the wage structure (curve) to the right. This is shown in Figure 7, which is plotted synchronizing Figure 5 and Figure 6. The upper part replicates the typical wage structure of a normal economy (as in Figure 5). The lower part presents a modified version of Ethiopia's wage structure. The pre-reform distribution is drawn as done in Figure 6. The post-reform curve presents a wage distribution similar to the one portrayed against the typical distribution case for a normal economy. This implies that Ethiopia's wage reform would mean pushing the old wage curve to the right, as well as broadening and flattening it so that it would have a similar structure with the typical distribution in a developing economy. In that case, Ethiopia's average wage would be equal to (or comparable to) those of neighboring economies. It is then and only then that Ethiopia can introduce a sensible and legally binding minimum wage, say at M, which is equal or comparable to that of its neighboring countries.

Now it is appropriate to ponder over whether or not it would be realistic for Ethiopia to undertake and implement wage reform at this scale, revamping the entire wage structure. For instance, Ethiopia's wage reform would mean at the very least doubling salary of every employee. As noted earlier, Ethiopia's average monthly wage is $65, a third of that of Tanzania! Therefore, if trebling is daunting, at least doubling Ethiopia's average will become necessary. The point is that can Ethiopia afford to

accomplish this daunting task? The challenges come from two directions: (a) strain on government budget, and (b) inflationary pressure. I will briefly discuss each of these.

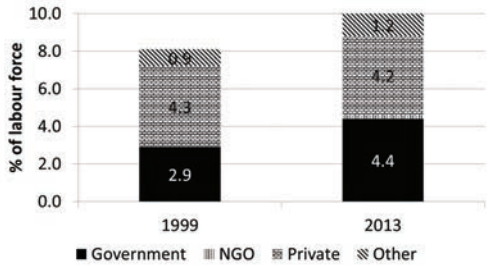
Figure 7. Proposed Wage Reform



1.5. Costing Wage Reform

The budgetary implication comes in terms of increasing salary of government employees as well as provisions of labor subsidy to the private sector for a limited period. It would help to have a sense of magnitude about how much it would cost. Figure 8 presents percentage of the workforce in paid employment. It is astonishing to observe that only 10% of Ethiopia's workforce is in paid employment. The remaining proportion are self-employed, either in farming in rural areas or informal activities in rural and urban areas. In nearly a decade and a half (1999 to 2013) the proportion in employment increased by just 2% and much of that increment occurred in public sector, with the relative proportion of private sector paid employment marginally declined from 4.3% in 1999 to 4.2% in 2013. Now given that the size of workforce in paid employment is relatively small, perhaps Ethiopia is better off implementing a wage reform now when it is affordable than wait till latter when the proportion of workforce in paid employment would rise to larger proportions, say 20% or 30%.

Figure 8. Wage Employment by Category



Source: UNDP 2018, p. 48

A rough estimate of the budgetary cost of Ethiopia's wage reform is provided in Table 1. World Bank estimates that Ethiopia's working age population was about 53 million in 2018. About 82% of the working age population was estimated to be actively seeking employment. This gives the size of the labor force, defined as in employment or unemployed, was about 43 million. Only 10% of the labor force were in wage employment as discussed earlier. Hence, the number of employees receiving wage, and whose wage needs to be increased, would be 4.3 million. As noted earlier, average monthly wage was estimated to be $65. Here the budgetary cost was calculated by assuming that the government does not only increase public sector wages but also provides support to the private sector, whose labor cost would escalate because of the wage reform. Suppose the wage reform continues to happen for a duration of 12 months, that is to say, the economy would adjust and stabilize within this period. Further suppose, the wage reform implies doubling monthly salary of every wage earner. Applying these assumptions, the total cost of the reform would come to $3.4bn.

Table 1. "Back of envelope" calculation of budgetary cost

Working age (15-64)	52,630,311	World Bank 2019 (WDI)
Labor force participation rate (%)	82.3	World Bank 2019 (WDI)
Size of labor force	43,314,746	
Employees (%)	10.0	UNDP (2018)
Employees (number)	4,331,475	
Average salary per month ($)	65	Gelan (2018)
Budget estimate for doubling average salary for all ($ bn)	3.4	

This rough estimate provides a sense of magnitude, a starting point to contemplate revamping Ethiopia's wage structure. Ethiopia has been wasting scarce resources amounting several times this amount on mega, costly, and adventurous projects over the years. In my opinion, what Ethiopia cannot afford is not so much the cost of wage reform but carrying the crippling low wage burden, with all of its ramifications in terms of weakening the economy. In any event, the cost reported here could be rather simplistic. This requires dynamic computable general equilibrium modeling, which is left for future research. This would also reveal the inflationary effects and feedback mechanisms through which more realistic costs and benefits of the wage reform could be estimated, as well as revealing inflationary outcomes.

Regarding inflation, as long as the wage reform and agricultural production supports were properly planned and sequenced, inflationary effects would not necessarily become such an overwhelming concern. After all, inflation is a full employment phenomenon, but Ethiopia has plenty of unemployed human and natural resources that can be put to use; outputs of goods and services can be boosted without any daunting efforts.

2. idIosyncracy #2: Centre-Periphery

The extent to which Ethiopia's economic policy has led to rampant inequalities can by no means be overemphasized. The inequalities are manifested in two dimensions: interpersonal and interregional. The wide gaps in interpersonal inequalities can be indirectly addressed through varieties policies, including those discussed in the preceding section. In this section, I will concentrate on interregional inequalities, inequalities between places! Centre-periphery pattern of development is one way in which inequality between places are manifested. The role and functions of the megacity in a country would critically depend on the extent to which it dominates the rest of the cities in the urban hierarchy. The case of Addis Ababa is discussed in detail in *Addis Ababa: An Enigmatic City* (Gelan 2018, pp. 203-2012) and the discussion in this section heavily borrows from that article.

I will use two indicators to illustrate the issues. The first one is related to what is termed as Zipf's Law (Zipf, 1949). According to this theory, the context of urban hierarchy is expressed as: "the population of the city on top, the mega city, is expected to be: about *two times* the population of the *second largest* city, and *three times* that of the *third largest* city, *four times* that of the *fourth largest* city, and so on. City rank size distributions

in most countries may not exactly fit to this analytical frame but they do closely follow this pattern of distribution".

Table 2 compares Ethiopia with selected countries from different continents. In order to maintain comparability, data was obtained from the same source for all countries reported in Table 2 (City Population, 2021). According to this source, Addis Ababa's population was about 10 times the size of population in Adama, the second largest city in Ethiopia in 2015. There was no country in the world whose megacity has that much bigger than the next largest city of that country. From that database, Kigali came second to Addis Ababa with Zipf ratio of 6.8 and London with 7.8 from developed countries. The case of London is understandable because of it being financial hub of the world.

Table 2. Largest city to second largest city population ratios (2015)

Country/Cities	Ratio
Africa:	
Ethiopia - Addis Ababa : Adama	10.1
Rwanda - Kigali : Gosenyi	6.8
Tanzania - Dar es Salam : Mwanza	6.2
Uganda - Kampala : Nansana	4.1
Kenya - Nairobi : Mombasa	3.4
Nigeria-Labos:Kano	3.3
South Africa-Johannesburg:Cape Town	2.3
Egypt - Cairo : Alexandaria	1.9
Congo - Brazzaville : Pointe-Noire	1.9
Ghana - Acra : Kumasi	1.0
Rest of the world:	
UK - London:Birmingham	7.8
France -Paris:Marseille	2.6
Russia -Moscow:St Petersberg	2.3
USA -New York:Los Angeles	2.1
Germany - Berlin:Hamburg	2.0

Source: Compiled by Gelan (2018. p. 2005) using data from Thomas Brinkhoff: www. City population.de

Centre-periphery patterns of development hinder economic development in many ways. In the context of Ethiopia, where the dominance of the megacity takes such an extreme lopsidedness, the relationship between the center and the periphery becomes parasitic rather than symbiotic. On the one hand, the center being so much far from the periphery, then the latter would be starved of markets. In other words, the periphery cannot benefit from the big market the megacity offers because of transportation cost piles up per unit distance. Districts beyond a certain distance threshold would simply loose out from the market benefits.

On the other hand, the central government taxes all citizens regardless of where they live, including those that reside in the periphery, to provide and maintain services offered to the megacity. For instance, Table 3 shows that Addis Ababa gets about 60% of total electricity generated and distributed in Ethiopia. The population of Addis Ababa could be maximum of 5 million, which is about 4.5% of Ethiopia's 110 million population. This means that 4.5% of the population is allocated 60% of power generated while the remaining 95% of the population is condemned to survive on the remaining proportion of 40%. In a study conducted by Addis Ababa Institute of Technology (2012) it was reported that about 50% of the vehicles with ET plates circulate in and around Addis Ababa (p. 121).

Table 3. Domestic Consumption by Regional Administration (2012)

	MW	**%**
Addis Ababa	751	59
Eastern	172	14
Northern	178	14
Southern	320	25
Western	81	6
South Eastern	96	8
Southern	95	7
Eastern	47	4
Jijiga	11	1
Semera	14	1
North Eastern	39	3
Northern	87	7

	MW	%
North Western	66	5
Western	51	4
Asosa	8	1
Gambella	7	1
Total	1,272	100

Source: Ethiopian Electric Power (2014)

It is unclear the extent to which the existence of extraordinary pattern of center-periphery pattern of development happening in the economy known by the authorities. It should be known that market forces always favor agglomeration. There is always a tendency for dominant cities to become even more dominant if matters are left to market forces. It is the duty of policy-makers to damp down the power of agglomeration. In other words, there is always this tug of war between market forces enhancing forces of agglomeration and causing concentration, on the one hand, and public policy discouraging concentration but encouraging forces of dispersion. The fact that Ethiopian authorities seem to be uninformed or ill-informed about the complex center periphery relationships means they actually work hand in hand with market forces, reinforcing agglomerations, and contributing to worsening center-periphery relationships. This amounts to adding fuel to an already raging fire.

3. IDIOSYNCRACY #3: URBAN-RURAL RELATIONSHIPS

Ethiopia's economy is beset with a plethora of inequalities. The low wage curse is one way through which interpersonal income inequalities are manifested. Centre periphery is only one dimension of inequalities, inequalities between places and hence by extension between communities of people who live in the central and peripheral locations. This section is devoted to yet another dimension of place inequality, imbalances between urban and rural areas!

These encapsulates three variants of inequalities. First, urban and rural areas are geographically separate and hence inequalities between them can be seen as variant of regional inequalities. Second, economic functions of urban and rural areas are distinctively different, industrial and agricultural respectively. Hence, urban bias in economic development is an expression of bias in favor of urban sectors (industry and services) and against rural sectors, mainly agriculture. Third, urban and rural households

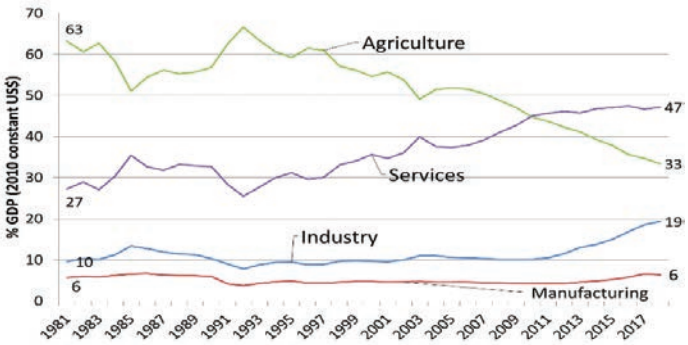
belong distinct socioeconomic groups; often sociologically separate groups in the case of Ethiopia. Urban bias, therefore, implies inequalities of income and opportunities between rural and urban residents.

In spite of pious words reserved for agricultural and the rural sector, urban bias has remained a characteristic feature of the Ethiopia economy, starting from the imperial era all the way through the present day. The EPRDF regime had a sensible start when agriculture-led development strategy (ALDI) was adopted. A dramatic shift to industry occurred prematurely without registering any meaningful achievement with ALDI. This proved to be a deadly policy blunder. It is possible to get away with policy mistakes with any other sector, but not with agriculture, the consequences of such policy mistakes become apparent in a short while.

3.1. Structural Transformation

In the context of a developing country like Ethiopia, economic development involves two changes concurrently happening. First, the size of the economy expands and this is measured by annual growth of the GDP. Second, the structure of GDP changes from predominantly agricultural, rural and traditional sectors to industrial, urban and modern sectors. The shift in the structure of the economy is termed as *structural transformation*.

Figure 9. Structural Transformation in Ethiopia (1981-2018).



Source: World Bank 2019

Changes in the size and composition of Ethiopia's GDP for the 38 years (1981 to 2018) is displayed in Figure 8. The size of Ethiopia's real GDP (that is after accounting for inflation) expanded by an average of 5.5% per annum. This is a weighted average of the 1.3% during the last

decade of the Derg regime (1981-1990) and the rosy growth rate of the nearly three decades of the EPRDF era (1991 – 2018). Whether Ethiopia's GDP has really grown at the rate implied in the government official statistics is questionable (Gelan 2018, pp. 65-73).

Now we turn our attention to the changes in the component of the GDP, i.e., the status of Ethiopia's structural transformation during the period. This is shown by the relative changes in the different components: agriculture, Industry, services, and manufacturing (which is separately reported although it is also included in industry). It proves useful to start with manufacturing, the red line shown at the bottom just above the horizontal axis. The red line is completely flat showing no structural transformation has occurred in the Ethiopian economy as far as the share of manufacturing in Ethiopia's GDP is concerned. It is extraordinary to note that the relative position of manufacturing in the Ethiopia has remained at the level it was nearly four decades ago, stuck at 6%! So much about miraculous economic growth mantra of the EPRDF government.

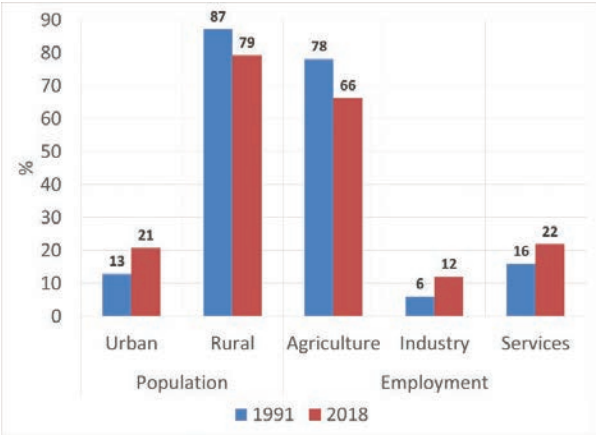
The story is about the same when we examine the relative share of industry. It too stayed stagnant for much of the period, 10% all the way from 1981 to 2010 and then the line curved upwards. Why sudden upward changes from 2010 onwards? The reason is "construction" is included in industry. In a desperate attempt to show some growth record, the EPRDF government shifted gear to developmental state model, through which a serious of mega construction projects were launched an implemented. Consequently, the share of industry rose from 10% to 19% in just eight years. However, we know construction is a means to an end. For instance, it is not enough to build roads. Goods would need to be produced to move over those roads, otherwise, the roads themselves would wear out without rendering any service and the government has to return to it for maintenance. Therefore, infrastructural development through costly construction projects would be a deceptive way of achieving structural transformation.

Last, but by no means least, are changes in the relative positions of services and agriculture, which happen to shape up into mirror images of each other. In 1981, agriculture and services had 63% and 27% share in Ethiopia's GDP respectively. In 2010, agriculture and services achieved parity, each 45% share in GDP. From then onwards, the two sectors swapped positions, with services on top and agriculture below. By 2018, agriculture reached its lowest point, 33%, while

services climbed up to 47%. During the entire period, agriculture and services have simply swapped positions and industry, particularly manufacturing have remained stagnant, except for the construction-induced shift. In short, one cannot seriously argue that any meaningful structural transformation has occurred in the Ethiopian economy during the last three decades.

One of the important features of structural transformation is rural-urban migration. For this to occur, the urban sector has to have an absorptive capacity, that is to say ability to create jobs for excess rural labour force. The rural labour force can be realistically called excess or surplus only if productivity in agriculture has increased in a substantive way. If this happens, then those who remain in rural areas can produce enough to feed themselves (their families) and produce marketable surplus to feed those who just got released (new rural-urban migrants) as well as those that were already in urban areas. These sequences would yield a healthy and substantive structural transformation. The share of rural and urban areas in total population of Ethiopia as well as the relative shares of agriculture, industry and services in total employment are displayed in Figure 10. It proves useful to start with changes in rural and urban population between 1991 and 2018. In 1991, 13% and 87% of Ethiopia's population lived in urban and rural areas, respectively. The corresponding shares in 2018 were 21% and 79%. This means a rural to urban demographic shift of 8% in twenty-seven years.

Figure 10. Urban-rural population and employment (1991 and 2018).



Source: World Bank 2019

Now let us turn our attention to changes in sectoral employment composition. The share of agriculture in total labour force was 78% in 1991 and 66% in 2018, a shift by only 12%. It should be noted that the share of agriculture in GDP declined by 30% (from 63% in 1991 to 33% in 2018). Thus, output per agricultural worker has continuously declined during the period. Employment in industry and services has increased by each by 6% during the period. However, the shares of industry and services in GDP increased by 9% and 20% respectively.

How can we explain the disproportionately larger increase in the share of service GDP than the corresponding increase in the share of service sector employment? Does this necessarily imply large increase in labour productivity in the service sector? This is not necessarily the case. It seems what is happening in the Ethiopian economy is something akin to Baumol disease or simply Baumol effect (Baumol and Bowen 1966). Baumol effect is familiar in advanced economies whereby "the rise of salaries in jobs that have experienced no or low increase of labor productivity, in response to rising salaries in other jobs that have experienced higher labor productivity growth. This pattern seemingly goes against the theory in classical economics in which real wage growth is closely tied to labor productivity changes." In the case of Ethiopia, it seems some service sector employees, possibly some government sector employees, are paid disproportionately higher salaries, but not in response to productivity gains anywhere elsewhere.

3.2. Cost-Price Squeeze in Ethiopian Agriculture

The anomalies encapsulated in the process of Ethiopia's structural transformation can be expressed a unique way the so-called cost-price squeeze taking place in the Ethiopian agriculture. Cost-price squeeze is widely reported to occur in most farming communities, even in those that get massive dose of support from their governments in developed economies (Czyżewski, Matuszczak & Miśkiewicz 2019, Shield 2010, Moss,1992).

The cost-price squeeze in the context of Ethiopia is explained using vertical hierarchy of market relationships between the urban and rural areas within the Ethiopian economy and then its linkage with the world economy. This relationship represents not just commodity flows but also power relationships between actors in the nodes. By far the most important imbalance in power relationship happens within the domestic economy - between urban traders and rural producers. The rural producers

are mostly connected to the world market through mediations of urban traders (see the direction of the arrows connecting the circles).

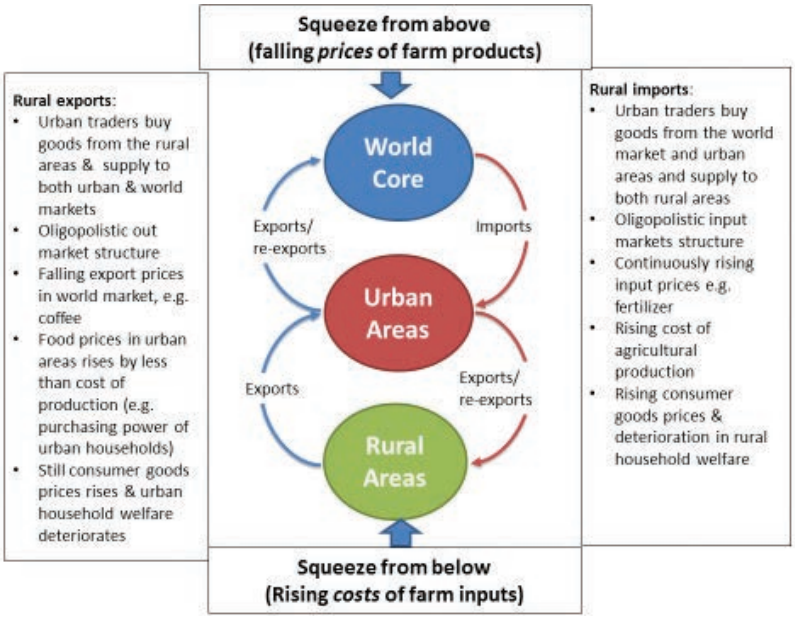
Figure 11 depicts the relationship between rural and urban in the domestic economy as well as those between the domestic economy and the global economy. This structure is adapted from a strand of dependency theory model concerned specifically with terms of trade and unequal exchange, often referred to as Singer-Prebish hypothesis (*Toye & Toye 2003*). Starting from the import side, the economy of urban sectors largely depends on importing from the rest of the world, and then re-exporting to rural areas, in addition to goods and services produced in urban areas. Importers in Ethiopia enjoy enormous oligopolistic power, after all importers of each product are very few in number but they face millions of buyers, rural and urban resident households and businesses. The cost of imported goods often keeps on rising year-on-year.

Even when the prices of imported items fall due to cost reducing innovations elsewhere in the world, the importers would not pass on gains to farmers at the same rate of reduction they encountered at the source of purchase. Lack of competition means increasing their own profit margins becomes their priority. For instance, the price of fertilizer in Ethiopia has been rising over the years. The matter got from bad to worse when the government completely withdrew fertilizer subsidies many years back, leaving farmers at the mercy of monopolistic firms that import and distribute fertilizer to rural producers. In any event, increase in the cost of fertilizer and other inputs means cost of agricultural production has been rising rapidly, not just dictated by world market prices but also margins set in the oligopolistic market. The imperfect import market affects not just agricultural input prices but also prices of consumer goods supplied to rural as well as urban residents, causing additional inflationary pressure and hence deterioration in welfare of households. This completes the process through which costs of agricultural inputs put pressure on producers' margins, that is to say the squeeze from below!

Now we turn out attention to rural exports, output markets for rural products. Urban traders buy from rural households. A few urban traders meet with millions of rural producers in agricultural product markets. As in import markets, when few buyers deal with many sellers, then we have buyers' market, an oligopolistic market structure. Buyers have greater power in determining output prices. What urban traders buy from rural exporters, they dispose of in domestic urban markets or export them to the world market. Exporters have limited options to influence prices

in the world market, where prices of agricultural products tend to be extremely volatile. The higher the volatility, the greater the risk. However, that does not mean exporters would bear the risk that they encounter in the world market. Their margins are often left intact. Whatever risk comes their way; the traders would pass it onto the powerless farmers.

Figure 11. Price-Cost Squeeze



In domestic market, urban traders encounter extremely low purchasing power of urban residents. As discussed earlier, urban households earn extremely low wages. The non-wage earners are few in number and how much they would spend on food has a biologically determined upper limit. Consequently, in urban market, traders have a limited room for maneuver as far as increasing food prices are concerned. They fix prices at the level that guarantees survival of their business; keep their own margins relatively intact and then decide how much they would pay to the farmers. In short, the consequences of volatility or rigidity in the agricultural output market is ultimately born by the farmers. This completes the price squeeze, the squeeze from above.

The essence of the cost-price squeeze into agricultural producer's margin is that farmers carrying the entire burden that is to say the

consequences of imperfect market structure in input and output markets as well as the ultimate consequence of weak and limited market size imposed by the low wage curse. The only way to get out of this quagmire is to devise public policy that would enhance agricultural productivity through technological improvements. Innovations in agricultural production would reduce cost of agricultural production. This has to be coupled with improving purchasing power of urban residents by implementing a comprehensive and far-reaching income policy reforms.

4. Conclusion

This paper presented salient feature of structural imbalances in the Ethiopian society. Three interrelated idiosyncrasies of the Ethiopian economy were separately examined in detail and their relationships were highlighted. The peculiarities of the Ethiopian economy were summarized in inequalities with three dimensions: low wage, center-periphery, and urban-rural relationships.

Low wage is a manifestation of interpersonal income inequalities. In the Ethiopian case, low wage takes a different connotation, a bias against wage income in general, rather than inequalities within the wage structure. Ethiopia does not only have low wage at the bottom end in the pay structure, but the entire salary scale is exceptionally skewed to the left, the distribution is mostly clustered to the lower end, and negligible percentage of the work force, earning a decent wage. Regardless, the authorities and the donor communities (including the ILO) are contemplating to introduce a minim wage. However, minimum wage applies to a normal situation that is to say when only a small proportion of wage earners have fallen behind the rest, minimum wage law as a tool to bring them up and closer to the rest.

The situation in Ethiopia is not normal in that all wages are miserably low. The difference between the top earners and low earners is very narrow. The gap between salary earned by a highly skilled university professor and that of unskilled factory worker is only a few thousands. In this circumstance, a minimum wage introduced to address troubles at the lower end of that narrow range, and especially if the minimum wage factory workers has to be a decent living wage, then what would be the minimum would end up getting very close to the average salary of skilled workers. We may end up with a ridiculous situation whereby salaries of elementary school teachers and nurses become about the same as those of unskilled factory workers. The only option left to the authorities would be to adopt an

income policy whereby the entire pay structure of the nation is fundamentally revamped. An appropriate policy of this kind can be formulated only if one pays attention to peculiar imbalances in the country's economy.

Center-periphery is an element of regional inequality, specifically, between capital city and remote regions. Agglomeration happens in most economies, but Ethiopia has a peculiar type of center-periphery, an extremely lop-sided urban system, which is dwarfed by Addis Ababa. The size of Addis Ababa's population is over ten times that of Adama, the second highest city in Ethiopia's urban hierarchy. As far as I am aware, there is no other country in the world portraying such extreme version of imbalance in its urban system. A typical pattern is that the largest city in the urban system would have about two to three times the population of the second largest city in the urban system.

Like center-periphery, urban-rural relationship is a form of regional inequality. However, urban-rural inequality is much more diffused and its understanding required deeper insights into power relationships between actors along the rural and urban continuum. The dependency theoretical framework was employed to make sense of oligopolistic power relationships in Ethiopia, between a handful of urban traders and millions of rural farmers in agricultural output and input markets. In absence of government support in supplying farm inputs or buying farm outputs, a few urban traders are expected to reach tacit agreements to squeeze farmer's margins by reducing prices of farm outputs they buy or raising prices of farm inputs they supply. Urban bias and cost-price squeeze in Ethiopia exist in peculiarly extreme ways, pretty much like the other imbalances in wage structure or center-periphery relationships.

The plethora of inequalities in the Ethiopian society are interrelated. The explanation for each of the idiosyncratic features lie deep in Ethiopian history, specifically the manner in which Ethiopia's governance structure was formed from the very outset, and continued to exist uninterrupted to the present day, unlike most developing countries. The abysmally low wage may have its roots in bias against work and wage labor in feudalism, which has remained ingrained in Ethiopia's governance. The unique center-periphery imbalance may have something to do with Ethiopia's exceptionally centralized governance, leaving the periphery pretty much outside the mainstream social and political structure. Urban-rural dualism in Ethiopia is not just economic but also sociological and linguistic. Urban bias has been a clear manifestation of the garrison nature of most towns in Ethiopia, whose residents have remained detached from the

hinterland rural areas. Clearly, redressing Ethiopia's peculiarly structural imbalances require a holistic solution to the complex and interrelated economic, social, and political factors.

References

Addis Ababa Institute of Technology 2012. Pilot Report On Global Fuel Economy Initiative Study On Ethiopia. Https://Www.Globalfueleconomy.Org/Media/461026/Africa_Final-Report-Ethiopia.Pdf

Barrett, Paul and Baumann-Pauly, Dorothée (2019). Made in Ethiopia: challenges in the garment industry's new frontier. A Report produced for the NYU Stern Centre for Human Rights. https://issuu.com/nyusterncenterforbusinessandhumanri/docs/nyu_ethiopia_final_online?e=31640827/69644612

Baumol, William J.; Bowen, William G. (1966). Performing Arts, The Economic Dilemma: a study of problems common to theater, opera, music, and dance. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T

Brinkhoff, Thomas. *Population Statistics for Countries, Administrative Areas, Cities and Agglomerations – Interactive Maps and Charts.* http://www.citypopulation.de (various pages)

Capital Newspaper. (May 13, 2019). Commission to set National Minimum Wage. Astatike, Dawit., https://www.capitalethiopia.com/capital/commission-to-set-national-minimum-wage/

Czyżewski, Bazyli & Matuszczak, Anna & Miśkiewicz, Radosław. (2019). Public Goods Versus the Farm Price-Cost Squeeze: Shaping the Sustainability of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. *Technological and Economic Development of Economy*. In press. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329183712_Public_Goods_Versus_the_Farm_Price- cost_Squeeze_Shaping_the_Sustainability_of_the_EU's_Common_Agricultural_Policy

City Population 2021. https://www.citypopulation.de/

Ethiopian Electric Power (2014). Power Sector DevelopmentPOWERING AFRICA2014 http://pubs.naruc.org/pub/537c14d4-2354-d714-511e-cb19b0d7ebd9.

Gelan, Ayele (2018). "Ethiopia's low wage is a curse, not a blessing" in *Chronicles on the Political Economy of Plunder in Ethiopia (1991-2018)*, pp, 190-202, AAU printing Press, December 2018.

Gelan, Ayele (2019). "Ethiopia's low wages must be viewed in real terms – and the result is shocking," https://www.theafricareport.com/12866/ethiopia-factory-workers-paid-less-than-subsistence-wage/

Gelan (2019) *Genuine and Transparent Policies are Desperately Needed to Boost Remittance Inflows. https://dinagddee.com/2019/07/07/genuine-and-transparent-policies-are-desperately-needed-to-boost-remittance-inflows/*

Guerriero, M. (2019). The Labor Share of Income Around the World: Evidence from a Panel Dataset. ADBI Working Paper 920. Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute. Available:https://www.adb.org/publications/labor-share-income-around-world-evidence-panel-datase

Guerriero, Marta (2012). The Labour Share of Income around the World. Evidence from a Panel Dataset. Paper prepared for the 4th Economic Development International Conference of GREThA/ GRES "Inequalities and Development: new challenges, new measurements?" University of Bordeaux, France, June 13-15, 2012 http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/files/Guerriero2012.pdf

ILO 2017. An Exploratory Study for a Minimum Wage System in Ethiopia. Call for Consultancy Service, Terms of Reference (Tor). http://www.ilo.org/addisababa/about-us/offices/addis-ababa/wcms_573550/lang--en/index.htm

ILO 2019a. Labor income share as a percent of GDP -- ILO modelled estimates, July 2019 (%).ILOSTAT database. https://www.ilo.org/ilostat

ILO 2019b. The Global Labor Income Share and Distribution. Data Production and Analysis Unit, ILO Department of Statistics Methodological Description July 2019. https://www.ilo.org/ilostat-files/Documents/Labour%20income%20share%20and%20distribution.pdf

Lavoie, Marc; Stockhammer, Engelbert 2012. Wage-Led Growth: Concept, Theories and Policies. International Labour Office, Conditions of Work and Employment Branch. - Geneva: ILO, 2012

Melese, A. T. (2017). Living Wage Report Non-Metropolitan Urban Ethiopia Ziway Region: Context Provided in the Horticulture Sector. The Global Living Wage Coalition. https://rucforsk.ruc.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/60982905

Moss, Charles B. (1992). The Cost-Price Squeeze in Agriculture: An Application of Cointegration, *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*, 14(2): 205–213,

Numbeo 2021. Africa: Cost of Living Index by City 2021. https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/region_rankings.jsp?title=2021&region=002

Nurkse, Ragnar 1961 Problems of Capital Formation in Underdeveloped Countries. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pavletic, Ivan (2010). *Political Competition, Economic Reform and Growth: Theory and Evidence from Transition Countries*. open access: www.vdf.ethz.ch

Prebisch, R. (1950). The Economic Development of Latin America and Its Principal Problems. *Economic Bulletin for Latin America*, 7:1-12.

Romer*, David (2011). Endogenous Growth. Advanced Macroeconomics (Fourth ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill*

Rutkowski, Jan 2003. The Minimum Wage: Curse or Cure? Human Development Economics Europe and Central Asia Region, The World Bank

Shields, Dennis A. (2010). *The Farm Price-Cost Squeeze and U.S. Farm Policy Analyst in Agricultural Policy*. https://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/crs/R40761.pdf

Toye, J. and Toye, R. (2003). The Origins and Interpretation of the Prebisch-Singer Thesis. History of Political Economy. 35(3): 437–467

UNCTAD (2013). Towards More Balanced Growth: A Greater Role for Domestic Demand in Development Strategies. *Trade and Development Report, 2013*. United Nations Center for Trade and Development. https://unctad.org/en/PublicationChapters/tdr2013ch2_en.pdf

UNDP 2018. ETHIOPIA | National Human Development Report 2018. Industrialization with a Human Face. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/ethiopia_national_human_development_report_2018.pdf

UNIDO (2017). Demand for Manufacturing: Driving Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development. Industrial Development Report 2018. United Nations Industrial Development Organization. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2537IDR2018_FULL_REPORT_1.pdf

World Bank (2019). World Development Indicators Database. https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators

Zipf GK (1949). *Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley. p. 1.

Endnotes

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at The Oromo Studies Association, 33rd Annual Conference, July 26-28, 2019, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and then published in the OSA Conference proceeding.

2 Why profit-led growth would not lead to sustainable growth can be partly discerned from the relationships displayed in the circular flow of income (discussed in the preceding section).

Journal of Oromo Studies_#28.indb 122 7/13/2023 5:11:06 PM

HUMAN-BIRD INTERACTIONS: AN EXPLORATION OF OROMO CULTURAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH THE NORTHERN GROUND-HORNBILL

Addisu Asefa

Wildlife Research Directorate, Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority

Abstract: This article explores the cultural beliefs and practices of Ethiopia's Oromo society related to the Northern Ground-Hornbill (the Hornbill) (*Bucorvus abyssinicus*), a vulnerable bird species native to Africa, and the consequences of these beliefs and practices on conservation of the species. An ethnography research approach, via Facebook platform, was employed to identify and describe the cultural beliefs and practices. Accordingly, text comments posted by Facebook users in response to a question asking the cultural significances of the Hornbill posted on a popular community Facebook page, which then was shared by many Facebook users, were collected from 59 Facebook pages both through observation and participation techniques. A total of 870 discrete text comment posts were downloaded on 27 December 2019 from the 59 Facebook pages and analyzed. Data were analyzed by means of qualitative, thematic content analysis. Four main themes and 14 categories (types of beliefs and practices) emerged from the data elucidating Oromo cultural beliefs and practices related to the Hornbill. The Hornbill was viewed as a source of good luck (i.e., as signifier of child delivery, wealth,

Journal of Oromo Studies_#28.indb 123 7/13/2023 5:11:06 PM

longevity and fortune); curator from disease and protector from harmful animals; bad luck (death/loss); and a timekeeper (seasonal change). These findings show that Hornbill has significant cultural values to the Oromo society, some of the cultural practices having a negative influence on the species' survival. Knowledge gained from this study may help contribute to the conservation of the species, for example, by reinforcing the practices assumed to have potentially protective influences, and by implementing intervention strategies on practices that appear to have destructive consequences.

Keywords: *Ayyaana*, *Bucorvus abyssinicus*, Conservation, Facebook Page, *Gadaa System*, *Huummoo*, *Waaqeffannaa*

1. Introduction

Birds are important to humans in many ways. They play a significant role in the lives of people across almost all cultures (Muiruri and Maundu, 2010). The diversity and variations in size, morphology, anatomy, song, foraging and social behavior of birds have aesthetically inspired humans since time immemorial (Fernandes-Ferreira et al. 2012; BirdLife International 2018). This inspiration and the direct and regular contact of people with specific bird species—especially with those that possess prominent visual, auditory or behavioral characteristics (Coetzee et al. 2014)—have led most cultures to develop significant beliefs in relation to such birds (Alves 2012). Such beliefs, which are usually constructed through a process of social interactions (Muiruri and Maundu, 2010), in turn, give rise to a variety of practices and behaviors that center around these bird species. These practices and behaviors include direct uses, such as hunting certain bird species for food, and using birds in cultural practices, including in rituals, ceremonial acts, and the making of traditional medicines (Muiruri and Maundu, 2010; Alves, 2012; Coetzee et al., 2014). Humans' use of birds, depending on the type and extent of uses and species involved, could have positive, negative or neutral consequences on the persistence of the species (Coetzee et al. 2014). For example, some traditional practices (e.g., food taboos and using a species as symbolic representation) prevent killing of species, leading to their protection (Alves 2012; BirdLife International 2018). On the other hand, the use of animals or their parts for food and for making traditional medicines usually entails the birds to be killed and thus pose a destructive influence on the species (Fernandes-Ferreira 1997; Gaoue 2017; BirdLife International

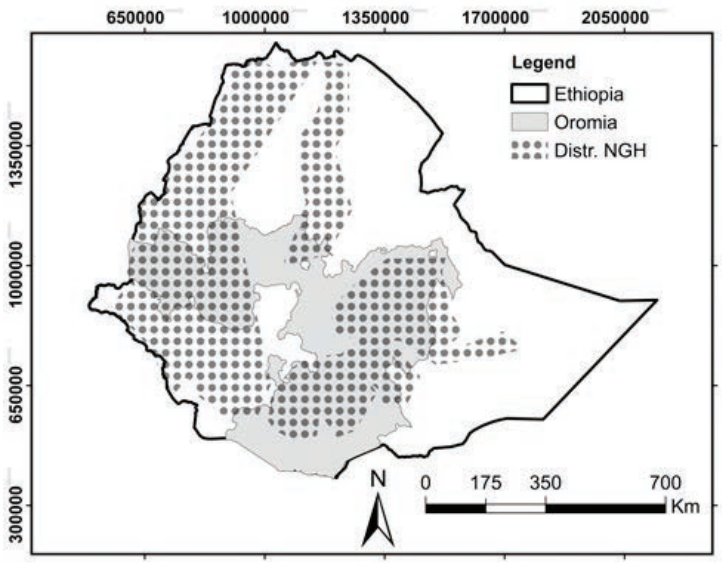
2019). This destructive influence could be a major conservation concern, especially when the species involved is of conservation-dependent (Coetzee et al. 2014; BirdLife International 2018, 2019). Destructive use of conservation concern species can not only lead to loss of the species but also to loss of people's knowledge and cultural values associated with that species (Gaoue et al., 2017).

The Northern Ground-Hornbill (hereafter referred to as 'Hornbill') (*Bucorvus abyssinicus*) is a native bird species to Africa, north of the equator, where it ranges from Mauritania, Senegal and Guinea in the southern to Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya and Uganda in the northeast (Kemp and Boesman, 2017; BirdLife international, 2018). In Ethiopia, Hornbills are found almost throughout the country except in the south-eastern and northern highland regions (3000m above sea level, asl hereafter) and in the south-eastern arid regions below 200m asl (Redman et al., 2009; BirdLife International, 2018; Figure 1). The species mainly inhabits subtropical/tropical dry woodland forest, savanna, shrub land and grassland, high altitude grassland, and rocky areas (BirdLife International, 2018). The Hornbill is the epitome of a species that has been in regular contact with many different cultures over a prolonged period of time, and that has all the characteristics that could result in the development of a large number of cultural beliefs and practices (see Coetzee et al., 2014). The birds are typicaly large-bodied (on average 95 cm in height, and 4 kg in weight) animals with white primaries, red (in male birds) or blue (in females) neck, and a long and deep-curved beak. They use both visual and auditory means of communications, characterized by a loud and deep booming sound "umm-hum-umm" delivered from prominent perch, mostly before dawn and after dusk (del Hoyo et al., 2001; Redman et al. 2009). The birds feed on reptiles, including snakes and lizards, and mammals such as hares, and insects (Redman et al., 2009). Hornbills are monogamous, with a male and a female pair, sometimes along with their young off-springs, usually found together (BirdLife International, 2018).

The species is currently classified under 'vulnerable' threat category of the IUCN Red List of threatened species due to the rapidly declining population as a result of habitat loss and degradation, and intentional hunting for use in various traditional cultural practices (BirdLife International, 2018). In many range states the species has disappeared from areas outside of protected areas, and hunting may also impact the species in some places, though in other areas it could be protected as a totem bird (Kemp and Boesman, 2017). The species' biology has not

been extensively studied, its global population size is not determined, and no targeted conservation actions are in place for this species (del Hoyo et al., 2001, BirdLife International, 2018). Consequently, three urgent conservation actions have been recommended: (i) researching to better understand the species' biology, (ii) determining the overall global population size and trends, and (iii) raising awareness of the species to try to reduce the impact of hunting (del Hoyo et al., 2001; Kemp and Boesman, 2017; BirdLife International, 2018).

Figure 1. A map showing the distribution of Northern Ground-hornbill in the Oromia region and Ethiopia.



Many Hornbill species are used for various cultural practices, particularly in Asia and Africa (Setha, 2004; Coetzee et al., 2014; BirdLife international, 2019). For example, the Knobbed Hornbill (*Rhyticeros cassidix*) and Sulawesi Hornbill (*Rhabdotorrhinus exarhatus*) in Indonesia (BirdLife international, 2019) and the Southern Ground Hornbill (*Bucorvus leadbeateri*) in Africa (Coetzee et al., 2014) are reported to have significant roles in people's social and spiritual worlds (Simelane and Knight, 1997) and in the beliefs and practices pertaining to environment, including rain, lightning and drought (Vernon, 1984; Coetzee et al., 2014). The Hornbill is no exception. For example, in some areas

of range countries, such as northern Cameroon and Burkina Faso, the Hornbills are hunted for food as they are culturally associated with bad luck (Thiollay, 2006). However, studies documenting the cultural uses of the species by societies across most of the species' range and conservation implications of the uses are scant, particularly in the Horn of Africa including in Ethiopia (BirdLife International, 2018). In an effort to fill the void, this study attempts to explore the cultural beliefs and practices of the Oromo society related to the Hornbill.

The Oromo are the most populous ethno-nation in the Northeast Africa (Jalata, 2001; Boku, 2011). In Ethiopia, they constitute the largest ethnic group, accounting for ~40% of the estimated 110 million total population of the country (Dibaba, 2020). Their administrative region, Oromia National Regional State, covers 359.619 km^2 which is a third of the country's total land mass (Jaleta, 2004; Figure 1). Oromo people's native language, '*Afaan Oromo*', which belongs to the eastern Cushitic language is the fourth widely spoken language in Africa next to Arabic, Swahili and Hausa (Bartels, 1983; Boku, 2011).The Oromo are an oral society which rely on a traditional institution known as the '*Gadaa* System' (Legesse, 2006; UNESCO, 2016) of self-administration for regulating their political, social, economic, and religious life and as a mechanism of socialization, education, peacemaking, conflict resolution, judicial administration, religious expression, economic organization, and social harmony" (Bartels, 1983; Legesse, 2006). This indigenous Institution has been practiced since the sixtieth century and was registered in 2016 on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity (Legesse, 2006; UNESCO, 2016). Embedded within the Gadaa system is a traditional religion known as '*Waaqeffannaa*', which is derived from the word '*Waaqa*' (literally meaning Almighty God/Creator) representing a belief in one God (*Waaqa*) who has created everything in His power and will (Bartels, 1983; Legesse, 2006; UNESCO, 2016). The majority of Oromo people are Moslems or Christians. Many are followers of the '*Waaqeffannaa*' religion (Bartels, 1983).

What distinguishes the *Waaqeffannaa* followers from followers of other denominational religions practiced by the Oromo is that the principles the *Waaqeffannaa* are essentially drawn from Oromo-oriented traditions and indigenous value systems. For instance, Gadaa rules and regulations are the guiding principles of the *Waaqeffannaa* followers just as the Bible and the Quran are for Christians and Muslim value systems, respectively (Beyene, 2018). In Oromo philosophy

associated with *Waaqeffannaa* religion, the *ayyaanaa* is said to have acted in the world of human beings including in people's domiciles (clans, rivers, mountains, lakes, cattle and environment). According to Oromo worldviews of the *Waaqeffannaa* religion, *Waaqaa* (the Creator/God) gives *ayyaana* (divinity) to human beings, as well as to all His creations including animals, mountains, lakes (Bartels, 1983; Beyene, 2018). *Ayyaana* is the guardian spirit of God (or God's force) which is believed to be endowed to human beings and other creatures by *Waaqaa* that provides characteristics and distinction to individual person, animal and inanimate object (Bartels, 1983; Gebissa, 2018). *Ayyaana* are also taken as the intermediaries between *Waaqaa* and human beings and believed to be regarded as the sentinel of the people during calamities, sources of their pleasure, and their assistant as messengers (Bartels, 1983; Jalata, 2001; Beyene, 2018). Consequently, *Waaqeffanna* ritual celebrations, such as *Irreechaa*, are conducted at sacred sites like mountains/hills, lakes and Synchrome tree with the belief that such sites host God's *ayyaana* (Bartels, 1983; Jalata, 2001; Beyene, 2018). These sacred sites are selected based on their uniqueness in characteristics (e.g., height, beauty, cleanness, ever-greenness, etc) and are thus believed to be blessed, in possessing *ayyaana* (Bartels, 1983). It is with the same notion that certain animal species, such as the Hornbill, by virtue of their aposematic colorations and conspicuousness that make them to be considered as blessed by God to host *ayyaana*, are used in the Oromo cultural beliefs and practices.

The Oromo society provides a good framework to study African cultural beliefs and practices in relation to biodiversity at least for two main reasons. First, Oromo represent one of the few societies in Africa where the original African traditions are still active and most of their cultural practices are related to their surrounding biodiversity (Jaleta, 2004; Legesse, 2006). Second, one of the major functions of the Oromo '*Gadaa System*' is governing the management and sustainable use of biodiversity (Teresa and Hunduma, 2018). A recent report by Asefa et al. (2019) provides first-hand practical evidence on the role of the *Gadaa* system in promoting conservation of endangered species. From an ethno-ornithological perspective, and given the current lack of information on the species' biology, ecology and threats (BirdLife International, 2018), documenting the cultural beliefs and practices of the Oromo society in relation to the Hornbill is thus important from the African cultural heritage perspective. Knowledge gained through studies such as

this could have a potential contribution for effective conservation of the species and preservation of the associated Oromo cultural practices. To this end, the present study addresses two main questions: what cultural beliefs and practices of the Oromo are associated with the Hornbill; the potential effects of the cultural beliefs and practices on the survival of the species?

2. Methods

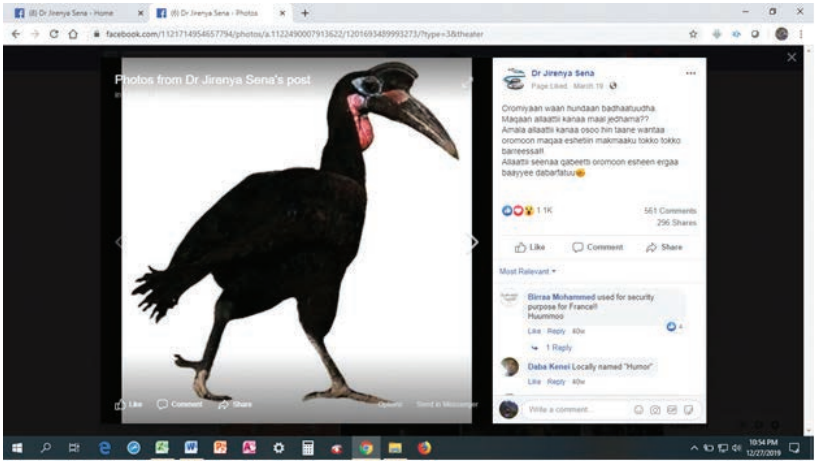
A netnographic approach was deployed as a principal research strategy to explore the participants, view on the cultural beliefs and practices of Oromo society associated with the Hornbill (Kozinets, 2010; Kozinets et al., 2014). This approach is an internet-based primarily qualitative-oriented content analysis technique—although it can also be applicable to quantitative content analysis depending on the method of data analysis used, such as in the present study—an interpretive paradigm (Kozinets et al., 2014). The talent of the interpretive paradigm is that reality is socially constructed through language, consciousness, shared meanings and other artefacts. The paradigm, thus, allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants and use those experiences to construct and interpret their understanding and knowledge from gathered data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

2.1. Data Collection

Data used for this study come from Facebook users (FB users) text comments made on 59 Facebook pages in response to a male Hornbill picture and response to the following text questions, in 'Afaan Oromoo', asking the name and proverbs attached to the bird:

> *Oromiyaan waan hundumaan badhaatuudha. Maqaan allaattii kanaa maal jedhama? Amala allaattii kanaa osoo hin taane wanta oromoon maqaa esheetiin makmaaku tokko tokko barreessaa!! Allaattii seenaa qabeettii oromoon esheetiin ergaa baayyee dabarfata* (Facebook, 2020a; Figure 2). Its literal translation is: [Oromia is endowed with everything. What is the name of this bird? Please, write at least one Oromo proverb [folklore, including proverbs, tales, poems, beliefs and practices, etc.] manifested through the bird's name. This is a famous raptor species which Oromos convey enormous messages through it.]

Figure 2. Screenshot picture of a Facebook page post showing photo of the Hornbill and the research questions and number of FB users reactions (likes), comments and shares.



The content was originally posted on a popular community/public Facebook 'Like Page' known in the user name of 'Dr Jirenya Sena' (Facebook, 2020a). The manager of the page always posts in Afaan Oromo, sometimes in combination with in English, likely suggesting that most of followers of the page were Oromo—or at least know Afaan Oromo language and Oromo culture— i.e., share similar culture, language and history. As of 27 December 2019, the page had 101,423 Followers/Likes (hereafter referred to as FB users), and the post about the Hornbill received over 500 comments and shared by 261 FB users (Facebook, 2020a; Figure, 2). Thus, to have a full understanding of the cultural use of the Hornbill, I also visited 83 of the 261 FB users' pages who shared the original post and whose privacy setting allowed unrestricted data access. Out of these, 58 FB users' pages had one or more comment posts. Consequently, 59 pages (the original post page and 58 shared pages) were used as web page sites the study following Franz, et al.,(2019), a 'self-selection' method was used to choose sample of research participants (FB users who were friends or followers of the 59 FB pages) from among the pages' followers/likes. The method can be described as a nonprobability sampling procedure in which the sample units (each FB user) choose themselves to take part in research on their own accord based on their willingness, knowledge and/or experience (Kozinets et al., 2014). Data collection was undertaken following both passive observation and engaging

netnographic procedures (Kozinets, 2010; Kozinets et al., 2014). Passive observations were carried-out once a day from 19–29 March 2019, and then once a week from 30 March to 25 May 2019. Thereafter, I was engaged as a participant with the community members by replying (posting questions asking for clarifications) to their comment. Data (textual comment posts and ancillary data, including users name and the date/time each comment was posted) from the 59 pages were downloaded on 27 December 2019. The responses are archived data and publicly available without restriction (Facebook, 2020b). To download the text comments from each page, all comments were first displayed and manually copied and pasted into an excel spreadsheet (Franz et al., 2019). A numerical ID code was finally assigned to each User's text comments to ensure anonymity, and prior to analysis, the whole text posts of each user were translated from 'Afaan Oromo' into English.

In line with the standard practices used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007), data were collected until a point of saturation was reached. This was achieved by examining the date on which each belief and practice category was mentioned for the first time.

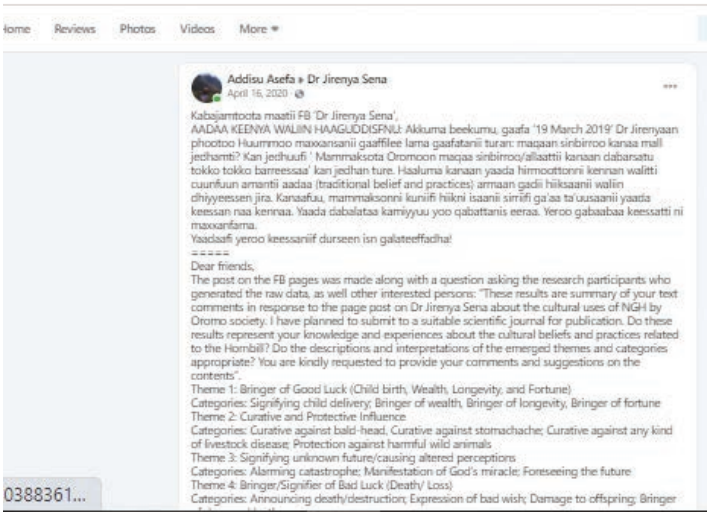
Overall, 870 discrete text posts were downloaded from the 59 Facebook pages. Out of these: (i) 819 (94%) of text comment posts contained the correct name of the species in 'Afaan Oromo', naming as '*Huummoo*', with or without citing cultural values of the bird; (ii) 332 (38%) contained at least one proverb; (iii) 251 (29%) contained at least one concept related to cultural beliefs and practices; and (iv) 133 (15%) contained at least one concept related to other folklore genres (e.g., poetries, fable stories and children words/games). In this article, only the 251 distinct text posts that contained concepts related to cultural belief and practices were analyzed and presented. The rest of the data were kept separately for future use.

2.2. Data Analysis

A thematic content analysis method was applied to the text data (FB users' text comments) to identify, code, categorize and determine the frequency of occurrence of concepts related to Oromo cultural beliefs and practices related to the Hornbill (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Neuendorf, 2019). This method was deemed appropriate to simultaneously undertake both qualitative (identify, code and categorize the cultural beliefs and practices) and quantitative (count of frequency of occurrence of each belief/practice categories) analyses. Data analysis was conducted in six steps. First, each user's comments were read and reread several times to better

understand the concepts contained within the comments (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Second, contents of each FB user's text comment were subjected to line-by-line open coding process, during which descriptive codes were assigned to fragments of the text on a variety of levels, including words, phrases, clauses, sentences, or paragraphs (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Coetzee et al., 2014). These codes were mostly taken from participants' own words and concepts. Third, a selective coding procedure was applied to concepts that emerged from the open coding procedure. This involved examining the codes to identify broader patterns of meaning and inductively grouping together of similar concepts into themes and categories of cultural beliefs and practices. Fourth, each theme and category were analyzed in detail and appropriately defined and named. Fifth, each theme and category were studied again in detail and double checked to make sure the original data truly support the emerged themes and categories. Finally, the frequency of occurrence of each belief/practice category in the whole dataset was counted and used to quantitatively establish the relative prevalence of the cultural belief and practice categories.

Figure 3. Screenshot picture of a Facebook page post results of analysis of the data for research participants' comments.



To establish validity of the study, the result of preliminary data analysis was posted on 'Dr Jirenya Sena's' community page on 16 April

2019 for the stakeholders' reference (FB users who generated the data) (Figure 3), and the draft manuscript was sent to three Oromo scholars (see Acknowledgements) in the fields of biology and linguistics. While information obtained from the stakeholders enabled better clarification on the description of some practice categories, no new theme or category emerged.

Results

Overall, four themes and 14 categories of cultural beliefs and practices emerged from the qualitative analysis of the data (Tables 1 and 2). Of the total 251 distinct text comments analyzed, 74 (30%) and 16 (6%) of them contained two and three cultural beliefs and practices, respectively. In terms of prevalence, the three most frequently cited beliefs were that the Hornbill are regarded as 'sourse of wealth (richer) 92 (27%), signal of change in season 77 (23%) and harbinger of longevity 63 (18%) (Table 1). The themes and categories and verbatim quotes from the participants that support each theme and category were depicted in Table 2 and were discussed in light of the background information provided in the introduction section and by the FB users on the cultural context of the Oromo society, and the behavior, ecology and biology of the Hornbill. The potential consequences of these cultural beliefs and practices categories for survival of the species were briefly discussed under each theme.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of citation of Oromo beliefs and practices associated with the Northern Ground-Hornbill

Theme	Category	Frequency	Percent
Bringer of Good Luck (Child birth, Wealth, Longevity, and Fortune)	Signifying child delivery	9	3
	Bringer of wealth (richer)	92	27
	Bringer of better crop yield	3	1
	Bringer of longevity	63	18
	Bringer of fortune (attainment of plans/goals)	8	2
Curative and Protective Influence	Curative against bald head	4	1
	Curative against stomachache	14	4

Theme	Category	Frequency	Percent
	Curative against any kind of livestock disease	5	1
	Protection against snakes	12	4
Bringer/Signifier of Bad Luck (Death/ Loss)	Announcing death/ destruction	23	7
	Causing Audial Deformity to family	6	2
	Causing damage/death	23	7
Timekeeper	Change in season	77	23
	Working days	2	1

Table 2. Themes and categories related to Oromo cultural beliefs and practices associated with the Northern Ground-Hornbill

Theme	Category	Verbatim samples
Bringer of Good Luck (Child birth, Wealth, Longevity, and Fortune)	Signifying child delivery	"A Hornbill perched in or near a community's village is a sign of a pregnant woman giving birth to a child safely."
	Bringer of wealth	"If someone crosses between two hornbills one will get richer."
	Bringer of better crop yield	"Seeing Hornbills foraging in one's crop filed during land preparation for cultivation signifies a year of prosperity [better crop yield]."
	Bringer of longevity	"If someone crosses between two hornbills, one will live long."
	Bringer of fortune	"If people travelling to somewhere early in the morning for critical affair come across Hornbills, the people will back with success [accomplishing what you aimed to do]."
Curative and Protective Influence	Curative against bald head	"If Hornbill's blood is applied onto a young bald-person's head, his hair will be regrown, and if applied onto a kinked hair of a women/girl, she will get her hair reaching her waist within a week time."

Theme	Category	Verbatim samples
	Curative against stomachache	"If someone who is suffering from stomachache crosses between two hornbills, he will get relief from the stomachache."
	Curative against any kind of livestock disease	"If an animal suffering from any disease is fumigated with smokes of burnt Hornbill's beak, the animal will be cured."
	Protection against harmful wild animals	"Hornbills are very important to people: by consuming and indicating the presence of snakes in our surroundings, they protect us from being stung by poisonous Snakes".
Bringer/Signifier of Bad Luck (Death/ Loss)	Announcing death/destruction	"When a Hornbill carrying a snake lands on a person's roof something bad is going to happen".
	Deformity to family	"If you kill a Hornbill, you will give birth to deaf children."
	Causing damage/ death	"If a bare-footed person steps with on pellets of the Hornbill, she/he will get her/his leg swollen, which ultimately could lead to death".
Timekeeper	Change in season	"When a Hornbill calls, it signifies start of the rainy season".
	Working days	"It tells us when to wake up or go to bed."

Source of Good Luck (Child Birth/Wealth/Longevity/Fortune)

The most prominent theme that emerged from the data was that the Hornbill is often perceived as a sourse of good luck (child birth/wealth/ longevity/fortune). More specifically, it is believed that if the birds enter or approach a village or homestead. It signifies a pregnant woman is going to deliver safely. In this regard, many FB users stated that "*a Hornbill perched in or near a community's village is a sign of a pregnant woman giving birth to a child safely*". Similarly, seeing Hornbills in crop fields is believed to bring better crop yield during that cropping season. As such, the respondents' said that "*seeing Hornbills foraging in one's crop filed during land preparation for cultivation signifies a year of prosperity [better crop yield]*". Another belief practice relates to Hornbills' intra-specific

social life. A pair of male and female Hornbills usually forages far apart from each other. Despite this, they do not allow people to cross in between them. As the birds are always in sensory contact, via visual and acoustic communications, they move towards each other and walk away or take off together when people attempt to pass in between them. The FB users mentioned that crossing between a pair of hornbill brings a good luck, in terms of wealth and life span. They stated that "*if someone crosses between two hornbills, one will live longer and/or get richer*". Finally the Oromo people believe that observation of Hornbills in the wild signifies good fortune in achieving one's goals. To this end, they stated that "*if people come across Hornbills while travelling to somewhere for critical affair early in the morning, the people will back with success*".

These observations appear to suggest that the bird is a symbol of good luck. Nonetheless, the practice of attempting to cross in between two birds, as a result of its association with getting richer/longevity, could pose disturbance to the birds' normal vital activities and physiological stresses.

Curative and Protective Influence

The second most prominent theme that emerged from the data was that Hornbill is perceived as having a curative influence against baldness of men at early age, appearance of curly hari for women, and stomachache and livestock disease. In relation to these curative influences, the respondents stated that "*when a blood of Hornbill is applied onto a young bald-person's head, the hair will regrow*"; and "*If a woman /girl with a kinked hair applies d's blood to her hair, it will grow reaching her waist within a week time*". Another curative belief is that "*if someone who is suffering from a stomachache passes in between two hornbills, he will get relief from the illness*". Beaks of the Hornbill are used for treatment of livestock diseases. As quoted by the FB users "*if an animal suffering from any disease is fumigated with smokes of burnt Hornbill beaks, the animal will recover from its illness*".

The protective influence hornbills also extend to harmful animals. Snakes, which people consider their natural enemies, constitute among the common food items of Hornbill. This knowledge has caused the Oromo people to perceive that Snakes. Consequently, in addition to eradicating and/or maintaining the population size of snakes in the locality, Hornbills protect people against poisonous snakes by warning people to avoid or be cautious while walking or sitting at such sites. This fact was reflected in the FB users' statements as "*hornbills are very important*

to people: by consuming and indicating the presence of snakes in our surroundings, they protect us from being stung by poisonous Snakes". An important concept tying the protective function of the Hornbills with Oromo people's respect for the bird was the following tale taken from the respondents comment "… *it is said that a Hornbill was seen killing a snake that was going to bite Abba Gadaa (Oromo leader). Consequently, it was enacted in the Gadaa law that a person who kills a Hornbill shall be punished equivalently with a 'human life indemnity*'…".

The consequences of these beliefs appear to be both destructive and protective. The demand for the curative influences of the bird's blood for human hair treatment and its beak for livestock disease treatment leads to the birds being killed. In contrast, the belief associated with its protective influence against poisonous snakes affords them a protective consequence. This was reflected in the words of one of the FB users who stated that "*since Hornbills eradicate and warn people where snakes are, they are respected and not killed*". The indemnity law associated with the tale that a Hornbill saved Abba Gadaa from being stung by a snake is of a great protective practice for the birds.

Signifier of Bad Luck (Death/ Destruction/Loss)

The third theme was that Hornbill is often perceived as a signifier of death/ destruction/loss. More specifically, the bird entering or approaching a village or homestead carrying a snake signifies a forthcoming disaster, which involves the death of someone known to the individual, or the damage of personal property. In this particular belief, the FB users believed that "*when a Hornbill carrying a snake lands on a person's roof or in his garden, something bad is going to happen*". The prominence of this belief can be observed from the fact that Oromo people's use of the belief to curse (expressing bad wish to) someone who has harmed them, saying "*May a hornbill carrying a snake comes to your village*!" Killing a Hornbill brings bad consequences on the killer's children: "*if you kill a Hornbill, you will give birth to deaf children*". Finally, as the Hornbill eats poisonous animals, it is believed that its pellets also contain poisonous chemicals which harm people when their feet are exposed to the pellets. They stated that "*if a person steps with bare-feet on pellets of the Hornbill, she/he will get her/his leg swollen, which ultimately could lead to death*".

The consequences of these beliefs are as destructive as they might be beneficial. Specifically, the belief associated with Hornbill's entering one's garden or landing on one's house roof is a warning for that person

to get ready or take counteractive actions to avoid the occurrence of the incidence or to minimize its impacts. One of the FB users who stated "*Huummoo manatti dhufte abbaatu hooddata*" (When a Hornbill comes to one's house, she/he should deal with it [the unknown situation]). The implication is that, for example, the household head should take sick persons, if any present, to health services or consult *Qaalluu* (spiritual person who predicts what would be going to happen and suggest remedial actions to remedy the forthcoming bad incidence. In this regard, Hornbill seems to be seen as helpful animal to alarming people to take actions or get ready to calm down if something bad happens. Similarly, the belief that killing a Hornbill causes one to give birth to a deaf children also has significant protective consequence. However, the belief that stepping on Hornbill's pellet leads to leg disease that has the potential to cause death may have negative consequences for the bird, especially to chase them away with the intention of making their area free from the Hornbill's pellets.

Timekeeper (Season Changes/timing of the day)

The final theme that emerged from the data was that the Hornbill is often perceived as a timekeeper in relation to seasonal changes and time of the day. Hornbills disappear from some localities during the dry season prior to the onset of the rainy season. Observation and knowledge the seasonal movement of the bird has inspired the Oromo people to develop the belief that Hornbill is a sign of a change from the dry season to the wet season. The FB users cited that "*when a Hornbill arrives and calls, it signals that the rain is coming soon*". In their second role as a daily timekeeper, the call of the bird is used to announce the start and end of a working day, especially during the rainy season, when dense cloud cover often makes it hard to recognize the beginning and ending of the day. The participants *said that "the Hornbill tells us when to wake up or go to bed*".

The effect of these beliefs appear to be neutral or even positive as the Hornbill is not physically used in the cultural practices, for example where its call is an indication of the beginning or end of a working day.

Discussion

This study demonstrated that the Hornbill has a significant cultural importance to the Oromo society of Ethiopia. These findings raise two key questions: What are the causal conditions acting as stimulants for the Hornbill's use in Oromo cultural practices? Is the Hornbill a culturally significant species to Oromo society and why? As our world is

full of uncertainties and unpredictable future, we may lack the power to full cope up with nature (Beyene, 2018) Coetzee et al. (2014), the causal factors that act as stimuli for the Hornbill's use in cultural practices of Oromo community is therefore people's attempts to deal with existential uncertainties resulting from natural phenomena (e.g., disease, death, droughts and loss of properties), or unpredictable future. Similar to the belief and practices in the *Waaqeffannaa* religion, where ayyaana possessed by some people are believed serve as an intermediary between God and humans, using the Hornbill in these practices empowers the users, by helping them to survive and cope with natural phenomena over which they do not have power. Using the bird endows the users a sense of control over the underlying emotions, such as fear, uncertainty and insecurity (Alves, 2012; Coetzee et al., 2014). As is true of most African communities, the major economic activities of the Oromo people are livestock husbandry and rain-fed crop cultivation (Dibaba, 2020). Thus, seasonal appearance of the Hornbills brings people the feeling of change of season and happiness to welcome a season which facilitates their important activities, such as preparing land for planting crops and providing livestock with sufficient fodder and water which yields better productivity (i.e., milk and butter).

On the question as to whether the Hornbill a culturally significant species to Oromo society, *Waaqeffannaa* religion followers believe that all living and non-living physical objects host *ayyaana* (*Waaqa's* spirit/force) endowed to them by *Waaqa* (Creator/God) (Beyene, 2018). Some people are endowed with exceptional personal qualities due to the *ayyaana* given to them by God. Such individuals are known as *qaalluu*—a spiritual person (i) who acts as intermediaries between human beings and the God; (ii) what happened in the past or currently to someone; and (iii) is able to predict upcoming events (Legesse, 2006). As a result, *Waaqeffannaa* followers usually gather at *abbaa qaalluu's* house and sing ritual songs that praise God/Creator (*Waaqa*), express hope/promise, *kadhannaa*, etc (Beyene, 2018). It seems that a similar principle would explain Oromo's use of Hornbill in their cultural beliefs and practices. First, the Hornbill has ayyaana endowed to it from God, just like all human being and other bird species (Beyene, 2018; Gebissa, 2018). However, its larger size, aposematic coloration (black-red-white) and behavior might have made it appear distinct and conspicuousness compared to other co-occurring bird species in the Oromia region (Redman et al., 2009; BirdLife International, 2018). This distinctness and conspicuousness appearance,

coupled to its regular contact with Oromo people over a prolonged period of time, in turn, could have motivated Oromo people to select it as a culturally significant species that is used in direct, indirect, and symbolic ways to deal with these uncertainties (Coetzee et al., 2014). It is unsurprising that most of Oromo cultural belief and practices documented in this study in relation to the Hornbill have also been reported for its congeneric species (Southern Ground-hornbill) among communities in the southern and eastern African countries (for detail see Msimanga, 2004, and Coetzee et al., 2014). However, interpretations ascribed to the beliefs and practices associated with the two species are sometimes contrasting (Msimanga 2004; Coetzee et al. 2014). This may suggest that closely related species can have similar cultural values or play complementary roles across different cultures, but with subtle differences in practices and interpretations of the beliefs, as well as in conservation consequences.

Results of the present study highlight that some of the traditional beliefs and practices related to the Hornbill appear to having positive (protective) conservation impacts, as the uses do not involve or lead to killing of the birds, or do prevent killing. Such believes include seeing the bird entering a village or homestead that believed to signify safe delivery of a pregnant woman; observation of the bird in the wild that believed to signify a good fortune; protection of people from poisonous snakes; and signifying seasonal change (Tables 1 and 2). Even in the case of the beliefs under the theme 'a bringer of bad luck', such as "If you kill a Hornbill, you will give birth to deaf children", the practice has protective consequences as it discourages people not to kill the birds. Similar beliefs and practices that play protective role have also been reported for certain hornbill species across many cultures, including in Indonesia (BirdLife international, 2019) and in the southern Africa region (Coetzee et al., 2014). However, some other practices, such as the making use for traditional medicines, seem to possibly have destructive consequences, as they involve killing or leading to disturbance of the birds. Furthermore, the belief associated with stepping on Hornbill's pellets which is believed to cause damage/death of the individual could lead people to have or develop negative attitudes towards the birds, by motivating people to chase or kill the birds to avoid its pellets from their surroundings. Finally, the practices that people attempting to cross between two Hornbills for the beliefs to get rich, relief from stomachache and/or longevity cause disturbance to the birds, potentially affecting their normal vital activities (e.g., foraging, court-shipping, resting, and

nesting behavioral activities). Although the magnitude of these presumably destructive practices and their actual and potential impacts on the bird is unclear yet and requires further studies, people's avoidance of killing the Hornbills, as reflected in the FB users' opinions that the Hornbill had rescued the Abba Gada from being bitten by a snake, can serve conservationists as a motto to minimize the destructive practices and their effects. Specifically, although its current functionality is uncertain, the stated applicability of 'human life indemnity law' of the Gadaa system on people who area found guilty of killing a Hornbill is key import concept in regulating destructive use of the species. In this regard, a recent report by Asefa et al. (2019) has demonstrated the effectiveness of Gadaa laws enacted to conserve (through avoidance of illegal hunting/killing) an endemic mammal, the Swayne's Senkelle Hartebeest, in Oromia. This action has resulted to population increase from 200 individuals in 1993 to 800 individuals at present (Asefa et al., 2019).

In conclusion, in light of the current threatened status of the Hornbill and lack of knowledge about use of the species in cultural practices, this study has provided valuable information needed to implement effective strategies that would aid in reinforcement of the cultural practices with potentially protective influences, and in direct implementation of targeted intervention strategies on the practices presumed to have destructive consequences. Most importantly, the potential to apply the 'human life indemnity law' of the Gadaa system should be assessed to capitalize on and promote conservation of the species. Similar studies among societies across the species range would also be important to have comprehensive understanding of the uses and implement community-specific targeted interventions.

Acknowledgments

I am thankful to manager of 'Dr Jirenya Sena' Facebook Like page for posting this interesting topic, without which this study would not have been incepted and conducted. All Facebook users who shared their experience/knowledge on the page post are duly acknowledged. I would like to thank Habite Jabessa, Habte Talila and Sena Gashe for their critical comments on the draft manuscript.

References

Alves, R. (2012). Relationships between fauna and people and the role of Ethnozoology in animal conservation. *Ethnobiology and Conservation* 1:1–69.

Asefa, A., Mengesha, G. and Almaw, R. (2019). Indigenous institutions and wildlife conservation: The case of the Oromo Gada System protecting Swayne's Hartebeest in Ethiopia. *Conservation Science and Practice* 2019;e113. DOI: 10.1111/csp2.113.

Bartels, L. (1983). Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the western Oromo of Ethiopia, An attempt to understand. Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Berlin, Germany.

Beyene, E. (2018). *Waaqeffanna* folksongs and poetic verse among Tuulamaa Oromo. *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 25(1 & 2): 151–196.

BirdLife International. (2018). *Bucorvus abyssinicus*. IUCN red list of threatened species 2018 [web page]. Available at: http://www.e.T22682632A132204438. Accessed on November 11, 2019.

BirdLife International. (2019). Using education to build a grassroots hornbill conservation movement [web page]. Available at: https://www.birdLife.org/asia/news/. Accessed on August 08, 2019.

Boku, D.D. (2011). Oromo Wisdom in Black Civilization. Finfinnee, Ethiopia: Finfinnee Printing and Publishing S.C.

Coetzee, H., Nell, W. and van Rensburg, L. (2014). An Exploration of Cultural Beliefs and Practices across the Southern Ground-Hornbill's Range in Africa. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 2014; 10:28. Doi: 10.1186/1746-4269-10-28.

Corbin, J. and Strauss, A. (2008). Basics of Qualitative Research. Los Angeles, USA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W. (2007). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A. and Sargatal, J. (2001). Handbook of the Birds of the World, vol. 6: Mousebirds to Hornbills. Barcelona, Spain: Lynx Edicions.

Dibaba, A. T. (2020). Oromo Orature: An Ecopoetic Approach, Theory and Practice (Oromia/Ethiopia, Northeast Africa). *Humanities* (9)28. DOI:10.3390/h9020028

Facebook. (2019a). Dr-Jirenya-Sena [web page]. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/Dr-Jirenya-Sena-1121714954657794. Accessed on December 27, 2019.

Facebook. (2019b). Public Data Use Terms and Policies [web page]. Available at: (https://www.facebook.com/policies/). Accessed on December 27, 2019.

Fernandes-Ferreira, H., Mendonça, S.V., Albano, C., Ferreira, F.S. and Alves, R. (2012). Hunting, Use and Conservation of Birds in Northeast Brazil. *Biodiversity and Conservation* 21: 221–244.

Franz, D. Marsh, H.E., Chen, J.I. and Teo, A.R. (2019). Using Facebook for qualitative research: a brief primer. *Journal of Medicine and Internet Research* 21(8), e13544. https://doi.org/10.2196/13544.

Gaoue, O.G., Coe, M.A., Bond, M., Hart, G., Seyler, B.C. and McMillen, H. (2017). Theories and Major Hypotheses in Ethnobotany. *Economic Botany* 71:269–287.

Gebissa, E. (2018). Indigenizing Universal Principals: Oromo Perspectives on Human Rights. The *Journal of Oromo Studies* 25(1 & 2):1–24.

Jalata, A. (2001). Fighting against the Injustice of the State and Globalization: Comparing the African American and Oromo Movements. New York, USA: Palgrave MacMillan.

Jaleta, T. (2004). A Contextual Study of Guji-Oromo Proverbs: Functions in Focus. MA Thesis, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Addis Ababa University.

Kemp, A.C. and Boesman, P. (2017). Northern Ground-hornbill (*Bucorvus abyssinicus*). In: del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., Sargatal, J., Christie, D.A. and de Juana, E. (eds.), Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive, pp 488–489. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions. .

Kozinets, R.V. (2010). Netnography. Thousand Oaks, USA: The Sage publications.

Kozinets, R.V., Dolbec, P. and Earley, A. (2014). Netnographic analysis: Understanding culture through social media data. In: Katie Metzler (ed.), The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis, pp. 262–276. Thousand Oaks: The Sage Publications.

Legesse, L. (2006). Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System. Lawrencevill, NJ: The Red Sea Press.

Msimanga, A. (2004). Breeding biology of Southern Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri* in Zimbabwe. *Bird Conservation International* 14(Special Issue):63–69.

Muiruri, M.N. and Maundu, P. (2010). Birds, people and conservation, In: Tidemann, S. and Gosler, A. (eds.), Ethno-Ornithology: Birds, Indigenous People, Cultures and Society, pp. 279–289. Washington: Earthscan.

Neuendorf, K. A. (2019). Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis, In: Brough, P. (ed.), Research Methods for Applied Psychologists: Design, Analysis and Reporting, pp. 211–223. New York: Routledge.

Redman, N., T. Stevenson, and J. Fanshawe. (2009). Birds of the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and Socotora, 2nd edition. London: Christopher Helm.

Setha, T.A.N. (2004). The status and conservation of hornbills in Cambodia. *Bird Conservation International*, 14(Supplement S1): S5–S11.

Simelane, T.S. and Knight, M.G. (1997). Traditional beliefs and conservation. *Custos* 1997:8–9.

Teresa, G.C. and Hunduma, D.R. (2018). Oromo oral literature for environmental conservation: A study of selected folksongs in east and west Hararghe Zones. *Humanities* 7(94). https://doi.org/10.3390/h7040094.

Thiollay, J. (2006). Large Bird Declines with Increasing Human Pressure in Savanna Woodlands (Burkina Faso). *Biodiversity and Conservation* 15:2085. DOI: 10.1007/s10531-004-6684-3–2108.

UNESCO. (2016). Gada System: An Indigenous Democratic Socio-political System of the Oromo [web page]. Available at: https://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/document-4375. Accessed on October 9, 2019.

Vernon, C. (1984). Ground hornbills and the drought. *Bee-eater* 35:32.

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND THE QUEST FOR PEACE IN THE ETHIOPIAN FEDERAL SYSTEM

Temesgen Thomas Halabo

Wachemo University, Ethiopia

Taddesse Berisso

Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

Abstract: This study examines ethnic identity and the quest for peace in the Ethiopian federal system using primary and secondary sources. As of 1991, ethnic-based federal system has long been instituted in Ethiopia along with ethnic right to self-determination up to secession. The quest for an anatomy of conflicts in pre- and post-federal Ethiopia leads one to clearly understand the nature of political relations in historic and contemporary Ethiopia. The historic root of formalized identity politics and ethnic rights to self-determination under ethnic-based federal system goes back to the politico-ideological agenda of *National Questions* by Ethiopian Student Movements (ESM) in the 1960s. Using the New War Theory as a conceptual framework, this study argues that the formalized identity politics has altered the causes, goals and nature of conflicts in Ethiopia. The study concludes that ethnic federal system and ethnic rights to self-determination up to secession has neither led to ethnic political autonomy nor ended secessionist conflicts in Ethiopia.

Keywords: *Ethnic Federal System, Identity Politics, New War Theory, Boundary Conflicts, Ethnic Autonomy Conflicts and Pan- Ethiopian Identity*

Journal of Oromo Studies_#28.indb 145 7/13/2023 5:11:11 PM

Introduction

At the end of the Cold War, the socialist military regime in Ethiopia was overthrown by ethno-nationalist armed forces. A political regime that came to power in 1991 had adopted a federal system, which is explicitly based on ethnicity with the aim of radically constructing the Ethiopian state and society as a multi-ethnic federation. This federal system was adopted as a response to 'old' ethno-nationalist armed conflict that beleaguered the old regime and has helped to successfully pacify such conflicts from national scene in the post 1990s (Aalen, 2006; Tsegay, 2010). With the introduction of ethnic-based federalism in contrast to authoritarian and socialist unitary state, the politics of ethnicity was formally institutionalized. Consistent with this the 'New Wars' theory describes that 'the new identity politics arises out of the collapse of the communist state and the disintegration of centralized authoritarian modern state structure' (Kaldor, 2006:81-82).

While the federal system helped in dealing with old ethnic armed conflicts, it triggered other (new) conflicts in Ethiopia. New conflicts have emerged and the dimension of the conflicts has also changed (Assefa, 2012: Tsegay, 2010). This identity politics has therefore entirely altered the dynamics, goal and nature of the conflict. In view of this, it is now possible to consider the contemporary conflicts in Ethiopia in the categories of the 'New Wars' perspective. The key objective of this study is to analyze conflicts induced by politicized ethnicity after adopting ethnic-based federal system in Ethiopia in light of the 'New Wars' thesis.

The study use multiple methods of data collection: qualitative face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis and review of secondary sources. The researchers made several field trips to cities and towns for data collection. They held interviews with key informants, as well as conducted focus group discussions in the capital city, Addis Ababa, Regional capital city of Hawassa and Zonal cities of Arba Minch, Hossana, Wolaita-Sodo, Wolkite, Sawola and in some selected *woredas* since April 2015. Subjects involved in the research, including traditional leaders, elders, religious leaders and government officials from local to federal levels. Informants had been kept anonymous due to the sensitivity of the study issues.

The paper is organized into the following sections and sub-sections. The first section briefly examines the major tenets of 'New Wars' thesis. In the second section, the study scrutinizes the historic 'making and re-making' of the Ethiopian state to understand the current formalized identity

politics and changes and continuities in Ethiopia. The current conflicts are thematically analyzed in the third section of the study. The last section of the paper presents concluding remark that focuses on the summary of evaluation of the main assumptions of the 'New Wars' theory.

A New Wars Theory: A Theoretical framework

It is often argued that the new wars are consequences of the end of the Cold War. The discrediting of socialist ideology, disintegration of the totalitarian empires and the withdrawal of the superpowers support to client regimes following the end of Cold War contributed in important ways to the new wars (Kaldor, 2006). Kaldor argues that 'the new wars can be contrasted with earlier wars in terms of their goals, the methods of warfare and how they are financed' (2006:7). The structural transformation of old wars is a consequence of a radical change in the goals of new wars. The goals of the new wars are about identity politics in contrast to the geo-political or ideological goals of the earlier wars (Kaldor, 2006). In the new wars, the political goals are about the claim to power on the basis of identities. The groups involved in the new wars also define themselves on the basis of their identities - national, ethnic, religious or cultural character (Kaldor, 2006).

Furthermore, the sources of the new identity politics are linked to globalization, rapid urbanization and the parallel economy. Kaldor further points that 'the collapse of communist states after 1991 and the disintegration or erosion of modern state structure, especially centralized authoritarian state provide the environment in which the new identity politics are nurtured' (2006:81-2). Kaldor attributes 'the growth in the identity politics to lack of politics of ideas and/or the lack of forward looking projects' (2006: 81). In contrast to politics of ideas, identity politics tends to be fragementative, backward looking and exclusive. The new wars are increasingly internal, intense and protracted in contrast to interstate old wars. The new wars do not typically have a precise beginning and formal declarations of war in contrast to the structured conduct of 'old' wars. They conspicuously lack definitive battles, decisive campaigns and formal endings (Kaldor, 2006).

With respect to Africa, Kaldor has emphasized the unique aspects of conflicts set in the African context (2006). African states have to deal with the disillusion of post-independence hopes and problems of internal security such as rapid urbanization, poverty and inequality. Furthermore, Kaldor accentuates that 'the contemporary violence in Africa is a reaction

of the established political elites to the declining legitimacy and growing inability to cope with problematic issues' (2006: 78-81). However, the 'New Wars' thesis disregard a few aspects of conflicts set in the African context (Malantowicz 2010). Unlike Europe, Africa still lacks democracy and political pluralism. As a result, the ideological agenda is still present in violent struggles in Africa.

According to critics, 'the description of 'New Wars' is in fact only a new name for different types of 'old' wars' (Berdal, 2003:78-81). In the same vein, Newman has states that 'the distinction between 'contemporary' forms of conflict and wars of earlier times is exaggerated and in some instances does not stand up to scrutiny, especially when drawing upon historical material' (2004:173). Newman also questions the extent to which the contemporary forms of organized violence reflect new patterns in terms of actors, objectives, spatial context, human impact, and the political economy and social structure of conflict (2004). The tendency in the new wars scholarship to identify common patterns in 'contemporary' civil conflicts ignores important differences among them (Newman, 2004). The 'New Wars' thesis rather reflect types of conflict that are not particularly 'modern' and in fact reflect rather enduring patterns over the last century. Newman concluds that 'we would not be able to present a sustained, linear pattern in the contemporary conflicts' rather 'the changes in the pattern of the conflicts are most obviously noticeable on a case-by-case base' (2004: 186). Berdal (2003) also draws attention to the lack of a proper historical perspective in the 'New Wars' thesis as a major limitation.

Formalized Identity Politics Seen Through a Historic 'Making and Re-making' of Modern Ethiopia

It is obvious that any attempt to understand the post 1990s identity politics would be incomplete if it is seen separately from the historical trajectories that shaped the modern Ethiopian state since the late 19th century. To fully understand the anatomy of conflicts in the pre-and post 1990s, it is necessary to address one important question: why and how the state building process in the late 19th left the seeds of future conflict? In response to this question, we briefly explore the historical process which led to the creation of modern Ethiopian state and the outcome of those processes in terms of ethnicity (historical factors for adopting ethnic federal system and formalizing identity politics in the post 1990s) in the current Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is considered as an ancient state with a three millennia history of statehood (Bahru, 2002; Mengisteab, 1997). However, Ethiopia took its modern shape in the first decade of the 20th century. During the Europeans' scramble for Africa in the 1880s, the Abyssinian Empire was also busy in an empire-building project launched by its architect, King Menelik of Shawa – later Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia (Teshale, 1995). Emperor Menelik II was considered as the only black African leader who actively participated in the scramble for Africa. Through the conquest, the greater portion of the country's landmass was incorporated into the empire and gaving the coutry its present geographical shape and cultural, linguistic and ethnic compositions by the beginning of the 20th century. The autonomous smaller states in south, south-west, and south-eastern Ethiopia were subdued by Emperor Menelik II as a result of unbalanced military power despite fierce resistance by many of these states (Vaughan, 2003). The net effect of the process of state formation put various ethno-linguistic groups under the newly created state of Ethiopia where more than 80 linguistic and ethnic groups live. The conquest was followed by the institutionalization of the northern feudal system of exploitation, the revoking of lands and land rights, lands and the imposition of the *Amhara* language, religion, and other forms of culture at the expense of the indigenous practices of subjugated peoples (Teshale 1995).

Emperor *Haileselassie I* (1930-1974) continued the project of building 'one nation out of many' through cultural homogenization, assimilation, centralization and one language policy by adopting the first modern constitution in 1931. According to John Markakis (1994:227), 'it was easier for a non-Christian, who also did not speak Amharigna, to pass through the eye of a needle than to enter the charmed circle of power and privilege'. Markakis further notes that understandably 'Amhara ruling elites' perception of national identity was the mirror image of their ethnic and cultural ego' (1994: 225). This argument is further supported by Poluha noting that:

> *…nevertheless, a person aspiring to power had to be a man who had mastered Amharigna, adhered to [Orthodox] Christianity and had developed a good relationship with a powerful patron* (Poluha, 1998:31).

Inequality based on ethnic affinity had been part of Ethiopian governance since the establishment of the modern state. The Amhara has been

perceived as the ruling group and the Ethiopian national identity was therefore intrinsically linked to the Amhara (Aalen, 2006). It was ethnically based historical injustices and inequality that triggered the subjugated peoples to revitalize their ethnic identity and articulate ethnic-based political movements since 1960s (Bassi, 1996). The deep-rooted problem spearheaded by Ethiopian Student Movements (ESM)[1] finally led to the 1974 popular revolution[2], the toppling of emperor *Haileselassie I* from power. Nonetheless, in the absence of organized political parties to assume power, the military took advantage of the political vacuum and controlled state power. Notwithstanding the military regime's attempts to reorganize the country's internal administration after its establishment of People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) in 1987, it failed to create a new social and political basis for the country (Clapham, 1994).

The 1974 popular revolution was basically the result of the ESM which begun in 1960's. Influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideology, students of Addis Ababa University (AAU) brought forward the issue of *National Question*[3]. The idea of the right of 'Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (NNPs)' to self determination including secession had also dominated the political agendas of the ESM (Walelegn, 1969). This political ideological agenda became a driving revolutionary force in the Student circles and ethno- nationalist movements which were descendants of ESM - such as, the Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF), Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), Sidama Liberation Front (SLF), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and of the Pan-Ethiopianist movements, like Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and All Ethiopian Socialist Movement known popularly as *MEISON* (Merera, 2003; Young, 1997). The ESM itself was divided on the issue of *National Question*. Some groups of students started to contend that the issue that needs to be addressed in the Ethiopian politics is the idea of *class* struggle but not *National Question.* This debate led to the birth of two contending political groups: Pan Ethiopianist groups (Class based movements) and Ethno nationalist groups (ethnic based movements).

The ethno nationalist groups were dominantly represented by EPLF, TPLF, SLF and OLF. As a descendant of the ESM, the ethno-nationalist groups were organized on the ideological foundation of Marxist - Leninist principle of the 'right to self-determination including secession' as a driving revolutionary force (Merera 2003; Vaughan 2003). They claim that the Ethiopian state is an exclusionist one and the oppressed and marginalized groups need to have the right to self-determination to

the extent of secession. Furthermore, 'the EPLF and OLF emphasized that the Ethiopian state had 'colonized'[4] various ethnic groups. Hence, Ethiopia, just like any western colonial empire, needs to undergo decolonization (Asnake, 2013). Ethnicity became an aspect of the political movements. By considering the Ethiopian state as a 'colonial' empire, the EPLF and OLF opted for complete independence consecutively of Eritrea and Oromia from Ethiopia.

TPLF oscillated in their agenda between complete independence from Ethiopia and its self-determination within the greater Ethiopian context. This self–determination agenda by the TPLF ranges form autonomy, federation, confederation, to and including independence (Markakis, 1987; Young, 1997). The most protracted and Africa's longest intra-state civil wars ended in 1991 with the secession of Eritrea and the control of state power by ethno nationalist forces led the TPLF[5] /EPRDF forces (Temesgen, 2011). As a result the political pendulum in the country swung towards identity politics - ethnic federal system.

In 1995, the EPRDF adopted a new constitution that brought a fundamental transformation its political philosophy an antithesis to ethnic assimilation policy and marginalization by old regimes. They instituted ethnic-based federal system around Marxist-Leninist principle of ethnic right to self-determination up to secession (Art.39/1) as a fundamental response to the longstanding *National Questions* and prolonged ethno-nationalist conflicts in Ethiopia (Vaughan, 2003:169; Tsegay, 2010:85). In stark contrast to socialist and dictatorial strong unitary past, the ethnic-based federal system formalized the politics of ethnicity. This is consistent with the 'New Wars' thesis which depicts that the new identity politics arises out the disintegration of centralized authoritarian and communist states.

At the foot heel of the federal dispensation the current conflicts, post-federal conflicts were born. Ethnic federal system was both a response to 'old' ethno-nationalist armed struggle and a cause for the current ethnic-identity based conflicts (Tsegay, 2010). It effectively addressed 'old' conflicts from national scene. It also proliferated localized conflicts at national and local levels (Aalen, 2006). This indicates that out of the solutions for 'old' conflicts, current post federal conflicts were born. Post federal conflicts are ethnic identity based conflicts for new power, new resources, and new opportunities. Scholars, (such as, Aalen, 2006; Abbink, 2006; Asnake, 2010; Tsegay, 2010; Temesgen, 2011) that there are now new demands for a distinct ethnic identity, self-governance

and autonomy, local economic justice, political empowerment and participation, statehood, territory and disputes over boundary. The underlying causes of contemporary conflicts, which are the subject of this paper, emerge out of the problems of state reconstruction by ethnic federal re-structuring, politicized ethnicity and ethnic elite's political economy.

The current conflicts are localized, ethnic identity based, dispersed and low intensity conflicts in contrast to previously organized large scale ethno-nationalist armed conflicts. Corresponding to the major tenets of the 'New War' hypothesis, the current conflicts do not have a precise beginning and no formal declarations. They are non-ideological with the exception of the secessionist armed struggle led by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). In contrast to the 'New War' thesis, current ethnic identity-based conflicts cannot be decoupled from the pre-1991 political processes and historical trajectories that shaped modern Ethiopian state. Therefore, the study does not suggest that contemporary conflicts are distinct from the past in Ethiopia.

The Identity Politics and Conflicts in Ethiopia

The history of the Ethiopian state has been characterized as the history of conflicts (Merera, 2003). The conflicts that pre-dominated the political terrain of the 20th century had class, ethnic, religious and regional dimensions. The EPRDF's radical policy initiative (i.e., the ethnic federal model and formalizing self-determination including secession) is response to 'old' ethno-nationalist civil wars that beleaguered the previous regimes.

The politics of ethnicity has also transformed and generated localized ethnic conflicts. The conflicts are devolved from national scene of earlier periods to the current sub-national and local levels (Abbink, 2006). The study informants reported that localized conflicts are characterized by conflicts of low intensity, fragmentation and identity politics and ethnic elites' entrepreneurships or political economy. Although identity based conflicts are closely inter related and should be viewed holistically, thematically categorize the current conflicts can be for analytical purpose:

1. The *ethnic based boundary conflicts* within and between regional states.
2. Ethnic *autonomy conflict* issues, such as ethnic quest for distinct ethnic identity, self-rule at regional and sub-regional level, competition

for control over regional power, resources and opportunities, access to and control over cities or towns from federal to local levels.

3. The *Pan-Ethiopian identity conflict* arising from the lack of overarching and inclusive pan-national identity and the creation of ethno-political boundaries that exclude people on the basis of their identity.

Ethnic based Administrative Boundary Conflicts

The highly centralized system has been replaced by ethnic based federal arrangement that established ten, including recently established Sidama Regional state in early 2020, ethnically and territorially delimited regional states. These regional states are basically demarcated on the basis of 'settlement patterns, identity, language and consent of the people concerned' (Art. 46/2). This constitutional principle has made regional and sub-regional administrative boundaries to coincide with ethnic identity. While every ethnic group is not found inhabiting territorially defined geographic areas, the process of matching ethnic identity and politico administrative boundary ignores the history of the strong unitary system.

The ethnic-based federal structuring - an assemblage of distinct ethnic group with distinct territory- is problematic. This is because ethnic groups in Ethiopia have become interspersed for many years through diverse and long-standing patterns of settlement (Clapham, 2002; Vaughan, 2003). Assefa's summary worth mentioning:

> *…there has been a long process of inter-ethnic integration in Ethiopia, so much so that today a considerable proportion of the Ethiopian people are of mixed ethnic background. As a result, ethnic based federal boundary making seemed inappropriate in a country in which substantial portions of the population are of mixed background, or unsure of which ethnic group they belong to or wish to identity with* (Assefa, 2007:254).

The Ethiopian history is full of conflicts of one type or another and to single out the issue of nationalities using ethnic based boundaries therefore, excludes several other essential clauses (Assefa, 2007; Asnake, 2013). To this end, the study responds stressed that due to the long history of ethnic mobility, integration and inter-groups relations, the issue of redrawing ethnic based boundaries between groups generated unprecedented and violent ethnic boundary conflicts. Consequently,

ethnic re-structuring has radically changed not only the governance rhetoric but also the dimension of conflicts in the post 1990s. In contrast, defining the ethnic identity of several smaller ethnic groups has emerged as an arena of local/regional (re-) negotiation of identity, statehood and protracted conflicts throughout Ethiopia.

According to the respondents, ethnic federal restructuring divided ethnic groups that used to live together and shared resources into different administrative units. Asnake that ethnic federal system has brought the politico-legal arena the question of which group belongs to which wider ethnicity (2010). The federal re-structuring has created new stranded groups (i.e., ethnic groups that are caught in between two or more regions when the new mapping of the constituent units of the federation was conducted). The inclusion and exclusion of these stranded identity groups in the administrative units dominated and designated by dominant groups has serious implication to resource access, power and opportunity due to their subsumed status.[6]

Regarding the boundary conflicts between regional states, when the disputed areas coincided with the boundaries between regional states, conflicts between ethnic groups have transformed to conflicts between regional states. This is apparent from the prolonged boundary conflicts over the ownership of Babile, a town between Oromia and Somali regional states (Asnake, 2013). More instances include violent inter-regional ethnic boundary conflicts, among others, between the Guji vs. Gedeo in Oromia and SNNPR States; Gurage and Marako nationality in SNNPRS, Konso and Ale in SNNPRS, Guji vs. Burji in Oromia and SNNPR states. All these ethnic-identity conflicts resulted in the death of thousands of people, ethnic animosity, inter-regional dispute and destruction of property.

As emphasized by study informants, the ethnicization of state and territory is not the only underlying cause for boundary conflicts. As the 'New Wars' theory indicates, 'political economy' of current conflicts in Ethiopia are highly decentralized due to ethnic-based federal system. These localized identity based conflicts are often subjected to manipulation by domestic elites for their own political expediency. For instance, a longstanding peaceful co-existence between the Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups has changed into a protracted inter-ethnic conflict mainly due to the local political elites desire for power (Asebe, 2007). In the southern regional state, the Konso and Ale nationalities with history of no conflict have entered into violent conflict after the

formation of separate self-administration at zonal and special *woreda s*tatus, respectively. The ethnic elites gain an advantage in using conflict for their own ends. As a result, they maintain strong interests in perpetuating some of the conflicts. Consistent with the 'New Wars' thesis, inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts are characteristics of the current conflicts in Ethiopia.

Ethnic Autonomy Conflicts

In the FDRE constitution, ethnic group is labeled as 'Nation, Nationality and Peoples' (in Amharic, *behieroch, behiereseboch, ena hezboch*). These terms are predominant in the current Ethiopian political and constitutional legal rhetoric. The FDRE constitution (art.39/5) defines a 'Nation, Nationality and People' (NNP) as clearly distinguishable cultural groups akin to the primordial assumption of ethnicity. From constitutional definition, one can identify a number of primordialist traits attributed to ethnicity in the context of Ethiopia: a) people, b) culture or custom, c) language, d) belief in common or related identity, e) psychological makeup, and f) territory. Accordingly, ethnic group in Ethiopia can be defined as people with their own common culture or custom, language, identity, psyche and contiguous territory. The constitution provides a single definition and no distinction is made between these distinct terms - 'Nation', 'Nationality' and 'People'. Implicitly, this categorization indicates a hierarchy among ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

Within the formalized ethnic politics, any cultural group that wishes to have a self–governing administrative structure needs to be recognized as either 'nation', 'nationality' or 'people'. Accordingly, defining the ethnic identity of several smaller groups has emerged as an arena of (re) negotiation of identity. This is particularly evident in the multi–ethnic regional states. The House of Federation (HoF), the upper house that interprets the constitution, uses the constitutionally stipulated primordial criteria (art.39/5) to determine cultural groups' ethnic status granting the right to self–determination and fulfilling the criteria set by the constitution. In other words, an outside political body determines the ethnic status and grants the right to self–determination. This is evident in the process of granting separate ethnic status for the Silte from Gurage after fierce and violent identity conflict. Under the auspices of House of Federation (HoF), the Silte declared an independent ethnic group status by referendum and managed to get their own separate Zone. One can observe clear paradoxical combination between instrumental uses and primordial

definition of ethnicity in determining ethnic status and granting the right to self–determination.

Broader political autonomy is granted to regional states including the right to secede from the federation (art.47/2). The state sovereignty is vested on the nations' nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia. This, however, departs from the traditional trends of ascribing sovereignty to the 'people'. Theoretically, nations', nationalities and peoples' are granted the right to self–determination up to secession, the right to develop language, culture and history, recognized the right to self–governance (at the local level); accorded the right to fair and equitable representation at the federal and regional governments (art.39/1–4). Territorially concentrated smaller ethnic groups that are currently not granted the rights to self–rule are allowed to establish separate self–governance to establish separate regional state or have the right to establish separate statehood at any time.

Owing to the decision by vanguard EPRDF party at the centre to determine ethnic identity status and the right to self-governance, paradoxes that are difficult to explain remain. There has not been an attempt to allow ethnic groups to decide on their own identity and their right to self–determination. Rather, it is the 'vanguard party that grants outside the right to self–determination for ethnic groups' (Aalen, 2008:71-3). As reported by study respondents, in the process of granting the right to self–determination, ethnic equality has been violated in two ways. First, by imposing identity on the people and arbitrarily creating ethnic regions, and second, by arbitrarily stratifying ethnic group some at regional level, other at zonal level and still so many others, at *woreda* and *kebelle* levels of administrative hierarchy. The criteria for granting ethnic regional status remain vague and arbitrary. This is evident in the case of tiny a minority Hareri regional status and the denial of the same right for ethnic groups with over a million population, such as, Sidama, Gurage, Wolayit and Gamo in Southern Ethiopia. Only after persistent struggle a separate statehood has been guaranteed for Sidama via referendum. In most cases, the EPRDF regime remained unwilling to address ethnic demand in accordance with the constitutional stipulations.

According to informants, the government has difficulty in adhering to the constitution to address ethnic demands for autonomy. The EPRDF relied more on a centralized party system than on the federal compact and federal institutions. The government practices democratic centralism and top-down ideology-driven policy and decision making. However, this practice sharply contradicts the constitutionally proclaimed principles

of self–rule and state autonomy (Medhane and Young, 2003). Abbink (2006) adds that 'the specific model of 'revolutionary democracy' officially espoused by the ruling EPRDF, the party built around the TPLF, represents in many ways a contradiction to the proclaimed constitutional principles'. Undoubtedly, this will have its own consequence. The federal system and other constitutionally established institutions have not yet well entrenched in Ethiopia. There is a fear that 'once the ruling party loses control of power, the fate of the federal system will be uncertain or will wither away with it' (Clapham, 2009:191). The EPRDF's power politics has been creating unforeseeable effects that have been difficult for the government to control. The constitutionally promised principles of the right to self–determination and paradoxes associated with its implementation are the source of ethnic-based conflicts in the country.

Due to intense inter-ethnic elites' competition to control regional power and resources, violent conflicts also occurred between regional dominant ethnic groups of Nuer vs. Anuak in Gambella; Berta vs. Gumuz in Benishangul-Gumuz and Sidama vs. Wolaita in SNNPRS. For instance, according to informants, ethnic elites' from Sidama and Wolaita were violently competing for key posts especially regional presidential post. Fierce ethnic elites' competition has grown into group competition between the Sidama and Wolaita groups transformed into inter-ethnic hostility and open confrontation at the regional capital Hawasa. Citing population size, physical location of the regional state in their territory and the refusal of the government to allow separate statehood, the Sidama claimed that regional presidential post must be preserved for Sidama.

The competition for access and authority over cities at federal, state, and local levels is another critical challenge of politicized ethnicity. This is evident in the case of the violent conflicts by, the Sidama over control of Hawassa and the frequent conflict between Gurage and Qabena over Walkite town. In SNNPRS, for instance, the federal government attempted to make the regional capital Hawassa a federal city. This added a fuel to their longstanding unmet demand for a regional status, was met by violent conflict by Sidama that wanted to keep Hawassa as the main city for the Sidama. Following frequent violence, the government postponed its decision. In a similar vein, to avoid the conflicts by Oromo that aimed at controlling Addis Ababa, the government recognized the special interest of Oromo on Addis Ababa.

The secessionist war by the ONLF and OLF is a paradox in a country where there is constitutional recognition of the right to secession.

Although the Constitution provides all nationalities with the right to secession, it is apparent that this right would not be allowed to be exercised under the current regime (Aalen, 2006; Asnake, 2013). Thus, the politics of ethnicity and formalized right to secession neither led to ethnic political autonomy nor ended secessionist conflicts in Ethiopia. The continuation of the conflicts shows that the issue of ethnic identity and political ideology still remain underlying causes of conflicts in Ethiopia in contrast to the main assumption of the 'New Wars' thesis. The autonomy conflicts are very complex in terms of issues and the actors involved. Structural factors and engagement of ethnic elites in the political economies of conflicts are the underlying causes of conflicts. Consistent with the 'New Wars' hypothesis, ethnic elites' exclusive focus on their identity based group interests and their greed are making negotiations and compromises very difficult in Ethiopia. As the theory explains, ethnic elites' are engaged in the political economies of conflicts or ethnic elites' entrepreneurship which are highly decentralized under ethnic decentralization.

Pan-Ethiopian Identity Politics and Conflicts

In the pre-1990s, there was relatively strong common identity, an idea of overarching citizenship that transcends ethnic identity. This identity is rooted in the Ethiopia's survival as the only country on the African continent that was not colonized by foreign powers. As it has been noted earlier on, a fundamental problem with the historically entrenched Ethiopian identity emerged from the Amhara dominated elite's point of view. The identities of the peripheral peoples of the south, west and east of the country were not included in the national identity.

In the post 1990s, Ethiopian politics swung between the forces of 'state integration' or pan-Ethiopianism on one hand and 'ethnicization' or ethnic politics on the other. The ethnic federal system brought apparent political paradigm shift from overarching common identity to distinct ethnic identity. Unlike other African states, ethnic identity became the normative identity in Ethiopia (Abbink, 1997). Woldesellasie for example, states that since 1991, the political context in Ethiopia has changed from the age-old tradition of imagining and symbolizing 'Greater Ethiopia' to the practice of a political structure articulated under the ideology of 'Formal Ethnicizm' (cited in Asebe, 2007). Under ethnic federal system, as stated by informants, acquiring a separate ethnic identity and an ethnically defined administrative structure become the key to geting access to resources from the federal government. Undermining the idea of citizenship.

Moreover, it has been repeatedly stated that the basis of ethnic federalism is ethnicity. Nonetheless, the geographic boundaries of the Regional States are not inhabited by homogenous ethnic groups. Consequently, every regional state has non-indigenous minorities, which have survived the influence of the majority for many years. Even the two regional states -Afar and Somali- that seem to have homogenous groups encompass non-indigenous minorities. The respondents stressed that ethnic federal system doesn't provide adequate legal protection to the internally displaced minority groups and individuals in every state. Minorities living in states other than their state of origin have no right to political representation. The rights to live and work in any parts of the country are seriously curtailed. The ethno-political boundaries have served as instruments of inclusion and exclusion with serious implications on access to local resources and political representation.

The ethnic federal restructuring has created ethnic political boundaries between the dominant ethnic groups after whom the administrative units are often named and non-indigenous minority groups. In view of this, Mbembe, for example, notes that:

> *...the process of matching ethnic and politico-administrative boundaries that ethnic autonomy may entail not only contributes to the transformation of ethnic identity from the realm of the socio-cultural to the political, but also contributes to the crystallization of wider ethnic solidarity* (Mbembe, 2000: 267).

The post 1990s attempt to establish a direct equation between 'territory' and 'ethnicity' has created 'new' minorities who are now unattended in the new federal constitutional dispensation. One can identify at least two categories of new minorities in Ethiopia: a) scattered groups or internally displaced groups due to search for jobs, villagization, (re)settlement programs and others; b) stranded groups (i.e., groups that are caught in between two or more regions when the new mapping of the constituent units of the federation was conducted). We may also add the new category of religious minorities, or of the minorities of mixed ethnic origin. These new minorities seek a diverse array of rights such as recognition, identity, exercise and enjoyment of linguistic rights, right to representation, participation in decision-making, self-rule, reassignment in a way they consider to be their 'home region'. However, they remain invisible in the political process within ethnic regions.

Theoretically, the politics of territoriality - control of territory - is inherently problematic and conflict-prone (Anderson *et al.*, 2002). In Ethiopia, the politics of ethnicity has replaced overarching and inclusive Pan Ethiopian identity by distinct ethnic identity. It has rather constrained the political space for an overall citizenship. The patterns of relationship between regional majority and settler minorities and individuals experience has acutely changed. As result, the majority vs. minority tensions often run into open confrontations and violence in every regional state. This is evident in the Gurage vs Kabena conflict over the ownership and control of the town Wolkite, the capital of Gurage Zone. And the Gambella, Harari, Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz Regional States where there are large scale internally displaced minorities.

According to Lovise Aalen (2006:244), 'without the idea of common citizenship, self-determination for ethnic groups turns into claims of secession and that could lead to the disintegration of federal states'. In order to prevent parochialism and fragmentation, space must be given to the development of an overarching and inclusive national citizenship. The political space must be afforded to people so that they have loyalty to both an overall citizenship and individual rights for all citizens independent of ethnic identity. This could help mitigate identity based conflicts institutionalizated in the politics of ethnicity.

Conclusion

The 'New Wars' thesis contributes to the analysis of contemporary conflicts in Ethiopia on some scale. Rightfully, the 'New Wars' thesis depicts, among others, identity politics, complex ethnic conflicts, increasing competition over resources, political economy and/or elites' entrepreneurship often organized according to ethnic identity as the defining features of contemporary conflict. These tenets of the theory help us to see the contemporary conflicts in Ethiopia in a new perspective. As discussed in the study, these tenets correspond with the patterns of the 'new' post federal Ethiopian conflicts with altered causes, goals and nature of conflicts. The theory has also its own limitation to fully explain the conflicts set in the Ethiopian context. One of the drawbacks of this theory is its assumption that contemporary conflicts are somehow distinct from the past.

As reviewed in the study, it is problematic to assert a complete departure of today's formalization of ethnic identity politics under ethnic federal system from 'a nation building projects' aimed at building

one nation out of many via assimilation and marginalization during old regimes. Similarly, the root of contemporary formalized identity politics goes back to the politico ideological agenda of *National or ethnic Questions* by Ethiopian Student Movements (ESM) in the 1960s. The ethno-nationalist forces that finally succeeded in controlling the state power in 1991 after overthrowing the military regime were descendants of the ESM. The main argument here is that fully explaining conflicts set in the Ethiopian context require historical perspective in contrast to the assumptions of the 'New War' thesis. Historical trajectories that shaped modern Ethiopia have had an impact on the contemporary formalized identity politics.

The 'New War' theory disregards other aspects of conflicts in Ethiopian. Despite the limitations it is justifiable to call contemporary conflicts 'new' since the formalized identity politics remains the underlying cause of post-federal conflicts. While ethnic based federal system has solved some 'old' identity based conflicts, it has induced the emergence of other identity based contemporary conflicts in Ethiopia.

Acknowledgements: Dr. Temesgen is thankful to his ongoing PhD study informants who shared with him their rich experiences. He is also thankful for one anonymous reviewer whose constructive feedback helped to enrich the manuscript.

References

Young, J. (1997). *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Aalen, L. (2008)." *Institutionalizing the politics of Ethnicity: Actors, Power and Mobilization in Southern Ethiopia under Ethnic Federalism*." PhD dissertation, University of Oslo.

Aalen, L. (2006). Ethnic Federalism and Self-Determination for Nationalities in a Semi-Authoritarian State: The Case of Ethiopia. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights 13*: 243–261.

Abbink, J. (1997). Ethnicity and Constitutionalism in Contemporary Ethiopia. *Journal of African Law*, *vol.41* (no.2), pp.159-174.

Abbink, J. (2006). Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia: Some Problems and Prospects of Ethno-Regional Federalism. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies,* 24(3):389 – 413.

Anderson, J., Liam O'Dowd, & Thomas M. W. (2002). Why Study Borders Now? *Journal of Regional and Federal Studies,* 12(4): 1–12.

Asnake, K. (2010). Federal Restructuring in Ethiopia: Renegotiating Identity and Borders along the Oromo–Somali Ethnic Frontiers. *Development and Change,* 41(4): 615-635. Blackwell Publishing.

Asnake, K. (2013). *Ethiopian Federalism and Conflicts in Ethiopia: Comparative case study*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Assefa, F. (2007). *Federalism and Accommodation of Diversity in Ethiopia: A comparative Study.* The Netherlands: University of Utrecht.

Assefa, F. (2012). Ethiopia's Experiment in Accommodating Diversity: 20 Year's Balance Sheet. *Journal of Regional and Federal Studies,* 22(4): 435-473.

Asebe, R. (2007). *Ethnicity and Inter-Ethnic Relations: The 'Ethiopian Experiment' and the Case of the Guji and Gedeo.* University of Tromso, MA Thesis.

Bahiru, Z. (2002). *History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1974* (2nd edition). Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Bassi, M. (1996). Power's Ambiguity or the Political Significance of Gada. In P.T.W. Baxter, J. Hultin and A. Triulzi (eds.), *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries.* Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

Berhanu, G. (2007). *Restructuring State and Society: Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia*. Denmark: Aalborg University SPIRIT PhD Series.

Berdal, M. (2003). How new are New Wars? *Global Governance,* 9: 477-502.

Clapham, C. (1994). Ethnicity and the National Question in Ethiopia. In P. Woodward and M. Forsyth (eds.), *Conflict and Peace in the Horn of Africa: Federalism and its Alternatives*. Aldershot: Dartmouth.

Clapham, C. (2002). The Political Framework: Controlling Space in Ethiopia. In W. James, D. L. Donham *et al* (eds), *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After,* pp. 9–30. Oxford: James Currey.

Clapham, C. (2009). Post-War Ethiopia: The Trajectories of Crisis. *Review of African Political Economy,* 36 (120): 181–92.

FDRE. (1995). *The Proclamation of the Constitution of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE).* Addis Ababa: Berhanina Selam Printing Press.

Kaldor, M. (2006). New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Markakis, J. (1987). National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Markakis, J. (1994). Ethnic Conflict and the State in the Horn of Africa. In F. Katsuyoshi and J. Markakis(eds.). Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Medhane, T &Young, J. (2003). TPLF: Reform or Decline? *Review of African Political Economy, 30(97):389–403.*

Mengisteab, K. (1997). New Approaches to State Building in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia's Ethnic-Based Federalism. *African Studies Review, 40(3)*:111-132.

Merera, G. (2003). Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalism and the Quest for Democracy, 1960–2000. Addis Ababa: Chamber Printing House.

Mbembe, A. (2000). At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa. *Public Culture* 12(1): 259–284.

Newman, E. (2004). The 'New Wars' Debate: A Historical Perspective is needed. *Security Dialogue 35(2)*: 173–189.

Poluha, E. (1998). Ethnicity and Democracy–A Viable Alliance? In S.M. A. Mohammed and J. Markakis (eds.), *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

Teshale, T. (1995). *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896–1974*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.

Temesgen, T. (2011). *Ethnic Quest for Common Ethnic Identity and Self-governance in SSNPRS within the Context of Ethiopian Ethnic Federalism. Case of Ale People. An Anthology of Peace and Security Research* 2:152-220. Addis Ababa: AAU-IPSS & Friedrich Ebert Stiftung,

Tsegaye, R. (2010). Learning to Live with Conflicts: Federalism as a Tool of Conflict Management in Ethiopia: an overview. *Mizan Law Review 4(1):* 51-101

Vaughan, S. (2003). *Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia*. PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh.

Walelegn, M. (1969). *On the Question of the Nationalities in Ethiopia*. HSIU: Addis Ababa.

Endnotes

1 The Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) was first organized by the students of the then Haile Sillasie I University (now Addis Ababa University) in early 1960s and later spread to the colleges and secondary schools in the country as a protest against the exploitative feudal system.

2 Since the early 1960s, the legitimacy of the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie I began to be questioned among the military and the educated elite. Earlier to this, a peasant protest in Tigray (the First *Woyane* movement) and Gojjam and the protest by the Bale Oromo/Somali Nationalists reared their head as a form of bottom up resistance but were suppressed. It is important to note *Haile Selassie* I enjoyed the most peaceful season of Ethiopia's history except for the short-lived Italian occupation from 1936-1941. This peace begun to be 'disrupted' by the sign of dissonance expressed first among the army, then among the students, and later among the general public (see Tsegay, 2010).

3 *National Questions* refers to the quests by representatives of ethno-national groups and political forces and/ or movements to abolish ethnic domination and oppression, as well as their struggle to promote political right, freedom, equality and respect of identity of the respective ethnic group. It was articulated by ESM and eventually emerged as a political agenda during the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution and even since 1960.

4 There are three major *theses* on Ethiopia's historiography, namely *the colonial thesis, the national oppression thesis, the nation-building or the national (re) unification thesis* the unleashing of which partly contributed to the affairs of competing nationalisms in contemporary Ethiopia.

5 TPLF was organized in 1975 by the Tigrean youth who was discontented with the shift of political power to the Amhara and the subsequent 'suppressions' of the group under the Amhara hegemony. As the name implies, the principal aim of TPLF was liberation of Tigray. Toward the end of overthrowing the Military regime, the TPLF transformed itself from un-liberation to multi-ethnic liberation by created EPRDF in 1989.

6 Stranded ethnic groups include: Yem in SNNPRS and Oromia; the Mezenger in SNNPRS and Gambella; the Argoba in Afar and Amhara; the Guji Oromo in SNNPRS and Oromia; the Agaw in Benishangul Gumuz and Amhara; the Oromos in Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia; the Opo in Gambella and Benishangul Gumuz; the Oromos in Harari State and Oromia; the Afar, the Amhara, and the Oromo in Tigray.

GUFO OBA. *HERDER WARFARE IN EAST AFRICA: A SOCIAL AND SPATIAL HISTORY.* WINWICK: THE WHITE HORSE PRESS. 2017. PAPER. 357 PP

Fatuma B. Guyo

University of Tennessee-Knoxville

According to Professor Gufo Oba, studies on wars often neglect conducting research on herding societies. His book, *Herder Warfare in East Africa: A Social and Spatial History*, addresses that "gap in the literature on histories of herder warfare among diverse pastoral societies both during the pre-colonial and colonial periods in East Africa" (10). In fact, this work offers one of the first bold attempts at understanding history of warfare among herders. Broad in spatial and chronological scope, it brings together oral history, archival and secondary sources to examine the reasons herders engage in warfare. The work is a welcome addition to fill a historical lacuna in histories of herder warfare.

Oba structures his exploration of herder warfare experiences in three broad parts which then are further sub-divided into various chapters. Part I examines socio-cultural institutions, military organizational techniques and environmental factors to explain expansion and warfare among pastoral societies of East Africa. Building on these discussions, the author elucidates what he calls the "frontiers of conflict," expanding the book's spatial dimension analysis, for example, to include the Horn Africa, the Central Rift Valley, Somalia, and the coastal hinterland of East Africa.

Journal of Oromo Studies_#28.indb 165 7/13/2023 5:11:15 PM

By doing so, he places pastoralists' experience of warfare into a regional comparative perspective in order to understand the nomadic meaning of war and their ways of warfare.

Setting out to answer the primary question of "factors of warfare," Oba categorizes socio-cultural institutional aspects, military organization, and techniques as well as environmental triggers. While these factors are critical, they alone cannot account for all that warfare entails. Equally important, and to reveal the historical process of warfare, its connections to the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial historical periods remain essential to branch out beyond discussions of causalities of herder warfare. The author argues that a mixture of factors, which include ritual warfare missions imposed by one ethnic group's culture over another combined with competition over resources and sour political relations with neighbors contributed to herder warfare. Additionally, migration, drought and famine serve as factors of warfare. Readers, however, are left to question the substantive relationship between wars and famine and to ask questions of whether famine caused drought or if the war disrupted farming which ultimately caused drought and famine. Thus, an analysis of how war, famine and drought are inextricably linked would have been appreciated and strengthened the book's argument.

Parts II and III of the book mainly present a succinct discussion of the glorious history of the Southern Oromo in Jubaland and along the interior of Kenyan coast. In the early nineteenth century, the Oromos dominated the Kenya-Ethiopia borderland. They controlled grazing and wells before their downfall that was largely attributed to the expanding Darood Somali clan from the north. For example, Chapter 9 discusses how pressure from the expanding Somali expelled the Borana Oromo from their Wajir wells in Kenya-Ethiopia borderlands while the British colonial administration watched silently. Similarly, the Somali clan's raid and their Maa-speaking allies pushed many Oromo who occupied South of Tana River and Wama (the Oromo name for present-day Jubalanda) from their traditional grazing zone. In addition, the ensuing conflict, and the use of a biological weapon by the Darood Somali spread both the smallpox virus and the rinderpest disease killed many people and livestock, respectively. While the argument on the decreased Oromo population tied to the smallpox epidemic is valid, other factors not mentioned in this analysis also contributed to the decrease in the Oromo population. Readers are left to question if parallels exist between the Oromo-epidemic ordeals vis-á-vis stable

populations elsewhere in Africa that might make a more convincing comparative analysis.

In Chapter 3 of Part II, Oba examines a migration series of the Southern Oromo that brought them to the fringes of the East African coast. In the course of their migration, he demonstrates that the Southern Oromo reconfigured political and military power in the coastal hinterland until the turn of the nineteenth century. The Oromo transformed cultures of the populations they met, including assimilation of the northern Bantu and Proto-Somali groups. Oba's exposition on the Oromo presents the role that identity, epitomized by the gada generation set, played in shaping Oromo hegemonic political influence. Broadly speaking, the author implores his audience to pay attention to five main features to understand Oromo as a "regional pastoral empire:" (i) Southern Oromo institutional structure; (ii) a critique of the clientele system; (iii) history of Oromo influence on coastal city-sates; (iv) Oromo control of the interior trade through monopoly in ivory trade, control over the participation of coastal population in trade and taxation; and (v) control over foreign travel in their country (pp. 112-113). With these criteria, the author explains that one can reconstruct historical relations between the Southern Oromo and the East African coastal population debunking the myth that pastoral societies were isolated groups. He simultaneously reestablishes the connection of Orma and Warda Oromo (groups that have been for a long time studied in isolation) to the wider Oromo in Ethiopia.

A pivotal contribution of Oba's work lies in his clear and concise reconstruction of Warda Oromo history, a group whose story has never been told in such detail nor their historical context given such considerable attention. The author achieves this by integrating oral sources (interviews with living Warda) while remaining reliant on the work familiar to a range of scholars such as Jan Vansina. For the first time, Oba brings to life the histories of enslavement interwoven with the theme of warfare and enslavement of ethnic Oromo in Tana River. A revealing strength of the book is Oba's ability to put a human face on the Oromo experience of slavery by using life histories (p.211). The author contends that the processes of slavery entailed raid and capture, intertwining the theme of pastoral warfare with slavery and providing an understanding of how, by the late nineteenth century, pastoralists' forms of warfare shifted from traditional capture to slavery (p.194). Although in previous chapters, identity is not ascribed the feature of fluidity, Gufu's treatment offers explanations of how the enslaved Oromo strove to form a distinct social identity and,

thereby, became Warda Oromo by joining their Orma Oromo kin across the Tana River. Here the author is seeking to demonstrate the agency of the enslaved Oromo in reclaiming their identity.

Herder Warfare is an invaluable contribution to the histories of pastoral societies. It is an appropriate supplemental text for graduate and upper-level undergraduate courses in several disciplines—African history, East African history, social anthropology, postcolonial discourse, warfare, slavery and conflict studies. The list of references and index are invaluable to scholars. The work also is relevant to readers in the general public. Overall, the book is easy to read and merits reading by anyone interested in understanding the history of pastoral societies and particularly the topic of warfare from an insider perspective.

Despite these strengths, the book does not bring the various chapters or sections into explicit conversation with one another even though the author does provide a framing for the work in the introduction. For instance, an approach on the perspectives of what the author calls "warfare ecology," which he promises earlier on in the Preference (p.1) and in the Introduction (p.12) is not clear in subsequent chapters. Nonetheless, this is understood as an inherent limitation given the breadth and the chronological scope of this pioneering work.

THE NORTHERN OROMO AND THE ABYSSINIAN STATE: A REVIEW OF *THE OTHER ABYSSINIANS*

Guluma Gemeda

University of Michigan-Flint

The Other Abyssinians: The Northern Oromo and the Creation of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1913, by Brian J. Yates. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020. Pp. 236+ ix. Maps. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $109. ISBN: 978158046980 (hardcover).

Scholars have long recognized that identities are fluid. Individuals and groups may change their self-identification or perception; may claim new identity or assimilate into an existing social or ethnic group. But researchers do not assign identities to groups they study. Unfortunately, that is what Brian Yates, author of *The Other Abyssinians*, did. He assigned *Habasha* identity to the Oromo of Wallo, Yajjuu, and Northern Shawa because, he claims, the Habasha accepted them into their ranks, despite the ethnic and religious differences. He defines *Habasha* as "a syncritic cultural community that includes all of the cultural groups of the [Ethiopian] highlands and a combination of their cultural practices" (p. 17). The author attempts to show that *Habasha* as an inclusive cultural category not necessarily identified with a single ethnic group. The author also rejects ethnicity because it is not a useful concept to analyze and understand Ethiopian history.

The book has five chapters along with an introduction and conclusion. The introduction reviews the experiences of the northern Oromo in a context of the competing nationalisms in modern Ethiopia.

Journal of Oromo Studies_#28.indb 169 7/13/2023 5:11:16 PM

Chapter One outlines the cultural background of modern Ethiopian state, which the author prefers to call *Habasha*. Chapter Two deals with the integration of the Wallo Oromo into the *habasha* state. Chapters Three and Four discuss the role of two leading Oromo personalities—*Ras* Gobana Dacii and *Ras* (later *Negus*/King) Mikael Ali—in the making of Shawa and Wallo, respectively, and later in the creation of modern Ethiopian state under Menelik II (King of Shawa, 1865-1889, Emperor of Ethiopia, 1889-1913). Chapter Five discusses the transformation of Shawa from a provincial kingdom to a centralizing (imperial) power. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the position of northern Oromo in modern Ethiopian history.

Yates points out three important approaches to understand the Oromo in Ethiopian history. The first and the second approaches portray the Oromo as outsiders and the 'enemies' of the Ethiopian state. The author critiques Ethiopianists who focused on the Semitic speakers, especially the Amhara and Tigrayan people—who traditionally felt entitled to rule the Habasha state because of their role in state building and possession of 'superior' civilization such as Orthodox Church and a writing system—and endorsed the above two approaches. While focusing on the Amhara-Tigrayan identity, these perspectives denied the Oromo a proper space in Ethiopian history. On the other hand, Yates posits, a third approach representing the Oromo has developed recently. He claims that this perspective is a reaction to the Abyssinian narratives that excluded the Oromo, and argues, it attempts to show the Oromo as a culturally unified population. But Yates critiques this approach as well. While attempting "to put the Oromo back into the Ethiopianist discourse," he believes, it has essentialized and distorted the Amhara and the Oromo relationships (pp. 3-4). Yates also claims all three approaches utilize an ethnic perspective which hinders understanding Ethiopian history rather than facilitating it. To overcome these weaknesses, he claims, *The Other Abyssinians* will contribute to the development of a fourth approach. This 'new' approach, he hopes, will incorporate the Oromo into Ethiopian history without essentializing them.

Yates' criticism of the shortcomings of Ethiopian and Oromo historiographies is commendable. But he failed to clearly articulate the issues beyond a desire to develop an inclusive and balanced history of Ethiopia. At times, his argument is crude as well as confused. For example, he criticizes an earlier Ethiopian scholarship. He argues, the Semitists who dominated Ethiopian studies in the past were fascinated by ancient

Ethiopian civilization and its church institutions. They linked Ethiopia to Semitic, Judeo-Christian, and modern Western civilizations. While doing, they, however, failed to analyze the African Contexts Ethiopian civilization. It is true that early Ethiopian scholarship took pride in associating Christian Ethiopia with its coreligionists of the Eastern Mediterranean and modern West, and persistently distanced Ethiopia from its Cushitic, Indigenous cultures, such as the Oromo and others in the Horn of Africa. Second, Ethiopian scholarship also failed to question the Habasha sense of superiority and entitlement to rule the Ethiopian state. Over the years, however, serious Ethiopianist scholars have distanced themselves from the mythical claims of the Solomonic ruling elite and the dogmatic approaches of the Ethiopian Orthodox clergy. Instead, Ethiopianist scholars (although not activists) now accept the same position that Yates introduces as a new, fourth, approach.

To be fair, *Ethiopianists* now accept that the *Habasha* culture is syncretic and encompasses all peoples in Ethiopia, including the Oromo. But they use the same argument, as Yates does, to deny the existence of ethnicities in Ethiopia or, even worse, to denigrate non-Habasha cultures. To justify a unified image of Ethiopia with unbroken, centuries old, history, they subscribe to a single narrative—the 'great tradition.' Ethiopianists still resist the efficacy ethnic framework for scholarly investigation and deny the existence of multiple national identities. On the other hand, they try to 'write-in' the Oromo into Ethiopian history to avoid acknowledging their distinct identity and without explaining how the Oromo other non-Habasha groups incorporation into the Ethiopian empire were violently. Instead, they focus on individual actors in modern Ethiopian history and gloss over the agonies of millions of victimized Oromo annexed into the empire in the late nineteenth century. Through this novel approach, they are trying to replace the former outsiders, 'pagan' or 'savage' Oromo by integrated—biologically, through marriage, and politically, through assimilation— 'patriotic' Oromo Ethiopians. Often cited examples are 'nation-builders' such as *Ras* Gobana Dacii, *Negus* Mikael Ali, *Fitwrari* Habte Giyorgis, and the once maligned, Yajjuu Oromo leaders. Incidentally, this new reinterpretation of history nicely meets the needs of the current Oromo elite holding power at the center, such as Abiy Ahmed, who otherwise find themselves in historical *cul de suc*.

Although Yates has participated in Oromo studies conferences and contributed articles to the *Journal of Oromo Studies*, surprisingly, his book

has not benefited much from the emerging scholarship of the Oromo people. In reviewing the works of Oromo scholars, he either misread or misunderstood the latest publications. Thus, he makes contradictory assessments of these works. For example, he accuses Oromo scholars of ignoring the Oromo empire-builders in Ethiopian history; they do not "discuss relations between the Oromo and the Ethiopian state after 1860" and do not "explore in any significant manner the Northern Oromo of Wallo." (p.8). Yates also claims Oromo scholars are fixated on Menelik's conquest of the southern territories and its consequences. He argues, "Oromo history remains unchanging until their late nineteenth century conquest by Menelik's 'Amhara' Shawans, the period when most studies about them [the Oromo] begin." (p. 8). But any scholar who has carefully examined Oromo Studies easily understands the coverage of the northern Oromo and the post-conquest period.[1] His accusation of Oromo scholars neglects the works of Mekuria Bulcha (2011 [2016]), Mohammed Hassen (2015), Negasso Gidada (2002), Gemetchu Megarssa and Aneesa Kassam (2019) among others, which extensively explore Oromo history of pre-Menelik's conquest.[2] For example, Mekuria Bulcha and Mohammed Hassen have examined the medieval history of the Oromo and their relations with the Christian kingdom. But Yates did not appropriately utilize these relevant publications by Oromo scholars.[3]

Thus, despite tangential criticisms of Ethiopianist historiography, Yates holds onto the same dominant 'great tradition' of Ethiopian historiography that promotes 'a single story' line and subsumes diverse identities under the rubric of *Habasha* culture, '*Ethiopiawinet*' (Ethiopianess) or a Pan-Ethiopian identity. Like other Ethiopianists, Yates denies the existence of multivocal and complex historical narratives and uses *Habasha,* term that refers to and privileges a particular group. Habasha serves to avoid addressing ethnicity or multiple national identities. Subsuming all under the Habasha category helps to ignore the historical roots of current political crises in Ethiopia.

In this work, Yates also prefers to use community rather than ethnicity because community is 'elastic' and can expand to include any group, while ethnicity is restrictive and exclusivist (p. 26). He thinks the absence of chattel slavery and racist attitude in Ethiopia, as opposed to the American experience, makes the *Habasha* culture an inclusive system. But under the veneer of inclusivity, the Habasha culture entertained racist attitudes towards non-Habasha communities. The violent raids and exploitation of the lowland communities until the early twentieth

century is very well known in Ethiopian history. The historical sources from *Zamana Masafint* and the nineteenth century reveal a widespread enslavement of people of the western lowlands by the Habasha highland elite for labor. The incorporation of the Wallo Oromo into the Christian Habasha culture also involved violent suppression and coercion. Yates himself admits the Oromo needed to convert to Orthodox Christianity, acquire knowledge of the Amharic language to integrate into the Habasha political system. On the other hand, he does not explain why others, outside the northern highlands, receive or reject the *Habasha* culture, or whether Habasha itself is a form ethnic identity. Contrary to Yates' assumptions, the Ethiopian empire imposed the *Habasha* culture, including the Amharic language and Orthodox Christianity, on the Oromo in the northern and southern regions of Ethiopia. In minimizing this fact, the author clearly aligns his work with the Ethiopianist scholarship that has denies the ethnic factor in Ethiopian history.

Of course, because of their geographical proximity to the *Habasha* center of power for a long time and due to their involvement in the politics of the Christian kingdom during *zamana mesafint,* northern Oromo had integrated into the Habasha culture. For this reason, an earlier generation of Ethiopinist scholars have argued that ethnicity is not relevant in Ethiopian history. They have also critiqued others, such as Mordechai Abir, who recognized an ethnic factor in the politics of *zamana mesafint* and the rise of the Tewodros in the mid-nineteenth century. Abir, for example, wrote, ". . . [the] most important factor that influenced "the [political] developments in northern Ethiopia [in the nineteenth century], was the reaction of the Amhara-Tigrayan nobility, [Christian] population and clergy to the growth of the Galla [Oromo] power and to the Islamic tendencies of the Galla rulers."[4] Other scholars, however, disagreed with Abir and down played the role of the ethnic factor in the politics of the *zamana mesafint* and Ethiopian history in general. Regarding the *zamana mesafint*, Donald Crummey argued, "ethnicity played little apparent role in the motives or alignments of the nobility either during the decisive decades of the 1760s and 1770s or subsequently."[5] Taddesse Tamrat, who devoted two articles explaining the question of ethnicity, emphasized integration rather than persistent ethnic differences.[6]

Partly reacting to the rise of ethnicity to the central stage of Ethiopian politics, present generation of Ethiopianists have become even more hostile towards the scholarship of ethnicity. For example, writing about the Yajjuu and Wallo Oromo dynasties, Shiferaw Bekele uses religion

(Islam)— 'Warra Sheikh' and 'Mammedoch'—to refer to the Yajjuu and the Warra Himanu Wallo Oromo, respectively.[7] Eloi Fiquet also dismisses the ethnic identity of the Yajuu and Warra Himano dynasties in favor of religion (Islam). He claims that identifying the Wallo dynasty as Oromo is "simplistic" because it was "at the core [the] interactions between Oromo and Amhara societies . . . that resulted in mixed and transitional" status.[8] Even under the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime, when ethnicity is hotly debated, Leonardo Arriola argues that economic and sociodemographic factors played more role than ethnicity in the 2005 elections.[9] Thus, following such Ethiopianist arguments, Yates writes, "In Ethiopia, . . . religion, territory, and culture supersede ethnic categories in lived experiences and interactions" (p. 3). In an article published in *History in Africa* (2017), he even goes further to claim that ethnicity is a 'hinderance' to understanding Ethiopian history.[10]

However, while Ethiopianists deny the existence of ethnicity, historical research and current politics further highlight the deeper roots of ethnic fault lines in Ethiopian history and culture. Ethnicity, as the national question, remains a major rallying point for ethnonationalist movements in Ethiopia. Ironically, accusing Oromo scholars of using ethnicity in their analyses, Yates brings in *Habasha* as a substitute, which is equally an essentialist concept. *Habasha presented* as an alternative term to 'unify' people of diverse backgrounds, and to 'clarify' complex historical developments. However, the question is, what makes *Habasha* non-ethnic or neutral, different from or better than other ethnic designations? While the author attempts to distance himself from the earlier crude form of Ethiopianist narrative, *The Other Habasha* repeats aspects of the same narrative. For those who believe that Ethiopia is a unitary state with historically privileged position for the Amhara elite, Orthodox Christianity, the Amharic language as the core elements of the *Habasha* culture, ethnicity poses a danger because it legitimizes the existence of multiple identities and histories. Obviously, it is scary phenomenon for unitarist politicians.

Scholars who ignore ethnicity, however, focus on religion as a crucial identity factor in Ethiopia. The relationship between Muslim and Christian populations in the country is incredibly old. But, for a long time, Muslims occupied a subordinate position in the Christian *Habasha* society. Sometimes, the Habasha elite conflated the religion and ethnicity of the non-*Habasha* groups. During *Zamana Masafint*, for example,

the Amhara Christian elite used religion for political propaganda and to undermine the leadership of the Yajju leaders among the Christian peasants. Despite the Christian Habasha's characterization of the Oromo leaders of Wallo as fanatic Muslims, they were flexible and pluralistic in their religious policy. Unlike the Habasha, the Oromo accepted those who followed different religions. Regarding Liban Amade (d. 1815), for example, Ficquet remarked that Liban's reputation of fanaticism was born out of a "stereotype reflecting the fear of Christian rulers against the development of a Muslim regional power."[11] Ficquet suggests, even *Lij* Iyasu may have been inspired by the leniency of his great-grand-fathers when he attempted to relax the relationship between the Christians and the Muslims all over Ethiopia during his brief rule in the early twentieth century.[12] Thus, the differences that are attributed to religion are primarily based on ethnic affiliations, not religion.

Despite their commitment to uphold the institution of Gondarine kingship, the Yajjuu Oromo leaders did not fare better than their Wallo siblings. When they actively participated in the politics of the kingdom of Gondar and eventually rose to prominence, the Yajjuu elite were careful to share power with the Christian kings of Gondar and other regional lords. But their outsider (ethnic) status undermined their leadership among the Christian Amhara population. Even when they officially converted to Orthodox Christianity, and built and churches, and generously endowed them, the Amhara elite and peasants suspected the Yejju Oromo leaders for secretly remaining Muslims. Finally, after seventy years of thankless service to the Christian kingdom, they bowed out to take a subordinate status within the Ethiopian political system. This shows *Habasha* culture is not inclusivist but assimilationist.

During the closing years of *zamana masafint*, the two Oromo dynasties—Yajjuu and Warra Himanu—were coming together through marriage and ethnicity. The marriage of Alula, son of *Ras* Gugsa of Yajjuu, and Manan, daughter of *Imam* Liban Amade of Wallo united the two families. The son Alula and Manan, Ali II became the last guardian of the Gondarine throne (1831-1853) until Tewodros II overthrew him in 1853. At that time, the convergence of the two powerful Oromo families worried Amhara lords because they could have established a formidable Oromo ruling dynasty in the middle of an Amhara society. As Fiquet noted, the Amhara regional overlords considered the Yajjuu-Warra Himanu union, strangers and recent converts to Christianity or hidden Muslims, would "pervert the ancestral legacy of the Christian [*Habasha*]

kingdom."[13] It was such fear that facilitated the rise of Tewodros II who promised to wipe out the Oromo who threatened the Christian kingdom. Throughout his reign (1855-1868), Tewodros relentlessly fought the Wallo Oromo to realize this dream. The commentaries in the chronicles of *zamana masafint* and the tone of Tewodros' letters to European monarchs, especially the Queen of England, reveal the exclusivist sentiment of the *Habasha* culture.[14]

On the other hand, the Yajjuu and the Warra Himanu dynasties also made blunders that undermined their positions. For example, they failed to understand the threat from the united Amhara lords to their political survival when making shorted-lived tactical alliances with various enemies. Internally, both the Yajjuu and the Wallo Oromo clashed with each other. During the reign of Liban Amade (1803-1815) and his successor, Amade Liban (1815-1838), different Wallo chiefs in the central and southern region challenged the authority of the Warra Himanu dynasty. On their part, the Yajjuu elite had internal challenges. *Ras* Gugsa (d. 1825), the most accomplished leader of the Yajjuu dynasty, struggled to subdue his own cousin, Gojji Aligaz, while he presided over other regions. Gugsa also spent time trying to subdue the rulers of Gojam, especially *Dajazmach* Zewde (d. 1819), himself an Oromo descent.[15] Gugsa spent time and energy on Gojam probably because he wanted to control the lucrative trade passing through from the Gibe region to Gondar. *Ras* Ali II, who represented the Yajjuu and the Warra Himano families, was born in Gojam when his father, Alula, briefly ruled western Gojam. But the region eluded the Yajjuu leaders' sustained control.

When Ras Ali II and his mother Menen occupied the highest position in Gondar, the Yajjuu-Warra Himano union could have reconfigured the politics of the Christian kingdom. But Ali did not receive strong backing from both Wallo and Yajuu families when he confronted Amhara and their allies from Gojam. Finally, despite all the efforts that the Yajjuu leaders did to ingratiate themselves to the Christian kingdom by converting to Christianity and marrying their children to the Christian families, integration to the Habash culture was more apparent than real. Because of their Oromo descent, the Christian Habasha mocked the Yajju leaders and regarded by the Amhara elite as permanent outsiders and usurpers of *Habasha* power. Thus, due to their internal weaknesses and the attitude *Habasha* elite the northern Oromo not fully integrated when the Yejjuu dynasty came down in 1853. The rallying call of both Tewodros and Yohannes IV to the Christian *Habasha* was expelling the Oromo the

center of their kingdom. In the end, the Abyssinian state conquered and imposed *Habasha* culture on its subjects both in the north and south of the Ethiopian empire the late nineteenth century. This coercive history of conquest is still fueling the political discourse and making ethnicity such a potent force in contemporary Ethiopian politics that even scholars do not want to touch.

Yates argues that cross cultural marriages had facilitated the integration of the northern Oromo and Amhara populations into a *Habasha* society. However, here, the author mixes up the institution of marriage, which is the result of individual, mostly elite, decision, with collective group identity. Everywhere, individuals marry outside their ethnic groups, but in most cases, individual decisions may not significantly impact the survival of a group ethnic or national identity. For example, for centuries, European ruling families had intermarried with each other without affecting their national identities. That is why the English, the French, the Germans, and the Russians remain distinct, despite the intermarriages between their ruling families. The intermarriage of the English and Scottish elite families did not end the distinct identity of the Scottish people. Similarly, the Amhara intermarriage with the northern Oromo elite did not result in complete integration of the two groups and the disappearance of one or the other ethnic identity.

The marriage of the Wallo Oromo elite that led to a half-Oromo king on the Gondarine throne in the eighteenth century ended in disaster. The Oromo who moved to the Gondar palace received hostile reception after the assassination of Emperor Iyoas (d. 1769). Then, the ruling dynasty of Wallo Oromo turned to bundling up their Oromo identity with Islam to insulate themselves from the Christian Amhara domination. Their strategy was to unify all Wallo group even when few from their ranks joined the Gondarine kingdom. As their neighbors embroiled in the conflicts of the *zamana masafint,* the Warra Himanu dynasty of Wallo kept away from the conflict of the *Habasaha* and Christianized Oromo. Their participation in the politics of the *zamana masafint* increased only when they started allying with the Yajjuu dynasty in the early nineteenth century. For this reason, despite internal problems, the Wallo Oromo evaded forced integration into the *Habasha* (Abyssinian) state until the 1870s.

Marriage unions between members of different religions and across cultural boundaries often involved elite political calculations. But they did not dissolve ethnic identities. Marriage base alliances frequently dissolved as political strategies shifted from one family to another.

Sometimes, in-laws fought on the opposite side of conflicts—as demonstrated by Tewodros who fought against *Ras* Ali II and his mother, Maman, in 1853. While he was still married to the daughter of *Ras* Ali, Tewodros still condemned the Oromo. Six decades later, Shawan and Wallo nobility clashed at Sagale in 1916, despite a high-profile marriage of Menelik's daughter to *Negus* Mikael of Wallo, while Menen, the granddaughter of the Mikael was married to *Ras* Tafari. Marriage resulted in the integration of individuals into the *Habasha* culture but did not destroy ethnic identity of the groups from which they emerged. Thus, the religious conversions and elite marriage alliances, ethnic identities remained active.

Thus, intermarriage and religious conversion did not end ethnic tensions and conflicts either. Both ethnic and religious divisions compounded the challenges to the Oromo elite during *zamana masafint* and ended their political ambitions to an end. For example, as indicated above, it was because of ethnicity, the Amhara elite did not fully accept the Yajju leaders as the guardians of the Gondarine court because they considered the position as the prerogative of the Christian Amhara lords. Despite the commitment of Yaju *rases* to the preservation the 'Solomonic' Gondarine monarchy and their generosity in building and endowing but considered unfit to rule by the Amhara elite and Christian clergy. In 1803, for example, the *echege* declared: 'Do not serve or mingle with Galla [ie. The Yaju lords] for we have no part or lot (with them) . . . [if you do] we curse you by the power of Peter and Paul, by the power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."[16] When he came to power, the central appeal of Tewodros to the Amhara elite and Christian peasants was the desire to 'drive away' the 'illegitimate' Oromo rulers. During his reign, the king faced strong resistance from the Wallo Oromo whom he regarded as a double scourge to the Christian nation due to their Muslim religion and Oromo identity.[17] In his letter to the Queen Victoria, Tewodros also declared his determination to remove them from the land.[18] Yates rightly says, the violence of Tewodros II "cost Wallo a generation of leaders, leaving its population [weakened and] dependent upon other provincial leaders for stability until the ascent of Ras Mikael." (p. 38)

To the extent it happened, integration did not take place because of marriage or the inclusive nature of the *Habasha* culture but due to conquest and coercive assimilation. After years of resistance, for example, the Wallo Oromo integrated in the Abyssinian state, aft the chaos that followed Tewodros' invasion in the 1850s and 1860s. By the second half of

the nineteenth century, the existence of an unintegrated Muslim Oromo community of Wallo in the middle of Christian provinces of Ethiopia hindered the unification projects of Christian kings such as Tewodros, Yohannes, and Menelik (p.45). After the fall of Tewodros, Wallo faced the Shawan king, Menelik, from the south, and the Tigrayan, Yohannes IV, from the north in the early 1870s. Both demanded tribute and conversion of its leaders to Christianity.

In 1876, internally divided and exhausted by the previous years of resistance, the leaders of Wallo surrendered to the Christian kings. But these kings also wanted to integrate the population of Wallo into a unified Christian state, led by Christian monarchs and supported by the Orthodox Church. After the religious conference of Boru Meda (1878), Yohannes and Menelik jointly set out to implement their policy of religious uniformity of the empire by forcing the Muslim leaders of Wallo to immediately convert to Christianity. Muhammed Ali and his rival, Amade Liban, both collaborated with Yohannes and Menelik, gave up their religion to save their political positions. They took new names as Mikael and Haile Mariam, respectively. Although the Warra Himanu family continued to play a prominent role in Ethiopian politics, the forced conversion of Mohammed Ali and Amade Liban, effectively ended the political independence of Wallo in 1878. As Hussein Ahmed pointed out, the "injustice, and the arbitrariness with which it [the religious policy in Wallo] was enforced, triggered off stiff resistance from the militant *ulama* that inspired political opposition to the new administrative hierarchy. . ."[19] Yates agrees, the kings' conception of Ethiopia was "narrow and distorted" (p. 51) because they did not hesitate to destroy Wallo to unify Ethiopia. Yet, this was how they received inclusivity in *Habasha* culture.

Finally, Yates refers to the role land and military services in imperial Ethiopia as unifying factors of *Habasha* culture. He argues military service provided an opportunity for "peasants or social outsiders" to join the rank of *Habasha* political elite, while the land offered for military service "tied together nobility and peasant" (pp. 26-27). It is true that the ruling elite used land and military institutions to mobilize loyal followers from all sections of the Ethiopian empire. But. Although the land system also varied from region to region, it served the interests of the Amharic speaking, Orthodox Christian Habasha at the expense of non-Habasha population. While the Abyssinian military and landholding systems in the north may have served to integrate the elite families, elsewhere in the south, he instruments exploitation served sources of cleavage between

the tribute/tax paying *gabar* and the imperial army and Habasha elite over conquered peasants. Obviously, the *Habasha* military institution and land grant system admitted very few non-habasha elite—the *balabat*—from from the conquered territories. Thus, the system alienated the oppressing the masses while assimilating few elite groups.

Oromo elite and integration to Habasha Culture: the case of *Ras* Gobana and *Negus* Mikael

To show the success of the integrative ability of *Habasha* culture and the Ethiopian state system, Yates used two well-known leaders of Oromo heritage—*Ras* Gobana of the Tuulama Oromo, and *Negus* Mikael of Wallo. According to Dachassa Abebe, *Ras* Gobana was born to an Oromo family at Abdalla near the town of Mandida around 1817/1818[20] His father was a well-known Oromo warrior who raised Gobana and his other two siblings to be successful military leaders. At an early age, Gobana received good training in horsemanship from his father.[21] Growing up on the cultural and political frontiers of the Tuulama Oromo and the Shwan Amhara kingdom, Gobana participated in conflicts where he gained practical military experiences and excelled in warfare. By the 1860s, on the eve of Menelik's escape from prison at Maqdala, Gobana was a recognized leader of the Tuulama Oromo resistance against Tewodros. When Menelik return to Shawa in 1865, he quickly allied with Menelik and remained loyal to the Shawan king until his death in 1889.

Although the alliance between the two leaders initially mutual, Menelik eventually exploited Gobana's loyalty and excellent military skills for his own empire building project. Gobana helped Menelik to conquer the Western Oromo (Macaa) territories in the 1870s and 1880s. Although Gobana was not the first Oromo general to join an Abyssinian ruler against his own people, it is not clear why Gobana remained totally devoted to the service of Menelik.[22] Despite his steadfast loyalty and monumental contributions to Menelik's conquests of the Oromo and the building the modern Ethiopian empire, Gobana's power declined shortly before his sudden death in 1889.[23] Beginning in 1885, Gobana was stripped off parts of the territories he conquered. Upon the death of the general, Gobana's family lost the estates that he held when he was alive. They dismantled his legacy quickly. Today, Oromo and the Habasha remember Gobana's legacies differently.

The rise of *Negus* Mikael (c. 1849-1918) is better known than that of *Ras* Gobana. Mohammed (Mikael's Muslim name before his conversion

to Christianity) was the son of Ali (Abba Bula) Amade, leader of the Warra Himano dynasty. However, we know little about Mikael's mother, Gayti Gababe, who was from the Liban Oromo of Gendebarat. Mohammed was born around 1849.[24] He grew up during a critical period in Wallo history. When Mohammed was growing up, he witnessed the ravages that Tewodros did to Wallo. Outraged by the resistance from the Wallo Oromo, Tewodros repeatedly raided the region. He also executed Mohammed's half-brother, Amade Ali, in prison in 1865, his stepmother, Queen Worqitu adopted Mohammed and provided him protection and supported rise to power.

After the death of Tewodros, when the Tigrayan and Shawan lords both competed annex Wallo, Mohammed strategically positioned himself with Yohannes. But when the rivalry between Yohannes and Menelik ended and after the Boru Meda religious council, in 1878, Mohammed converted to Christianity, took new name—Mikael—and permanent allied the Christian kings and the with empire. Although the policy of religious conversion forced upon religious and political elite of Wallo, resisted or went into exile. Mikael chose submission to protect his position, and loyalty paid off for him. It helped to eliminate his rivals who chose to resist the imperial system.

In the 1890s and early 1900s, Menelik liked and trusted Mikael and married his daughter to him. With a marriage union with Menelik's family and the designation of his son, *Lij* Iyasu, as heir to imperial throne, assimilation seemed have worked. Yates obviously emphasizes this aspect of the story to show the inclusive nature of Habasha culture. Menelik's wife, Taitu, watched Mikael closely and conspired to limit his power. She carefully calibrated by the promotion of her own relatives' loyal followers. Coalition of Shawan and northern lords deposed his son, defeated Mikael on a battlefield and imprisoned him in 1916. He died in captivity two years and his remains finally transferred to Wallo a decade later. Captured by his enemies in 1921, *Lij* Iyasu finally died in prison in prison at Gara Mulata, Hararge, in 1936. Interesting, Yates' book does not cover the downfall of Mikael and *Lij* Iyasu, and the marginalization of Wallo.

Conclusion

Criticizing the so-called Semanticist and Oromo-centric approaches, this book promised to provide an alternative thesis. However, repackaging mostly well-known sources and old arguments, it has ended endorsing a sensitized version of the meta-narrative of Ethiopian history that portrays

Ethiopia as a long-integrated culture and polity. However, the current hotly debated national identity politics and the fragility of the Ethiopian state in indicate the failure of national integration. The real question is, then, Is *habasha* culture different from Amhara ethnicity? This book has not answered it and did not help the reader to understand why, as the author claims, a 'flexible' and 'open' *Habasha* culture has failed to accommodate a diverse society on a mutual basis. The book under review failed acknowledge the one-way assimilationist nature of the *Habasha* culture and how it stands as a proxy for the Amhara ethnicity.

Regarding Wallo, the author argued that after 1878, Menelik made a union with Mikael that improved Wallo's political profile and economic wellbeing, Throughout the book, he has also argued selectively to prove that integration of the northern Oromo elite into the *Habasha* society and culture was successful, and the integrated elite were partners in building modern Ethiopian state. While it is true that the Oromo elite had joined the Abyssinian state since the seventeenth century, their integration into the Abyssinian system was not smooth, contrary to what Yates has attempted to portray. Even when the Oromo elite converted to Christianity sincerely and trusted the father confessors, joined Abyssinian politics, and remained loyal to system and the kings, as the Yajjuu elite did, they did not escape the wrath of *habasha* elite, the propensity of the towards betrayal, desire for humiliation, and brutality towards adversaries.

The connection between *Negus* Mikael and Menelik were based on vassal-lord relationship, not a partnership of equals. That is why Mikael and his family suffered after Menelik's death. Despite his far-sighted vision consolidate the empire, by the Shawan old guards accused the young prince of converting to Islam on flimsy evidence accused *Lij* Iyasu of converting to Islam on flimsy evidence and removed the young prince removed from power. Thus, both father and son, *Negus* Mikael and *Lij* Iyasu, finally tragically ended their final years lives in prison. Incidentally, the experience of *Lij* Iyasu is similar to that of King Iyoas (d.1769), a half-Oromo prince who came to the Abyssinian throne in mid-eighteenth century. Like *Lij* Iyasu, the conspiracy of *Habasha* (Amhara-Tigrayan) elite led to the overthrow of King Iyoas. Even Emperor Haile Selassie, who officially ran away from his Oromo heritage and built an aura of a 'Solomonic King,' did not escape an inglorious death. These incidents clearly demonstrate the lack of tolerance in *Habasha* culture and its failure to integrate 'others' on mutually acceptable terms.

Endnotes

1 Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History, 1570-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *Idem*., *The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia, 1300-1700* (Woodbridge, UK., James Currey, 2015).

2 Mekuria Bulcha, *Contours of the Emergent and Ancient Oromo Nation: Dilemmas in the Ethiopian Politics of State and Nation Building* (Cape Town< Centre for Advanced Studies of African Societies, 2016); Negasso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo Oromoo of Southwestern Wallaga, Ethiopia, from 1730-1886* (Addis Ababa, Mega Pring Enterprise, 20010; Gemetchu Megersa and Aneesa Kassam, *Sacred Knowledge traditions of the Oromo of the Horn of Africa* (Durham, UK., Fifth World Publications, 2019).

3 Guluma Gemeda "The Glory and the Price of Serving Empire: The Oromo Elite and the Ethiopian State, c. 1600-1900," *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, 21: 1 (2014), pp. 27-58.

4 Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes, The Challenges of Islam, and the Re-unification of the Christian Empire (1769-1855),* Hollywood, CA, Tsehai Publishers, reprint, 2011), p. xviii.

5 Crummey further suggests that the anti-Oromo sentiment reflected in contemporary chronicles was initiated by James Bruce, a Scottish traveler who was in Gonder the early 1770s. See Donald Crummey, "Society and Ethnicity in the Politics of the Christian Kingdom during *Zamana Masafint*," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 8:2 (1975), pp. 272-75.

6 Taddesse Tamrat, "The Process of Ethnic Interaction and integration in Ethiopian History: The case of the Agaw," *Journal of African History*, 29: 1 (1988), 5-8. *Idem*., "Ethnic Interaction and Integration in Ethiopian History: The Case of the Gafat," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 21 (1988), 121-54.

7 Shiferaw Bekele, "Reflections on the Power of the Wara Sheh Masfenat," *Annales d'Ethiopoie*," 15 (1990), pp. 166-68.

8 Eloi Fiquet, "Understanding Lij Iyasu through His Forefathers: The Mammedoch *Imam*-s of Wallo," in Eloi Fiquet and Wolbert G.C. Smidt, eds. *Th Life and Times of Lij Iyasu of Ethiopia, New Insights* (Belin, LIT, 2014), pp. 6-7.

9 Leonardo Arriola, "Ethnicity, Economic Conditions, and Opposition Support: Evidence from Ethiopia's 2005 3l3ctions," *Northeast African Studies*, 10: 1 (2000), pp. 125-28.

10 Brian J. Yates, "Ethnicity as a Hinderance for Understanding Ethiopian History: An Argument Against an Ethnic Late Nineteenth Century," *History in Africa*, Vol. 44 (2017), pp. 101–131.

11 Eloi Ficquet, "Understanding Lij Iyasu through his Forefather: The Mammedoch *Imams* of Wello," in *The Life and Times of Lij Iyasu of Ethiopia, New Insights*, ed. Bu Eloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt (Berlin, LIT Verlag, 2014), p. 19.

12 *Ibid.,* p. 25.

13 *Ibid*., p. 22.

14 Tewodros to Queen Victoria, October 29,1862 and to the King of France, Napoleon III. See Sven Rubenson, ed., *Tewodros and His Contemporaries, 1855-1868, Acta Aethiopica, Vol. II* (Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa University Press, 1989).

15 See Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, 1976.

16 Blundell, H. Weld, trans. *The Royal Chronicles of Abyssinia, 1769-1840, with Translation and Notes* (Osnbruck, Zeller, 1989 [1922]), p. 421.

17 See Donald Crummey, "The Violence of Tewodros," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 9:2 (1971), 107-125.

18 See note #14 above.

19 Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth Century Wallo, Ethiopia: Revival, Reform and Reaction* (Leiden, Brill, 2001.

20 Yates has reviewed a few sources on the early life of *Ras* Gobana Daacii (c. 1817-1889) but did not add any new information on the history of this Oromo general who played a vital role in Menelik's conquest of the central and western Oromo. He only cites an anachronistic oral testimony first published by Enrico Cerulli in in *Folk Literature of the Galla* (1922). For the latest on Ras Gobana, see Dachassa Abebe, ጎበና፤ ወታደራዊና ፖለቲካዊ ህይወት [*Gobana: Military and Political Life*], (Los Angeles, Tsehai Publishers, 2013), pp. 52-54.

21 Dachassa, [*Gobana: Military and Political Life]*, pp. 52-54.

22 For the assessment of Gobana's contradictory memories, see Yates, "Christian Patriot or Oromo Traitor? The Ethiopian State the Memories of Ras Gobana Daci," *Northeast African Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2013), pp. 25-52.

23 The cause of his death is not clear. Dachassa Abebe raises three possibilities, including poising. See Dachassa, *Gobaba*, pp. 275-277.

24 Misganaw Tadesse, ሚካኤል፤ ንጉሰ ወሎ ወትግረ [*Mikael – King of Wallo and Tigray*] (Addis Ababa, 2008 Eth. C [2015].