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EDITORIAL OVERVIEW

This volume of the *Journal of Oromo Studies* addresses substantive issues related to the efforts of an indigenous Oromo NGO (Hundee) in dealing with socio-economic development, the wide-spread cases of the HIV/AIDS pandemic owing to the powerlessness of the Oromo and the need for their empowerment in order to contain the spread of the disease, the grave political climate that has persisted between the ruling minority dictatorship of the TPLF regime and the Oromo Liberation Front since 1991, some aspects of gender differences in Boran Oromo society, and the efforts to bridge the gap between the oral and written Oromo poetry. A brief synopsis of each article is given below.

In her article, **Dr. Aneesa Kassam** employs the concept of political opportunity structure (POS) in an effort to provide a detailed case analysis of an indigenous Oromo NGO named Hundee (founded in Oromia in 1995). Dr. Kassam argues that the official formation of Hundee under the current regime was facilitated by changes that were taking place in the international development arena as a result of which foreign donor pressure was exerted on the new federal state to allow a national NGO formation to take place. The paper also discusses the meso-level factors that contributed to Hundee's formation. Its programs of assistance are culturally framed by the democratic values of the traditional Gada system from which Hundee draws customary practices such as *buusa gonofaa* (institutionalized welfare system), *dabbarre* (stock loans), and methods of environmental protection which can serve a modern function. Similarly, the traditional law making assemblies (*seera tumma*) led by the elders can still continue to play an important role by legislating against harmful practices that have arisen as a result of social change.

Mr. Begna Dugassa's article "Powerlessness and the HIV/AIDS Epidemics in the Ethiopian Empire" deals with the grave public health problem in Oromia and Ethiopia and Africa at large. Currently, Ethiopia has over 2.7 million people who are already infected with HIV/AIDS. Unless it is controlled, the worst impact of the epidemic will be felt in the course of the next decade and beyond. The magnitude of the

epidemic can not simply be explained in terms of people's sexual behavior. Specifically, he argues that Ethiopian socio-economic-political conditions are determinants of sexual behavior. Critical historical analyses of public health show that socio-economic-political powerlessness has played a crucial role in public health. In this paper, he examines the powerlessness and social well-being of the Oromo people in general and HIV/AIDS epidemics in particular within the framework of powerlessness.

In his short article entitled "OLF and TPLF: Major Issues and Outcomes of Decades of Negotiations since 1991" **Mr. Abiyu Gelata** gives an account of major issues and outcomes of negotiations between the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Outcomes that were not products of joint decisions were also indicated to complete a picture of major events that took place during the decade since 1991. After carefully and critically laying out in chronological order accounts of the negotiations that ensued directly or indirectly with the TPLF led minority regime in Ethiopia, Mr. Gelata provides his assessment of the dialogues as follows. During the period from 1991 to 2003, the TPLF has been inflicting immense damage on the Oromo people to carry out its program of unification. The violation of Oromo national pride and honor, the huge loss of Oromo lives, the horrendous destruction of the social fabric, the colossal pillage of resources have become issues of fundamental interest to the Oromo people. He warns that these are issues that cannot be ignored in the event of any negotiation with an Ethiopian regime.

Dr. Fugich Wako's article entitled, "Contesting Marginality in Jest: The Voice of the Borana Women in Oral Tradition," gives against the backdrop of male dominance and female marginality as a social phenomenon among the Borana society. Male dominance has been defined as 'the manifestation of the exclusion of women from political and economic decision making, male aggression against women manifest in the expectation that males should be tough, brave and aggressive, frequent quarrelling, fighting, wife beating and the institutionalization of or regular occurrence of rape and elopement' (Peggy, 1981: 164). Specifically, she focuses on how the Borana women use jest to expose the nature of this dominance and negotiate its effect within society under review.

One of the negative impacts of the colonial domination of the Oromo culture by the Ethiopian empire state relates to the prohibition of written Oromo literature. Consequently, for more than a century, the Oromo literature is relegated to only oral tradition which lacks proper development and continuity because, until recently, backed with written literature.

In his article, **Mr. Zelealem** reviews several types of oral poetry and assesses the prospects for the transition from oral to written Oromo poetry. He concludes that for a nation, the one place that might provide a bonanza of stimulant in its effort of energizing its cultural existence and sustenance is the wealth of its oral literature. Besides, it is believed to be a repository of people's general philosophical outlook, especially, the proverbial expressions are believed to be laden with folk wisdom and educative elements. For the Oromo who suffered subjugation and cultural domination for so long, one of the sources of inspiration during the struggle for self-determination is, hence, the oral wealth they possess, but unable to harness. What stands above their literary values of the national wisdom is their inherent unifying and organizing power, their role in creating and advancing self and cultural awareness, thereby guaranteeing national cohesion.

Dr. Mohammed Hassen's article deals with the teaching career and contributions of a prolific scholar and great Oromo nationalist, the late Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo (1895–1980). The article pays homage to Saphalo's proud legacy of a lifelong struggle for the cause and in the interests of his people. It also traces his efforts in the development of the Oromo language, demonstrates his use of knowledge as a weapon of resistance, and shows his contributions to the written Oromo language based on primary and secondary sources of information.

Finally, I want to extend my sincere thanks to the contributors of articles and book reviews without which *The Journal of Oromo Studies* could not have succeeded in its mission of expanding the frontiers of knowledge about the forgotten Oromo people. I would also like to thank the anonymous referees for their valuable contributions by reading and making constructive suggestions for the authors. The need for quality articles which address issues related to the Oromo and the Horn of Africa at large continues to exist. I would hope that you would accept

the challenge by making JOS as one of the main outlets for your scholarly contributions. With your cooperation and contributions, we can certainly produce and disseminate a first rate journal to individuals, institutions of higher learning, governments, and nongovernmental agencies such that there is no excuse for ignorance about the Oromo people. Each of you has a key role to play in the collective mission of Oromo studies which is to broaden our understandings of the Oromo people.

Bichaka Fayissa, Editor, Professor of Economics, July 2003

NGOs, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, AND DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY FROM THE ETHIOPIAN REGIONAL STATE OF OROMIA

Aneesa Kassam

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In Ethiopia, the expansion of the non-governmental sector did not take place until the beginning of the 1990s, about a decade after many other African countries. By 1995, however, the number of officially registered national and international non-government organizations (NGOs) had risen from about sixty to more than two hundred and fifty (Campbell, 1996: 15). The rapid growth of this sector can be attributed to a number of national and international factors.

In 1995, Ethiopia became a federal democratic republic composed of nine ethnic states.¹ This new “democracy” is a fragile one, based on regional and national elections that were far from free and fair (NDI 1992; Pausewang, 1994). Critics have questioned the commitment of the new regime to bringing about a truly democratic order in the country (Hassen 1999, 2000; Holcomb, 1997; Lata, 1999; Ottaway, 1999). Despite these problems, however, the transition created the space for the emergence of a new generation of NGOs (Campbell, 1996: 14; Tvedt, 1998: 28).²

This new space was also opened up due to pressure exerted by the international donor community. The change of regime in Ethiopia coincided with a paradigmatic shift that was occurring in international development policy during this time. As Tvedt (1998: 168) explains, this New Policy Agenda is an amalgam one, which espouses a particular set of discursive propositions and recommendations. It encompasses both economic and political dimensions that focus on the liberalization of the market and the democratization of development through the strengthening of civil society institutions and the reduction of the role of the state.³ It emerged from the policy agenda of good governance of the late 1980s, in which aid was made conditional to respect for

human rights, multi-party elections and reform of the authoritarian state bureaucracies (Clayton, 1996:7). In the early 1990s, this policy framework began to move away from the state as the principal initiator and provider of development. It attributed a more active role to civil society organizations as promoters of democratic culture. NGOs emerged as key actors in this new paradigm (Clark, 1994; Clayton, 1996; Tvedt, 1998).

In his analysis of the transformations that have taken place in this sector, Korten (1990: 114-132) distinguishes four “generations” of NGOs, based on their strategic programme orientations: (1) relief and welfare, (2) community development, (3) institutional policy-making, and (4) alternative development. He states that the aim of first generation NGOs was to provide immediate assistance to people in a situation of crisis. Second generation NGOs focused on empowering communities to undertake small-scale, self-reliant development at the local level. Third generation NGOs sought to create new policy and institutional frameworks at the local, national, and international levels with a view to changing the power structures that inhibit equitable development. For Korten, the emerging, fourth generation NGOs are led by “peoples movements” and are based on alternative development issues such as gender, environment, and human rights.⁴ Other analysts (Clammer, 2002; Frantz, 1987; Schuurman, 1993) have also noted this overlap between social movements and development.

Following this classificatory scheme, some of the national NGOs that were formed in Ethiopia after 1991 can be described as having moved from a first generation emphasis on relief and welfare to a second-generation focus on community-based development, whilst often retaining a prior ethnic and/or religious constituency. This is because, in the Ethiopian case, some of these NGOs often had close links with the relief agencies of their former national liberation movements (Tvedt, 1998: 28). Hundee, the Oromo NGO which is the focus of this paper, can be described as being a relatively new initiative in this respect, in that it espoused an alternative, human rights agenda from the outset, and has gradually gone on to address policy issues. It can, therefore, be characterized as a fourth generation NGO.

This paper provides a detailed case study of Hundee, the Oromo Grassroots Development Initiative. It traces how Hundee emerged ideologically from the larger movement for self-determination of the Oromo and discusses how its strategies evolved from a focus on community development, to creating new institutional frameworks for tackling the problems of underdevelopment of the peasantry in the Oromia regional state. It is based on an alternative vision of development informed by cultural values. As a number of researchers (Briggs and Neame, 1995; Hulme, 1994; Trivedy and Acharya, 1996: 60ff) suggest, an approach that differs from the conventional organizational analysis may be required where NGO formation is led by such social activist agendas.

The concept of political opportunity structure

This paper proposes to employ the concept of political opportunity structure (henceforth POS) to discuss the formation of Hundee. The notion of POS, derived from the political process model in social movement theory, was initially elaborated to study groups and their organizations in Western nations.⁵ The POS is made up of the “configuration of forces in a (potential or actual) group’s political environment that influences that group’s assertion of its political claims” (Brockett, 1991: 254). This constellation of variables differs according to whether the regime is a democratic or authoritarian one (Tarrow, 1998). Depending on the type of regime, a system of opportunities or constraints is created for the group in question (Melucci, 1988: 322). The POS may include such key dimensions as points of access to the political system in terms of its relative openness or closure, shifting alignments, divisions within the ruling elite, the presence or absence of allies, and the state’s capacity for repression and use of violence (Tarrow, 1998: 76-80). In particular, the paper draws on a study by Rucht (1990:166-8) who explains that the POS may be determined by structural patterns at the macro, meso, and micro levels. Macro-structural factors include the economic regime, patterns of social stratification, state structures, and values. The meso-structural level can be found in factors such as pre-existing organizations, party constellations, rules and

practices, public opinion, factions internal to the movement, and lessons learned by core activists from previous experiences. At the micro-structural level, there exist such parameters as informal hierarchies, patterns of internal and external interaction, and the distribution of resources. Changes at these different structural levels can also be brought about through a single event or a combination of events. These factors may shape a movement's strategies.

The concept of POS can be usefully applied to reflecting on the process of NGO formation that is taking place in many parts of the world today as a result of popular movements for democracy and development. Hundee's organizational initiative in the socio-economic and political context of Ethiopia will be discussed to show how it relates to previous forms of association aimed at addressing the development problems of the Oromo.

Abyssinian colonialism and Oromo nationalism⁶

The Oromo, who constitute about forty per cent of the population of over sixty million, are the largest indigenous ethnic group in Ethiopia and occupy about half the country. Despite their numerical majority, for the past century, they have been subordinated to the ethnocratic rule of the Amhara and Tigre elite.

As Holcomb and Ibssa (1990:1) explain, the geopolitical entity that became "Ethiopia" at the beginning of the twentieth century "was created when Abyssinia, a cluster of small kingdoms...expanded in the mid-1800s by conquering independent nations in the region using firearms provided by European powers." This expansion coincided with the European scramble for Africa.

The forcible incorporation of the Oromo into the empire-state in the 1890s marks a critical turning point in their contemporary history (Baxter, 1983; Hassen, 1999; Jalata, 1993). It is from this date that the Oromo consider that they ceased to rule themselves through their own democratic politico-religious institutions (*Gada* and *Qaalluu*) and became a subject people. More details of these institutions are given below. The conquest curtailed the military power of the Oromo and diminished the important cultural and economic roles they had previously played

in the region. Historically, the Oromo experienced the conquest as a psychological trauma. Their struggle has been to regain their territory, economic, political and cultural autonomy, spheres of influence, and human rights.

Following the conquest of the Oromo and other ethnic groups, a process of colonization was systematically undertaken by the imperial regime. Two-thirds of Oromo lands were expropriated and distributed to officials of the conquering army, church dignitaries and members of the royal family (Hassen, 1999:139). Oromo notables were allowed to retain the remaining portion (*sissoo*) on condition that they provided labour and other unpaid services to the new masters. This gave rise to the *naftanya-gabbar* system, through which the armed settlers (*naftanya*) extracted labour from the peasants, reducing them to a state of quasi-serfdom (*gabbar*) (Jalata 1993: 69; Hassen 1999: 139ff). Outright slavery was also institutionally practiced, resulting in depopulation in many regions (Hassen 1999: 138; Lata 1999:157). Garrison towns were established in the conquered territories. This subjugation was not limited to economic exploitation. As in other colonial systems, it was accompanied by a policy of linguistic, cultural, and religious assimilation intended to “civilize” the Oromo (Hassen 1999: 142-3). Oromo cultural practices and ways of life were systematically undermined. Many southeastern Arssi Oromo converted to Islam in the 1930s to resist Amhara domination (Haji, 1995). Elsewhere, however, they were co-opted into the imperial system and acted as local intermediaries (*balabbat*) for tax-collection purposes or were appointed as local rulers in exchange for land and titles. Such practices of divide and rule later resulted in internal class divisions, regional differences, and religious cleavages among the Oromo.

The twin processes of Oromo resistance and collaboration continued under Haile Selassie (1930-35; 1941-74), whose succession to the imperial throne was interrupted by the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1936. The Emperor’s exile in Britain provided a temporary political opening in the system closure brought about by conquest. In 1936, traditional chiefs under the leadership of a local governor formed the Western Oromo Confederation. They appealed to the League of Nations to grant them autonomy under British mandate and outlined a

programme for economic development (Hassen 2000: 113-14). The occupying Italians suppressed this regional initiative. In general, however, they followed a more equitable ethnic policy, especially in terms of personal autonomy, land-rights and language use. They dismantled the Ethiopian colonial institutions based on slavery and the *naftanya-gabbar* system and introduced wage labour (Jalata 1993: 84-5). Oromo were allowed to use their own language in schools and in the court system (Bulcha 1997: 331-2). When the Italians were ousted in 1941, the British reinstated Haile Selassie and assisted him in modernizing the state. The Oromo were placed again under Ethiopian rule and lost most of the gains they had made under the Italians. The language policy was reversed and a new exploitative tenancy system of land holding, produce extraction, and systems of taxation were devised (Jalata 1993: 87). The Emperor also embarked on a programme of centralization, Christianization, and Amharization (Hassen 2000: 118). Whilst small numbers of educated Oromo became assimilated in the process, several local uprisings against Ethiopian rule took place in many Oromo regions between 1941-74, continuing the trend that had begun prior to the Italian occupation (Hassen 2000:122-124; Jalata 1993: 151).

It was members of this emerging class of Oromo professionals in Haile Selassie's modernizing government who established the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association in 1963 to assist community development (Hassen 2000: 125-134; Jalata 1993: 155-158). The Association was created as a social welfare one, in accordance with the prevalent national style of voluntary organization.⁷ It was officially registered in 1964. It aimed to address a wide range of issues affecting the Oromo: "to build schools, clinics, roads, churches and mosques, to help the weak and disabled, to organize Ethiopian civilian and national rights, and to spread literacy and basic knowledge about health care" (Hassen 2000:126). It was mainly Oromo in composition. It had its central office in Addis Ababa and later branch offices all over the Oromo region. Mobilization was based on cultural symbols and performances. As Hassen (2000:126) writes, the leaders of the Association promoted "[a] national renaissance and cultivated a...national consciousness that challenged the legitimacy of the Ethiopian political establishment, claiming that it ignored or excluded Oromo national identity." As the Association grew increasingly

radical, it began to cause concern to the authorities. When government agents uncovered an alleged plot to assassinate the Emperor, they arrested its leaders. The Association was dissolved in 1967. As Jalata (1993:156) notes, “[the] main political objective of the association was not to create an independent Oromia; [it] merely wanted to improve the condition of the Oromo people.” Nevertheless, some of its younger members had already begun to take a more militant approach by establishing links with an armed resistance movement in the Bale region of southeastern Ethiopia.

The Bale Movement (1963-70) has been described as the longest peasant protest struggle in contemporary Ethiopian history (Tareke 1991:141). It used Islam as the ideological matrix for resistance and organization and obtained material support from the government of neighbouring Somalia. This alliance with the Muslim Ogaden Somalis transformed the sporadic revolts of the farmers against the regime into a loosely organized guerrilla struggle. By 1966, the insurgents, who included women fighters, had brought three-fifths of Bale under their influence or control. The region was put under martial rule in 1969. The military coup in Somalia, which stemmed the flow of firearms to the rebels, and the intensification of government operations backed by British and American units, brought the conflict to an end in 1970.

The suppression of the Macha-Tulama Association and the Bale Oromo Movement forced the members of the incipient national movement to go underground. They established clandestine political groups that began to produce literature campaigning for the decolonization of the Oromo. Other activists went to the Middle East to train in guerrilla warfare and returned to establish the embryo of a liberation army in eastern Oromia in 1973. The OLF was formed in 1974 as a result of these combined political processes (Hassen 2000: 142-44; Jalata 1993:164-70). The OLF issued its first political and economic programme in 1974, which was later amended in 1976. It stated that its main political objective was “the realization of national self-determination for the Oromo people and their liberation from oppression and exploitation in all forms” (OLF 1976). This, it said, could only be achieved through a democratic revolution and the establishment of the Peoples’ Democratic Republic of Oromia. It added

that it would strive to bring about “political union with other nations on the basis of equality, respect for mutual interests, and the principles of voluntary association.” Its economic programme, though not fully worked out, focuses on the reorganization of agricultural production, the nationalization of strategic financial institutions, selected industrial enterprises, and promotion of technical education.

The OLF struggle is culturally framed in terms of the democratic ideals and principles of the traditional Oromo *Gada* system of governance. The *Gada* was a form of participatory democracy through assemblies operating at different integrative levels, from meetings of village or camp elders to larger, more inclusive regional law-making conventions (Bassi 1996). Assemblies at the territorial level were constituted on the basis of kinship and headed by elected leaders whose succession was determined by a generation grading system (Legesse 1973; 2000). These semi-autonomous political assemblies owed allegiance to the popular assembly and nominal central religious figure(s) (*Qaalluu* or *Abba Mudaa*), which served to unite the different *Gada* territorial groups. These interlinked institutions had political, social, economic, military, and ritual functions. After the Oromo migrations of the sixteenth century, the *Gada* system declined among the northern and western groups, due to both internal and external factors, and in some of these regions gave rise to a stratified monarchical (*mottii*) system (Hassen 1994: 99). *Gada* has continued, however, to be practiced in the southern Oromo groups to the present day, albeit, with restricted functions (Baxter and Almagor, 1978; Legesse 1973). Nevertheless, even where *gada* no longer formally exists, its egalitarian values have continued to inform social relationships (Legesse 2000). The basic set of principles and practices that underlie its political culture, such as self-government, participation and debate through assembly, election of representative leaders, mutual forms of assistance, and membership in voluntary associations still form part of everyday life in Oromia (Lewis 1994: 53-58). This egalitarian ethos, which emphasizes respect for custom and law, resolution of conflict through peaceful means, and respect for the environment stands in contrast to the forms of authoritarianism, violence and ecological damage experienced by the Oromo as colonial subjects. *Gada* epitomizes the democratic values for which all Oromo

stand and it serves as a unifying value system that transcends their various differences. It represents the core element in the construction of Oromo national identity.

At the beginning of 1974, the convergence of a number of social forces in what has been termed the “February Upsurge,” led to the downfall of the Haile Selassie government (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990: 329-385). These movements represented different dimensions of the socio-economic and political crises that had been mounting in the country from the late 1960s. In Oromo country, peasants seized the opportunity to reclaim and redistribute their ancestral lands and refused to hand over produce due to absentee landlords.

In September 1974, the military junta of the Dergue deposed the Emperor and subsequently eliminated him. The Dergue claimed to be socialist and revolutionary, but through its ruthless suppression of the popular urban forces that had brought it to power and its increasing totalitarian hold on the rest of the country, it subverted the revolution. Between 1975 and 1976, the Dergue nationalized the major state institutions and all land was declared to be the collective holding of the Ethiopian people (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990: 348; Jalata, 1993:118). Initially, Oromo and other peasants welcomed the 1975 land reform proclamation which abolished all rents, forced contributions to landlords, and allowed farmers to continue to organize production according to their own traditional mechanisms (Holcomb and Ibssa ,1990: 347-8; Pausewang, 1993: 210). With local variations, in the first two years following the reform, peasants generally demonstrated a high level of commitment to their own development and levels of agricultural production and consumption rose (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990:357; Pausewang, 1993: 211-3). However, between 1977 and 1985 this policy was reversed. The government reasserted economic and political control, through its rural bureaucratic organs, the newly created Peasant Associations. The farmers were forced to sell a percentage of their produce to the government at fixed prices or had their grain supplies confiscated and had to pay higher taxes (Pausewang, 1993:214-8). As a result of these and other controversial policies, such as collectivization, villagization, and resettlement programs, “the average peasant was worse off than before the revolution after 1985” (Pausewang 1993:216). Many Oromo now began to refer to the Dergue as “the new *naftanya*”.

As popular resistance to the regime grew, greater support began to be given to the national liberation fronts, which intensified their military operations from the 1980s. It was the regime's costly civil wars with the four main national movements (Somali, Oromo, Tigray and Eritrean), its inability to resolve the land issue, loss of legitimacy following the 1984/5 drought, and shifts in superpower politics that finally led to its collapse in May 1991.

A transitional government (TGE), made up of representatives from all the major ethnic groups and liberation movements was formed to oversee the transition to democracy. The representatives jointly drew up a political charter. Within a short time, however, major differences developed between these contending parties. The OLF and other members of the TGE withdrew from the electoral contest due to alleged irregularities. Its leadership was forced to go into exile (Lata, 1999). The Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) controversially filled its place. The OPDO, which forms part of the coalition of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), is not recognized as a legitimate organ by the majority of the Oromo, despite the fact that it provided the figurehead president of the new republic (Krylow, 1994: 236). Real power was and is wielded in the coalition by the dominant Tigre Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF) which was responsible for creating it.

Whilst the strategic withdrawal of the OLF at this time was precipitated by the election process and extra-judicial killings of its members by the TPLF, it could be said that the difficulties it encountered were due to a long chain of causal factors (cf. Rucht, 1990:167). Such structural factors included *lack of effective leadership* (due to discriminatory national educational policies, co-optation, imprisonment and elimination of intelligentsia), *lack of unity* (internal divisions and factions working at cross-purposes), *lack of substantive political and economic programs*, *lack of material resources* to carry out sustained guerrilla warfare, *lack of an effective communication system* to block the Ethiopian dynastic myth of state and counterpose Oromo republican ideals, *inadequate political analysis* of the transitional situation, *cultural value base* (egalitarian ideals; dislike of "big men" authority figures), and other related aspects. For Oromo

intellectuals and leaders, however, the TPLF/EPRDF usurpation of power and the marginalization of the OLF from the political process constituted the loss of an historical opportunity to build a multi-ethnic, democratic society in Ethiopia (Hassen 1990, 2000; Lata, 1999). For the majority of the Oromo, the advent of the new regime marked another major political closure.

The second part of the paper describes how Hundee negotiated a space in this hostile political environment to create an organization that could address the problem of underdevelopment in Oromia through non-political means. It discusses Hundee's development philosophy and programs and indicates how the organization is attempting to build on the Oromo democratic culture and indigenous institutions⁸.

Formation of Hundee

Following the 1992 elections, it became clear that Oromo aspirations to establish popular democracy in Oromia and in Ethiopia as a whole could not be realized. Instead, the previous Amhara rule had been replaced by Tigre ethnic domination.⁹ After the withdrawal of the OLF, all independent civil institutions not linked to the EPRDF were subjected to harassment by the TGE. They were replaced by OPDO/TPLF created Peoples' Democratic Organizations (PDOs) through which these parties could gain regional control. The Oromo Relief Association (ORA), the former humanitarian wing of the OLF, also experienced such intimidation. ORA had acquired NGO status in August 1991. According to the 1997 Human Rights Report, "to international donors, ORA was a responsible partner which provided development assistance at the grassroots in a wide range of projects in the west and northeast of Oromia Region."¹⁰ Yet the organization underwent systematic government obstruction on the grounds that it was engaging in OLF activities. It was banned in November 1995, its bank account was frozen and its property confiscated. ORA's appeals in 1996 and 1997 were overturned. Its director was imprisoned, and then released in 2001. Currently ORA operates from offices in Germany and England, through which it continues to provide relief assistance to Oromo refugees.

A core of Oromo social activists, who had belonged to or regrouped around ORA, with the hope of continuing the struggle by other, non-combative means, were left without direction. After discussions with other concerned individuals, they decided to form a new development NGO. The name Hundee was chosen to distinguish it as a secular, non-politically affiliated organization with a broad-based development agenda.¹¹ *Hundee* means 'root(s)'. In particular, it refers to the principal line of descent that connects the Oromo to their apical ancestor, Horo (Megerssa, 1993). It thus stands for the Oromo people, their land, and their culture. The name also evokes the popular, grassroots orientation of Hundee's work.

Hundee was registered as a membership organization with the Oromo Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Commission (ODPPC) on 10 April 1995 and then with the Ministry of Internal Affairs on 12 June 1995.¹² Under the Civil Code of Ethiopia governing association, Hundee was required to have separate policy and management organs. It consists of a general assembly of about one hundred members who are nominally responsible for formulating policy and a management board in charge of day-to-day affairs. For practical purposes, the management board has been acting both as a *de facto* policy-making organ and a forum for collective-decision making. Hundee has three departments: Development Services, Civic and Popular Education and Finance and Administration. It is based in Addis Ababa with five branch offices, and operates in four zones in Oromia: North, West and East Shoa, and Bale. Branch offices come under the supervision of the Development Services department and are represented on the management committee by project coordinators. Hundee employs twenty-four professional staff and a number of support staff. An Oromo anthropologist advises the organization in a voluntary capacity. Its founding members and professional staff are mainly of a middle class background.

The director of Hundee is Zegeye Asfaw, a specialist in land tenure law. He comes from a former landowning family. In 1975, as the Minister for Agriculture, he contributed to the revolutionary land reform programme implemented under the Dergue. In 1979, when he was the Minister of Justice, he was imprisoned for ten years for allegedly

collaborating with the OLF. In 1991, he served as the Minister for Agriculture in the TGE. He resigned from this post when the OLF withdrew from the government in June 1992. After a short period in exile, he returned to Ethiopia and Hundee was formed under his leadership.

From the outset, Hundee encountered a number of problems of legitimacy arising from various quarters, both Oromo and non-Oromo. At some federal and regional government levels, it was seen as an affiliate of the OLF and its development programmes were thought to have a “hidden political agenda.” Its staff was subjected to periodic interrogation and imprisonment. The organization also faced bureaucratic delays and obstacles in obtaining authorization to carry out its projects. For Oromo in exile, on the other hand, Hundee’s selective cooperation with the new regime was perceived as a betrayal of their national cause. Local dignitaries of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church opposed it for allegedly propagating counter-religious doctrines. Yet when Hundee started work in the predominantly Islamic Bale region, it was seen as a vehicle for Christian evangelization. Due to the previous links of some of its staff with the OLF, some donor agencies were initially wary of supporting its activities. Allies had, therefore, to be identified in the international community who would provide core funding. These and other factors affected its work with the communities, which had negative experiences of government “development” schemes and little experience of NGO intervention. The organization was only able to circumvent the forces ranged against it through the diplomatic skills of the director and the solidarity and commitment of his staff.

Hundee’s aims and development philosophy

In its mission statement, Hundee (2001) states that its aims are to:

- enable small farmers, women, older persons, youth, and other marginalized groups to organize around common issues of concern for sustainable livelihoods and to revitalize proven community-based traditional support mechanisms and institutions;

- reduce vulnerability of target groups to transitory food shortages and build on their capacity to play an active role in grain-marketing;
- empower women to attain political, economic and social rights and to eradicate all forms of violence and discrimination against them;
- relate with government, civil institutions, and other NGOs at all levels to further [its] vision, and where possible, implement [its] development aid activities together with them.¹³

Hundee (1997) describes this vision of development as a *rights-based* one. It sees development as being founded on “human rights and dignity”; on the “social, economic and cultural rights” of all peoples; and on “equitable access to and control over resources and their sustainable use.” It states that the responsibility for empowering resource-poor communities socially, politically and economically, lies jointly with government and civil society institutions. As Hundee’s reports make clear, its intentions are to complement rather than obstruct federal and regional government development projects.

As in the case of previous Oromo organizations, Hundee’s equity based approach is inspired by the democratic principles enshrined in the *Gada* system. Through its work at the grassroots level, it has gone further than any other organization hitherto in translating these cultural ideals into practice. It has done this through a number of projects that draw on cultural practices and institutions. These projects will be discussed at greater length below. They are based on the conviction that culture represents a dynamic force for change and development. Hundee’s approach has been, therefore, to work from within the culture, to simultaneously build on the positive traditional practices that have given the Oromo their cultural identity, and to change harmful practices that have arisen at different historical junctures. This involves methods of conscientization similar to those advocated by Freire (1974). It also draws on traditional forms of debate and problem solving that entail the mediation of the still authoritative *Gada* elders. Hundee has also

sought to revitalize other indigenous institutions relating to social welfare and assistance in respect to marginalized groups and to the environment. In playing this advocacy role, it has had to probe deeper into the traditional Oromo culture, its institutions and knowledge system, and in particular into the intricacies of customary law.

Hundee's programs of assistance

Hundee's programmes fall under two broad categories: development and civic education. It is the only national NGO that combines civic education with development. The development programme consists of three components (1) Food Security, (2) Environmental Rehabilitation and Protection and (3) Support for the Elderly. The Credit and Savings scheme, which also previously formed part of this area of activity, was transferred to the Buusaa Gonofaa Micro Financing Share Company in 1999. The Civic Education programme consists of two components both aimed at rural women: (1) combating harmful traditional practices and (2) improving women's access to and control over economic resources. These programmes were established after carrying out a needs assessment survey based on extensive consultation with community groups, discussion with local authorities and other development organizations. Once it had established its "track record" with donors and was proven to be a highly accountable and transparent recipient, Hundee was able to overcome its initial difficulties in obtaining funding for its projects. At the end of 2002, it operated with an annual budget of about US\$ 540,000. Each of its projects will now be discussed in turn.

The *Credit and Savings* scheme was one of Hundee's earliest projects, implemented in March 1996. It initially aimed to provide revolving loans to various age groups in rural areas to meet subsistence needs and to engage in income-generating activities. In the predominantly agricultural economy of Oromia, plough oxen are crucial for working arable land. Households without oxen are forced to enter into disadvantageous sharecropping arrangements. For younger men, it is the lack of access to land that is a critical problem, making them dependent on their families, with few or no opportunities to reduce such dependency.

Similarly, women who are economically dependent on their husbands have few means of supplementing the family income. Poverty levels of the beneficiaries were determined through wealth-ranking techniques. On this basis, the scheme made loans to male and female-headed households to purchase oxen, to married women to raise sheep, to young unmarried girls to raise poultry and to landless youth to engage in other types of income-generating activities, such as petty-trading. Loans were made through groups composed of between five to twenty members, at an interest rate of fifteen per cent. Each group determined its own repayment period and schedule. Training was provided on the concept of savings and loans, group formation and planning. Group leaders were also trained in record keeping. Each group formulated its internal code of regulations.

Based on the experiences of this pilot phase, Hundee modified the design and replicated it in other areas of operation. It also extended the scheme to include recipients in peri-urban communities and to groups engaging in off-farm activities, such as milk processing and baking, sale of garden produce, pottery, weaving and tailoring. The Canadian Embassy funded the pilot phase. Subsequent phases have received funding from Oxfam (USA), the Irish Embassy, and the Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation.

At the end of 1999, in accordance with new government regulations on micro-credit, Hundee formed the Buusaa Gonofaa Micro Financing Share Company, becoming its major shareholder.¹⁴ Like the previous credit scheme, it provides short-term working capital to groups without collateral to engage in income-generating micro-enterprises. The name of the company is adopted from the southern Boorana Oromo institutionalized welfare system, of which there are variants in other parts of Oromia. This traditional system operated through contributions made by members of the community in times of crisis to assist those worse affected to re-establish themselves in the pastoral economy. The aim of the company is to provide the modern equivalent of such assistance in order to create self-sufficiency.¹⁵

The *Food Security* project aims to create cereal bank associations at the village and locality levels to enable farmers to cope with critical food and seed shortages during the wet season, and to enhance their

bargaining power on the grain market.¹⁶ Food shortages occur due to low yields, but also because farmers are obliged to sell grain during the harvest period to pay land-use and agricultural taxes, raise cash to buy fertilizers, repay loans and to make other social contributions. As the season advances, peasants are also forced to sell livestock and milk products to supplement grain requirements, particularly for the very young and elderly. Traders exploit this situation by offering the lowest prices for these products. The project was initiated to address these problems. The associations also serve as conduits for discussion of other community issues. The project has obtained funding mainly from the World Solidarity Movement, a Belgian umbrella organization, and Oxfam (USA).

The first cereal bank associations were piloted at the beginning of 1997 in East Shoa. Hundee provided management and awareness training to the members. The associations formed executive and audit committees to oversee and plan operations. Members met at quarterly intervals to discuss the seasonal type, quantity and price of grain to be bought, discuss the purchase report, fix sale prices, and evaluate the bank's performance. Hundee provided an interest free loan to the associations to purchase grain, materials to construct a store, and to buy scales and sacks. In addition, members contributed a small amount (about six per cent) of the capital in order to increase their purchasing power. The association credited 100 kilos of grain to each member at a price lower than the market rate. Surplus was sold at the peak of the season at maximum profits. Profits accrued were added to the working capital.

The project contributed significantly to alleviating seasonal food shortages of poor households in the area of operation. It also increased the decision-making power of farmers by providing them with an alternative market channel that had previously been monopolized by grain merchants, and stimulated a healthy competition between the two groups.

From 1998, Hundee began to experiment with a new type of cereal bank association in the Bale zone of Oromia, a predominantly Muslim area. Hundee and the Centre for International Development and Research (CIDR) jointly implemented the project, with the view that

Hundee would eventually assume sole responsibility. In addition, the Bale project receives funding from the Dutch NGO, Novib and the European Union. The Bale village model differs mainly in its capitalization structure in that both Hundee/CIDR and the members contribute matching funds. The contribution of the former represents a direct grant. The project also established a Service Enterprise to assist farmers in determining price structure, marketing produce, and provide other related services. The donors initially subsidized this venture, but it was expected to become an independent provider in the second phase, by charging for the services. Other donors, like the German Catholic Bishops Conference expressed interest in replicating this model in West Shoa. A pilot project to determine the appropriateness of the project was undertaken in 2000 and three cereal banks were established on an experimental basis, with the view to establishing a three-year project.

The Oromia Cooperative Promotion Bureau has recognized the efficacy of the project, and has worked with Hundee to control the grain price fluctuations that occurred in 2001. Such price fluctuations have had a negative impact on the stocks held by the cereal banks. These are due to a number of factors, primarily the availability of cheaper grain supplies through food aid donations, which flooded the market and caused the fall of prices. This affected local production. Ultimately, the problem is one of a lack of agricultural and market policy and pressure will have to be brought to bear on central government to rectify the situation.

The *Environmental Rehabilitation and Protection* project grew out of Hundee's first development activity undertaken in East Shoa in mid-1995. Like other national NGOs, as part of the official requirements, Hundee had to demonstrate its project capability within the first six months, or face deregistration. Due to its lack of resources at this time, Hundee decided to begin with a community reforestation project within easy reach of the capital. The project was formulated to address the growing problem of environmental degradation in Oromia. The project aims to (1) sensitize the community to the relationship between environment and poverty through educational workshops and (2) to promote environmental protection and regeneration by encouraging members of the community to plant indigenous and other varieties of

trees. Whilst reluctant to commit direct funds to the project at this time, Agri-Services Ethiopia, Self-Help International, American Joint Action and CARE (Ethiopia) contributed help in kind to supplement funds raised by Hundee's members and other individuals. Based on the lessons learnt, Hundee undertook similar projects at other sites. These projects received funding from the German Development Service (GDS), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Oxfam (USA and Canada) and the Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO).

Hundee also carried out environmental education campaigns at some of its projects sites. Oromo youth responded positively to this initiative and formed environmental clubs to learn about and participate in the replanting of indigenous trees and shrubs. By 2000, fifty-one hectares of land in the project sites had been covered with various tree species, mainly eucalyptus. The preference of communities for this species was mainly due to its economic value, but Hundee continues to advocate indigenous species. The environmental project is intended to be an integral component of Hundee's programmes of assistance. Its inclusion is, however, dependent on donor funding.

The *Elderly Project* aims at providing impoverished and homeless members of the older generation with vital assistance in terms of food and shelter. Due to social change, the elderly have often been marginalized and lack social support. The project assists them through special provisions in the existing cereal banks, constructing shelters, and making stock loans. The loans are based on a traditional institution of reciprocal assistance (*dabarre*). Through this system, wealthy stockowners loaned milking stock to less privileged members of the community, who in turn passed on the offspring, thus forming a chain of such relationships.¹⁷ In the modern version, the recipients are given two sheep or a heifer through the Dabarre Council, presided by a group of elders. They enter into a contractual agreement to pass on female offspring produced to another needy elderly person. Help Age International, Christian Relief Service, and Bread and Water for Africa fund the project. Help Age has also facilitated cataract operations for the elderly. The project has raised Hundee's moral standing in the communities.

The *Civic Education Programme* is Hundee's most innovative and successful activity. It focuses on the problems of gender and development in Oromia. It addresses two dimensions of this problem: (1) the constitutional and legal rights of women and (2) their productive and reproductive rights. These two issues emerged through women's focus groups. These discussions revealed the extent to which women were discriminated against in the patriarchal system of production, with few rights of access to or control over property. They had been forced to enter into a variety of non-traditional marriage contracts, including marriage by abduction, which had arisen through socio-economic change. The latter affected the education of adolescent girls, who were afraid to attend school for fear of being kidnapped. Alcoholism was also a widespread problem. Women reported that they had been physically abused, subjected to domestic violence, and exposed to HIV/AIDS. They were also forced to undergo a number of harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, which adversely affected their reproductive health and psychological well-being.

The programme organizes a series of women's rights education workshops at different levels to tackle these issues. These begin with discussions with the women themselves, in which they are encouraged to express their problems and are instructed on their constitutional rights. The issues raised are then taken up with the men in the community, followed by a joint debate to reach consensus on how they should be resolved. This consultative process culminates with a communal assembly convened by the *Gada* elders, at which new laws pertaining to the problems identified are promulgated and ritually sanctioned. These are highly dramatic performances. Following the workshops, Women's Rights Defence Committees made up of members of the community and representatives from the major law-enforcement institutions (Police, Judiciary), and other relevant agencies, such as the Bureau of Women's Affairs, are formed to monitor the situation, provide support to victims and take appropriate legal action at different administrative levels. Further training is subsequently provided to groups of women in some areas through Gender in Leadership and Decision-Making courses to train others and empower them to act for themselves. The programme

has received funding from the American Embassy (Ambassador's Grant) and from the NDI.

As a result of these interventions, communities have been sensitized to discriminatory practices against women and encouraged to reflect on their root causes and legislate against them, leading in most cases to an improvement of women's lives and of their female children.

Hundee is continuing to expand its activities, despite continued obstruction of its work by the regional government, in particular its civic education program. Hundee's direct and indirect (through workshop attendance) beneficiaries number some 13,200 people, whilst Buusaa has some 5,000 recipients, 85% of which are women.

Conclusion

As Hulme (1994: 271) notes, the NGO sector should be seen as "a social and political force, rather than a convenient mechanism for delivering aid." However, as Clammer (2002: 53) argues, not all NGOs can be qualified as agents for social change. This latter role, he suggests, "is rather the prerogative of social movements." He recommends that a more detailed, ethnographic approach be taken to understanding the complex social and political contexts out of which NGOs emerge.

This paper has provided a detailed study of an indigenous NGO founded in the Oromia region in 1995. It has suggested that historically and ideologically, Hundee's social activist agenda, in which it recognizes the fundamental right of all the Oromo people to development, can be traced to the larger movement for self-determination. The individuals who founded the organization were sympathetic to this cause. In order to chart its emergence, the paper has employed the concept of political opportunity structure, derived from social movement theory, particularly as formulated by Rucht (1990).

It has shown that at the macro-level, Hundee's establishment under the current regime was facilitated by changes that were taking place in the international development context. As a result of these policy changes, foreign donor pressure was exerted on the new federal state to allow national NGO formation to take place, thus creating an "illusion" of democracy (Keller 1995: 634). Nevertheless, this pressure removed

some of the constraints that had hitherto limited NGO formation in the country, by not only providing greater room for manoeuvre, but also enabling these organizations to gain access to external monetary resources for their community development work. As elsewhere in Africa (Bratton 1989), this relative autonomy created tensions between the NGO sector and the state, resulting in the imposition of centralized control and regulation of its activities. In Ethiopia, this problem has been aggravated by the fact that some of these NGOs had links with former liberation movement. The pattern of NGO formation in the country has, thus, tended to follow the division of regions along ethnic lines.

The paper has also discussed the meso-level factors that contributed to Hundee's formation. It has described the different organizational initiatives and forms of collective action that were adopted by the ethno-national movement from its inception to try to address the problems of socio-economic development and lack of political autonomy of the Oromo as a result of their colonization. These initiatives and forms of radical action included the Oromo Western Confederacy (1936), the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association (1963), the Bale Oromo Peasant Movement (1963-70), the Oromo Liberation Front (1974) (and other factional fronts), and the Oromo Relief Association. The latter was initially a humanitarian wing of the OLF, and later an autonomous NGO (1991). It has shown that in terms of its development role Hundee filled the gap left by the closure of ORA's offices in the country. The NGO channel provided some of the adherents and sympathizers of the OLF, who did not recognize the legitimacy of the OPDO, with an alternative form of action through which they could continue the struggle, using non-violent means. It also provided them with a window of opportunity to act in what was otherwise generally perceived as a closure of the political system. Hundee's survival and success in this politically hostile environment can be attributed to its willingness to negotiate with its opponents at the federal and regional levels and to institute a working relationship with local authorities. This is mainly due to the charismatic leadership and social vision of Hundee's politically moderate and internationally respected director. *He has been able to inspire and rally his staff, convince*

donors, and contend with the problems the organization has faced by drawing on his legal training and on the lessons he learnt from serving under both the Dergue and the Transitional Government of Ethiopia. This policy of non-confrontation and professionalism has won the organization allies within the ruling elite and in the donor community. The accommodation reached by Hundee with the regime has been interpreted by Oromo critics both inside and outside Ethiopia as a betrayal of the cause.

Hundee has also networked with other NGOs, for example in the creation of grain bank associations and the provision of micro-credit. This has, sometimes, however, led it to modify its generally socialist orientations by introducing capitalistic structures, such as the Service Enterprises in Bale. Following government regulations, it also created the Buusaa Gonafaa Micro Finance Company. On the whole, whilst becoming more professionalized, it has hitherto retained its social value base. However, as Hundee expands, becomes more bureaucratic in its operations and less reflexive about its collective ideals, like other small group organizations, it is likely to lose sight of some of these goals.

At the micro-level, Hundee ultimately derives its legitimacy from the Oromo communities it has chosen to serve. Its development work has given it a unique opportunity to mobilize and conscientize communities at the grass-roots level and to put into practice its social agenda of development, or development from within the framework of the culture (Kassam 2002; Stavenhagen 1990). As indicated, Hundee's programs of assistance are culturally framed by the democratic values of the traditional *Gada* system. Hundee has drawn innovatively on this system and its institutions in its work with the communities. It has demonstrated that far from being outdated, customary practices like that of *buusaa gonafaa* (institutionalized welfare system), *dabbarre* (stock loans) and methods of environmental protection can be revived and made to serve a modern function. Similarly, the traditional law-making assemblies (*seera tumma*) led by elders can still continue to play an important role by legislating against harmful practices that have arisen as a result of social change. It is not yet clear to what extent this transposition of indigenous institutions into the modern context changes and decontextualizes them.

Due to its rights based agenda, Hundee can be categorized as a “fourth-generation” NGO in the scheme outlined by Korten (1990). From an initial emphasis on second-generation community development work, it began to create third-generation type institutional frameworks, like grain-bank associations, through which to address social inequities and bring pressure to bear on policy-makers. Since 2002, it has also gone on to serve in an advisory capacity on policy formulation at the national level. Its fourth generation, alternative, cultural and human rights, agenda was apparent from the beginning, but this has become clearer through its interactions with the communities and with greater understanding of the indigenous institutions and system of knowledge. This orientation and its focus on gender and civic education distinguish it from other national NGOs in Ethiopia.

Korten (1990: 127) comments that development has not generally been seen as a “movement”. This phenomenon can largely be seen as a reaction to the processes of modernization, particularly in situations where ethnic and other marginalized communities are struggling to gain access to scarce resources controlled by hegemonic groups. For this reason, Stavenhagen (1990) posits a dynamic link between ethnicity and development. This relationship, and that between social movements, NGOs and development, remains a relatively unexplored area in development theory.

NOTES

¹The capital, Addis Ababa, and Harar have special city status.

²As Pausewang (1992:7) points out, this transition was a multiple one, “from dictatorship to democracy, from a centralized government to regional and local administration, from a history of war to a state of peace.” On the complexities of the transition, see also Lata (1999:xx).

³“Civil society” is a complex political concept. “Simply stated, civil society is, together with state and market, one of the three ‘spheres’ that interface in the making of democratic societies. Civil society is the sphere in which social movements become organized. The organizations of civil society, which represent many diverse and sometimes contradictory social interests, are shaped to fit their social base, constituency, thematic orientations (e.g. environment, gender, human rights) and types of activity. They include

church related groups, trade unions, cooperatives, service organizations, community groups and youth organizations, as well as academic institutions and others” UNDP (1993:1). To this list we can also add NGOs.

⁴ As Korten (1990: 129) points out, these four orientations are not necessarily sequential, but may often evolve and co-exist within the same organization. Tvedt (1998:34) has criticized the scheme for being too normative. It is used here because it reflects well NGO formation in Ethiopia.

⁵ The concept of POS, introduced by Tilly (1978), has been elaborated principally by Tarrow (1998: 71-105). The political process model is a variant of resource mobilization theory.

⁶ In the contemporary world, the Oromo see themselves as a “nation” and the Federal Constitution of 1994 considers them to be one of the constituent “nationalities,” following the Russian model (cf. Lata 1999: 198-203). Analytically, however, they are a territorially based ethnic group, or a “proto-nation” (Eriksen 1993: 14), who like the Kurds, Palestinians, and Tamils are seeking to create their own state.

⁷ Such community-based welfare organizations, which still exist, include *iddir*, formed by people in the same locality to meet burial and other expenses, *equb*, credit associations, and *debo* rural mutual support organizations, the latter mainly in Oromo areas (see Tvedt 1998: 40).

⁸ The following description of Hundee’s development work is based on several informal discussions held with the director and members of the organization from 1996, and on visits to some of its field sites. It is also based on formal interviews with one of its project officers, in Addis Ababa in December 1998 and November-December 2003. These discussions were complemented by observation of Hundee’s participatory methods at five civic education workshops held in East Shoa, at Sandafa (28-29 December 1998) and at Adulalla and Bushoftu (3-4 January 1999). It also draws on Hundee’s project and annual reports. Research undertaken prior to 2001 was self-funded; the Nuffield Foundation funds current research on Hundee’s civic education program.

⁹ Holcomb (1997) suggests that a form of “elite democracy” or “polyarchy” that serves transnational, global interests has been instituted in Ethiopia as part of current American foreign policy.

¹⁰ This report can also be found on the Human Rights Watch website, <http://www.hrw.org>.

¹¹ According to the Oromia Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau, 106 NGOs were operating in the region in 2002. 77 of these are international ones, whilst 29 are national ones. Other Oromo NGOs include the Oromo Self-Help Association, the Macha-Tulama Association, revived in 1991, the Guddina Foundation, Siqqee, a women's organization and a number of OPDO created ones. See, also Campbell (2000).

¹² Hitherto, NGOs have not been recognized as distinct legal entities and their registration is based on an outdated legal framework (Human Rights Report, 1997). They were regulated under the 1960 civil code of Ethiopia and the 1966 associations' registration regulations. The DPPC was formerly known as the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) and undertook registration of international NGOs that provided emergency humanitarian assistance during the 1984/5 droughts. The government is currently revising its regulations.

¹³ Hundee's initial mission statement has been slightly modified to reflect its current programs and activities.

¹⁴ This policy pertains to the Licensing and Supervision of Micro Financing, Proclamation No. 40/1996.

¹⁵ The documentary, "The Loan, the Chicken and the Egg," by the French producer Claude Mouriéras (2001), gives a good account of Buusaa's work.

¹⁶ Such rural associations are sanctioned under the government's Agricultural Cooperative Societies Proclamation, No. 85/1995.

¹⁷ On *dabarree*, see Megerssa (1993). See also the essays of Bassi and Burke in Baxter and Hogg (1990).

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Powerlessness and the HIV/AIDS Epidemics in Ethiopian Empire

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Abstract

Currently, Ethiopia has over 2.7 million people who are already infected with HIV/AIDS. Unless it is controlled, the worst impact of the epidemic will be felt in the course of the next decade and beyond. The magnitude of the epidemic can not simply explained in terms of people's sexual behavior. Specifically, I argue that Ethiopian socio-economic-political conditions are determinants of sexual behavior. Critical historical analyses of public health show that socio-economic-political powerlessness has played a crucial role in public health. In this paper, I examine the powerlessness and social well-being of the Oromo people in general and HIV/AIDS epidemics in particular within the framework of powerlessness.

Introduction

An early slogan of AIDS prevention campaigns in the United States was that "AIDS does not discriminate." Unfortunately, this is only partly true. AIDS does discriminate; it is now clear that HIV/AIDS spreads more quickly where social life is chaotic, where poverty is endemic, and where human rights are violated (Cohen and Wiseberg, 1990). The burden of HIV/AIDS is borne disproportionately by people and communities already suffering from poverty, hunger, homelessness, inadequate health care, discrimination, and stigmatization (Gostin, 1997). In rich countries, AIDS patients die more slowly than in poor countries. In communities and countries in which less dominant people have lost their land and their way of life and are disempowered as a result of colonialism and neo-colonialism, the infection rate of HIV/AIDS is very high when compared with the dominant groups.

Mann, et. al (1999) and Goldsmith (1993) suggest that the critical

relationship between societal discrimination and vulnerability to HIV, as well as other health problems, is the central insight gained from over a decade of global work. Hirose (1994) also suggests that the AIDS epidemic is centred in developing countries, as they are susceptible to human rights violations. Therefore, fundamentally, the battle against AIDS is linked to the struggle for human rights, dignity, and empowerment that is inextricably linked to the battle for women's rights and the battle against racism (Cotton, 1994) as well as poverty. For example, poverty affects prevention efforts by limiting accessibility to preventive measures. Moreover, the rate of maternal transmission of HIV virus could be cut by two thirds with the drug zidovudine. However, it is far too costly for most of the world's HIV-infected pregnant women.

The history of public health repeatedly demonstrates that times of turmoil or economic instability and altered migration patterns and of changing mores and political ferment have provided fertile ground for the propagation of epidemics. According to the UNAIDS Executive Director (2001), civil and international conflict helps the spread of HIV, as populations are destabilized and armies move across new territories. The same source states that conflict exacerbates the spread of HIV virus and, in a vicious cycle, the weakened defenses of nations contribute to international instability. Several researchers argue that progress in public health, including the control of HIV/AIDS, cannot be made without empowering of the oppressed and the vulnerable.

Individual behavior changes have long been the central theme in HIV/AIDS prevention policy, encouraging all people to "just say no" or to engage only in safe sex practices. Though behavior is relevant to improving health and preventing diseases, individuals must be empowered to make the kind of decisions about their lives that will enable them to protect their health. In order to just say no or to engage only in safe sex, individuals should be empowered. For example, Zelalem's (2001) survey report shows that among 354 sexually active female adolescents in Finfine (Addis Ababa) aged 15 to 19 years, 62 percent answered that they have very little control over sex with their partners. Obviously, this is partly due to the prevailing socio-cultural situation (e.g., low status of women) that affects women's lives in Ethiopia, a country where abduction and rape are rampant. AIDS/

HIV epidemics are a very serious public health matter for people like the Oromos who have no control over their social, economic, environmental, political, and health affairs.

There is an old story about the person who lost his way and asked a local for directions. “Ah, yes,” replied the local, “I know the place, but if I were going there, I wouldn’t start from here.” There is an element of wisdom here, as some places are hard to get to from certain locations, while other routes are more straightforward.

Similarly, in the search for reasons and solutions for the HIV/AIDS epidemics in Africa, and in the Ethiopian Empire in particular, we should ask where to start our search to understand the problem and then prescribe solutions. The question is what are the reasons behind AIDS epidemics in Ethiopia and surrounding regions? Does sexual behavior explain the whole epidemic of HIV/AIDS or are there any other social and political factors that should be taken into account? Such questions lead us to study the HIV/AIDS epidemics in terms of historical, social, and political power relations. More specifically, these questions lead us to examine and re-examine Ethiopian government policies in terms of power relations. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to emphasize the importance of empowerment in controlling the spread of HIV/AIDS epidemics and to initiate alternative discourses in order to determine a new direction for research in public health policies in Ethiopia.

What is Empowerment?

To have an in-depth understanding of the relationship between health and empowerment requires understanding the history of a people. As well, there should be an understanding of how emancipation works in public health. Rappaport (1984) defines empowerment as a process and mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives. Here, empowerment is viewed as a transforming process constructed through action. Sen and Batliwala (2000) define empowerment broadly with respect to empowering women with regard to reproductive rights. In the authors’ definition, empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the

circumstances of their lives. This includes both control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, and financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values, and attitudes). For them, empowerment means not only greater extrinsic control, but also a growing intrinsic capacity— greater self-confidence and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers to accessing resources or changing traditional ideology. According to Swift (1984), the root of the philosophy of empowerment goes deep into the political and philosophical foundation of democracy. In other words, her thesis is that democracy and its embodiment in political institutions are based on the principle of empowering citizens to participate in the decisions affecting their well-being.

Understanding empowerment demands that we first make clear a conception of the condition from which it evolves. For Fanon (1963), the colonial model exemplifies powerlessness. Freire's (1970) conceptions are broader and applicable in a colonial state of affairs as well as in societies divided by social status. In his view, the individual becomes powerless in assuming the role of 'object' acted upon by the environment, rather than 'subject' acting in and on the world. Another way of understanding this is as submersion in a system of social relations to such an extent that individuals and groups lose their sense of control over those relations. Actually, powerlessness and empowerment are interwoven with political power relations, in which power holders are usually in possession of sufficient influence or authority to produce or to force change. Thus empowerment is the process of changing power relations in favor of those at the lower levels of a hierarchy.

At the international level, the importance of community participation in health promotion is recognized and employed. For example, in 1986, the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion identified community empowerment as a central theme of health promotion discourse (see, World Health Organization or WHO, Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion). Subsequent international conferences to address health promotion have acted to reinforce this concept. Subsequently, the Annapolis Declaration of International Partnership against HIV/AIDS in Africa has called for local empowerment (see, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 1999). The plan is to empower

local governments, the private sector, communities, and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to participate actively in designing and implementing parts of the international AIDS program. Legal and policy changes are advocated that permit easy creation and operation of NGOs and community-based organizations, mapping and engagement of local groups (The World Bank, 2000). However, Ethiopia, who is also a member of the WHO, does not tolerate independent organizations, whether political or humanitarian. The idea of empowerment of individuals and communities is contrary to the Ethiopian government colonial agenda.

Empowerment and Public Health

The idea of empowerment in public health is based on the understanding that programs and projects that do not address community concerns and that do not allow stakeholders to participate in the process have been shown not to achieve their purpose (Rifkin, 1990). Historically, three basic approaches have been employed in developing health education interventions. The first one is the preventive model, which is focused on the individual decision-making process in adopting a positive health behavior for the prevention of disease. The second is the radical political model, which is focused on changing social, environmental and political structures to tackle the root of health problems. The final is the empowerment model, which is focused on facilitating individual and community choices by supplementing knowledge acquisition with *decision making practice and community organizing skills* through nontraditional teaching methods (Collins, 1994).

It has been argued that the traditional preventive health education model which the Ethiopian government is employing has a tendency to blame the victim, whereas the radical-political model may bias consciousness-raising efforts towards the interests of health educators rather than those of a community. For example, Becker (1986), in his paper entitled “The Tyranny of Health Promotion,” critiqued the individual lifestyle approach to health promotion and cautioned against its tendencies to equate “being ill” with “being guilty” and to substitute

“personal” health goals for more important “societal goals.” Since the 1980s, we have witnessed a revolution in the field of health education and promotion. The foundation for an alternative approach can be called health education for social change, based on Paulo Friere’s empowerment education (Freire, 1970). In this approach, health education to enact social change is examined theoretically within the context of the need to address social injustice and inequities in health.

Although recently empowerment has been reformulated as an ideological center of public health, the principles are believed to extend back to the formation of the public health discipline in the mid-1800s. In that period, public health practitioners recognized that environmental and community factors influence health. Community involvement in the diagnosis and solution of health problems is reported to be a long-standing tenet of public health (see Institute of Medicine, 1988). Since empowerment became central concept for public health, the role of public health professionals has developed into *facilitating the community’s efforts to solve its own problems.*

According to Beeker et. al (1998), the philosophical foundation of empowerment in public health is based on three assumptions. The first assumption is that health problems have multiple determinants, often including those that lie beyond individual lifestyles and skills. The *second assumption relates to how the participation of communities fosters the awareness of health problems and preventive actions through its definition of health problems and preventive plans of action.* The third assumption is that the success of intervention depends on the capacity of the community to engage in effective action.

Emancipatory education focuses on group action and dialogue directed at community targets in order to enhance people’s belief in their ability to change their own lives (Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1988). Here, empowerment in health promotion is often defined as “a process of helping people to assert control over the factors that affect their health.” It has also been used synonymously with indices of coping skills, mutual support, community organization, support systems, neighborhood participation, personal efficacy, competence, self-esteem, and self-sufficiency. This limited concept of empowerment evokes the notion that controlling environmental forces is the ultimate goal. The

idea of environmental forces expands the definition and includes an understanding of all that is necessary for the transformation of reality.

Powerlessness and Epidemics

In order to decide whether or not empowerment would be a solution for HIV/AIDS epidemics in Ethiopia, we need to closely evaluate available records in this regard. The literature in social epidemiology and social psychology examines lack of control over one's life as a risk factor. Here lack of control means being overburdened with life demands without adequate resources to meet the demand (Syme, 1986). In addition, social epidemiological research has long documented that lower socioeconomic status is related to increased morbidity and mortality from such risks as improper sanitation, hazardous jobs, malnutrition, poor education or minority status. There is a growing body of evidence that underlines the importance of the determinants of health, such as: income and social status, social support networks, education, employment and working conditions, physical environments, biology and genetic endowment, personal health practices and coping skills, healthy child development and health services (Govt. of Canada, 1994).

During feudal times in Western Europe, powerlessness was linked to the outbreak of epidemics. The consolidation of land dispossessed English peasants and deprived them of other privileges that the peasantry had enjoyed from medieval times. Therefore, they left the rural way of life and moved to cities and towns. In their new urban life, the very first challenges were to secure food and shelter. The process by which they obtained food changed from that of subsistence farming, in which they produced food for themselves, to that of buying food from someone else in the available market (Meredith, 1989). This resulted in a change in the diet of these people, raising various nutritional issues such as food hygiene and different nutritional deficiency syndromes. The need for shelter near the factories drove people to rent not cottages as in the country side, but unheated, unventilated, single rooms, sometimes in wet basements with an outdoor privy and no indoor water, toilet, or bath. The unmet demand for cheap housing led to overcrowding, with several families sharing a single room. Poor housing

and the lack of drains and sewage prompted the rapid spread of communicable diseases in the malnourished and debilitated populations (Meredith, 1989).

But even in countries that do guarantee health care as a right, such as Canada, major public health problems are far from resolved. The gap between the health status of the poor and the rich continues to exist and may be growing (Krieger, 1990). The disparity between black and white health in the U.S.A. has been reported to be linked to various factors (Last, 1987) which can be directly related to empowerment and social inequalities.

In the U.S.A., the United Church of Christ Commission on Real Justice shows that toxic waste generation sites and treatment facilities are located in the residential neighborhoods of minorities (Meredith, 1989). These toxic wastes are one of the reasons that explain the differences between the life expectancy of white and black Americans. It is not a coincidence that toxic waste dumps are located in poor communities lacking the political power to oppose corporations successfully. Actually, corporate holders know the health impact of such toxic waste; that is why they dump it in such disempowered neighborhoods.

The effects of lack of control or powerlessness in disease causation are well recorded. For example, in 1985, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared that “despite the unprecedented explosion in scientific knowledge and the capacity of medicine to diagnose, treat and cure disease, blacks have not fully benefited equally from the fruits of science or from the systems responsible for translation and using health technology” (U.S. Department of Health, 1985). The same report also showed that the life expectancy of blacks is far behind that of the whites. In 1985, blacks had a life expectancy already reached by whites in the early 1950s, or a lag of about 30 years. In 1960, blacks suffered 44.3 infant deaths for every 1,000 births, roughly twice the ratio for whites, 22.9.

An analogous case is recorded among native Canadians who have a historical similarity and comparable socio-economic status with black Americans in the U.S.A. For example, Canadian Aboriginal peoples, as a group, are the most disadvantaged citizens, and have the poorest health

status. They have significantly higher infant death rates, compared to the rest of the Canadian population. Tuberculosis rates are about eight times higher for registered Indians than for the total Canadian population. Diabetes rates are two to five times as high, and suicide rates are two to three times higher than among whites. In a Manitoba hospital, for example, morbidity for infectious and parasitic diseases; endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases and immunity disorders; diseases of the respiratory and digestive systems; complications of pregnancy and childbirth; and injury and poisonings are at least twice as high for registered Indians than for other residents (Meredith, 1990).

In spite of the above-mentioned cases, the health status of many blacks has improved, as they have become empowered and attained middle-class status through public education and government enforcement of equal employment opportunities and entitlement laws (Stephen, 1992). In general, the health status of the black community is tied to the role black Americans play today and the role they will play in the future. In other words, the primary determinants of disease are economic and social, and therefore its remedies must also be economic and social. And, the social and economic status of people directly depends on their degree of empowerment.

Similar to the case of black Americans, women's empowerment is hypothesized as positively influencing the survival and health of their children. This follows from the fact that empowerment, by definition, must put women, the primary care-takers of their own children, in a position to make informed decisions, give them access to and control over necessary resources, and the power to make and implement their own decisions (Kishor, 2000).

Powerlessness and Social Wellbeing in Oromia in Historical Perspective

What is the situation in Ethiopia? The Ethiopian health education program has been declared to be a failure (see, Shabbir & Larson, 1995 and the Statements of Ethiopian Opposition Parties). The Ethiopian government has also set up a National AIDS Council and introduced a public awareness campaign, but analysts say that there has been little impact on the spread of the disease. According to the Council report,

up to 5,000 people a week are infected with HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia and the infection is attributed to poverty, ignorance, gender inequality, cultural barriers, war and the displacement of people. The opposition parties have dismissed the country's HIV/AIDS program as ineffective and have called on the government to declare a state of emergency to stop the spread of the disease (see the Statements of Ethiopian Opposition Parties).

But to link powerlessness with the social wellbeing of the Oromos, first I would like to examine the Oromo concept of health and then briefly demonstrate how much the Oromo people have been disempowered both in the historical past and at the present.

For the Oromians, health (*fayya*) is interconnected with peace (*nagaa*). For them, health and peace are inseparable. In addition, the Oromo relate their health and peace with the peace and health of the environmental and so it also includes environmental health.¹ The Oromo concept of health is thus more holistic than the one defined by the World Health Organization. According to WHO (1997), "Health is a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

Following the WHO definition of health and considering the way the Oromo conceptualize health, these colonized and neo-colonized people are entirely unhealthy. Among several African peoples, colonialism itself is considered as a 'disease.' For example, Meredith, (1989) quotes from the work of Albert Memmi in which he described the experience of Africans opposing assimilation and colonialism; he portrays the colonizers as "disfigured" and even "diseased" by their role in colonial society. Their social and economic wellbeing was interrupted by colonialism and neocolonialism, which also affected their physical and spiritual well-being. Therefore, in search of alternative solutions to the epidemics of HIV/AIDS, fundamental causes should be systematically looked for from the perspective of power relations. Given that health is holistic for the Oromos, the focus of public health should be holistic rather than individual, as in the Western world. To briefly introduce the socio-economic-political status the Oromo and their power relation with Abyssinia, now let us turn to historical analyses.

Following the Berlin conference of 1884 known as the Scramble

for Africa, Europeans colonized many African peoples. With the help of Europeans, Abyssinia colonized Oromia; that makes Ethiopia a dependent colonial state in northeast Africa (Holcomb & Sisay, 1990). Few European writers have recorded the degree to which Abyssinian colonialism disempowered the Oromo people and affected their social wellbeing. Blundell and his team (1900) as they traveled in Oromia in early 1888, recorded that everywhere they went, the face of the country showed signs of past warfare and passing expeditions. Many houses were burned or abandoned, and much of what had formerly been land covered by crops of cotton, wheat, and millet was reclaimed by rich jungles. According to the author, the people were reduced to semi-starvation by two consecutive Abyssinian invasions.

According to Newman the British advisor to the Abyssinian king, who was an army officer, Plowden, was killed in one of the many campaigns waged against the Oromo. He witnessed that the war was particularly brutal:

“In the war against the Galla (Oromo), Theodorus used punishment with variations such as cutting off either or both hands or feet, with or without the gouging out of the eyes, which has long been a prominent feature in Ethiopian warfare, and is not yet considered out of date” (Newman, 1936).

The same author, reporting on the population of the region before and after the Abyssinian colonial wars, comments:

The extent to which these areas have been depopulated is shown by the fact that prior to its conquest, the population of Kaffa was estimated at 1,500,000, but owing to the slave trade and removal of the population by [the] gabar system, it has been reduced to 20,000. In the same way, the slave trade in men, women and children has so reduced the population of Gimirra that it dropped in five years from 100,000 to 20,000 inhabitants.

According to Prouty et. al (1981), between the years 1800 and 1850, Abyssinia supplied over 1,250,000 slaves to the world slave market.

The people who were sold into slavery were those who were conquered by Abyssinians in that time. On April 21, 1919, a US diplomat wrote:

Much of the present slave-raiding is said to occur among the Boran [Oromo] people in southern Abyssinia, in Kaffa province, and in the region of Lake Rudolph on both sides of frontier. The large and rich province of Kaffa is said to have been converted in a few years from a land of industrious people producing great quantities of agricultural and pastoral products, into a land of wilderness with only a few people remaining [with] these spending their time hidden in the jungle to escape the notice of raiding or marauding bands of so-called Abyssinian soldiers (Starrett, 1976).

Between 1850 and 1870, the French historian Martial de Salviac estimated the Oromo population to be about 10 million. In 1900 he reported that only half had survived the Abyssinian war of occupation (Melba, 1980). Similarly, Gelmo Abbas, an Oromo historian, reported indiscriminate killing of Oromos in the Arsi region by Abyssinian King Menilik II.



An Abyssinian Slave Market, taken from Picture Courtesy of League of Nations, prepared as a Post Card for Oromo Remembrance Day.

In the village known as Anolee, the force of Menilik II had mutilated the hands of the Oromo men and the breasts of Oromo women indiscriminately. The event is recorded as “Harkaa Muraa and Harmaa Muraa Anolee.” (Harka =hand and harmaa =breast and muraa means mutilation).

Abyssinian crimes against individuals are also recorded. For example, referring to Dejach Balcha, Abba-Nafso, an American diplomat stationed in Addis Ababa, states:

His history is a sad one.... He was taken prisoner, when a boy, by the Abyssinians who conquered [his] province.... According to the prevailing custom, even up till today, Balcha was made a slave after having been horribly mutilated by his captors (Starret, 1976).

The Oromo have not fared well in recent times either. In 1973, Northern Oromia (Wallo) was affected by drought and starvation in which over 200,000 people, mostly women and children, died. The majority were either Oromo from Wallo or Afar people (Hassen, 2001). King Haile Selassie kept the situation secret from the international media and prohibited people's movement from the drought-affected area of the North to fertile regions of the country.

In 1992, following the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) withdrawal from a transitional government, over 30,000 Oromos were arrested. Thousands were killed and hundreds are still missing. OLF withdrew from the transitional government after the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) failed to conduct free and fair elections in the Empire State. Oromo Support Groups (OSG) reported that from 1991 to 2000, the organization recorded 2,592 extra-judicial killings and 838 disappearances of civilians suspected of supporting groups opposing the Ethiopian government. Thousands of civilians have been imprisoned. Torture and rape of prisoners is commonplace. Most of them are Oromo nationals (OSG Report No. 32, 2000).

By my observation, most of these political prisoners are from educated groups. Oromo educated groups (teachers, lawyers, doctors and, in general, Oromo intellectuals) have been forced to migrate to neighboring countries and the Western world. This mass political

imprisonment, killing, firing from positions and migration has resulted in a severe shortage of educated workers in Oromia and very serious social and political problems in the society. This has not happened by accident. It is deliberately planned and executed by TPLF to disempower the Oromo people.

In 1999, the Tigrayan People Liberation Front (TPLF) government burned natural Oromian forests. Students who were concerned about this environmental, social and economic catastrophe organized themselves to fight the fire, first in Ambo then in many other cities. However, the Ethiopian government, already alleged to be responsible for the fire that consumed over a million hectares of forests, banned students from fighting the fire. To silence these concerned brave students, the government security forces killed two students, wounded six and detained over 1000 in Ambo alone. In April 2000, thousands of students and hundreds of teachers were kidnapped and disappeared from their schools, dormitories and streets in several cities and towns of Oromia.² The fire resulted in immense ecological and economic damage, having immediate and certainly an enormous future impact on Oromia and the region. In one of the letters sent to the Oromos in the Diaspora, the students described the situation:

TPLF is using a principle of drying the lake to kill the fish, so they decide to burn and destroy Oromia's national forests in order to demolish Oromia's social fabric by first and foremost burning the forest of Oromia, in a long run to crush our national [Liberation] movement.³

According to an Amnesty International Urgent Action letter dated January 12, 2001, about 150 Oromo students from Finfine (Addis Ababa) University had been in police custody since December 22, 2000. Among them, only 18 were brought to court and charged within 48 hours, as required by law. Amnesty International has expressed fears that those students who remained in police custody might be at risk of torture or ill-treatment. Giving some background information, the letter asserts that thousands of people of Oromo nationality have been detained in Ethiopia without charge or trial, following several peaceful demonstrations against the government's decision to move the Oromia

regional capital from Addis Ababa (Finfine) to Nazareth (Adama). Oromo students at Addis Ababa University had reportedly organized the protest shortly before the arrest.

The forest burn destabilized thousands of Oromo people, as the fire consumed their homes, farms and their animals. Shortly after the forest burn, the government of Ethiopia declared that millions of people would die if the international community did not provide food in the region affected by the fire. As very often happens, without questioning the root cause of the problem, the Western world poured in food donations.



Starving Children



Military hardware



War front

While the world community poured in emergency food to the affected region and encouraged Ethiopian to settle the border dispute peacefully with Eritrea, the Ethiopian government started one of the bloodiest wars recorded in history. As millions of people were starving to death, Oromo young men were forced to die in senseless and unnecessary battles.

On May 18, 1999, the Guardian newspaper reported that the ruling party of Ethiopia, the TPLF used Oromo peasants as human minesweepers in the war against Eritrea. Hirst put the case in this way:

If the conduct of war is a measure of government's fitness and ability to rule, then Tsorona is a terrible indictment of the TPLF. It was Oromo peasants it selected as human minesweepers, and Tigrayan officers who shot them from the rear. Yet it showed hardly less contempt for its own people. Local Tigrayan villagers were pressed into that

suicidal baggage train, and mainly Tigrean soldiers died in the tanks that were entrusted to no other nationality.

After over 130,000 powerless people were killed, Ethiopia and Eritrea finally agreed to settle their border dispute. By then, the war had already consumed not only human beings who had died at the war front but also enormous resources. According to the Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute, the two-and-a-half-year war with Eritrea cost Ethiopia \$2.9 billion U.S. During this time, military expenditures were reported to be 49.8 percent of the country's total annual expenditures. The estimated cost of destroyed public and social infrastructure was well over \$200 million (Bhalla, 2001a). Loltu has attempted to explain the motives of Meles Zenawi, who is both the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and at the same time the leader of TPLF, who declared war against Eritrea:

By eliminating the Oromo threat at the front lines, Meles kills two birds in one battle. Actually, to him, it is like a cockfight. Meles would be delighted to see both fighters disable each other for life. So, when people ask how Meles could send his own people into such incredible danger in these wars, it is clear that they do not understand his plan. Meles does not regard the foot soldiers sent to assail the Eritrean to be his "own people" at all. They are the ones who want their own self-determination. The war with Eritrea provides both the perfect excuse to snatch these young nationalists out of Oromia and parts of the south and the perfect opportunity to send them unprotected in great numbers against the Eritreans (Loltu, 2000).

More than a year after Ethiopia and Eritrea signed a cease-fire agreement ending their border conflict, it was reported that hundreds of bodies of soldiers were still lying at the front line (Bhalla, 2001b). The United Nations appealed to these countries to collect the bodies of hundreds of soldiers from the front lines. Reflecting the degree of human rights violations in these countries and the extent to which the regimes of these states are irresponsible to their people, UN spokesman

Jean Victor stated in diplomatic language: “These are the remains of human beings, who had families, who had countries, and who were people” (Bhalla, 2001b).

Powerlessness and Epidemics in Oromia Colonialism and Epidemics

There are several cases where colonizers have deliberately or inadvertently used infectious diseases to silence the people who oppose their colonial agenda. The British, for example, historically used smallpox against native Canadians (Christopher et al, 1997) and New Zealand used influenza against the Samoan people (see, *The New Zealand Herald*, June 2002). Similarly, after Abyssinia attacked Oromos in Arsi and Wolaitans, an outbreak of smallpox followed. According to local oral history tellers, Menilik II sent armies already infected with smallpox to fight the Oromians and Wolaitans, instructing them to surrender. The Oromos, whose traditional law and custom do not permit the indiscriminate or killing of prisoners of war, took in these surrendered armies and kept them within their own society. As a result, smallpox affected a very wide region of Oromia. In the Ginir area, an entire Oromo clan was believed to have perished of this infectious disease⁴.

In Western Oromia, there was a similar case. Birri (1995), writing the history of the Presbyterian Church in Oromia, stated that in 1918/1919, the deadly influenza commonly known as Spanish flu which is also known in Amaharic as ‘Yehidar Beshita,’ affected Western Oromia. In his account, the first Presbyterian missionaries in Western Oromia arrived as medical doctors to battle against these epidemics. The timing of the outbreak of Spanish Flu in Western Oromia is very close to the arrival time of Abyssinian colonial forces in that part of the country. Another case has been documented in Eastern Oromia. The evidence shows that soon after Abyssinia invaded the eastern part of Oromia, a cholera outbreak and famine was witnessed. Subsequent visitation of cholera and famine had practically decimated the population of the Oromos throughout the whole region as far as the Hawash (Blundell, 1900). These different cases clearly show that as the Oromos lost their sovereignty, their social wellbeing was negatively affected. However,

further research is required to establish whether or not the outbreaks of Spanish flu in Western Oromia and cholera outbreaks in Eastern Oromia were deliberately started like the cases of Native Canadians and the Samoan people.

HIV/AIDS Epidemics

Now let us turn to the main topic of the current paper—HIV/AIDS epidemics and powerlessness. *First let us consider the magnitude of the problem and synthesize from this the role of the current TPLF government and the role of the former military government of Ethiopia.* In June 1999, the World Bank reported that Sub-Saharan Africa carries the major HIV disease burden of the globe. According to this data, out of the global total of 5.8 million new HIV infections, 4.0 million are in Africa. Global HIV patient numbers are 33.4 million, and among them, 22.5 million live in Africa. The number of people who have died of AIDS are 13.9 million and among them, 11.5 million of them have been in Africa. Cumulative HIV infections to date are 47.3 million, and among them 34.0 million are in Africa (World Bank, 2000).

Ethiopia is one of the countries affected the most by the AIDS epidemic. By the end of the year 2001, total deaths from AIDS were projected to reach about 1.7 million out of a population of 60 million in the Ethiopian empire. The secretary-general of the National HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Council told the Associate Press that Ethiopia now has 2.7 million people infected with HIV, ranking third behind South Africa and India. The first case of HIV infection was recorded in Ethiopia in 1984 (Khodakevich and Zewdie, 1993), and since then 750,000 children have lost one or both parents to AIDS.

In 2001, according to the official figures, the numbers of orphans resulting from AIDS were approximately 850,000 in Ethiopia and the unofficial figure is probably closer to one million. According to the Glimmer of Hope Web site (2002), in Addis Ababa, there are over 40,000 children under the age of 15 living in difficult circumstances due to the effects of HIV/AIDS. The same document reveals that 380,000 of three million people with HIV/AIDS in the country live in Addis Ababa.

Mobilization and De-mobilization of the Army and HIV/AIDS Epidemics

In order to explain how the HIV/AIDS epidemic has spread, I want to describe a project in which over 400,000 Ethiopian ex-soldiers were resettled into their villages and analyze it, bearing in mind that individual and group empowerment make a difference in controlling the spread of HIV/AIDS. In May 1991, the TPLF with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) alliance forces defeated the military government of Ethiopia and took power. Over half a million ex-soldiers were dispersed throughout Ethiopia and in neighboring countries (Somalia, Sudan, Kenya and Djibouti).

In a project funded by the Ethiopian government, the World Bank and major international non-governmental and governmental organizations, nearly 400,000 former government soldiers were sent back to their villages and towns. Before these ex-soldiers were dispatched to their villages and towns, it was known that many of them were already infected with different types of infectious diseases (Gizaw, 1992) later to manifest as a serious public health threat. Upon the arrival of the soldiers at the shelter camps, their health status was recorded. According to Gizaw, the ex-soldiers were stressed and malnourished and many of them were suffering from war wounds. Most of them were poorly dressed and had poor personal hygiene and therefore extensive body lice infection. The health problems identified during their stay in the camp include: shigelloses, relapsing fever, malaria and skin infections (Gizaw, 1992). The author also recorded that the movement of these ex-soldiers had immediately impacted on the health of people in the nearby villages and towns. As the soldiers were allowed free movement to nearby villages and towns to search for food, they transmitted infectious diseases such as malaria, relapsing fever, tuberculosis and waterborne diseases and body lice to the nearby communities (Gizaw, 1992). Shabbir and Larson (1995) also reported high-risk practices for HIV infection in rural areas where the ex-soldiers resided. The authors point out that in Ethiopia, the route of spread for HIV infection is from urban to rural areas, associated closely with movements of these ex-soldiers.

Writing on the transition from war to peace in Sub-Saharan Africa and describing the demobilization situation of Ethiopian ex-soldiers, Colletta et. al (1996) acknowledge that communities may justifiably be worried about the return of ex-combatants infected with HIV. They also admit that *minimal medical screening* may have been undertaken during discharge, but that cost considerations precluded the testing of all demobilized combatants in most instances. They suggested that, in general, the delivery of health services within the program should be through established government channels. They emphasized that for the Oromo people and for the rest of the other people in Ethiopia, *community health and social integrity are the first priorities*. Earlier in this paper, I argued that empowerment involves community participation to control the risk factors that affect community health. It is in such circumstances as these where empowerment can make a considerable difference in public health. I argue that if the Oromos were empowered and had their own government and if the project was planned and executed by them, the cost and benefit of the project would have been analyzed. Based on that, measures would have been taken to avoid exposing the whole population to such deadly epidemics rather than simply precluding the testing for cost reasons.

And this is not the end of TPLF crimes in public health. According to Voelker (2000), the TPLF government actually closed facilities set up by the military government to battle HIV/AIDS epidemics. In her account, prior to the TPLF government, Ethiopia employed 25 physicians, 25 counsellors and 34 laboratories in its HIV/AIDS control program. Once the TPLF took power and the magnitude of the problem was out of control, the staff was reduced to three or four.

To further relate the case of the demobilization of these ex-soldiers to empowerment and powerlessness, it is important to understand how these ex-armies were recruited. Most of the ex-soldiers, were recruited by force from their villages and towns and the designated military garrison areas were far from their home villages and towns. This entailed prolonged family separations and had serious physical and psychological repercussions. The misery of the material, social and environmental deprivation caused by the fragmented family took various forms, among them: alcoholism, mental disorders and widespread resorting to

prostitution. The unequal gender ratio in the military made it difficult for men to establish stable sexual liaisons with women, and this encouraged prostitution.

From 1975 to 1991, about one and half a million forcefully-recruited soldiers died in the war (Save the Children, 2002) and three hundred thousand were injured or disabled returned home (Kloos, 1993) becoming a socio-economic burden to their families and fellow villagers. As a result, many children lost their fathers. Aging mothers and fathers who traditionally depended on the support of sons and daughters faced very serious problems as they lost their sons to the war and many of their daughters became single mothers, as they lost their husbands at the same time. Shortages of food resulted and the socio-economic sustainability of the community at large was threatened, which also increased the HIV/AIDS risk factors.

These forcefully-recruited soldiers were kept in military camps located in the desert or in semi-desert regions. In such regions, no clean water, no fresh food, no proper medication and no preventive health education was provided. The temperature in these regions is always hot during the day and cold in the nighttime. Malaria and yellow fever, shigellosis, relapsing fever, meningitis, infectious hepatitis, typhus, and typhoid fever are very common in these regions. Most of these soldiers were depressed and angry at the government as they had been involuntarily recruited into the army.

On a weekly basis, a few of these soldiers were allowed to leave the military camps to go to the nearby towns and cities as a 'vacation'. Obviously, for them, a vacation is nothing but an opportunity to be high on alcohol and spend a night or two with commercial sex workers. Hence, venereal diseases were very common among these soldiers. As stated above, the relation between Abyssinia and Oromia as well as the other nations in Ethiopian Empire is colonial in its nature and the wellbeing of the soldiers is not a priority.

The incubation period for the HIV is longer than formerly known venereal diseases; therefore, ordinary people did not notice the onset of this epidemic. However, among health professionals, it was known that the prevalence of HIV among female blood donors in Gonder

city, the region where many of these ex-soldiers were stationed for years, has been recorded to be at seven percent in 1989, which had increased to 16.8 percent in 1992. It was also known that HIV infection was widespread among these ex-soldiers (Assefa et al, 1994).

Ten years after the demobilization of ex-soldiers, HIV is like a ticking time bomb and has cost the lives of over a million people. Recent reports indicate that the HIV virus is spreading into rural areas where the vast majority of the Ethiopian population resides. One of the main suspected reasons for why the HIV virus has affected rural Ethiopia through the ex-soldiers who have re-settled in the villages from which they were forcefully recruited (Shabbir and Larson, 1995).

To further understand the nature of this project funded by the World Bank, it is important to examine who planned and executed the demobilization project and for whom the project was planned. Most of the ex-soldiers are believed to be Oromos and non-Abyssinians who were used as mine sweepers, as mentioned above. Since the TPLF totally controlled the government apparatus, they alone designed and implemented the so-called demilitarization program. Therefore, the project was planned and implemented by Tigrean nationals versus the rest of other Ethiopian nations and nationalities. For example, among ex-soldiers dispatched to their villages and towns by the TPLF government, only 5,052 individuals (2.3 percent) were sent to the Tigray region, as compared to more than 217, 000 (97.7 percent) to other regions. Therefore, the health effect of demobilization of ex-soldiers is minimal to Tigrean region.

At the beginning of this paper, I argued that empowerment is a process and mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives. The concept of empowerment is interwoven with the principle of democracy and its embodiment in political institutions encourages citizens to participate in decision making that affects their well-being. Hence, it is clear that empowerment is very significant for colonized people and for the poor who typically have no say in political decision making. In the case of the people in Ethiopian Empire, if the people had been empowered or if they had rights to question government policies and agendas, they would have resisted their forced military recruitment and prevented the

risk factors related to their exposure to HIV/AIDS. In addition, if ex-soldiers had been empowered, they would have had socially, culturally, and economically viable health education and would have taken preventive measures against this deadly virus.

The Ethiopian Government and the Public Reaction to HIV/AIDS

The Ethiopian government acknowledged the existence of HIV/AIDS disease in Ethiopia by 1986; however, it did not make much effort to control the spread of this deadly virus. In actual fact, HIV has been known since 1984 or the year before (Khodakevich and Zewdie, 1993). According to Shabbir and Larson (1995), in Ethiopia, 60 percent of commercial sex workers are HIV positive. If these commercial sex workers and ex-soldiers were empowered, the available information would have been used as educational material for the awareness campaign and preventive measures against the disease. However, as explained above, it is not enough just to say that these soldiers were not educated individuals about safe sex practices. They were also oppressed socially, economically and politically, were faced with the possibility of impending death, and were suspicious that HIV/AIDS was one of the government's scare tactics and propaganda. This all worked against the men in understanding their situation. The public whispered about HIV/AIDS in the following manner: "The government denied us all our basic human rights and at this time it is coming to our bedrooms telling us what to do and what not to do." Again, it is evident that not only the soldiers but the society is not empowered; therefore, they are not making an effort to change the situation they are in. Furthermore, as the government has no accountability to the people, it makes hardly any effort to monitor the health status of commercial sex-workers to educate them about safe sex practices or to prohibit unsafe practices.

It is now known that in many African countries, an HIV/AIDS infection rate in the military is as high as 90 per cent. Picard (2001) has quoted from a Canadian Security Intelligence Services publication stating that African soldiers are five times more likely to be infected with HIV than members of the general public, due principally to their use of prostitution. There is also evidence that much of the Ethiopian military

forces are HIV positive. For example, by 1990, it was known that the urban areas of Ethiopia accounted for most of the HIV infection, the highest prevalence being among the female commercial sex workers, soldiers and truck drivers (Mehret, 1990).

Another data linking the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Oromia to the demobilized ex-soldiers is the number of commercial sex workers who were HIV positive in Bahir-Dar city during 1987 to 1991. According to a UNAIDS report (UNAIDS, 2002) in Bahir-Dar, over 68 percent of commercial sex workers were HIV positive in 1988. After the Military government forces were defeated in Tigray region in 1987, most of them had moved to Bahir-Dar and surrounding regions until 1991.

In Gonder city, blood was collected from potential male blood donors in 1994 and in 1995, and the samples were tested for the HIV virus. According to the test result, in 1994 only three percent of farmers were infected with HIV virus, which jumped to eight percent after a year. In 1994, 22.8 percent of the soldiers and 40 percent of truck drivers were found to be HIV positive. A year later, the number of soldiers infected with HIV was found to be even higher and reached 30.6 percent (Rahlenbeck, 1997).

Language and Culture

The other area where powerlessness is linked with HIV/AIDS epidemics is through the language policy of Ethiopian government. A case in point is the effect of the discriminatory language policy of Ethiopia on health education and promotion has been proven in the Hadiyya region of Southern Ethiopia. Ten years after the Ethiopian government acknowledged the existence of the disease, in 1996, over 40 percent of the rural farmers surveyed in this region indicated they did not know of the existence of the AIDS epidemic (Shabbir & Larson, 1995). This would suggest that large segments of rural Ethiopia, and more specifically, of non-Amaharic speakers, are unaware of the AIDS epidemic in their country.

Another area where powerlessness is closely linked to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Oromia is via cultural domination. Until recently, commercial sex was an unthinkable business within Oromo society. In

contrast, however, it is widely popular and deeply rooted in the Abyssinian culture (Feleke & Kloos, 1993²). Even today, in Oromia and in other regions, most of the commercial sex workers are believed to have come from the Abyssinian heartland. In contemporary times, despite the fact that the HIV/AIDS epidemic has become a very serious public health concern, commercial sex remains popular in Ethiopia. It is reported that currently in Addis Ababa, 78 percent of commercial sex workers are HIV positive (UNAIDS, 2002). In spite of that, the Ethiopian government dominated by Abyssinians is not enthusiastic about questioning this unhealthy practice.

Discussions

I conclude that the demobilization of ex-soldiers and the presence of a TPLF military in Oromia is the major contributing factor to the HIV/AIDS epidemics in the region. It has been recorded that in several African countries, the movement of the army is the most important contributing factor for HIV/AIDS epidemics. In her book, The Politics of AIDS, Virginia Van der Vliet (1996) emphasized that war and anarchy create ideal conditions for transmission of HIV/AIDS. A U.S. National Intelligence service report also reveals that the relation between disease and political instability is indirect but real (see U.S. National Intelligence website). Kloos (1993), writing about the “Health Impact of War” in Ethiopia, clearly indicated that violence against women and prostitution were common wherever the Ethiopian army operates.

As mentioned earlier, it is in the memory of the people that Abyssinians have used smallpox to fight against the Oromo people. Currently there are rumors about a TPLF policy of placing HIV/AIDS-infected individuals from Amahara and Tigray regions as commercial sex workers in Oromia, thus making use of HIV/AIDS as a biological weapon to silence the peoples’ voice for self-determination. In several African countries, UNAIDS has documented the use of rape in war, in which soldiers are intended to deliberately infect the enemy side with the HIV virus (UNAIDS, 2000). For example, women who are displaced as a result of war and who live in refugee camps, such as those established by the UN agencies, are six times more likely to become infected than populations outside the camps (UNAIDS, 2001).

It is also known that most of African military personnel are HIV positive. It is estimated that the rate of HIV-infection in the Congolese army is 50 percent. Indeed, U.S. National Intelligence statistics have put HIV prevalence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) military at between 40 and 60 percent. DRC armed forces health officials admit that 60 percent of army deaths between 1989 and 1993 were the result of AIDS, and as of the year 1998, it is the major cause of death. Of other African countries with soldiers deployed in the DRC, HIV estimates are 40 to 60 percent for Angola, 66 percent for Uganda, and 80 to 90 percent for Zimbabwe (Financial Mail, 1998).

According to a Canadian Security Intelligence report (2001), in April 2001, South Africa committed its forces to U.N. Peacekeeping duty when a team of 93 soldiers were deployed in the DRC. It is said that to recruit the team, a group 400 potential peacekeepers was tested. Ninety percent were found to be HIV-positive. From a second group of 400, 87 percent were found to be HIV positive (see Canadian Security Intelligence report).

The Ugandan Army first became serious about HIV/AIDS in 1986, when President Museveni sent a contingent to Cuba for training. There they encountered compulsory testing, and 20 percent of them were found to be HIV-positive. Museveni is said to have quickly recognized this as a potential security threat to his country (Canadian Security Intelligence report, 2002). Recent data indicates a significant declining trend in the proportion of the population infected with HIV and a declining rate of new infections in the country (Buczkievicz and Carnegie 2001).

The rate of HIV/AIDS infection in Ethiopian army is not significantly different from African countries mentioned above. However, the TPLF government is not willing to acknowledge the magnitude of the problem among its army. As described above, Ethiopian armies never know “peacetime” and they are constantly engaged in wars and civil disturbances. The Ethiopian army moves from one place to the other without partners or families for extended periods, lives outside of conventional morality; thus many soldiers resort to prostitution and rape women to satisfy their sexual desires.

Hoping to control HIV/AIDS epidemic, in December 2000, the African Development Forum met in Addis Ababa, and concluded that the military is an important factor in the spread of the disease, and should therefore be a high-priority target for intervention as well as a possible agency for positive social changes at the community level (Canadian Security Intelligent Service, 2001).

Currently, the TPLF government is at war with the Oromo people, as the Oromos are in struggle to empower themselves on their affairs (see, Human Rights Watch Report 2002a, 2002b and 2003). However, the idea of empowerment for which the Oromo people are struggling is the contrary to the Ethiopian government agenda. For example, according to an Amnesty International (1994) and Human Rights Watch (1995) report in 1992, there were over 20,000 Oromo political prisoners. Significant portions of these prisoners were young women (Colletta, 1996). The prisoners are tortured and ill-treated and have been kept in secret detention centers. Torture includes the rape of women, a method frequently used to punish or deter suspected Oromo women who have been concerned with the socio-economic status of their people (Oromo Support Group, 2000).

According to an Oromo Support Group report (2000a), Caaltu—a female former political prisoner — estimated that the Ethiopian government security forces have raped 50 percent of the 450 female detainees that she knows. Torture is the method used to humiliate and desempower these prisoners. This helps explain why the Ethiopian government failed to take appropriate measures to control the HIV/AIDS epidemic among the military personnel and the commercial sex workers in the past and present.

Conclusion

This paper raised three major issues regarding the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Ethiopia in general and Oromia in particular. The first issue raised is that the health of the Oromo people is tied to the role they play today and the role they will play in the future in their socio-

economic-environmental-health and political affairs. In Ethiopia, HIV/AIDS epidemics could have been better controlled and deaths would have been significantly reduced if the people of the empire states of Ethiopia, particularly Oromia, had been empowered in their affairs. The prevalence of such infectious disease could have been controlled if the repatriation of ex-soldiers had been decided in consultation with community members and the willingness of these young men had been taken into account in the original recruitment process. The spread of AIDS could have been minimized if these ex-soldiers were empowered in their affairs and they had been appropriately informed about safe sex, AIDS and its health implications for their communities. Furthermore, if the communities had been empowered to solve their own problems, the epidemic could have been minimized.

Second, the presence of TPLF forces in Oromia has significantly impacted on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Keeping in mind that most of the TPLF military is currently stationed in Oromia, and understanding that it is a country where abduction and rape are rampant and that the Oromians are at war with TPLF government, one can only imagine the tragic future for this region.

Third, in countries like Ethiopia, where resources are not available for health care, there is a desperate need for preventive measures against the deadly HIV/AIDS epidemic. The most readily available, accessible and affordable preventive measure is to empower the people on their affairs and bring peace and stability in the empire.

NOTES

¹ I have synthesized the Oromo concept of health from the elders' blessing. Oromo elders give blessings saying, "Nagaa fi fayaan isiin ha ta'u" ("Let you be in peace and health"); "Fayaa fi nagaan deema" ("Go home with health and peace"); and "Qehee nagaa fi fayyat galaa" ("Go home to the vicinity of peace and health").

² Personal communication with student protesters, 2000.

³ Personal communication, Oromo University Students in the Refugee Camps, June, 2001.

⁴ Electronic communication with Dr. Galmo Haji Abbas.

⁵ According to Feleke and Kloos (1993) in Abyssinia prostitution has a long history. The first record dating goes back to the sixteenth century.

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OLF and TPLF: Major Issues and Outcomes of a Decade of Negotiations since 1991

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I. Introduction

Let me say, at the risk of being pedantic, that negotiation is a joint decision-making process. Parties formulate issues to be negotiated. The joint decision is called the “outcome” of the negotiation. In negotiations, issues are relevant because they are related to the underlying fundamental interests of the parties.¹

This article gives an account of major issues and outcomes of negotiations between the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Tigrean People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). The outcomes discussed in this article are not limited to negotiated outcomes. Outcomes that were not products of joint decisions were also indicated to complete a picture of major events that took place during the decade since 1991.

It is beyond the scope of this article to study the dynamic processes involved within and between the parties to identify the issues and to produce the outcomes of individual negotiations. For instances, it is not within the scope of the article to study the dynamic process that led the two protagonists, the OLF and the TPLF, with distinct cultural heritage² and political objectives to connect and interact with one another as negotiating partners. How far the primary parties had been cooperative or strident antagonists³ as negotiating partners is also not considered in this account.

By surveying the major outcomes of negotiations between the OLF and TPLF during a period of ten years, the article actually studies the dynamic process by which the fundamental interests of the parties were positively or negatively impacted by those outcomes. Thus, from an Oromo perspective, the centerpiece of this article is to study the dynamic process employed by their adversaries to frustrate the mechanism devised to peacefully achieve the right of self-determination. The article reveals how the TPLF resuscitated and used for itself the Ethiopian empire-state that was then in death throes.

From a technical angle, the study may serve to demonstrate the cumulative effect of series of outcomes of negotiations. The study also identifies different structures of negotiations - bilateral, multilateral, conference and legislative settings. Third party intervenors⁴ are identified for the purpose of showing the structure of the negotiations. No attempt is made to study how far the intervenors were stakeholders in the issues and in the outcomes of the negotiations.⁵

II. The London Conference

The OLF, TPLF, the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF), and the Dergue regime met in May 1991 in London in the presence of Mr. H. Cohen, the US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, to negotiate a peaceful resolution of the political conflict in Ethiopia. The encounter is known as the London Conference. There never was much of a negotiation that took place in the encounter. The Dergue regime was in total disarray and was not in a position to negotiate even terms of surrender for its forces and officials. The EPLF had practically won the Eritrean liberation war. The TPLF troops were at the gate of the capital city. The OLF could not influence the outcome of the London Conference. The US government endorsed the TPLF to march into the city, to form an interim administration and to call a conference within three months to forge a mechanism for a democratic solution of the political situation in Ethiopia⁶. To confirm his government's commitment to a political change in Ethiopia, as well as to provide incentives for the change, Mr. Cohen pronounced the US policy of "no-democracy-no-assistance."

The OLF and TPLF had already signed an agreement⁷ on September 26, 1990 in which they:

- defined their respective fundamental interests - their "priorities," as they called them;
- defined the content and modality of exercising the right of self-determination;

- committed themselves to undertake practical cooperation in matters of common interest, notwithstanding differences on other issues;
- agreed to call a conference in which all interested parties would participate to seek solutions to questions of self-determination.

The OLF expressed in the agreement its fundamental interest (or its priority) as follows:

The OLF reiterated its commitment to the necessity to agitate for the Oromo people's national identity and independence as a matter of priority and sees the commitment to unity with other peoples as a process that can be developed in the course of practical cooperation with each other on matters of common interest and confidence building measures.

The TPLF said that its fundamental interest (or its priority) was "unity." Here is how it was expressed in the agreement:

The TPLF believes that under favorable conditions whereby the oppressor state apparatus is completely dismantled and the interests of all peoples are safe-guarded, it is mutually advantageous for the Oromo and others in the Empire state to form a larger entity or democratic unity and thus democratic organizations should work as a priority to achieve this objective.

On the issue of the right of self-determination, the agreement said: "... the exercise of the right shall be through a democratically held referendum and the choice of the concerned people between formation of their own state or joining with others in a union shall be respected".

The difference regarding the priorities of the two organizations was left open for future discussions. The two parties agreed that the differences should not hinder practical cooperation between them. In effect the parties formed a coalition. Considering the above-cited terms of the agreement, the big question was how to safeguard the fundamental

interests of respective peoples while seeking mutual advantages. The agreement said, it is up to concerned people to decide through referendum what is to their best advantage. Evidently, the genuine interest of people depends on the integrity of the process by which their decision is made.

Moreover, there were grave doubts about the intention of the TPLF when it said its priority was to work for “democratic unity.” The reason for the doubt was that the TPLF had already organized the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO) out of Oromo prisoners of war captured from the Dergue army. The obvious objective was to affect the integrity of the Oromo people’s decision by using the OPDO as a leverage. What the TPLF called “democratic unity” could in effect be a ploy to claim vested interest in the decision of the Oromo people for the advantage of the people of Tigray.

The OLF did not accept interference by the TPLF to affect the integrity of the decision process of the Oromo people. The OLF priority - that posits to develop unity in a process of practical cooperation on matters of common interest - was in effect a demand for mutual noninterference in the internal affairs of one another. The issue was raised during the negotiation of the September agreement and it was left open by stating that the parties had differences of opinion regarding the creation and objectives of the OPDO.

The September agreement is significant for its recognition of the options available in the right of self-determination. It also indicated that a mechanism for peaceful exercise of the right could be negotiated in a conference to be held in the future. In the London Conference, the US endorsed the calling of a conference as already conceived.

III. Negotiation of the Charter of July 1991

Calling the July Conference

A few days after the London Conference, the TPLF entered Finfinne (Addis Ababa) and established an *interim* administration. It was a moment when the Ethiopian empire-state was in limbo - without a constitutional system and without institutions to define its characters and to defend its sovereignty. The armed forces and the security

apparatus as well as other state institutions were dismantled. The TPLF was not in full control of the empire. For all practical purposes the empire was in death throes. There were areas in the Oromo-land where the OLF or local populations had full control.

The OLF leadership entered Finfinne and resumed negotiations that were initiated at the time of the September Agreement (1990) regarding the calling and holding of a conference.

From the outcome of the London encounter - as well as by virtue of being in charge of the interim administration - the TPLF asserted the right to organize the intended conference. After extensive negotiations between the OLF and TPLF on a draft document to be submitted to an upcoming conference, a preliminary understanding was reached on a draft that defined principles and mechanisms for resolving the central issues of self-determination during a period of transition. The OLF and the TPLF were to attend the conference as coalition partners.

Regarding the issue of determining participants of the conference, it was not clear whether and how far it was subject to bilateral negotiation between the OLF and the TPLF. The issue was important. The conference was a multiparty negotiation that afforded formation of coalitions⁸ among the parties. Decisions of whom to include and whom to exclude had impacts on the outcome of the negotiation as demonstrated by subsequent events.

The TPLF had exclusive control over the bureaucracy and other resources of the ousted regime. That meant, even if “addition” and “subtraction” of conference members were subject to negotiation, the TPLF had a stronger bargaining power than the OLF. It was not evident at the time - although it became obvious later - that the TPLF used the power in its favor to build and to break other coalitions to achieve its agenda for the “Oromo and others in the Empire state.” From the outset, it was clear that the two parties were not on the same wavelength. The OLF was trying to honor its pledge to promote “practical cooperation” among peoples during the transition as confidence building measures to give democratic unity a chance.⁹ The spirit of cooperation was not reciprocated by the TPLF that was focused on exercising its power to impose its own recipe for unity.

When the conference was convened in the first week of July 1991, representation of the Oromo people in the conference was fragmented into five often-fractious forces - the OLF, Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO), United Oromo People Liberation Front (UOPLF), Oromo Abbo Liberation Front (OALF), and OPDO. The TPLF attended the conference as a strong force that herded surrogate parties created from POWs of Oromo and Amhara origin - the OPDO, EPDM and Officers' Group. Political groups from other nations—some newly created with the assistance of the TPLF for the occasion - as well as minor multi-national groups and individuals were selected by the TPLF to attend the conference. Those notably excluded from the conference were the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (AESM/MEISON), and Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE). The addition and subtraction of prospective members of the conference enhanced the political muscle of the TPLF.

Major Issues and Outcomes for the OLF and TPLF

The conference was held in Finfinne from July 1-5, 1991 in the presence of international observers. Its focus was on the following main issues:

- Principles for resolving issues of the right of self-determination of dependent peoples
- Issues of democratic governance¹⁰
- Mechanisms of exercising the rights of peoples and individuals

The system approved by the Conference was issued in a form of a document known as the July Charter.¹¹ The preamble of the Charter indicated that all institutions of repression installed by the previous regimes should be dismantled. The Charter recognized that all peoples in Ethiopia have the "right of self-determination of independence."¹² The parties in the Conference agreed that the Charter was the supreme law of the transitional period.¹³ The Charter upheld the right of every people to administer their own affairs within own defined territory in

accordance with laws consistent with the Charter.¹⁴ The Charter confirmed fully and without limitation respect for individual human rights based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁵

The Charter defined the structure and composition of a transitional government. One of the branches of the government was the Council of Representatives with exclusive legislative power¹⁶ to be composed of not more than 87 members representing national liberation movements, other political organizations and prominent individuals.¹⁷ The Council was given the power to elect its president who was also to be the head of state with the power of control over the Council of Ministers—the executive branch of the transitional government.¹⁸ It was evident that whoever controlled the Council of Representatives controlled all legal and political responsibility for the governance of Ethiopia-in-transition.

Regarding negotiations of a post-transition political, economic, and social system, the Charter provided for the establishment of a Constitutional Commission to draw up a draft constitution to be adopted by the transitional government as a final draft to be submitted to a Constituent Assembly.¹⁹ In other words, the determinants of “unity” were to be negotiated and defined during the constitution crafting process to safeguard the rights and interests of every concerned people.

The outcome of the Conference may be appraised from the perspectives of the different “priorities” reflected in the September Agreement. The following is a list of major outcomes achieved by the OLF from the Conference to promote its fundamental interest:

- Since the Charter was accepted as the supreme law, all laws of Ethiopia not consistent with the Charter were not binding on the Oromo people;
- Previous oppressive state apparatus to be dismantled and replaced by new transitional administrations from center down to local units;
- Respect of human rights of individual Oromos as recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

The pay-off for the TPLF:

- Since the TPLF was struggling for self-determination against the oppressive centralism of the Ethiopian government led by the Amhara ruling class, it benefited by achieving recognition of self-government for ethnic Tigray;
- The TPLF brought on board other parties to stabilize its interim administration, to launch a transitional government of Ethiopia under its own leadership, and to counterbalance the influence of the OLF;
- It secured a legal cover to rebuild and deploy the dismantled institutions of the empire-state to serve its own interests;
- By recognizing the right to independence, the TPLF crafted for itself and others an exit strategy from forced unity, while at the same time pursuing its policy of creating surrogate parties - PDOs - to violate other peoples' integrity to protect their basic rights and interests.

Next, I will indicate how far the two protagonists maintained and built on the political gains scored in the negotiations of the Charter.

IV. Negotiations to Form Transitional Central Government

The general legal frame for establishing a transitional central government was negotiated and defined by the parties in the July Charter. Considering the power vested by the Charter in the Council of Representatives, the issue of how to determine representation in the Council of Representatives was very crucial for the outcome of the transition. The TPLF decided to dominate determination of representation in the Council, just as it dominated the determination of representation in the Conference.

In a negotiation dance over the issue of representation in the Council of Representatives, the TPLF outmaneuvered the OLF and

allocated for itself a controlling number of seats in the Council. Out of the total of 82 seats of the Council, the TPLF took 32 seats for itself and its surrogate - the EPRDF. The total Oromo share of 27 seats were distributed among the five Oromo forces, out of which 10 seats (or 37%) were taken by the TPLF surrogate party - the OPDO; the OLF got 12 seats and the remaining five seats were distributed among the other three Oromo forces. A total of 23 seats were distributed among several other political forces, each with less than five seats. Thus, the TPLF made it impossible for the OLF - with its 12 seats - to form a coalition capable of winning a contest against the TPLF/EPRDF over any important issue in the Council.²⁰ The TPLF achieved an overwhelming bargaining power to push any decision through the Council of Representatives.

The TPLF used its power in the Council of Representatives to achieve yet more power by controlling the executive branch - power be-
got power.

- It effectively mobilized the voting power under its control to have a TPLF president elected and to push through the Council a law giving the President sweeping powers over the Council of Representatives, the Council of Ministers, and to make him the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.²¹
- The TPLF President nominated a Prime Minister from the surrogate Amhara party - the EPDM - to be approved by the Council of Representatives.
- The power vested by the Charter in the Prime Minister, in the president, and ultimately in the Council of Representatives was exercised to take key ministerial posts - defense, internal, and foreign affairs - in the Council of Ministers.
- The TPLF/EPRDF deployed the bureaucracy under its control to counter the influence of non-TPLF/EPRDF ministers in the execution of the affairs of the transition.

- The Council of Representatives decided that the TPLF troops to be the state army during the transition.²²

Because of the disparity of power as designed by the TPLF, the OLF could not secure for the Oromo people a fair representation in the central transitional government. OLF's bargaining power was insignificant against the TPLF whose president was the chairman of the Council of Representatives. He was the head of state and the commander-in-chief of the army. The President dominated the legislative actions through a voting power arbitrarily appropriated. He was the chief executive and, hence, he was in an effective control of the Council of Ministers as well as the civil and military bureaucracy.

The implications were far reaching for the Oromo people's basic political, economic, and social rights and fundamental interests during the transition, as well as during post-transition. Most dangerous of all, resolution of vital issues through a democratic process, such as fair and free elections - including referendum - was not safeguarded against any excesses by the TPLF that had monopoly of power over the coercive institutions of the government. The difficult and dangerous situation did not compel the OLF to withdraw from the transitional government—at least not yet.

V. Negotiations to Constitute National Transitional Self-government

The July Charter provided that a law to be passed by the Council of Representatives should define the power and functions of the national self-government²³. Accordingly, a law that defined a share of power between the transitional central government and the national self-government was negotiated in the Council. Some of the outcomes were:

- The Oromo territory was defined and legally recognized for the first time in the history of the Ethiopian empire-state. Oromia was put on the map.²⁴
- Sufficient legislative, executive, and judicial power,²⁵ as well as the power to levy taxes,²⁶ was recognized for the national self-government.

- The power to administer, develop, and protect the natural resources of the people was recognized.²⁷
- The self-government was made directly accountable to the Council of Representatives and the people that elected it.²⁸

Considering the disparity of power in the Council of Representatives, the outcome was not bad for the Oromo people who needed recognition of their right to have their own self-government. Self-government is a necessary means of pursuing their own economic, social and cultural wellbeing. It is also an indispensable mechanism for exercising the right of representation in the central government. According to its “priority,” the TPLF considered those Oromo rights to be within its domain of interest. From its track records, it was evident the TPLF was going to exercise, without any restraint, every leverage it had to control the self-government.

The Council of Representatives passed a law²⁹ to form a provisional administration at district and basic unit levels to carry out administrative activities until the establishment of national and district self-government. The TPLF mobilized the civil and military resources of the central transitional government to put the OPDO in charge of the provisional administration. For instance, a document compiled by the US embassy, titled Findings of the Preliminary Elections of May 1 - 4, 1992, said the following, regarding the situation in Gimbi (a province in western Oromia):

The population of Gimbi was in no position to hold elections. It is frightened. ... Of more concern, it was reported to observers that OPDO armed cadres using the authority of the state are intimidating and arresting political opponents who disappear without trial or charge. We received report of extra-judicial killings of OLF supporters or members by the OPDO....

After realizing the problem of achieving fair and free political competition to form Oromia national self-government, the OLF proposed to the TPLF on February 4, 1992 to hold a bilateral negotiation to remedy the situation. The proposal included:

- Phasing out partisan armies from administration of civil life as part of the process to bring about popular administration through fair and free elections;
- Sharing power to achieve checks and balances in major institutions of central government charged with the responsibilities of maintaining peace and order;
- Closer coordination of efforts within the council of ministers to better ensure credibility and viability of the transitional government.

Thus, the negotiation had to move from the multiparty situation in the Council back to the bilateral setting between the OLF and TPLF. The proposal was negotiated and the outcome was the Mekele Agreement of February 20, 1992 between the two parties. TPLF's interpretation of the outcome of the negotiation was that it reaffirmed the responsibility of the central defense army (i.e. TPLF/EPRDF troops) to maintain peace and security. At that time, the police force of the old regime was dismantled and partisan troops were in charge of enforcement of public peace and security in their respective areas of deployment.

OLF's view was that, during the transitional period, the armed wing of every liberation force should retain an inviolable inherent right to safeguard fundamental interests, security and the gains of the liberation struggle. According to this view, the inviolable right of the Oromo people limited the responsibility of central army. Apparently, the TPLF did not accept this view. The Mekele Agreement evaded the issue and established a "tripartite committee with the mediatory participation of the EPLF" to oversee the encampment of troops.

The "mediatory proposal" of March 18, 1992 by the Delegation of the Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) was completely silent on the size and encampment-sites of EPRDF's troops, while it suggested the size and encampment-sites of OLF troops. Did that suggest that only OLF troops were to be encamped? Interpretation of the agreement was creating difficulties.

At this point, the US embassy joined the PGE as a mediator. The US Charge d'Affaires, in his letter of April 10, 1992 to the OLF, said that, "... the security role of the EPRDF military must be interpreted in light of the policing arrangement included in the Mekele agreement and the limitation of the EPRDF's defense role in the relevant proclamation of the Council". A joint communiqué (with no date) issued by the OLF and TPLF/EPRDF on this occasion said:

All troops are to be encamped within a week of the signing of this agreement and the transitional defense and security arrangements worked out by the Council of Representatives of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia are to be fully and consistently implemented.

But, the parties had conflicting interpretations of the "transitional defense and security arrangement". Nevertheless, the OLF was willing to take a risk and honor the agreement,³⁰ as can be seen from a press release issued on February 25, 1992 that said in part:

... [T]he OLF undertook a series of consultations with the EPRDF on several occasions in the past. ... [T]heir implementation did not measure up to expectations. That, however, did not lessen the commitment of the OLF to constructive dialogue and peace.

... [T]he OLF has concluded another agreement with the EPRDF a few days ago with a view to creating conducive conditions which would permit the forthcoming elections to be conducted freely and fairly. In this connection the OLF ... commits itself once again to implement the agreement in good faith. It is hopeful that the EPRDF, on its part, would also do likewise.

... [We] appeal to the friends of our country and peoples and all those committed to effecting a peaceful transition to help in implementing the present and very important agreement. ...

The OLF encamped its troops while the TPLF/EPRDF refused to encamp, asserting its responsibility to keep peace and order as the transitional state army. Thus, the TPLF succeeded to outmaneuver the OLF to encamp its troops, while nobody cared to “help” in making the TPLF respect its pledge to encamp. In a situation where there is no formal forum to enforce an agreement, “[a]ny agreement is risky - and so is no agreement.”³¹ One possible alternative for the aggrieved party in such situation is to go ahead and implement its **best alternative to a negotiated agreement** - what is usually called BATNA.³²

The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) decamped. The costs to the OLF and the Oromo people in terms of human lives, material, and social sufferings were immense. Why and how this tragedy happened takes us to a study of the dynamic processes within the primary and the third parties. As mentioned in the introduction, that task is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to mention that the event had a devastating effect on the transitional arrangement. It destroyed the trustworthiness of the TPLF. It created doubts about the integrity of the intervenors and the international community that was expected to champion peaceful *settlement of conflict in Ethiopia*.

The TPLF deployed its troops and resources of the transitional central government under its control to bring the provisional administration of Oromia under the control of the OPDO - its surrogate party. What the TPLF meant by “democratic unity” was revealed in actual practice.

The elections of national self-government were the litmus test of TPLF’s commitment to a democratic process to safeguard the “interests of all peoples.” The spirit of the July Charter, the principles and mechanisms defined by the Charter were completely aborted and the OLF was finally compelled to withdraw from the transitional government in June 1992. The TPLF proceeded to achieve its strategic objective.

VI. The Asmara Talks

The Asmara talks were held in September 1992. The first meeting was held on September 14, 1992. It is worth noting that the TPLF sent to

the Asmara meeting a delegation of the transitional government, not TPLF/EPRDF delegation. According to a record of the meeting, the PGE, the Ambassadors of Britain, Germany, Sweden, and the United States participated “not [as] mediators but facilitators with the right to intervene and a continuing role as informal go-betweens.”

The main objective of the Asmara talks was to make the OLF rejoin the transitional government. But, situations had changed since the OLF left the government. After elections for the transitional self-government were completed, the TPLF proceeded with the establishment of a Constitutional Commission to draft the post-transition political, social and economic system for the “unity” of Ethiopia.

At the Asmara encounter, president Melles demanded that OLF’s commitment to “unity” and to the transitional process should be addressed and asserted prior to any discussion. The summary of the first meeting said that the facilitators devised a single negotiation text³³ for the protagonists to consider. The text included the issue of unity raised by Meles, issues of defense and security, and the issue of the Constitution Commission.

The protagonists gave their views regarding the issues proposed by the “facilitators” for negotiation. The TGE demanded unequivocal commitment by the OLF to work for and foster unity. It proposed OLF troops to be fully demobilized. It said the state defense army would be fully encamped as and when the regional police forces were in place. The OLF stressed commitment to a democratic process to determine the issue of “unity.” Regarding defense and security, the OLF proposed three alternatives that in effect suggested renegotiations of the issue.

After knowing the views of the OLF and EPRDF on the issues, the facilitators proposed a package to bridge the gap between the positions of the two parties. Among other things, the package proposed acceptance by the OLF “unity of the Ethiopian peoples”. Regarding the issue of defense, it proposed the EPRDF army to remain the defense forces of the transition and the OLF troops to be demobilized.

In its comment³⁴ regarding the proposals of the facilitators, the OLF expressed commitment to the basic tenet of the Charter and

insisted on renegotiations of their implementations. The Asmara talks and the idea of the OLF rejoining the transitional government appeared to have reached deadlock.³⁵

From this time onward, a new trend emerged to draw the OLF into the Ethiopian political process as an “opposition.”³⁶ But, the country was in a transition and the transitional Charter that was supposed to be the supreme law had been abrogated in practice. Accepting to work as an “opposition” meant renouncing armed resistance and giving legitimacy to the derailed transitional arrangement to determine the political status, social, economic, and cultural development of the Oromo people.

VII. THE CARTER CENTER TALKS

As mentioned earlier, the issue of the OLF rejoining the transitional government seemed dead. The TPLF had consolidated its political power with generous economic and technical support from major members of the international community. It had restructured institutions of the state to replace those of the past regime. The *Constitution Commission* was functioning under an exclusive control of the TPLF. The TPLF regime had set the date for a constitutional assembly election for June 5, 1994. Although everything was done in the name of democratization in accordance with the transitional Charter, some foreign powers started to wary that there was no semblance of democracy to support the claim. It was at this time that the OLF received signals that the United States wanted talks between selected political forces and the TPLF/EPRDF to be mediated by the Carter Center.

The Carter Center sent the OLF a letter dated January 13, 1994 inviting to a meeting of Ethiopian groups from February 7 - 8 1994 in Atlanta, Georgia. The letter indicated that All Amhara People's Organization, the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF), and the Southern Coalition were also invited to attend the meeting.

The OLF decided not to participate in the meeting as an “opposition”³⁷ and, in its letter dated January 1994, replied that the OLF was willing to send a high level delegation for consultation with President Carter and his assistants. President Carter accepted this

position and the OLF did not participate in collective discussions among the “opposition” group.

After consultation with Mr. Carter, the OLF wrote him a letter dated March 4, 1994 saying that it was prepared to discuss in a conference, or bilaterally, issues of rectification of violations of the Charter. However, in a letter dated March 18, 1994, President Carter informed the OLF that Meles was prepared to negotiate only with those who first renounce violence and who wish to have discussions on the modalities of participating in the political process as it was then structured. A precondition was imposed for a negotiation to take place at all. Issues to be negotiated were also limited to “discussions on the modalities of participation in the political process” carefully crafted by one party.

Evidently, there was no change in the positions of both parties to break the Asmara deadlock discussed above. In fact the TPLF had aggravated the situation since the Asmara talks by taking escalatory moves³⁸ - such as drafting a constitution and scheduling an election of a constitutional assembly to achieve its own fundamental interest of “unity.” The OLF was given a choice - to accept “unity” as defined by the TPLF or no agreement. The attempt by the Carter Center to initiate peace talks between the OLF and TPLF collapsed before it could even start.

VIII. PEACE INITIATIVE BY CONGRESSIONAL TASK FORCE

On October 7, 1994 Congressman Harry Johnston, Chairman of US Congress House Subcommittee on Africa sent for consideration of the OLF the “Ethiopia Task Force’s objectives and basic principles.” In his letter, the Congressman said that the objectives and principles defined by the Task Force would serve as a foundation and guide in the Task Force’s effort to facilitate peaceful participation of opposition group in the Ethiopian political process. At the time, the Council of Representatives had already approved the draft constitution for submission to the constituent assembly that was also already elected.

The OLF gave a formal reply in a letter dated October 27, 1994 reiterating that any serious and realistic effort to solve Ethiopia's endemic political problems had to take into account the *historical roots of the problems*. It recalled the July 1991 charter in which it was agreed that the most appropriate processes for resolving the political conflict was through a mechanism of fair and effective participation of the concerned peoples to freely negotiate their political bond in consummation of their *right of self-determination*. The OLF reaffirmed adherence to this basic principle and welcomed the proposal by the Task Force.

The OLF delegation met members of the Task Force on February 7, 1995 and presented its views in writing, as well as *orally*, proposing discussions with the government to be without preconditions and in presence of third parties. The government representative said the OLF could join the political process as long as it agreed to abide by the law and accepted the TGE's operation of *existing institutions* in Ethiopia. The TGE asserted that the approved constitution adequately addressed concerns of respect for human and political rights. By then, the TPLF had created Ethiopia in its own image and the OLF was in effect asked to take it as a "package" as far as the issue of "unity" goes - it was non-negotiable. The OLF protested that the Oromo people were denied to have their legitimate representatives in the constitution making process to negotiate and decide on the determinants of "unity" to safeguard their fundamental rights and interests.

The two sides could not agree on any point except a joint statement to leave channels open for future discussions.

IX. Negotiations through other intermediaries

On February 24 and 25, 1997 delegations of the OLF and the Ethiopian government held meetings organized in Bonn (Germany), using a former German ambassador to Ethiopia as an intermediary. The Ethiopian delegation proposed to the OLF to join the political process either as a government partner or as an opposition by accepting the constitution and renouncing violence.³⁹ The TPLF had by then completed formation of a post-transition Ethiopian state with a new constitution adopted on December 8, 1994. The constitution came into

force August 21, 1995. It defined Ethiopia's territorial jurisdiction and determined its political, social, and economic system. No legitimate representative of the Oromo people participated in the negotiation of the constitution that purported to make Oromia an integral part of the Ethiopian territory.⁴⁰

People who accept the constitution of a country and integrate into its political process become an integral part of the people of that country to jointly exercise only the right of democratic governance.⁴¹ Acceptance of the constitution is to concede merger of Oromia within Ethiopia and abrogate the Oromo people's right under international law to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.⁴²

Any question of self-determination that may be raised on behalf of the Oromo people after the constitution is accepted becomes a question of "secession" from the "motherland"⁴³ and thereby treated as treason. The idea of accepting the constitution was, therefore, rejected by the OLF.

The TPLF regime insisted on OLF's acceptance of the constitution and "renunciation of violence" as preconditions for any peace dialogue. In a letter written on March 17, 1998 to an intermediary (whose identity is not revealed for protection of confidentiality), an official of the OLF agreed to accept the present Ethiopian constitution as an existing reality and to unilaterally suspend any and all armed activities in preparation for a resumption of dialogue. It appeared the OLF blinked in order to break the deadlock.

However, the OLF Secretary General rejected the commitment made in his name without his authorization and ordered its withdrawal⁴⁴. The controversy triggered by this incident was resolved by the OLF Extraordinary National Congress of 1998 that rejected any acceptance of the TPLF regime's preconditions for peace dialogue with the regime.

The deadlock persisted. To unlock a deadlock in a negotiation, "something has to change."⁴⁵ Changing facts on the ground to create a credible alternative to a negotiated agreement does produce the kind of change that unlocks the deadlock. If, for example, the TPLF creates a credible alternative to a negotiated agreement with the OLF, the OLF may give concession out of fear of being made irrelevant. Similarly, the

OLF may create a credible alternative of achieving its objective without any agreement with the TPLF, thus compelling the latter to give concession.

Another kind of change is a change of regime or leader so that a new regime or a new leader that is willing to give a concession emerges to unlock the deadlock. For example, the Panama Canal negotiation of August 1903 between the US and Colombia faced a deadlock until Panama seceded and signed a treaty with the US in November 1903⁴⁶. In the current peace negotiation between the Israeli government led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Israelis and President George Bush are demanding the replacement of Yasser Arafat, the Chairman of the PLO.

It is beyond the scope of this article to describe the dynamic process within the OLF and TPLF that might have produced changes to unlock the deadlock. There are, however, changes that cannot be overlooked. Some of those changes might have unlocked the deadlock; some have become an emerging new issue.

Meles purged some of the top members of the TPLF leadership. That event and the internal problem of the OPDO did not introduce any change to unlock the deadlock between the OLF and TPLF. In November 1999 there was a change within the OLF leadership when the 2nd session of the OLF National Council elected a new Secretary General to replace the former. Next, the session issued on February 3, 2000 the "Agenda for Peace" that offered two options for the Meles regime to consider. Option B was considered inconsistent with the existing OLF position and created a controversy within the OLF and among the Oromo public.

The contention of those who oppose the Agenda is that, by accepting the sovereignty of the Ethiopian state over Oromia, Option B illegally abrogates the inherent right of the Oromo people to self-determination. Their argument is that: 1/ joining the Ethiopian political process as an opposition is acceptance of Ethiopia's sovereignty; 2/ the Oromo people's right cannot be abrogated without the consent of the people. Those who support the Agenda have shied away from explaining their position. Because of the controversy within the OLF and among the Oromo public regarding the issue, it can be argued that

there is not any valid change of position regarding the fundamental interest the OLF has been promoting.

During the period from 1991 to 2003, the TPLF has been inflicting immense damage on the Oromo people to carry out its program of unification. The violation of Oromo national pride and honor, the huge loss of Oromo lives, the horrendous destruction of the social fabric, the colossal pillage of resources have become issues of fundamental interest to the Oromo people. These are issues that cannot be ignored in the event of any negotiation with an Ethiopian regime.

NOTES

¹ See an article by Ralph L. Keeney & Howard Raiffa, Structuring and Analyzing Values of Multiple-Issue Negotiation, pp. 131ff, in H. Peyton Young (ed.), *Negotiation Analysis* (1991).

² For a succinct description of the distinction between the two cultures, see a booklet, *The Oromo People in Search of Justice*, by OLF Foreign Relations Committee sections 2.2 - 2.5 (May 1999). For detailed work see Donald Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press (1965), Asmarom Legesse, *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System*, Lawrenceville, NJ, The Red Sea Press (2000).

³ Regarding this concept, see, Howard Raiffa, *The Art & Science of Negotiation*, pp. 18. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts (1982).

⁴ Regarding this concept, see Raiffa, *ibid.* pp. 108.

⁵ Regarding the role of external powers to empower the TPLF, see, Abiyu Geleta's presentation at Harvard University Center for International Development, *Ethiopian System of Domination and Consequences, The Sidama Concern*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2000, pp. 5 - 10[on line], Bonnie K. Holcomb, *The Tale of Two Democracies: the Encounter Between US-sponsored Ethiopian "Democracy" and Indigenous Oromo Democratic Forms*, *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol.4, No. 1 & 2, July 1997, pp. 47 - 82.

⁶ Verbal account by those present at the conference.

⁷ Unpublished document.

⁸ Those interested in analysis of coalition dynamics can read David A. Lax and James K. Sebenius, *Thinking Coalitionally: Party Arithmetic, Process Opportunism, and Strategic Sequencing*, H. Peyton Young (ed.) *ibid.*

⁹ cf. footnote 30 *infra*.

¹⁰ For distinction between the right of dependent peoples and democratic governance see Abiyu Geleta, "The Right of Peoples to Self-determination as a Basic Human Right," presented at OSA Conference in Stockholm (Sweden) in April 2002.

¹¹ *Negarit Gazeta*, 50th Year, No. 1, Addis Ababa, 22nd July 1991.

¹² *Ibid.* Art. 2 ©

¹³ *Ibid.* Art 11

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Art. 2 (b)

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Art. 1

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Art. 9

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Art. 7

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Art. 9 (b)

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Art. 10

²⁰ It was not only the disparity of voting power, the TPLF had more resources to offer as side-benefits or to intimidate to form or break a coalition in its political battle against the OLF.

²¹ See Proclamation No. 1/1991 of August 10, 1991, *Negarit Gazeta* 50th Year No. 2.

²² See Proclamation No. 8/1991 of January 16, 1991 *Negarit Gazeta* 51st Year No. 3.

²³ The Charter, *Negarit Gazeta* 50th Year No. 1 *ibid.* Art. 13.

²⁴ See Proclamation No. 7/1991 Art. 4. *Negarit Gazeta*, *ibid.* Note that the article defines only a formula for identifying the core "homeland" without determining "details of the geographical borders." The formula was based on: 1/ the administrative boundaries designed by the Haile Selassie regime, 2/ the census compiled by the same regime. Both factors were known to

have been manipulated to make, for instance, Oromo areas enclaves of adjacent non-Oromo territories.

²⁵ Ibid. Art. 9.

²⁶ Ibid. Art. 10 (10).

²⁷ Ibid. Art. 10 (6).

²⁸ Ibid. Art. 9 (3).

²⁹ Proclamation no. 9/1992, *ibid.* The date of issue indicated as January 18 was changed by Corrigendum no.1 to January 27, 1992. The Council also passed Proclamation No. 11/1992 of February 8, 1992 regarding election of councils for national self-administration.

³⁰ This may be an example of OLF's effort to promote "practical cooperation" during the transition as a confidence-building measure. See footnote 9 *supra*.

³¹ Howard Raiffa, *ibid.* pp 16-17.

³² See H. Peyton Young, *ibid.* p. 3.

³³ Regarding this technique of structuring a negotiation, see Howard Raifa, *ibid.* pp. 205.

³⁴ "OLF's Comments on the Facilitators' Draft Proposal," dated October 26, 1992, unpublished.

³⁵ This was conveyed to the OLF by one of the facilitators in his letter of December 15, 1992.

³⁶ In an unpublished letter dated June 9, 1993 to the OLF by one of the facilitators of the Asmara talks, it was said: "We believe it is common ground that Democracy in Ethiopia will not work properly without an opposition: the OLF has a historic position in this country, and hence a duty to its many sympathizers which the OLF leadership can only fulfil by taking up the political challenge inside Ethiopia". At the time the facilitators were working on their draft proposal for the Asmara talks, there already was a Memorandum dated October 8, 1992 regarding "EPRDF - OLF Negotiations." It did not indicate its source. It said, "The differing characteristics of the two organizations, as well as the actual outcome of events of the past year, will require significant compromise...primarily, in the direction of the EPRDF, as the EPRDF constitutes the army and the

main party in the government. The OLF is an opposition force. While this may change, any discussion at present must reflect this objective reality....”

³⁷ The term “opposition” is taken to mean a political force that accepts the authority of the state but opposes and seeks to replace the party in power.

³⁸ Regarding escalation, see an article by Barry O’Neill, *Conflictual Moves in Bargaining: Warnings, Threats, Escalations, and Ultimatums*, H. Peyton Young (ed), *ibid*, pp 87 ff.

³⁹ A report dated March 3, 1997 by the leader of OLF delegation to the talks.

⁴⁰ The Ethiopian Constitution, Article 2 says: “The territorial jurisdiction of Ethiopia shall comprise the territory of the members of the Federation and its boundaries shall be as determined by international agreements.”

⁴¹ For the distinction between “democratic governance” and the right of self-determination of people under alien rule see Abiyu Geleta’s presentation at OSA Conference in Stockholm, *ibid*; Antonio Cassese: *Self-determination of Peoples: A Legal Reappraisal*, 1995; Morton H. Halperin & David J. Scheffer, *Self-determination in the New World Order*, Carnegie Endowment, Washington (D.C.) 1992.

⁴² Article 9 of the Ethiopian Constitution says: (1) The Constitution is the supreme law of the land. Any law, customary practice or a decision of an organ of state or a public official which contravenes this Constitution shall be of no effect. (2) All citizens, organs of state, political organizations, other associations as well as their officials have the duty to ensure observance of the Constitution and to obey it.

⁴³ *Ibid*. Article 39 (1) says: Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession.

⁴⁴ A letter dated April 15, 1998 written by the Secretary General of the OLF to the Deputy Secretary.

⁴⁵ Ronald M. Shapiro & Mark A. Jankowski, *The Power of Nice*, p 209.

⁴⁶ Raiffa, *ibid*. pp. 169-70.

Contesting Marginality in Jest: The Voice of the Borana Women in Oral Tradition.

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Introduction

This paper is given against the backdrop of male dominance and female marginality as a social phenomenon among the Borana society. Male dominance has been defined as ‘the manifestation of the exclusion of women from political and economic decision making, male aggression against women manifest in the expectation that males should be tough, brave and aggressive, frequent quarrelling, fighting, wife beating and the institutionalization of or regular occurrence of rape and elopement’ (Peggy, 1981: 164). Here, I look at how the Borana women use jest to expose the nature of this dominance and negotiate its effect within society under review.

The critical role joke serves has long been observed, and as Christie Davies (1990:9) argues, jokes are social thermometers that measure, record and indicate what is going on. In this sense, they provide insights into how societies work since “joke does not exist in a vacuum but rather exists in society where it embodies or reflects the concern of that society” (Dundes 1977: 141). Salient to this concern as Douglas indicates is that dominant patterns of social relations are challenged in joke (1968:366). Among the Borana, such a challenge is manifest in women’s *qoosaa-taapaa*, (joke/play) which to all intent and purposes is a public questioning of men’s posturing of themselves vis-à-vis women. *Qoosaa-taapaa* of women, in a nutshell, is a poetic and humorous rendering of the general discontent women experience. It is a narrative that can easily be categorized as what Morgan (1992:2) has called a critical exposure of ideological mystifications that

obscures the inequalities (between male and female) or presents them as natural and immutable. To the extent that they confront the male world and subdue it, if momentarily by subjecting it to shame, women's *qoosaa-taapaa* is an attempt at representing the culture of the subordination of women by men in a different light.

Performed during the *jilla* (naming ceremony), that allows oddities to be tolerated, women *qoosaa-taapaa* humorously assails male crudity. On this occasion, the women constitute themselves into a group that challenges the traditional social order which privileges the men, by recounting the follies of men in their daily experiences. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, such ceremonies are “opposed to dogma and authoritarianism, and they are full of revival and renewal that are sanctioned by the highest aims of human existence and the world of ideals” (1968:8). The present paper thus interrogates the ways in which the Borana women critique and challenge the men's hegemonic powers using the playful genre *qoosaa-taapaa*. Conceived and enacted within a critical paradigm, women's *qoosaa-taapaa* serves as a verbal weapon for those who have been relegated to a subservient position by a male oriented culture. From the point of view of the women, as Koljevic (1980) says of Yugoslav epic, it is a way of coming to terms with history and a means of getting out of it by negotiating the power differential between the two genders. Since women's *qoosaa-taapaa* is a discourse in power dynamics and the ways in which women negotiate this power, this study draws on the works of Eileen Gillooly (1999), Abu-Lughad Lila (1990), and Vail and White (1991), all of whose studies have treated the ways in which women negotiate the power differential between themselves and men.

Employing the concept of veiling or masking in her fascinating study of female humour, Gillooly has investigated the indictment of men by women. Feminine humour is conceptualized as a veiled tactic that refrains from pervasive satiric engagement but works inconspicuously to mock the officious (Gillooly 1999:18). Drawing on the 19th century British novel, the author uses copious evidence to demonstrate the ways in which feminine humour undermines socio-

cultural values in subtle and nuanced ways. For her, feminine humour inverts the male oriented paradigms by mocking the disproportions and incongruities within the (masculinized) norm. The traditional cultural authority has been internalized and it carries the weight and force of law. Set against this stifling tradition, feminine humour is subversive and functions as a tactic of cultural resistance and a gendered protest.

The kind of resistance motif outlined above has also been located in a Muslim community that seethes under strict Islamic codes. Abu-Lughad Lila's study of women's veiled resistance to men's power amongst the women of the Bedouin society in Egypt is a fine example. In her essay, veiling is used to underscore the women's invisible aggression towards the men's perception of themselves, troped in such adjectives as brave, dignified and strong; postures that are resisted through the inversion of the notions of power. Women resist male power by making fun of men and manhood even though officially masculine qualities are lauded. According to this scholar, women seem only too glad when men fail to live up to the ideals of autonomy and manhood, the ideals on which their alleged moral superiority and social precedence are based (Abu-Lughad, 1990:43). In their own ways women behave irreverently towards the mark of masculinity and privilege by engaging in subversive discourses. Violation of the masculine codes, the study concludes, must be seen as a way of resisting the system and challenging the authority of those who represent and benefit from it (Abu-Lughad, 1990:47).

The theme of resistance to men's hegemonic powers takes different forms. Vail & White (1991) through the study of spirit possession (*vimbuzi*) among the southern Tumbuka people of Malawi, illustrate how women use the licensed opportunity to articulate their sentiments against male hostilities embedded in the patrilineal systems of marriage. The possessed women, they suggest, present their complaints in the authoritative voice of the spirit, and the "songs invoke not merely an alternative interpretation of history, but also an alternative vision of how life ought to be lived" (1991:247). Through tactics like veiled sentiment or licensed opportunity afforded by spirit possession or concealed tactics to challenge masculinity, a powerless group attempts to find a niche for themselves within a world dominated by men.

Power, Johannes Fabian (1990:23) apprises us, is “eaten whole, and once ingested power is internalized, it becomes a person’s weight, a property rather than a function”. In this instance it is the men who are surfeited with power, both literally and figuratively, as a Borana legend will presently show, and it is this powerful monster in the form of men that women must learn to live with one way or the other. Women’s *goosaa-taapaa* as an ideological rather than taxonomic discourse, as Bruce Lincoln (1999:149) says of myth, imbues the women with the reflexive capacity to challenge and negotiate the effects of conventional power that essentially subordinates them. Thus the physical might of men is mediated by the verbal articulacy of women that undercuts it by attacking the moral base of the former. Johnson (1973:212) speaks of how women use words effectively to maintain control over the physically stronger men.

In the Borana traditional lore, the fact that men have indeed subjugated women in the power game is best captured by a well-known legend of a woman called Habanoye¹. The legend goes that at the height of her reign Habanoye had so subdued the men that, it was they who cared for and tended the children, drew water, collected firewood, and looked after cattle (Kidane, 1996:272). Before men toppled her and changed the prevailing power dynamics, she was remembered for demanding impossible tasks to be carried out by men, which included among others, bringing a sack full of fleas, and hide that has hair on both sides. Finding the tasks impossible, the men instituted their rebellion in stages, presided over by a young clever boy. To dispel the task of carrying children during the many nomadic migrations, the boy advised them to insist that they share the burden by cutting the children in half so that each carries some part of them. But the women, known for their love of their children, would decline and offer to carry them by themselves. As for building houses, the men declined to undertake the task, but insisted on making love in the open. This was meant to induce shame in the women and faced with this abject lack of privacy, they accepted the task of building the houses themselves.

The final onslaught against Habanoye herself came in the form of a meticulously devised conspiracy by the said boy. A hole was dug and covered with grass and her stool was placed on it to cover up any

suspicion. People then provoked her by opposing her suggestions on issues. Because it was known that she moved with her stool in moments of fury, it was anticipated that she would in the course of this movement fall into the fatal pit. This murderous plan was executed to the letter and the great Habanoye died in this way. As she was dying, the legend claims, she left a legacy and a rallying call to women to disobey their husbands, lie, deceive and fail to respond promptly when called for, edicts according to the Borana, women accomplished with great zeal.

What then is the significance of this legend to the concerns of this paper? It must be acknowledged that the legend is layered and can be analyzed at several levels, one of which is that by referring to the purported tyrannical rule of women in history, the legend serves to justify the present denigration of women. With the demise of Habanoye, patriarchy supplanted matriarchy. Women lost the power they enjoyed and were thus subjected to servile treatment from men, a state of affairs women's *goosaa-taapaa* in its own ways critique. This line of analysis is supported by the fact that the domestic chores now ritually and stoically borne by women had been previously carried out by men. Following from this and more importantly, the legend can be read as a codification of the politics of representation and how notions of gender are inscribed and naturalized (Kratz, 1994). The core meaning of the narrative is that it legitimizes the prevailing gender relations of power and authority by giving currency to male domination over female within the Borana culture. In short, the legend is essentially an explanation and a justification of the dethroning of women from what Nyman (1997) has called the public masculine world to the domestic feminine world. Thus it celebrates the masculine world as clever, virtuous and heroic and by extension posits masculinity as a cultural norm which came to be a viable alternative to the feminine rule whose tyranny was its own undoing. In addition, the knowledge of the legend helps us to locate the women's *goosaa-taapaa* within what Landeg White (1989) has termed "concrete social formations and particular historical moments". Thus situated, the humorous songs that are sung by women about male greed, for example, can be construed as an idiom of power dynamics between the men and women.

But not to be lost sight of is the edict, which was inserted as an etiological parting shot to explain the perceived obstinacy of women. What men perceive as obstinacy constitutes the resistance motif whose artistic expression women's *qoosaa-taapaa* verbalizes. Whether it takes the form of direct criticism, ridicule, sarcasm, veiling or masking, these are ways humour is represented in a particular place by a particular artist, oral or otherwise within the tradition in which the artist is operating. Veiling or masking can occur in many ways, some of which are embedded in the culturally licensed performance such as *qoosaa-taapaa* that diffuses the abusive elements but nevertheless makes its mark. In daily life, women's resistance to male power is embedded in a refusal to respond fast enough, as well as lying, cajoling and partaking in the choice portions of foods traditionally reserved for men. Verbal mockery in the form of songs, however, is a refined art where the performers show no apology and disguise for their mockery of the male world even though they have been reeling under its overarching ways. The women's *qoosaa-taapaa* and the reading of it in this paper is an exercise in what Daniel has called "a narrative other than the master narrative that needs to be drawn in a situation that calls for the cultivation of an ear for discourses that are normally drowned out by hegemonic ones" (1996:10).

As a marginalized group, women in the Borana community do not attend public meetings, which are the preserve of the male. Even if they are litigants or witnesses in cases, their pleas are taken as they cover their heads and face away from the gathering, after which they are required to leave immediately. Their marginality has also been captured and expressed in proverbs, an art that neatly summarizes the community's ethno-philosophy (Yankah, 1995). In a recent book on Borana proverb the missionary/ethnographer Ton Leus (2000: 219-20) records four proverbial saying that are directly concerned with the Borana perception of women. The proverbs:

"Nadheen haga dhartiï boochitu, dhugaan hin boochitu".
A woman will cry over something false more than truth

“Nadheeniifi tamboolleen bacao hin qabdu”.
Women and tobacco are never completely bad

“Nadheen keessumma hin qabdu.”
A woman is never treated as a guest

“Nadheen somaa, yoo cabde hin karoorfatan”
A woman is like a spear shaft. If it breaks you replace it
with another

Indeed, the four wise sayings portray the women at best in ambivalent terms (*Women and tobacco are never completely bad*) and at worst as outright liars (*A woman will rather cry over something false than over truth*). In between this continuum, they are perceived as beasts of burden that are transient and easily replaceable. Andrzejewski (1957) has also recorded a fairly detailed analysis of a proverb attributed to one Wale Wachu, a brave military strategist and achiever and according to Legesse (1973:190), an *Abba Gada* of the Borana from ca. 1722-1730. In the wisdom of Wale Wachu, women are like a bounty looted in raid, for they belong to the victorious (*nadheen harku danaba, naam bakifateti helmata*). The adage is premised on an assumption that women like cattle are goods that are owned by men and in this sense it is not uncommon that among the wealth of a man are his wife and children. This latter proverb denies the woman the humane element and commodifies her by equating her to cattle that exchange ownership on the basis of who triumphs in war.

The song jests used in this analysis were performed by women of the Maddo Addi village, on the night of 24 June 2001, the occasion being the *jilla* (naming ceremony) of Wario Huqa's child. The singers/jesters were singing the songs that are normally sung on such occasions, an act that is common in any village amongst the Borana in general. For the most part, three soloists led the jocular songs in unwrapping the things that the men do or fail to do. Throughout the songs the three soloists, Qabale Kosi, Shane Roba, Darmi Diida, articulated in multiple voices the feelings of the group. Qabale is in her mid-thirties, married with four children and is famed for her sharp tongue. She is talkative, fearless and easily gets along with all and sundry. Whenever the village

engages in verbal performances specific to women, she is called upon to perform, and has consequently acquired the role of a village singer. The other two have also come to be like Qabale in this respect, although the latter stands out by dint of the qualities alluded to. None of them has any education or formal skills from which they earn their living. Neither is their group formal in any sense of the word. They sing primarily because they know how to and enjoy it, and secondarily because the occasion is a communal one where everybody contributes his/her talent in the form of song, and food in accordance with his/her ability towards meeting the expenses and other demands of the occasion. In fact, as far as singing is concerned, women are requested to come and, in local terms, “open mouths (sing) for the people of the *jilla*”. They gladly oblige because it is a service they render for one another, for potentially if not practically, they will all be in need of such a service.

The jocular songs with which women attack the men in this paper are not directed to any particular person but critique typical situations which no doubt must have arisen from pervasive social realities within the *Borana* community. Dines-Levy and Smith (1988) suggest that humour that targets sex role stereotypes are about social types rather than identifiable persons. The fact that it is not directed at a known individual not only takes away its sting and lessens potential hostility, but it also has the advantage of speaking to the men folk as a separate gendered category suffering from the weaknesses women list and give echo to. Perhaps this explains Apte’s (1985: 73) contention that women’s humour generally lacks the aggressive and hostile quality of men’s humour.

The original authorship of the songs is seldom remembered, and in that sense the present versions are ascribed to the women who performed them on this particular occasion. In any event, the songs are generally known by almost everybody and there is without doubt a high degree of stability within them. But like any other oral song, addition of new items and omission of lines are commonplace. We can say with Terence Ranger “the structure of the tradition is open-ended enough so that the native who has mastered the tradition may, if he has enough talent, introduce entirely new elements into the common repertoire of ideas, images and expression” (1975:45). Yet, to the extent that the

songs are not new, the women cannot claim authorship in the individualistic style of owning them. The songs are a product of a collective endeavour of all the twenty or so women present, who danced, responded and formed a resounding chorus.

Although the *jilla* is a celebratory site where participants enjoy themselves as they wish, women's *goosaa-taapaa* points towards a kind of tension of rival regimes of truth with the men, who, it must be pointed out, are performing their own equally critical men's *goosaa-taapaa*. Contextually then, women's *goosaa-taapaa* is performed by the women well aware of other critical *goosaa-taapaa* being leveled at them by the men, a few metres away in the house of the *jilla* owner, the latter's performance venue. The songs are primarily the women's attempt to demolish the grandiose image of the men through a series of allusions to the tropes of heroism with which men surround themselves. On the surface, they appear simple, but under the apparent simplicity lurks a subtle humour that sarcastically unmasks the men's pretensions. Indeed in their performances, the jokes become the means of promoting cleavage and a way of staking a claim in the wider social system as "part of a repertoire of redressive symbolic action" (Limon, 1982:158).

I will consider for analysis three songs that were performed at the ceremony referred to above. Although they overlap in their concerns in the sense that all reveal a certain aspect of their relationship with men, each nonetheless adds a new dimension to their perception of the gender question. The poems evoke in a general sense issues of greed, property, honour, identity and mistress relations as the main problem areas that underpin gender interactions. It is to the poems we now turn for exemplars of these features.

Attacking Dishonour and Impropriety in Men: The Case of *Hallisoo*²

In this song, the women singers attack men with arrays of negative associations that are meant to undercut men's social standing. Such songs generally portray the character traits of men by sarcastically talking about them and undermining their worth. In the song under review, (see below) for example, women sing of how a man slaughters a bull, prepares and

stores the meat himself and settles down to its consumption in the course of which he neglects the demanding task of tending cattle:

Hallisoo hallisoo sin jedha, hallisoo
Hallisoon arraba naa qabada jedha
Olla keesoo bae gabayya gaafata
Gabayyan bori jennaan sayye ufi baafata
Beesen arka geete min farso gaafata
Farso xaasaa tokko si unati tokko
Beesen sanga tokko olma guya tokko
Ilman niiti ingeetu waani akana fokko
Korm bor qale dudda loonti gale
Ufuman naqate ufuman mafate
Dudda loonti gale fula fonti gale

Hallisoo hallisoo I say to you, *hallisoo*
Hallisoo is an insult listen to me
He walks in the village and enquires the market day
The market is morrow he sells his cattle
When he receives the money he asks for beer hall
One litre of alcohol is one sip for you
The price of one bull is one day's expense for you
The money is not shared with wife and son, this is shame
He slaughters the brown bull and turns his back to cattle
He prepares and stores the meat by himself
He turns his back to cattle and faces the meat

That he abandons cattle herding on which their livelihood depends for the sake of meat is illustrative of his inordinate greed. The domestic chore of storing meat, is normally carried out by women, and typifies their hard work as opposed to his indolence. In the opinion of the singers, when this man is not slaughtering cattle, he is busy selling them and drinking the proceeds. Alcohol consumption is repeatedly identified as a cause of neglect of responsibility and ensuing domestic quarrel. Tales of men seeking to know the market days, selling their bulls, and spending the proceeds in a day or two are narrated in the song jest. The singer concludes with a moralizing line, "it is not shared with wife and

son, this is shame". The concept of *cheera fokko* has been defined as respect for moral and spatial distance (Kassam & Megerssa, 1994: 88). The men who inconsiderately use the family wealth by excluding their dependants are regarded as violating social mores with which the Borana live by. *Hallisoo* not only attacks this selfish sense of not sharing the money or meat with the wife and the children, but the entire power structure that places the control and use of property in the hands of men.

In fact, the singers clearly indicate that the men's indulgences in activities inimical to family unity are characteristics of patriarchal power that affect both the women and the children. The women are not only sidelined from the enjoyment of the wealth they have helped produce, but also left out of the decision-making process of how it should be used. Thus wielding this insurmountable power, the man disposes of the family cattle by indiscriminate slaughter and sales and enjoys the largesse by himself. The excesses of indulging in drunkenness are shown by the speaker's claim that alcohol is taken in quick gulps and that the price of one bull barely covers the man's daily costs. Because of his insensitivity to their moral and material needs, the man becomes an object culpable of female and child neglect. The song is crafted in such a way that the speakers oscillate between the past misdeeds and the present consequences, culminating in a direct address to the man that invariably carries moral indictment. By listing the things foremost in the desires of the man such as market day, sale of cattle and purchase of liquor, the speaker reveals the character of the man to the audience as a sod who lives through the day satisfying his drinking appetites.

The man's triviality in picking a quarrel over small issues is mocked, as is his propensity to be overly selfish. A performer recounts how men even quarrel over the most insignificant item in the house, *affare*³ (fan) that in any case falls within the domain of the women.

Afarfama dhufe affare duubata
Affare arganan waan cufa duubata
Gara mona gahe cufaanaa duubata
Gara mana gahe garacha duubata
An gabayya daaqa na gololch jedha

Waan diqo an gaaleen naa kokorsi jedha
 An soliti infedhu na gogos jedha
 Gogodhun naa uuti na sooles jedha

He comes wobbling and quarrels over *affaire*
 After getting *affaire* he quarrels for everything
 In the center of cattle kraal he quarrels for closure
 In the center of the house he quarrels for hunger
 I am going to market, give me food, he says
 What little I brought, prepare it for me he says
 I do not want it soft, make it hard, he says
 Hard one is unpalatable; make it soft, he says

The song makes use of two key words, *duubata*/speak querulously and *jedha*/say, both of which are in the same semantic fields. In Borana traditional parlance, it is the women who have the penchant to speak querulously. Women's speech, as Abu-Lughad Lila (1990) has also indicated in her study, is classified by men as unsubstantive, noisy and uncoordinated, while men by contrast speak to negotiate in wisdom and bring harmony within the society. What the song does is to reverse that dogma and portray the men as engaging in talks that border on pettiness and functions as a fuel for disharmonious relations in the home. The words attributed to the man, as Karin Barber (1999) says in another context are "an encapsulation of his personal quality". In this case the man is quarrelsome, drunk, petty, gluttonous, selfish and uncaring. The theme of drunkenness is repeated here as evinced in the description of the walking/wobbling gait and the quarrels that come with it.

The speaker underlines the feeding habit of the man, who demands to be fed for he is going to market, presumably an important undertaking deserving special treatment. The irony of this claim of performing an important task is not lost on the listeners viewed against the backdrop of the preceding lines in which the man engages in an orgy of cattle sale and drinking the monies accrued. What is found irritating and yet in character with men in general is the apparent contradiction of their demand. They issue conflicting orders to the chagrin of women. Being drunkards they incessantly talk about the wrong in everything and

anything without making any attempts to right them. The constantly irritable naggings are indicated by the enumeration of the man's demands. The man is also ridiculed for his exaggeration of the food he has entrusted to his wife.

Fitiko qalate naa karab jedha
Dulaachi gad tahe naa dhankaka jedha
Somba saaren fute andarafa jedha
Andarafa nyaate naa haram jedha

He slaughters a calf; he claims it is an ox
An old cow dies he says it is a mature heifer
A dog snatches the lung he says, it is breastbone
He eats breastbone and swears he hasn't

These lines depict the man as trivial. The song relies heavily on the knowledge of the listener to the effect that *fitiko*/calf is not *karab*/ox, a knowledge that would enable him to decipher an exaggeration of ludicrous proportions. As Sherzer (1990: 21) notes, humour is intimately dependent on and integrated with knowledge, assumptions, and experiences shared by narrators and audiences. In this poem, the man's greed is boundless and there seems to be endless scope for invention where calves become oxen and lungs are transformed to breastbones. The joke deconstructs the myth that it is women who are liars, ordinarily echoed in proverbs and other oral genres. The speaker employs a list of contrasts calf/ox, old cow/mature heifer, and lung/breastbone in order to show the ridiculousness of the man's claim and his limitless envy. As the last line indicates the man is a perpetual liar who swears he has not eaten after consuming the breastbone, considered a choicy portion.

The *ballisoo* texts as indicated, are sung and the songs are accompanied by a kind of dance and music that reinforces the words. The singers clap their hands together, an effort that produces a musical sound and lends support for the speaker. Foot thumping on a raw cowhide accompanies the songs, and at high points a singer ululates to show that the song has been done well. This foot thumping is varied, where it is sometimes accelerated and at other times slackens. This change of movement, effectively dictates the tempo of the song jest,

and where it is accelerated it intensifies the exhilarating experiences of the performers. An example would suffice here. For instance, after about two or so lead singers have sung a few verses that underline men's vulnerability and loss of honour, a refrain as the one below is inserted:

Singer: Aanqataan!
Others: Hamal isa!
Singer: QocooCaaman!
Others: Hamal isa!
Singer: Qocii butaan!
Others: Hamal isa!

Singer: The one who fails!
Others: It is his habit!
Singer: The one who is mean!
Others: It is his habit!
Singer: The one who grabs hoe!
Others: It is his habit!

These lines, apart from underscoring the character of the man by repeated allusion to his failure, meanness and tempers, provide opportunities for enjoyment and laughter. It also galvanizes the theme of the song by abbreviating it in short quick lines that brings together lead singer and his group into pronouncing them. The voice modulation, repetitions, and the dialogue-like call-response between the speaker and his co-performers dramatize the song jest by invigorating and elevating it to a high moment. The reiterations of key themes in this way evoke their perception of men and underpin their project for the singing by attaining clarity and vividness in a climactic moment.

The Tale of the Mean One: Exposing Men's Stinginess

In the song that follows, the text is a kind of whisper among the women who tell the nasty stories of men to themselves. The first line sets the tone by asking whether the audience and the performers have heard of these stories. The performers then reply in the negative and hence goad the speaker to reveal the shameful acts of the men. The speaker depicts the man as one who counts, absurd as it may sound, the

grains of millet and the entrails of carcasses. Referring to him as the “owner of millet”, he is shown to be mean and particular about the food ration of the family. It is this particularity of meanness that is being ridiculed and laughed at. The theme of meanness and meticulous accounting of food items is furthered by the reference to him with the word *qorqortica*, a word that denotes one who looks rather meanly into minute details of food items. Let us examine the song text:

Oddu qorqortica wa dhageete
Indhagenne mee oddeesi
Qorqoro robate wa dhageete
Jaajji lobbee idhee wa dhageete
Oddu abba misingo wa dhageete
Misinga laakae wa dhageete
Mii garaa laakae wa dhageete
Mee maraaton jedhe wa dhageete

Did you hear the case of the mean one?
I haven't tell me
He roasted the raw hide did you hear?
He tied meat in string did you hear?
Did you hear the case of the owner of millet?
He counted the millet grains did you hear?
He counted the entrails did you hear?
He asked me for the small intestine did you hear?

As the speaker testifies, the man ensures that nobody takes away or wastes anything edible of which the roasting of cowhide is the operative cue (line 3). It is thus in character when the man counts entrails, roasts cowhide and stashes away the dried meat to preserve for some later day. This allusion to eating is similar to Davies' (1990:271) suggestion that differences of eating habits can give rise to a number of jokes. According to Davies, tabooed and inferior foods in Western Europe for example led to the comic nicknames conferred on the French as “Froggies” and the Germans as “Krauts” (cabbage eaters). To paraphrase Davies's words, there must be rules that are commonly observed and frequently broken. Because jokes embody shrewd social

observation, those who eat inferior foods, as in the case of men here, are comically inferior, coarse and ludicrous. Another example elaborates the point further:

Isa daaddu hikuu wa dhageete
 Sooddaan duuban baate wa dhageete
 Sooddaa tun maan jeette wa dhageete
 Aada bona jedhe wa dhageete
 Isa baare haraabu wa dhageete
 Harbori rakate wa dhageete
 Harbora incacabsani wa dhageete
 Baare incacabsani wa dhageete
 Ark isa inkutani wa dhageete
 Isa moora baasu wa dhageete
 Sareen shondu buute wa dhageete
 (The group burst into laughter and disintegrates for some time).

As he is untying a food container, did you hear?
 His mother in-law caught him, did you hear?
 She asked what was happening, did you hear?
 It is the norm of drought he said, did you hear?
 As he licked the container, did you hear?
 His bracelet got stuck, did you hear?
 The bracelet cannot be broken, did you hear?
 The container cannot be smashed, did you hear?
 His hand cannot be cut, did you hear?
 As he melts the fat, did you hear?
 Dog snatch his member, did you hear?

As already indicated, in this song, women play at telling one another some of the misadventures of men. The first line portrays the man as a thief, stealing the food he had initially so meanly preserved. The explanation he gives for the shameful act is that he was merely acting in accordance with norms that prevail during times of drought. To survive, he becomes selfish and thus endangers the survival of his wife and children, something which he purports to guard. According to the man,

the ways of drought involve self-preservation and privileging of the self in total disregard of one's dependents. In that struggle to survive is embedded the element of morbidity of his own honour, an issue women's *goosaa-taapaa* makes its focal point of attack.

In addition to lambasting the man for being greedy, the song criticizes him for trespassing into the secluded terrain of women. The storage of food items fall under the authority of women and for the man to be concerned with it, would be considered anomalous. As Gillooly (1999) points out, humour is caused by the disparity between individual action and the normative social order. What is obvious in this instance is that the butt clearly violates social expectation by transgressing in a world that is liminal to him. In fact, the song dents his assumed superiority by telling his tale of shame among the women folk for whom he wears this superiority. It is a stark revelation of the dismal levels to which he reduces himself in times of scarcity and want. The men are less enduring during drought, discarding their pretentious robe of gentility and indulging in thievery, meanness and scavenging.

The consequences of greed according to the singers are dishonour and in this case nothing captures it more than the mother-in-law seeing the man at his worst. For one, the mother-in-law is revered in Borana and is accorded great respect of which avoidance is its metaphoric representation. Thus to be caught in the act of stealing by the mother-in-law is tantamount to social death. The seriousness with which such a breach of honour is treated is attested to by the Borana adage *gurr duan lubbu duanit ir jirra* (It is better to die than lose honour). Honour is thus a quality that is worth dying for, and the man who is caught by the mother-in-law stealing from a container is deemed "dead". The importance attached to honour by other communities has been noted and argued by scholars elsewhere, a notable example being Abu-Lughod Lila's treatise on the Bedouin of North Africa. Acknowledging the fact that among the Bedouin, authority derives from moral worthiness, a notion that the Borana also share, she defines honour as a system of symbols and values in terms of which phenomena are conceptualized and interpreted in a specific culture (1986:18). Arising from this definition, she enumerates its primary codes as sincerity, honesty, generosity, fearlessness and loyalty to friend. Also included in the domain

of honour are assertiveness and keeping one's word. All of these can be applied to the Borana notion of honour, a code that underlies moral virtues.

The song relies on the listener's knowledge and sympathy with these virtues to ridicule the men as a dishonourable lot. A number of cultural metaphors have been drawn on for contrast and effective humour, of which the invocation of *harbora*, a signifier of heroic accomplishment denoting the killing of male enemies and elephants, is one (lines 5-9). The humorous anecdotal incident of the dilemma where the man's hand got stuck in the container presented by the speaker has a tragic/comic ring to it. For the women performers, it demolishes the man's assumed superiority and proves his vulnerability. But viewed from the perspective of the men themselves, it is tragic that a man, who has all the enviable accolades such as the *harbora*, is caught stealing something as petty as food by none other than a mother-in-law. Licking gourd is invariably associated with the womenfolk, and particularly girls, who usually finish off the remains of milk whose larger share has been consumed by the men. The act of gourd licking has effeminized the man.

The importance of *harbora* as a symbol of manhood among the Oromo in general has long been observed. The observation by a European traveler in Oromo country in the nineteenth century would suffice:

If the Galla [Oromo] be a man of courage, and successful in destroying his foes, he usually has on his forearm, rings of brass; if an elephant has succumbed to his prowess, he wears on his upper arm, two or three larger and thicker rings of ivory (Plowden, 1868:78).

The ring of ivory worn on the forearm is thus a mark of valour. The humour and hence the fatal blow to the man's honour is derived from the incongruity between the supposed heroism and his entrapment by a container he has no business in licking in the first place. The jester posits the dilemma of the people unwilling to break/cut the *harbora*, the hand and the container. It is greed that has brought upon him this unfathomable shame making him violate the codes of honour, which

he is expected to exemplify. It is such small events occurring in daily existence but hidden from the public view that women use to diminish men's superfluous images.

In the same song, it is recounted that as he is treating the hide, a dog snatches at his phallus (lines 10-11). The reference to the phallus completes the emasculation process that has begun with the effeminate tendencies of licking a gourd and being concerned with storing meat, essentially things of the domestic domain. This stirred laughter among the singers and the audience, with some expressing the feeling that the line is rather outlandish. For some, the utterance brought shame not only upon the imaginary men but also on the performers themselves, the reference to phallus having been made amongst the people they respect, in spite of the license enjoyed by the jocular songs, as the words *badaa ya bane* (we are finished with shame), uttered as a metacommentary on the effect of the offending word, reveal. This reaction is a product of post-performance criticism (Tedlock 1978:6). The song's cardinal interest is to attack the man's honour by revealing what the speakers consider the violations of honour.

But what is the significance of this song that parades the man's gluttony? Although the answer can by no means be arrived at in a monolithic paradigm, it seems to me our understanding of cultural codes could shed some light on it. For one, the song helps to demystify the superiority complex of men by showing them as gullible characters that like all humans, respond to times of scarcity by becoming subhuman. In fact, the song is an illustration of humanity at its worst, defrocked of its pretentious gentility and reduced to a bestial level. Superiority is only a façade that is worn when things are going well. In times of scarcity, the song contends, men behave like beasts by not only eating up everything at their disposal but also resorting to foodstuff they ordinarily do not eat. The song then, is not only a challenge to the fake superiority of men but it is also a terse criticism of the very codes that comprises this superiority. It questions not just the men but also the idioms with which they barricade themselves. In so far as cuisine rules are concern, the song seems to be pointing out that the inedible is an irrational cultural construct over which men preside. The song thus questions assumptions like the categorization of foods into gender and

generation as men have done and bores hole through them. By laughing at men who eat foods that are customarily preserved for women, the song makes a laughingstock not only of them but also of the rules they construct and live by.

Laughing at Men's Slavish Attachment to Women

The third song I consider here is rendered in the same mocking spirit as the others above with varying degrees of depth and nuances. It is directed at a category of men the Borana call *turquqa*. The word, heavily loaded with cultural connotation, can perhaps be translated as a 'Casanova'. *Turquqa* is generally a man who dedicates his life to a woman as a lover. He subordinates his entire life to her in exchange for sex. Such a man usually chooses a divorcee or a widow as his mistress and neglects his wife and other responsibilities. In the course of this lifelong craving for the woman, he acquires negative attributes and in this song the women ironically mock him for what he is. He displays himself as stupid, gluttonous, crude and ugly. It is these attributes that make him appear something of a caricature that is mocked by the very women he had vowed to love. Remarkably the speaker/jester plays the role of the woman whom he had served and from that vantage point of an insider reveals his ways:

Dueelle si dhamada
 Rafule si qabadha
 O o gutuu kunoo
 Daalachi funnan furroo
 O o gaayyaa jilbaa
 Sabdae garaan iddaa
 Agarta beeni jibbaa

I will leave a word for you in death
 I will remember you in sleep
 Oh oh the one whose tuft of hair is cut
 The foolish one with mucus in the nostril
 Oh oh the one whose knee is like a pipe
 He is a glut with veins on the belly
 People hate to see him

The first two lines read together with the whole stanza, are sarcastically rendered. The jester speaks to the man, and she claims to remember him in her sleep. In the event of death she will leave a word for him. This appears to be the words of an intimate lover. Yet they are deceptively so, as the intimacy is shattered systematically in the course of the song. Line 3 is a reference to the tuft of hair worn by Borana males who have killed large game such as lion, buffalo, elephant and rhino or human enemies with whom the Borana go to battle. For this man, his tuft of hair essentially shaped like a phallus, which in any case is a metaphor of maleness, is cut. The allusion to the cutting of this overtly expressive symbol of masculinity implies castration, a point the whole song makes. The song essentially castrates the man at the height of what he took to be an assertion of his maleness by sexually subduing the women. He is subjected to a vituperative insult to the effect that his foolishness exudes through the mucus from the nostril. The objective on the part of singer is to show unequivocally that the man, contrary to what he takes himself to be, is foolish, gluttonous, effeminate and castrated, a being that cannot be envied.

The next group of lines (5-7) portrays the man as one who has suffered acute malnourishment. A comparison is drawn between the knee and a pipe, betraying its leanness, and the belly is said to have been invaded by visible veins. These are manifestations of advanced malnutrition, and in that state he becomes an eyesore. The speaker does not mince her words in depicting him as a loathsome character. The verse works in such a way that the seeming sentimental attachment in the song is only an ironic gesture. Being foolish, malnourished and generally in a lethargic state, he is anything but admirable.

The second stanza also begins with the same ironic affect but essentially portrays him as a pitiable sight:

Oh oh abba maale
Ak jabba waali maale
Jech arrabaa waali gaale
Oh oh figa kiyyaa
Dudda inqabu ciisa kiyyaa
Annaan infoqatu miraa kiyyaa
Eh eh funan gorfaa

Adoles furroo cobsa
 Bon agayya fulo goossa

Oh oh father of whoever
 We are meant for each other
 We understand each other in speech
 Oh oh my runner
 He is mine who has no back; he must lie down
 He is mine who takes little food
 Oh oh he has the nose of a milk container
 He drips mucus in the cold season
 He has dry face in the hot season

The first line refers to him as “father of whoever” which is an affectionate name of a child whom one does not quite remember his/her real name or does not want to use it for purposes of expressing intimacy. The ironic intimacy cuts across the entire song as evinced in the repetition of the possessive “my”. The same sarcasm is extended in the next two lines. The one claims that the speaker and the addressee are meant for each other, and the other provides the reason for the supposed affection. The similarity at the sound level with the words *maale/gaale* helps to create a nuanced sound pattern, which runs throughout the song jest. However, the weaving thread is the technique of sarcasm, which reminds us of what was expressed at the beginning about *turquqa*. The possessive term *kiyya*/mine indicates the relationship between the speaker in her role in this parody and the man as one slavishly attracted to her. He is sarcastically referred to as “my runner”, implying that the man is active, athletic and restless. But the line that follows negates this sportsmanship attributed to him by alluding to his chronic back problem as a result of which he always lies down. He is again portrayed as one who does not take much milk, yet, this is explicitly ironic, in view of the previous revelation of his acutely malnourished body. His physical appearance is also a target of invective. The jester describes his nose in figurative terms as *gorfa*, a spherical milk container locally weaved from certain fibres by women. It conjures the picture of a short and stout object. This is followed by the insulting claim that alludes to the varying afflictions weather patterns leave on his body.

Let us look at the pathetic picture of the man as he craves for the woman to cook for him:

Ak dubra ire nyaata
Inhirate dubro danaa
Hamatee qulaa kee
Oh o hadho mana buri suule anaa dhaabi
Oh o abba maale buri dhaabu intau
Yabbiye anat galcha
Oh o hadho mana yabbi tee anat galcha
Oh o abba maale, dhaabu intau
Qoraan kiyya anat dhaqa
Oh on hadho maana, qoraan kee anat dhaqa
Atin buri ana dhaabi

He consumes ankle like girls
He is greedy he canes girls
He has bad manners he comes out naked
Oh mother of the house cook for me *buri*
Oh the father of whoever I cannot cook *buri*
I am the one to drive home the calves
Oh mother of the house I will bring your calves for you
Oh father of whoever I cannot cook
I am the one to collect my firewood
Oh mother of the house I will collect your firewood
You cook *buri* for me

Drawing on the already mentioned motif of the pipe-like knee and the fact that he cuts a loathsome figure that people wish not to see, he is shown naked, with loose skin belly, and ill-fitting trousers, presumably because of the loss of weight. By this, the speaker insinuates moral deprivation, for the man disregards decorum, exposing his nakedness rather unbecomingly. Before she surrenders her role to other performers, the speaker focuses on the man's irritable mood, which he takes out on the girls. The two lines about "consuming the ankle" and "caning girls" are loaded with cultural overtones that need some explanation. Normally the ankle as a portion of meat is preserved for

girls, other cuts being ritually assigned to the men, women and boys. The consumption of ankle, like girls, on the part of the man is condescension to a lower status for purposes of the belly. His caning of the girls further indicates this flouting of the rules, because *conventionally it is the mothers who discipline daughters*. The man is rebuked for refusing to respect the social space and the privacy due to girls.

The last lines dramatize the argument between the man and his consort. According to the speaker the man had gone in search of this wild tuber called *huri* already referred to above. The acquisition of it was a hazardous task because the tuber normally lodges itself among deeply penetrating and intertwining roots from which it needed to be dug out. It thus becomes a precious commodity, given the prevailing hunger and the amount of energy the man expended to secure it. It is this commodity that the man asks the woman to cook for him, a request she declines citing her numerous commitment to the household chores such as bringing firewood, water and livestock to the home. What is interesting is the length to which the man was prepared to acquiesce to role reversal in order to have the commodity cooked, so that he satisfies his cravings. Collecting firewood, bringing calves and donkeys into the home are distinctly female tasks according to culturally accepted arrangement. The assumption of the duties ordinarily performed by women is a feminizing idiom, which in turn makes him an object of mirth.

Conclusion

In their entirety, these songs are a parody of the men playing out their daily lives. Their behaviour appears as trifles in contrast to their bloated self-imaging. On the one hand, the men perceive themselves as possessing admirable qualities like bravery, strength, persistence, endurance, and the like, while on the other, these lofty qualities are no more than figments of their fertile imaginations. These positive qualities are particularly portrayed as male qualities and in normal speech any one lacking them is said not to be man enough. The songs question the validity of such male notions by subjecting these invincible men to scrutiny. By broadcasting the gory details of the nasty stories of men

who are purportedly conquerors of females, and therefore an epitome of maleness in the public arena, the songs deconstruct the myth of male superiority and lay them bare. By so doing, the women jesters are not necessarily conforming to the conventions of the superiority theory whose object was self-enhancement, but rather see themselves as objective moralists speaking for the common good of the society.

The jesters in women's *qoosaa-taapaa* are guided by their words, which are sung as a kind of metacommentary, *duuban gurat badaa*, *calimne karat badaa*, (if we speak out, his ear/name/honour will be destroyed, if we keep quiet his property will be destroyed). This line means that it was not their intention to destroy the men's honour, but the need to save his property from destruction compels them into critiquing his actions. As a man who indulges in self-destructive activities, he has to be protected from himself and the criticism engendered in women's *qoosaa-taapaa* is meant to serve that purpose. By exposing the exploitative structure informing male/female relations in society, women's *qoosaa-taapaa* suggests in a subtle way that such a structure of inequalities and oppression also poses a danger to the people who perpetrate it. By focusing on men whose appetite for food is perceived as ignoble, women's *qoosaa-taapaa* shocks the male culture to reexamine itself and revive a collective sense of moral integrity built on true honour that is self-denying and serving the greater good. The sense of superiority that emphasizes men's propensity for consumption rather than production is disparagingly attacked and negated. In this sense, the women see themselves, as Jackson (1982) says of the Kuranko artists, as chroniclers rather than performers. We could say with Peter Rigby (1968) that the public nature of most joking serves to shame the object of the jocular offensive, to invoke social pressure for conformity and elicit support for the complainant.

NOTES

¹ Famed for her tyrannical leadership Habanoye was the last of the most powerful women leaders among the Borana. According to legend, the pit into which she was believed to have fallen is found around the vicinity of Mega in Ethiopia, some 500 miles south of Addis Ababa. A similar legend was reported among the Kikuyu of a woman, Wangu wa Makeri who lorded

it over the men but was overthrown in similar circumstances. Although the two legends differ in detail, the authoritarian motif and overthrow of women from the position of leadership is the same.

² The word as it stands is meaningless, but it is a marker of a generic song type sung by women and is known and meant to denigrate men.

³ This is an item made from cowhide to fan a fire especially in the morning and is usually used by women. It is proverbial as an insignificant household item that falls in the domestic domain.

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Transition From Oral to Written Oromo Poetry

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Language is power; so is literature. Throughout modern history the clergy or elite and language planners have been aware of this fact. Cobarrubias and Fishman (1983:59) cite an interesting incidence concerning this fact. An individual named Antonio de Nebrija presented to Queen Isabella, his *Gramatica de la lengua Castellana* (1492), the first grammar of any European language he prepared and dedicated to her. The bewildered Queen asked what the book was for. A Bishop standing nearby is said to have answered the question swiftly by saying, “Your Majesty, language is the perfect instrument of the Empire.” Empire builders, and language status planners, down to this very day, have seriously heeded the bishop’s swift answer.

Subsequently, vernacular literature (oral and written) has always been relied upon as a strong tool of success by both those with an Imperialistic mission, as well as by those who claim a nationalistic cause. The cultural, communicational, and organizational values, and above all, the emotion feelings and pride that arise from the assumed uniqueness of one’s own language seems to possess such a power that makes the purity and correctness of the common cause totally unquestionable.

The plan usually involves consecration of the dominant language and demonising and subsequently, putting out of public service of the indigenous languages. It has also been relied upon as the only favourable formula to solve the language issues of multilingual societies such as Ethiopia. The casualty such language policies inflict upon indigenous languages and their different expressive forms is of enormous magnitude. However, in our case, what Paul Zumthor (1990, 4) writes about oral tradition’s importance in saving archaic civilisations and marginalized cultures seems to have worked in our favour. Our traditional poems did not retreat into obscurity *en toto*. However, this doesn’t mean that our society has not suffered from the lack of the consolidating

power of literature. It is only to say that Oromo literature was compelled to remain oral, until the beginning of the 19th century. It was during this period that Oromo traditional poetry, especially from the Western and Central regions underwent a significant transition from oral tradition to documentation.

Early 19th century was a period when European attitudes towards African oral literature took a radical turn from centuries of stereotypes that portrayed Africa as a land without indigenous literary tradition. With evangelization of Africa as a leading motive, the collaborative efforts of missionaries and linguists resulted in an intensive collection of folk-tales and vocabularies. Above all, linguistic as well as folklorist comparative studies became subjects of scholarly interests. Major universities in Europe, especially the ones in Germany opened a department for such studies by opening the way for other universities in major European cities.

Out of such comparative studies came out findings that succeeded in refuting the above erroneous assertions by confirming that the continent is not only a land with abundant wealth of traditional literature, but also rich in myths, characters, and incidences that make its folklore, if not the main root and stem as some might argue, but at least as “a branch of one universal tree”(Finnegan, 1970: 29).

Consequently, it was not coincidental that some of the most important phenomenon in the history of our language took place during this period. To mention some, J. L. Krapf’s *An Imperfect Outline of The Elements of the Galla Language* in 1840, Father Masisa’s *Amaharic-Oromo Dictionary* in 1867 and Prof. Etro Viterbbo’s *Oromo Dictionary* in 1892 were the publications that appeared during this period and heralded the transition of Oromo language from orality to documentation.

Most importantly, the publication of Karl Tutschek’s *The Dictionary of the Galla Language* in 1844 appeared forty years earlier than the first edition of *Oxford English Dictionary* and twenty eight years later than that of Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language*. This was not a bad beginning for a language since at least one of the first basic documents necessary for its development was already laid, may be way before other languages had the chance of enjoying similar privileges. However, the Oromo society had to wait for 145 years to get

a dictionary from its own scholars. Dr. Tilahun Gamta's, 1989 *Oromo-English Dictionary* and Obbo Mahadi Hameed Muude's *English-Oromo Dictionary*, are cases in point.

The second important phenomena and the one directly related to the topic at hand is the publication of collections of Onesimos Nesib and Aster Ganno's Oromo oral literature, published under the title: *The Galla Spelling-Book* (1894, Moncullo, Massowah). Enrico Cerulli's publication can also be mentioned as one of the important documentation of Oromo oral literature, though one might say it belongs to a later period. The first two works might safely be regarded as the hallmark of transition of Oromo literature from orality to a written language.

Some of the poems preserved by Onesimos and Aster in their *The Galla Spelling Book* have, in fact, achieved the honor of continental recognition. Chinweizu (1988) in his famous *Voices From Twentieth-Century Africa, Griots and Towncriers* has included two of the collections. On page 246 of this book, is a lamenting song of a woman in love with a merchant who took a long journey away from home. She sings of her strong desire to cut down the mountain between her and her lover, only if her hand has the axe and her heart the determination. The other one on page 409 sang by a rather duty-bound member of a caravan seems to be a chiding response to the lament of the women as if he received her desire via telepathic-mail. It is read as follows:

"Nagaadeen nagaadumaa
Kan tulluu Buree jirtuu
Harkatoo qottoo dhabee
Garaaoo murtoo dhabee
Kan tulluu muree jigsuu."
"Si'a bonaa yoo kuttoo kaasan malee
Si'a gannaa yoo dhoqqee dhiitan malee
Magaalaan oodan malee
Dimtuun boqqoran malee
Deegnii nama hinlakkisu
Deegii maggaanyaa korma
Luqqettuu nam lixa
Lumme nama jallisaa
Moofaa namattii buwwisa
Doofaa nama taasisa
Gecccaa garaatti hambisa
Nama dheeraa gabaabsa
Gabaabaa badduu baasa
Haati deesse hinjaallattu
Abbaan uume hinlellisu."

Merchant of merchandise
The one at mount Buree
My hand lacked an axe
My heart lacked the determination
To cut down the mountains.
Unless in summer one makes the dust rise,
In winter one even tramples the mud
Unless one stops flirting with the dark maiden
And shun the red maidens with a smile
Poverty will never leave one.
Poverty is a bull of a disease;
It penetrates the sides,
It bends the vertebrae,
It dresses one in rags,
It makes one stupid;
It suffocates all desire in the breast,
It shortens the tall ones
It dwarfs the short ones
One's own mother loves no more
Nor does one's own father esteem any more.

Alexander Bulatovich, the Russian Lieutenant, who happened to be among the Oromo from 1896-98, correctly discovered the natural poetic ability and artistic instinct of the Oromo. He wrote:

“The Galla is a poet. He worships nature, loves his mountains and rivers, considering them animated beings. He is a passionate hunter.”

However, because of the strict monolingual policy of the Ethiopian Empire, this unique poetic ability was compelled to remain totally oral until the 1974 popular uprising. It was during this time that a substantial number of poets began expressing themselves freely. Benefiting from the short-lived freedom of expression granted by the then military government, Oromo poets from all corners of Oromia expressed themselves. Their forum was Bariisaa (The Dawn), an Oromo newspaper in Sabean script (See, Mahadi Hamid Muudee’s 1996, *Walaloo Bariisaa*).

The 1991 socio-political change and the unanimous endorsement by all Oromo political organizations to adopt the Latin alphabet for the Oromo language brought about the most significant transition and development of the Oromo literature. Once again, the short lived rights to free expression granted in the Transitional Charter of July 1991 allowed the mushrooming of books, private magazines, newspapers, theatre clubs, and musical bands. T. A. Abdi’s collection of poems entitled *Billiqa* (1991) from eastern Oromia, Maaramee Harqaa-Kaasaa’s *Gundoo Booree* (1993) from western Oromia were few poetic works published in the Latin alphabet. There were other small pieces published in different magazines. Tesfaye Dheressa’s *Burra Karrayyu* and his other writings *Utuuu*, *Utuu*, *Utuu* and *Mallii Maali* are some of the literary works that were published in *Qube*. “Coqorsa” newspaper, “Oromia Out Look,” and other magazines such as “*Bijftu*,” “*Gadaa*,” “*Odaa*,” “*Urjii*,” “*Ichima*,” and others have come out with poems in *Qube* at one time or the other. It’s a pity that all of these magazines and newspapers suffered an early death, due to the censorship and maltreatment they suffered in the hands of the EPRDF bureaucracy.

For Diaspora Oromo, the O-net has become another literary forum

on which many members with poetic inclination have been writing and expressing themselves. Most of the poems focus on the promotion of national and cultural awareness while some are critical towards organizational, leadership, and unity issues. I now turn to the description of the nature of Oromo traditional poetry.

Oromo Oral Poetry

Putting poetry into a single set of definition is, indeed, a difficult task. As a matter of fact, no two poets seem to agree on a single definition. Some characterize it as the surplus value of a language. For others, it is a joke with black belt in karate. For the famous Frenchman of enlightenment, Voltaire, it is the music of the soul, and above all of great and feeling souls. Poetry is one of those modes of expressions, that helps externalises human feelings and imaginations, about love, dream, hope thoughts, aspirations, and ideas about gods, about nature, about beauty, and other many things. As when and where poetry began is as mysterious as the origin of language itself. Paul Zumthor (1990:4) traces the roots of poetry to the very phenomena of the primordial symbolism and phonation integration which he claims is evident in the use of language.

For those with strong nationalistic mission, the importance of poetry, especially folk-poetry, in the words of an early nineteenth century Finnish writer is expressed as follows:

“No father land can exist without folk-poetry. Poetry is nothing more than the crystal in which nationality can mirror itself; it is the spring which brings to the surface the truly original in the folk-soul” (Fishman, 1972: 52).

Generally, poetry consists of different types of figures of speech such as irony, metaphor, oxymoron, prose, pun, simile, rhyme and others which also occur in Oromo language and poetry. For instance, “harkii Waaqa baldhaa dha,” “buddeenni mootiidha,” can be a good example for **metaphoric** expression. While, “Ija bakkasha gootee!” for **simile**; “cabbii gubaa,” or “abidda diilallaa,” for **oxymoron**, “Du’uu, gu’uu,” “doofaa, moofaa,” “Muruu, uruu” and other words or phrases with similar ending for **rhyme**. However, in traditional Oromo poetry, rhyme

formation mainly relies on sound parallelity of words than similarity of word endings. For instance, “Agada dhuka, dhuka...” creates sound parallelity with “Kee graan muka, muka...” Attempting a detail investigation of the types of poetry in Oromiffa, for instance, the types we are accustomed to in *English poetry*, ode, epic, free verse, sonnet, ballad, and other independent types, or taking a comparative approach is rather out of the scope of my topic. Hence, I would rather try to say few words on the nature of some Oromo folk-poetry.

Panegyric or praise poetry:

Even though the necessity of an intensive and extensive field study is of a paramount importance in attempting to classify Oromo traditional poetry, I hope that the following effort with all its limitation could be a modest introduction to the nature of Oromo traditional poetry and an inspiration for those who have the intention of doing so. Praises of all kind are parts of an individual as well as societal life. No wonder Francis Bacon had to say, “Praise yourself daringly, something always sticks.” In hierarchical societies, it is customary for leaders and men in higher places to expect praise and even flattery from others, preferably from professionals, such as bards, poets, singers etc. However, there are poetic evidences that confirm members and leaders of traditional Oromo society were rather believers in self-reliance as far as praise poetry or what is known as “Panegyric” is concerned. In fact, praise poetry or Panegyric is one of the main types of poetry that we share in common with most African countries. As Finnegan (1970:111) describes, even though praise poem is popular among the court of the aristocrats, she, however, claims that it also occurs in other forms like the one in Oromo tradition. She writes:

“It is true that praise, (including self-praise) also occur among non centralized peoples, particularly those who lay on the significance of personal achievement in war, or hunting such as the Galla or Tuareg and also that the use of ‘praise names’ is nearly universal.”

Further, Finnegan (1970) writes the importance of praise poetry as a vehicle for recording history as viewed by the poet and as an

expression of pride in possession in cattle, family, and clan, etc. Praise poetry also serves as means to achieving position and power. A young man's ambition and inducement of action also are expressed in praise songs. Praise poetry can reflect a record of a man's before-death as well as after-death life. Finnegan (1970:142) puts it as follows:

“Thus in youth a man was reminded in praises of the measures of his promise; in maturity his praises presented an inspired record of his deeds and ambitions; in old age he could contemplate the praises of his achievements and adventures; while after death the poems would remain as an ornament of his life, an inspiration and glory to his friends and followers, and a worthy commemoration to keep his name alive as one of the ancestors.”

Accordingly, some of the popular forms of Oromo poetry that come under this category are *Geerarsa*, *weedduu amaamota*, and all kinds of praise poetry. Praises concerning Waaqa (God), or Lafa (mother earth), even though they are more of religious poetry, could be included into this category as well. This class also includes praises for different domestic animals and other wealth. You might hear a man behind a sewing machine sing:

“Senjerkoo yaa shaakisa,
Situ buddcen na nyaachisa”

“O my Singer (sewing machine), my chattering one
It is you that earn me my daily bread”

or a person with a gun, locally known as *Minishiri* sing:

“Minishiri ulullec,
Yaa buttuu akka culullec”

“O gun, you sound like a flute
And you snatch like a hawk”.

However, to limit *Gerarasa* to praise-singing only is erroneous. First of all, it is a mode of expression for many occasions and moods and social circumstances. There are *geerarsaa* which directly address political issues, specially the suffering of Oromo people after they were occupied by the Abyssinian aristocracy. In *geerarsa*, one can praise hunting ground gains; and in the mean time, one can also tell all the suffering he had to endure. Those who were not lucky enough as to come home with a trophy after all that ordeal would also sing *geerarsa* to tell themselves and others to cheer up, for tomorrow is another day; there is no hurry,

for the subject is only a young lad! *Geerarsa* is also used to praise one's parents, mother's beauty, wisdom, father's manliness, heroic deeds, wealth, and cleverness, etc.

Cerruli (1922:21) cites a poem that he calls "a boasting song" which can be used as a good example of self-praise. It was an exchange of verbal challenge between Simaa Abbaa Deentaa of Guumaa and Shoonee of Leeqaa Sibuu, before the due date of the physical one. It goes as follows:

Simaa:

Ciraa cira jettee?	Clear the weed, you said?
Maafan ciraa cira?	Why should I clear the weed?
Simaa simi jette?	"Receive Simaa" you said?
Maafan Simaa Sima?	Why should I receive Simaa?
Leenca, leenca baatu	A lion on top of a lion
Maraatuu Abbaa Deentaa	The furious son of Abbaa Deentaa
Simaa kaldhee leencaa	Simaa the cloak of a lion's skin
Bakakkaa Kuweedhaa	The lightning son of Kuwe
Irraa na darbata	He will unmount me
Jalaa na murata	He will amputate me from billow
Maafan Simaa Simaa?	Why should I receive Simaa?

Shoonee's response was:

Nama Simaa simu	The one who receives Simaa
Ani beekee hinhimu	I can not really tell
Gara Sibuuu himu	They say he is from Sibuu
Shoonee mudhii ribu	Shoonee with the elastic waist
Mucaa Buushee Mijuu	The son of Buushe Mijuu
Hatisaa Bojee dha	His mother is Bojee
Abaansaa Buushani	His father is Buushan
Argeesaa hinqufani	One can't have enough of his looks

Oromo society also shares the tradition of praising his possessions with other societies in Africa. According to studies, praising cattle, for instance, extends from the horn of Africa all the way down to the Bantu and Zulu societies in South Africa. In Oromo case, the praise occurs during feasts after *daboo*, the traditional mutual help and assistance during farm works, by shepherds or those who look after the cattle during midday when taking them to the river, and during the evening, when the cattle are taken home from the grazing fields.

Elegiac Poetry

As far as I can tell, there are no professional mourners or those who lament funeral dirges in Oromo society. However, as in other parts of Africa, there are lamentations that appear in a more or less stylized literary form, even though they differ significantly in their functions. The main character of elegiac poetry in Oromo society is its personal-grief expressive mode. They are expressed during sorrowful feelings due to the passing away or missing of a beloved one. At times, they occur long after-funeral expressions. Onesimos and Aster (1894: 140) have registered few of such poetry in their work.

Hammuu gaara baatee
Maa nan waamin maalo
Hawwuu gargara baane
Hawwuu maccaa taane
Maa nan nyaatin Baaro

When you climbed the hill
Why did you not call me
When we were separated
When we were dispersed
Baaro(river), why did you not draw me?

Hadara yaa mukaa
Dameekke 'nraasini
Hadara yaa du'aa
Garagar nunbaasini

O please you tree!
Don't shake your branches
O please death!
Do not separate us.

Religious Poetry

One of the types of poetry in traditional Oromo society is religious poetry. Finnegan (1970) states three criteria that help us identify a poetic work as a religious one. They are: contextual reference to gods and mythical actions, acknowledgement and recitation by religious specialists, and when performed during occasions which are generally agreed to be religious ones (Finnegan, 1970:168). Few poetic examples mainly frequented by traditional Oromo musicians sang as an expression of gratitude for all His mercy and the good things He(God) did for them.

Yaa hordaakoo yaa dambii
Leeqaan faaase garbuu
Yaa gooftaakoo yaa Rabbii
Shantaman yakkaa oolee
Dhibban balleessaa oolee
Beekaa na maartee garu
Ajjeesoo yaa kaasoo

O my wooden shaft of *dambii(tree)*
Leeqa has sown barley
O my Lord master Rabbi!
Fifty crimes, I committed this day
And erred hundred and one times
But, knowing all, you redeemed me
O You, the one who kills and resurrects

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Deesso yaa badhaaso

The bountiful, who rewards with children and wealth

(Source: Adde Xajitu Disaasaa Waaqayyoo, Minneapolis, 24 - 07 - 2001)

Another similar but one that concentrates on praising the greatness, monolithic and transcendental nature of Waaqa goes as follows.

Tokkicha maqaan dhibbaa
Gurraachaa garaa garbaa
Yaa Waaqa Waaqa hinqabnee
Yaa gooftaa gooftaa hinqabnee
Mootichaa giddii hinqabnee
Guungumaa garaa roobaa
Jaarsaa garaa dabbasaa
Waaqaa hundaa ol jirtuu
Abaa ifaaf dukkanaa
Si kadhee na dhagayi...

(Source: Qumbii Kumsa, 24, July 1999)

O the monolith with multiple names!
Black one, with infinite cosmic span
O God, of all Gods
O Lord of all lords
O King, bounded by no humanly obligation
The roaring one, with belly full of rain
Noble one, with a woolly chest
O God who exists above all else
Master of darkness and light
I so beseech you, heed to my prayers

As a result of the recent works of evangelization, present day Oromia is producing a substantial amount of religious cassettes sang by members of Church choirs. However, the lyrics and hymns are of modern times with some traditional prayer syllables, such as “Hoo qubaa” roughly translated: “accept thy reverence from me”. Poems in *Ateete* songs, praise for Waaqa and Mother Earth are few of the examples that come to mind. One of the best examples of traditional Oromo religious poetry I came across is the one Onesimos and Aster documented in their collection on page 118.

Karaa Waaq darbee
Eenyu abbaan argee
Yaa qara eeboo
Waaq gara beeko

.....
Humbaa, Humbaa yaa Waaq
Humbaa, Humbaa yaa Waaq
Uumtee nungatin
Humbaa, Humbaa yaa Waaq
Dagte nunbuusin
Humbaa, humbaa yaa Waaq
Obbo 'bba hiyyeessa, nu callee keeti
Ijaartec nundiigin Yaa Waaq
Kabdee nun buqqisin Yaa Waaq
Ija boo'u nu oolchi Yaa Waaq
Garaa na'u nu oolchi yaa Waaq
Gargar ba'u nu oolchi yaa Waaq

The path Waaqa took
Who has ever seen?
O the edge of the lance
Waaqa knows of the heart, mind

.....
Lo and alack Waaqa!
Lo and alack O Waaqa!
You created us, do not cast us away
Lo and alack Waaqa!
Do not forgetfully abandon us
Lo and alack Waaqa!
O Father of the poor, we are your beads
You have constructed us, do not demolish us, O Waaq!
You have supported us, do not uproot us, O Waaq!
Deliver us from weeping of the eyes, O Waaq!
Deliver us from grief of the heart, O Waaq!
Deliver us from disunity, O Waaq!

Nu dhaabi kaa yaa Rabbi
Akka mukaa yaa rabbi.

Deepen our roots O Rabbi!
Like a tree, O Rabbi!

Lullabies or Cradle poetry

The mother tongue, in the well known German folklorist and linguist Jacob Karl Ludwig Grimm's (1984) opinion is so called because:

“The nursing hears the first words at his mother's breast spoken to him from the soft and gentle maternal voice; and they cling to his virgin memory, before he has yet power over his own speech organs.”

If one adds this to the gist of Naom Chomsky's linguistic theory (Huck and Goldsmith, 1996) of how babies are innately equipped with a knowledge of linguistic universals, the structural properties which define the nature of human language, I believe it would rather be easy to understand the paramount importance of cradle poetry and songs in a given language. So is the great role mothers play in planting the first words in the fertile brains of children, thereby guarantying the intergenerational continuity of a language.

As *Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend* (1972: 653) states, aside from the humming, the most common syllables of lullabies in major European languages such as English, Polish, Rumanian, French, Italian, etc. are “loo-loo, lalla, lullay, ninna-nanna, bo, bo, do, do.” It further states that:

“Perhaps, the greatest number of lullabies say, in whatever the tune and whatever the language, ‘Go to sleep, Mother is here. You are safe. Everything is all right.’”

The Oromo cradle poetry possesses more to it than coaxing the child to sleep with such simple syllables. It consists of syllables that express the mother's hope in her child as her future guardian in time of sickness and tribulation, her gratitude towards Waaqa for giving her such happiness through the child. She narrates to the baby the similarity of her life with that of a bird, rising and chirping at dawn, and chattering at daybreak and how busy she remains the whole day long. Every mother, regardless of her economic status, sings to her child in melancholic and

soothing melody, what makes it cry, in fact, is none other than being pampered, that he/she goes to sleep for the bed is cleanly made and the milk is kept in a washed and smoked container, the way he/she loves it.

As in some cases of well-to-do Oromo mothers, there are other African mothers who employ nursemaids to look after their children. In such cases as, for instance, the Nyoro of Uganda who Finnegan (1970:300) calls “rank-conscious” mothers, what the babies listen to is not cradle songs, but rather the complaining song of the nursemaids about their employers. It goes like this:

Ha! that mother, who takes her food alone.
 Ha! that mother, before she has eaten.
 Ha! that mother she says “lull the children for me
 Ha! that mother when she has finished to eat
 Ha! That mother she says “give the child to me”

Pastoral Poems

Another type of poetry, commonly known among the Oromo and other African Societies, is pastoral poems. The following appears to be an exchange of dialogue between a girl and boy, though it is a verbal mockery that two young shepherds exchange.

Gufuu balbala Si fuudhaa hintala	Stump of the front-yard I shall marry you girl!
Ceekaa mana duuba Deegaatu nama fuudhaa?	The <i>cheeka</i> tree of the back-yard Could an impoverished be a husband?
Reejjii gama gabaa Reertii laman qaba	The <i>reejjii</i> tree in the market place But, I own two goats!
Tuph! ...Kusaayeen kosiidhaa? Bushaaayeen horiidhaa? (Source: Dr. Qannoo Baanjaw, August 3, 2001, Minneapolis)	Puuuf!..., Could <i>kusaayee</i> bush be garbage? Could goats be considered wealth?

Proverbial Poetry

Poetry in Oromo tradition is not only limited to the above mentioned modes of expression. There are also many instances in which poetry is used to convey proverbial expressions. Perfect examples that readily come to mind out of the abundant wealth of Oromo proverbs are the following:

Kan haadhaan qixxee
Qayyaa haadhaa fixxee

One who equates herself to her mother
Finished her mother's incense

Kanuma lamatu
Kanuma ija hamatu

What a pity they are only two
Yet worth, both are evil-eyed

(Source: Qanaatee Wolde Yesus, August 15, 1999, Tampere)

Special purpose poetry

Oromo traditional poetry also includes what Finnegan calls “special purpose poetry” whose orientation is towards critiquing social life and political comments targeting community leaders and even leaders at higher places. Some are of strong and derogatory nature.

In western Oromia, after the death of Kumsaa Moroda (Dajazmach Gebere Igziabeher) Qanna’a Likkaasa (Fitawraarii) had to lead a temporary care taking governance since the heir to the throne Habte Mariam Kumasa (later Dajazmach) was too young for the duty. However, when Qana’a Likkaasa was no more tolerated for abuse of power, but the court officials were afraid to speak their mind; it is said that local girls sang and expressed their wishes to forcefully bring Gichillee Dibaaba, the nephew of Kumsaa Moroda to power and replace Qana’aa Likkaasa. The song and its literary translation goes as follows.

Jirbii biteen Kitilee foosisaa
Kitilee Dilaalaa
Giddiin fideen Gichilleen moosisaa
Gichillee Dibaabaa.”

I would buy cotton and make Kitile spine it
Kitilee the daughter of Dilaala
I would rather forcefully enthrone Gichille
Gichille the son of Dibaaba

(Source: Qanaatee Wolde Yesus, August 15, 1999, Tampere)

Between the 1974 and 1990, when the regular meetings conducted by farmer’s association leaders became so monotonous and sickeningly boring, it was said that farmers from central Oromiya have sung:

“Yaa komüte, lafaa maasii teessanii,
Midhaanitiü namm’a hinjiraan keessanii”

O committee, you sat near the farm
Don’t infest our crop with your lice.

(Source: Anonymous)

Some are reflections on individual behaviours during minor social accidents or annual hunting seasons, usually coated with humor. During one of my field trips in rural areas of Western Oromiya a man killed a wild boar and made a lot of fuss about it as if he killed an elephant, a

buffalo, or a lion which are highly regarded among the Oromo society. One of the local farmers came out with the following humorous poem.

Geeshoo jala gugadheen	Running under the <i>geesho</i> tree
Eeboon lama tumadhe	Twice I gored it with my lance
Gafaan laddaa waraane	When I speared it in the belly
Akka arbaa caraane	It brayed like an elephant
Hamma gafarsaa ga'a	It was as big as a buffalo
Gogaan saa afarsaa ta'a	Its hide can be made into a winding fan
Kalaadaa qacaqacce	With that chattering tusks
Qaata na bajabbaje	O God, it almost sliced me
Afaan saa kalaadaa dha	Its mouth is full of tusks
Amaaraaf asaamaa dha	For the Amhara it is an <i>asama</i> (<i>hog</i>)

Encouraging or moral up lifting songs during conflicts and war are also known in Oromo society. Onesimos and Aster (1894: 46) have registered one such poetry.

Tumtuun qottuu 'nquuftii	A black smith gets rich if he farms
Qotuu baattuu 'quufti	Gets rich even if he farms not
Cabaan birileedha	A broken vase is worthless,
Lubbuun lotu 'nduuti	A man may die fighting
Loluu baattu 'nduuti	Dies if he does not fight
Haman itilleedha.	Worthless is dying on the sleeping mattress

The other type of poetry that may be mentioned under this category is the one for invoking rain. In Cerulli (1922:139), we can read the following:

Kosorru Gibee	The Kosorruu plant of Gibe
Huursaa Mandayyo	Storm of Mandayyo
Eessaa si dhibe	Where is your problem
Roobi Waaqayyoo!	Give us rain Waaqayyo
Roobi! Roobi!	Rain! Rain!

During special rites, there is one popular poem used for taking solemn oath. Cerulli(1992) calls it "Sworn renunciation". He further writes that the oath taken with the feet resting on the skin of a wild boar (regarded as an unclean animal in Semito-Hamites) and at the conclusion, a four-pronged fork is hurled into the air.

Na darbi jedhe	"Hurl me," has said
Murxuxxe kaku	The hurl of the oath
Ho Ubayaayi	<i>Ho Ubayyayi</i>
Qeyeekoo booyyeen ha dhaalu	May the wild boar inherit my home
Badii badduu bayi	Perish! Destroy thyself
Balabala shan badi	May you perish down to five generations
Ho ubayaayi	<i>Ho ubayaayi</i>

There are types of poetry that sound abusive, but play important role in Oromo social life. Poetry that is heard during marriage

ceremonies or wedding songs are not as abusive to an Oromo ear as might be to the ear of a foreigner. They are rather teasing or ire-testing songs which the bride or the groom should proudly bear and maintain their cool; they usually are soon to be followed with reconciliatory and praise songs.

Conclusion

For a nation, the one place that might provide a bonanza of stimulant in its effort of energizing its cultural existence and sustenance is the wealth of its oral literature. Besides, it is believed to be a repository of people's general philosophical outlook, especially, the proverbial expressions are believed to be laden with folk wisdom and educative elements. For people like the Oromo who suffered subjugation and cultural domination for so long, one of the sources that can be turned to during the struggle for self-determination is, hence, the oral wealth they possess, but unable to harness. What stands above their literary values of the national wisdom is their inherent unifying and organizing power, their role in creating and advancing self and cultural awareness, thereby guarantying national cohesion.

In this regard, there are lots of things to be done by Oromo intellectuals, not only in the systematic collection and documentation of folk-literature, but also a special focus on keeping and maintaining its artistic and mythic essence during presentation. In many instances, folklore documentation has followed the path of orientation towards a specific ideological goal and audience. A special attention has, hence, been given to their transformation from orality to written as well as their translation to other languages. As such the systematic gathering demands collective efforts; its documentation and translation needs individual talents of seasoned writers. This is because they determine the literary and artistic values and consumer demands. A dull and boring way of documentation and translation could become disastrous, thereby undermining the literary talents of a society. There are sufficient evidences that suggest how many times the Grimm brothers' stories were rewritten so as to make them fit the national-ideological framework. That would be the only way to employ them for the national cause as

well as keeping them intact and alive, thereby guarantying their intergenerational continuity.

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Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo (1895-1980): A Prolific Scholar and a Great Oromo Nationalist *

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This article examines the teaching career and contribution of Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo to the development of written Oromo literature. The article aims to accomplish six interrelated purposes. First, it pays homage to the great scholar, who died in 1980 at a refugee camp in northern Somalia, leaving behind a proud legacy of a life-long struggle for the cause and in the interests of his people. Second, it brings to the attention of the readers of *The Journal of Oromo Studies* his early efforts to the development of the Oromo language, culture, and political consciousness. Third, it demonstrates that Shaykh Bakrii was an activist scholar whose works reflect a deeply-seated passion to spread knowledge among his people and his vision for the future of the Oromo society showed foresight and wisdom. He demonstrated the importance of knowledge as a powerful weapon for those in search of social justice in order to free his people.¹ Fourth, the article shows that what truly moved Bakrii and ultimately dominated his long life was his concern for the development of the Oromo language. Like the famous pioneer, Onesimos Nasib and his language team that created written Oromo literature,² Bakrii, too, was committed to the same goal with passion and enthusiasm. Fifth, the article depicts that through many years of selfless efforts, Shaykh Bakrii brought his immense skills, energy, dedication and motivation to develop written literature. To this effect, he developed a unique writing system for Afaan Oromoo in the early 1950s. Shaykh Bakrii, who knew both Arabic and Ethiopic (Geez) scripts realized a possibility that the contemporary Oromo elite (both Muslims and Christians) scarcely knew a writing system which fits for the Oromo language existed. More than a decade before the Oromo elite who had received a modern Western education adopted Latin script for the Oromo language, Shaykh Bakrii demonstrated the need for a practical writing system for the Oromo language. Finally, the article shows that Shaykh Bakrii had a magnetic personality, engaging character,

and fascinating sense of humor, who decorated his speeches with proverbs, parables, and wit. He was a most influential scholar, most admired poet who had a decisive impact on the rise of political consciousness among the Oromo in Hararghe

This paper is based on several primary and secondary sources. First, I have heavily drawn on an article which Professor Hayward and I jointly published in 1981.³ Second, pertinent information from his former students were obtained both directly and indirectly with the help of friends and other individuals.^{4, 5, 6} Third, in July 1998, I interviewed Mohammed Nur, the grandson of Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo, who currently lives in Portland, Oregon who also provided me with information about his famous grandfather, together with some of his poems.⁷ Fourth, the recent work Aliyi Khalifa⁸ provides an excellent information particularly, about the life and career of Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo's family history, his educational background, teaching career, the schools he established the large number of people he touched with his infectious revolutionary ideas, his contribution to the development of Afaan Oromoo, and to the growth of Oromo nationalism. Fifth, the collection of Oromo poems published in 1996,⁹ includes eight of Shaykh Bakrii's poems, which demonstrate the power and beauty of his words, the depth of his knowledge, his commitment and dedication to the cause of his people. These poems, which earned him the title of "The Father of Revolutionary Oromo Poetry,"¹⁰ became the model for other writers to emulate.¹¹

Family History and Educational Background

Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo was born in the village of Saphalo in 1895. He was originally known as Abubakar when he was young. In fact, 'Bakrii', the root form of which is cognate with 'Abubakar', came to be inseparably linked with the name of his village. Thus he was generally known as Shaykh Bakrii saphalo, and indeed, very few among his admirers ever knew of his real name."¹²

The 1880s were full of events for the Oromo people of Hararghe, including the Egyptian occupation of Harar (1875-1885) and the later conquest of Menelik in January 1887 .

The Egyptian force destroyed the democratically elected Oromo gada government and replaced it by their administration that imposed Islam upon a section of the Oromo in Hararghe. Abubakar's father, Usman Oda was converted to Islam during the time of Egyptian occupation. Usman Oda lived under the independent Oromo government before it was replaced first by the Egyptian and then by Menelik's imperial administration. So Abubakar "grew up listening to the living testimony of his father as he recounted the major historical developments"¹³ that transformed the Oromo from being an independent proud people into colonial subjects. The yearning for freedom that moved and dominated Abubakar's life appears to have been planted in his mind while young.

Bakrii received his basic Quaranic education in his village of Saphalo. Then he studied for a number of years at Wayber in Arsi under Shaykh Abdalla, an Oromo scholar from Bale. By teaching how Menelik's forces systematically killed and mutilated Arsi Oromo men and women,^{14, 15} Shaykh Abadalla appeared to have a lasting impact on the life and future of career of Bakari.

Bakrii completed his studies under Shaykh Abdalla in 1909. He then went to Chaffee Guraattii for further studies under Shaykh Abdalla Walensu. In 1915 he went to Yakka yet for further studies, this time under the famous Shaykh Yusuf Adam from where in 1922 he went to Chercher to complete his advanced studies under Shaykh Umar Balballeetti. He returned to his village in 1927. As a recognized scholar-teacher, Saphalo became an important figure on the intellectual map of Muslim education in Hararghe and attracted students from far and near, Bakrii had spent more than two decades in acquiring advanced Islamic education in different parts of Hararghe.¹⁶ In all probability, his early education focused mainly on Islamic religious studies. Later on, he was involved in long distance learning with the world renowned Al-Azhar University of Cairo. It was his connection with Al-Azhar University¹⁷ that introduced him to the politics of revolutions in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, about which he wrote poems in the 1950s and 1960s. Of his three brothers and four sisters, Bakrii alone appears to have received an advanced Islamic education in theology, science, mathematics and philosophy.

He married his first wife, Kadija Ahmad in 1928. Following the death of his father in 1930, Shaykh Bakrii “ . . . became the head of his family and assumed a number of responsibilities.”¹⁸ With the land and property that he inherited from his father, Shaykh Bakrii supported a number his students and needy people , thus a reputation for benevolence in and around the village of Saphalo.¹⁹

Over time, he became well versed in traditional Oromo law as he was a revered and respected elder who settled disputes. His goal was to enable the Oromo to settle their disputes among themselves on the basis of their own law without going to the alien government judges.

Shaykh Bakrii had a remarkable gift for languages. He had excellent command of Oromo, Arabic and Somali and wrote poems in these languages. Later he learned the Amharic and as well Adare (Harari) languages. During the Italian occupation (1936-1941), he learned Italian. He even taught himself to read and write English.²⁰ According to Mohammed Nur (his grandson),²¹ it was Ayela Mengasha, who taught Shaykh Bakrii how to read and write in the Amharic language. Why he deliberately planned to learn how to read and write in Amharic will be mentioned later, here it should suffice to say that Shaykh Bakrii knew the Amharic (Ethiopic or Geez) writing system and perceived its strengths and weaknesses for writing in the Oromo language. Besides teaching Islamic education, he was deeply concerned with improving the political status of the Oromo, their cultural life and above all the development of their language.

In addition to religious education and philosophy, his teaching ranged over geography, history, mathematics, astronomy, Arabic and the composition of writings in the Oromo language. Besides teaching all the subjects in a comprehensive Islamic education, he also began to attract considerable attention to himself as an outstanding Oromo poet, and it was through the widespread appreciation of his religious poetry that his name or at least a version of it came to be known over a very large area.²²

It was in 1940 that Shaykh Bakrii opened his second center of teaching at Adellee, “. . . a place located to the west of Saphalo,”²³ where he married his second wife, produced children and powerful poems. During his long life Shaykh Bakrii married a number of wives,²⁴ by whom he had twenty-five children, (eleven sons and fourteen daughters), of whom only three sons and six daughters are still alive.²⁵ Shaykh Bakrii believed in the education of women and all his daughters received a good Islamic education. Ten of his sons were highly educated and became shaykhs (scholar-teachers). His eldest son, Mohammed Nur died while young.²⁶ One of his sons was sent to the government school in Dire Dhawa to master the Amharic language and Ethiopic writing system.²⁷ Shaykh Bakrii had the economic means to support his large family. All Shaykh Bakrii’s daughters were given in marriage to his former students, some of whom are now famous teachers.

He opened his third center of teaching at Ligibo in 1948, where he embarked on an intellectual journey that eventually culminated in the invention of an Oromo writing system. In 1953 he established his fourth center of teaching at Kortu, located east of the city of Dire Dhawa. Besides the above mentioned four centers, Shaykh Bakrii also established teaching centers in Dire Dhawa, Goota, . . . Qabanaawa and Bobbaasaa.²⁸ Shaykh Bakrii was able to support the students at his centers of learning in the rural areas mainly through two interrelated ways. First, he sought support from the surrounding population, “to feed and provide them with other necessities.”²⁹ Second, all his teaching centers were located near mosques, where his students and local people prayed together. From the local people, Shaykh Bakrii, sought *waqf* land (land given for the use of mosque) which was cultivated voluntarily by the local people for the benefit of his students, some of whom helped during the planting, weeding and harvesting times. Shaykh Bakrii traveled among his many centers of teaching.

Shaykh Bakrii introduced a radical method of teaching, which was based on the “horizontal relations among branches”³⁰ of subjects that were taught. In other words, he introduced modern teaching methods and a timetable of diverse subjects, as used in all modern schools, rather than the dreary rote learning method of religious schools at which texts were learned by heart.³¹ In all his teaching Shaykh Bakrii

stressed the importance of acquiring writing skill as well as the ability to speak Arabic or Oromo languages fluently. That is how he was able to train some of the best Muslim Oromo intellectuals who now teach in many places in and beyond Hararghe. They include (but are not limited to):

Sheikh Mohammad Siraj, [Bakrii's son who teaches] at Qallicha³² near Dire Dhawa, Sheikh Nuradin Ahmad, [who teaches] at Saphalo, Sheikh Abdusamed Ibrahim, [who teaches] at Gaalee Gaadaa, Sheikh Mohammad Mansur (the son of Sheik Bakrii) [who teaches] at Bobbaasaa, Sheikh Yusuf Abdulle [who teaches] at Adelle, Sheikh Mohammad Sheikh Usman [who teaches] near Barooda town, Sheikh Yusuf Soqaa [who teaches] around Dader town, Sheik Mohammad Tarce [who teaches] around Calanqo town, Sheikh Ibraahim Mullaata [who teaches] in Jarsoo, Sheikh Nibraas [who teaches] in Noole, Sheikh Mohammad Yusuuuf [who teaches] in Wallo, Sheikh Mussa Hassan [who teaches] in Anniyya, Sheik Sharif Nuureea [who teaches] in Arsi, Sheikh Mohammad Rashad [who works] in Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdurhaman Muda [who teaches] in Addis Ababa.³³

Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo's Scholarly Works

As a teacher, scholar, poet and highly respected cultural hero. (see below) Shaykh Bakrii was the nerve center of intellectual life among the Oromo in Hararghe. Among his Oromo admirers, for whom he was the noblest man of his age, he eventually gained the exalted status of saints.³⁴ His long teaching career took him to many places among the Oromo in Hararghe. Through his extensive travels, he was able to meet with many people, young and old, men and women, urban and rural, Muslims and Christians. He cultivated friendship with both Muslims and Christians and thrived in the company of his students, scholars and knowledgeable friends.³⁵ Admiring students and respecting scholars, flocked to his centers of teaching, which were regarded as paradise of knowledge, from where the ideas of political enlightenment³⁶ spread to the Oromo. His knowledge of the geography of the

administrative region of Hararghe, its rivers, valleys, fertile plains, hills, lowlands and mountains were the topics of some of his poems. His knowledge of the history of the various people of Hararghe, their customs, cultures, languages and way of life was solid.³⁷

There is no doubt that Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo had an impact on the rise of political consciousness among the Oromo in Hararghe, especially in urban centers such as Dire Dhawa (see below). What distinguished him was the clarity with which he articulated the importance of education for the liberation of his people. Not only did he educate distinguished scholars and a gifted poet such as Shaykh Mohammad Rashad, but also produced several works that shaped our understanding of the Oromo situation during the long reign of emperor Haile Selassie (1916-1974). *Among the Oromo in Hararghe*, Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo was a recognized authority in several branches of knowledge including (but not limited to) history, geography, Oromo law, and tradition, the gada system, science and mathematics. His knowledge of the smooth transfer of power under Oromo democracy, especially the importance of the bokku in the transfer of power was unrivaled.

The bokku was a multi-purpose emblem (sceptre) that was kept by the Abba Gada, the president of democratically elected chafee assembly (Oromo parliament). It was a symbol of independence and an insignia of political power. It was the revered emblem with which every Oromo public prayer started and ended, and with which all chafee assembly's deliberations on the making of law, declaration of war and making of peace started and ended. Shaykh Bakrii states that "nobody except the Abba Gada carried it. At the end of his tenure of office, the incoming leader took it directly from that of the outgoing leader."³⁸ Shaykh Bakrii had a mobile library, which was carried by beasts of burden between his centers of teaching. His library included books on Islamic studies, science, mathematics, history, Arabic poetry, socialism and world revolutions. He was a lover of books and an avid reader and raised funds for adding the latest books in Arabic to his collection. He enjoyed the reputation of having the largest collection of books among Muslim Oromo scholars in Hararghe. He spent most of the time reading, contemplating, writing and teaching. He loved reading mathematical

treaties, great Arabic poetry and historical books. He translated algebra and geometry from which language/s into the Oromo language.³⁹ Among the Oromo in Hararghe Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo was an outstanding scholar and a prolific writer. His eight major works which deal with secular as well as religious subjects, were written mainly in Arabic, although his poems were written in Oromo. Unfortunately only some of them have been published in Mogadishu. Sadly when Shaykh Bakrii was forced into exile hastily by the Ethiopian military regime (see below) in 1978, his main residence at Kortu was invaded by the regime's soldiers, who burned all his documents.⁴⁰ Any one who was "suspected of possessing" Shaykh Bakrii's manuscripts were either detained or forced into exile. For instance, Shaykh Hassan of Ananno, who was found in possession of his teacher's most popular manuscript on the history of the Oromo, was detained for four years.⁴¹ The manuscript was confiscated and destroyed. In 1978 alone, the Ethiopian military authorities in Hararghe struck a terrible blow to the works that Shaykh Bakrii had produced in the previous half century.

His works were destroyed because they contributed to the development of Oromo Nationalism. As far as I know, only Shaykh Mohammed Rashad (his famous student) has the major works of Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo in his possession. It was he who saved his teacher's labor of love for posterity. When I interviewed Shaykh Mohammed Rashad in Mogadishu in July 1980, he was working on the biography of his great teacher. I have been unable to confirm whether or not that biography has been published.⁴²

The first of Shaykh Bakrii's major works deals with the geography and demography of Hararghe region. It is in Arabic and entitled "*Dirasa fi al-Mintiqa Harariya Jugrafiyyan wa Bashariyyan*" c. 200 pp. Shaykh Bakrii devoted three manuscripts in Arabic to Oromo history. The first is entitled *Janiyi Shammarkeb min hadayiq al Tawarkeb* ("A collection of unripe dates from the garden of history"⁴³) which is typed and about 95 pages long. His second manuscript on history is entitled *Muqaddamat taysir al Zariya al Tawarkeb* ("A simplified introduction to nuclear (raw) history"⁴⁴) which is typed and about 48 pages long. His third manuscript on history is entitled *Kitaab Irsaal al Sawarikh ila sama al tawarikh* ("A guided missile to the sky [exalted] History"⁴⁵) which is typed and about 56 pages long.⁴⁶

According to Aliyi Khalifa, the above mentioned four manuscripts were published by Shaykh Mohammad Rashad⁴⁷ in Mogadishu in 1979.⁴⁸ Of the three above mentioned manuscripts dealing with history, only the last is in my possession. This interesting manuscript, divided into 19 sections, “attempts to sketch an overall panorama of Oromo history, contrasting their earlier greatness with their later humiliation under Amhara domination.”⁴⁹ Shaykh Bakrii was appalled by the deliberate and grotesque distortion of Oromo history in the Ethiopian historiography. He did not only wanted to free that history from distortion, but also use it as an ideological weapon for cultivating pan-Oromo identity. He was committed to creating political awareness among his people and, to a large measure, it was his tireless efforts that planted the idea among the Oromo in Hararghe that all Oromo were subjugated to the same crude and brutal system. His efforts anticipated the activities of the Macha and Tulama Association during the 1960s. In short, Shaykh Bakrii’s interest in Oromo history, reflects his concern for their unity and for their freedom and human dignity. He believed that the Oromo could achieve their ultimate goal of liberation only if they are united. What is particularly fascinating about Shaykh Bakrii’s concern, which is still relevant today, is that he clearly stated that the Oromo were defeated by Emperor Menelik because of their lack of unity among themselves. He condemned their lack of unity in the 1950s.⁵⁰ Half a century later, it is still unclear if the Oromo elite has drawn any lesson from Shaykh Bakrii’s wisdom.

Two other works of Shaykh Bakrii deal with Islamic teaching and are entitled *Taysir al Zamiya ela nuclear fughaa fi al kam al Sharia* (A “simplified [guidance] to the law of Sharia (Figh)”⁵¹ and *Al mawabib al admadiyyan fi l-awl al addiyyan*. In the remaining two works: *Qala'id durar fi tariikh Sheikh Umar* (“A pleasant and pearl biography of Sheikh Umar⁵²) and *Anafa fi tankh Sheikh Yusuf* (“A biography of Shaykh Yusuf”) Shaykh Bakrii took upon himself the task of writing the biographies of his two main teachers, Shaykh Umar Aliyye Balbalatti and Shaykh Yusuf Adam.⁵³ The biographies were works of love, devotion, commitment and indebtedness to those who had profound impact on his intellectual growth. Both of his famous teachers, studied at Dawwee in Wollo, the highest center of Islamic learning for the Oromo in Ethiopia.

His eight major works not only contain a wealth of information on different aspects of Oromo society, but also reveal his intellectual maturity, his profound knowledge of the Arabic language. And above all his works on history reveal his understanding of the oppression to which the Oromo have been subjected since the days of their conquest. He was an activist scholar, whose works reflect a deeply seated passion to spread knowledge among his people.

Development of Shaykh Bakrii's Political Consciousness

From internal evidence it appears that Shaykh Bakrii's interest in Oromo political subjugation, economic exploitation and cultural dehumanization started probably in 1934 and developed into political awakening during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941). I say this for the following reasons. First, according to Mohammed Nur,⁵⁴ Shaykh Bakrii's earliest political poem deals with Lej Iyyasu, who inherited Emperor Menelik's throne (1913-1916). Lej Iyyasu, besides being of Oromo origin himself, followed a policy that was radically different from that of his grandfather (Menelik) and those of his successors (the nominal Empress Zewditu (1916-1930) and Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974). Iyyasu was removed from power in 1916 through the coup engineered by *Ras* Tafari (future Haile Selassie). It was probably during the 1920s or even later that Shaykh Bakrii wrote poems about Lej Iyyasu in at least two of which he supported Lej Iyyasu and his radical policy of creating equality among all the peoples of Ethiopia and between both Christians and Muslims.⁵⁵ Secondly, in 1934 Shaykh Bakrii was

... imprisoned for his refusal to pay tribute. After he stayed in jail, under harsh punishment for about three weeks, his brother, Adam Usman paid the tribute through mediators by delivering a calf to the *anftagna* [armed-settler] at Barooda town.⁵⁶

In 1935 when the Italians invaded Ethiopia, Shaykh Bakrii wrote the following poem to express how the tables had turned against the oppressor.

Amhara nurra fuudhee
Rada burree Ayyani
Dhidhimee gaara seenee
Dheefa gurbee xaliyaani⁵⁷

Amhara took from us
A brown heifer of Ayyani⁵⁸
But [he] disappeared into
The forest to escape from the Italians⁵⁹

Third, through his pen Shakh Bakrii was at the forefront of the ideological battle against the Ethiopian administration that terrorized the Oromo in the land of their birth. He wrote a number of poems⁶⁰ that show how Amhara landlords dominated the economics of the Oromo, while acting as masters and judges, “. . . who imprisoned or released [Oromo] gabars, and did everything including beating and torturing, short of killing.”⁶¹ When the Italians conquered and occupied Ethiopia in 1936, Shaykh Bakrii articulated the destruction of the power and throne of the oppressor in the following poem using Arabic script:

Xaliyaan tanki gangalche
Gama ceekaa daraaraa
Amaara galee fixee
Akka hoolaa baraaraa
Mosolooniin caccabsee
Milaa siree Amaaraa
Motichi dheefaa deemee
Gogogaan fuula a'araa
Motiin hiyeesa midhee
Abadu numa qaaraa⁶²

The Italians drove their Tanks
Towards the flowering Ceeka tree
They entered and finished the Amhara
like a sheep for feast
Mussolini destroyed them
The legs of the Amhara throne

The king panicked and went into exile
The skinny man with angry Face
The king who oppresses the poor
will be overthrown⁶³

Shaykh Bakrii's attack on the gabar system was combined with his relentless efforts to alter profoundly the Oromos' perceptions of their condition.

Finally, in one of his poems, Shaykh Bakrii compares Ethiopian colonial administration with that of the Italians and states clearly that the latter was less harsh than the former. There is no doubt that Shaykh Bakrii was impressed by the anti-Amhara and pro-Oromo policy of Italian administration.⁶⁴ He was delighted by the Italian policy of using Afaan Oromoo for radio broadcasting and the use of that language as a medium of instruction in schools which may have sparked the interest in him to write about Oromo history, culture and language.

The British restoration of Emperor Haile Selassie to power in Ethiopia in 1941 may have shocked him as it shocked a large number of Oromo. Although the Oromo of Hararghe petitioned the British military administration not to restore Haile Selassie to power⁶⁵ it is not clear whether or not Shaykh Bakrii was involved in the petition. What is certain, however, is that Shaykh Bakrii was very unhappy with the emperor's policy of banning the use of Afaan Oromoo for broadcasting and for educational purposes. It was this measure which sparked his long search for an alternative mechanism for educating Oromo children.

Shaykh Bakrii's poetry

Among the Oromo in Hararghe the immense popularity of Shaykh Bakrii derived from his poems in Afaan Oromoo and his invention of a writing system. "... Shaykh Bakrii stirred the imagination and captured the love of the Oromo masses by means of his poems, which were composed in their language and were short enough for the people to learn by heart."⁶⁶

The poetic content of Shaykh Bakrii not only has a wealth of information about the general conditions of the time but it also has a great contribution to the development of the

language. Some of them expressed in simple and attractive language, whereas others expressed proverbially. He also used idiomatic and figurative speeches. [His poems that expressed his opposition to] ‘... the government took the form of cultural expression and revival.’⁶⁷

Shaykh Bakrii had the extra gift for writing elegant poems that moved listeners to tears of joy.⁶⁸ He used his poems for sharpening the mental and verbal skills of his students. “His school was the first outlet for his poems.”⁶⁹ Before the invention of his writing system, Shaykh Bakrii used Arabic script for writing down his poems in afaan Oromoo. Reading poetry to his students was an integral part of his teaching method and educational philosophy. His goal was to cultivate his students interest in and appreciation for poetry and to encourage them to develop this vital skill. In the process his schools produced some of the best poets among the Oromo in Hararghe. He also read his poems at *wadaja* (traditional prayer ceremony), at *Gouzza* (traditional collective public work occasion) and on holidays, at public places and on public occasions. In short, Shaykh Bakrii used poetry for the purpose of educating both his students and the public.⁷⁰ He had a musical voice that added beauty and elegance to his poems and carried his audience on the wings of joy to the universe of Oromo poetry. By reciting his poems to the people, Shaykh Bakrii saw the opportunity of reaching and capturing the attention of many people and involving them in their own cultural life and enriching their cultural heritage by continually engaging the people in discussing their own problems.

During the 1950s and 1960s, he was adept at engaging the people in discussing importance issues of the day. Those who knew him say that he had a gift for listening attentively during discussions.⁷¹ He intervened only when discussion failed to produce consensus. His intervention was in the form of prayer to cool tempers and to make suggestions at the right moment. He provided moral, spiritual and intellectual support for those who needed his guidance.⁷² He also encouraged literate individuals to write down his poems and read them to the people.⁷³ His poems deal with religious and secular subjects. Although a deeply a religious man, he wrote more secular poems than religious ones.⁷⁴ Some of his secular poems deal with the beauty of

Oromo country, its trees, animals, rivers, valleys, hills and people, while others deal with Oromo suffering under Amhara colonial domination. Shaykh Bakrii sought to educate the public about the importance of knowledge of Oromo history.⁷⁵

Odor ormii beekke odu nu dura
Hula itti cufaadhaa mara banama
Oduu dur dhageenyaan kale bilisaa
Sama maa gabra taata sodaa ilma namaa
Abbootuma keetii kalee nagasee
Taraan isin genyaan kunoo' aamaa⁷⁶

If people know their history
All closed doors are opened for them
from our history we know that we were independent
people yesterday
Why do you enslave yourself for fear other human beings
Your fathers were kings yesterday
When your turn came you lost everything⁷⁷

Shaykh Bakrii used his poems to tirelessly encourage the Oromo to take education seriously. In the following poem Shaykh Bakrii attacks the Oromo for their lack of interest in education.

Odoo qar'ee baratee dalagee
Biyya ol tahee adawii buqisaa
Inni kun odoo biyya saaf qar'au
Oduu nadhoo balisee safisaa
Dubbi hayaa barachu hin hamillu
Achi kijibaa dubarti bakisaa⁷⁸
If one learns, acquires education and works
He gets the skill / means for elevating his social status
and for uprooting the enemy
While others acquire education for their country
[Oromo] waste their time gossiping with women
[Oromo] are not enthusiastic learning about useful things
They flatter women with their lies⁷⁹

Shaykh Bakrii used poems to teach people about social evils. One such social evil for him was chewing jima (chat).

Jima hin tuqini kan rabsu bira fagaadadhu
Sigaalaa moore'ee kan nyattu baala
Ammas qamahan marii jiru hin tararuu
Marii jima yoo taate simnee dabaalaa
Ilaali kunoo kan nyaatu heddu maraachee
Been dhaqi laali yoo feetee argu magaalaa.⁸⁰

Do not chew jima [chat] get away from the one who gives
it to you
Are you a camel or a goat that eat leaves
He who chews jima does not do what is planned
If the plan is to chew jima he is the first to join you
Look at how those who chew a lot become crazy
Go to town if you want to see how chewing jima makes
people crazy.⁸¹

Shaykh Bakrii wrote many poems (that can not be discussed in this article⁸²) which demonstrate beyond any doubt that he was a militant Oromo nationalist who was committed to the cause of his people's freedom. Of his many poems eight appeared in the 1996 published collection of *Wallaloo Barisaa*.⁸³ In order to avoid harassment, imprisonment and even possible execution,⁸⁴ he created a fascinating metaphor (see below) through which he taught the Oromo how the Ethiopian rule deprived them of their right to have control over their own destiny, of self-respect, human dignity and sense of nationhood, all of which have to be restored through revolutionary struggle for freedom.⁸⁵

During the 1950s his ideas, poems and cultural nationalism captured the imagination of the Oromo elite in Hararghe, especially in the City of Dire Dawa, by then the third major industrial center in Ethiopia. It was during those days that the Oromo started to regard him as the storehouse of knowledge, the fountain of poetry and the living encyclopedia of Oromo wisdom. By 1960, his poems were the springboard for the birth of Oromo cultural nationalism in Dire Dhawa.

“He took the lead” in the formation of a cultural movement known as the Afran Qallo association in Dire Dhawa in 1960.⁸⁶ He raised funds for this movement and produced poems for its musical bands. In short, Shaykh Bakrii “allowed himself” to become a pathfinder in the larger vision of Oromo cultural renaissance. He was the brightest star in the galaxy of the Oromo cultural, intellectual and political elite in Hararghe in the 1950s and 1960s.

By producing powerful poems, that demonstrated the richness and beauty of the Oromo language, he set in motion a generation of famous poets and singers, such as the late Abubaker Musa, the late Ayub Abubaker, Shanham Shubissa and several others. His devotion to the development of the Oromo language and cultural dances (see below) directly contributed⁸⁷ to the establishment of two musical bands known as Biftu Ganama and Urjii Bakalcha.⁸⁸

It was the members of those cultural bands that first opened the door to the vast universe of modern Oromo music, one of the greatest cultural achievement of the past four decades. Ali Birra, Ali Shaboo, Shantam Shubissa, Ture Leenco and several others were the products of the two cultural bands that were formed in 1960. Of these, the most famous and internationally recognized singer is Ali Birra, who became a legend in his own life time. Just as today, Ali Birra is “the voice of the Oromo yearning for freedom,... Oromo institution as well as their heritage,⁸⁹ Shaykh Bakrii was an Oromo voice for freedom and he was also an Oromo institution as well as their heritage.

What is truly fascinating about Shaykh Bakrii was that he produced revolutionary poems, without the knowledge of Ethiopian officials. His religious poems were written in Arabic and his political poems were produced in the Oromo language, Ethiopian government authorities did not examine their contents and therefore did not pay attention to his activities. Ethiopian government officials knew him as a popular teacher and respected scholar. However, it was only after his writing system was found among Oromo guerrilla fighters in Bale,⁹⁰ probably in 1964, that Shaykh Bakrii was subjected to harassment and sentenced to ten years of house confinement (see below).

During the 1950s, Shaykh Bakrii probably came to think of himself as a liberated man, who had his own vision for the future of his people.

There is a clear intellectual shift in his writings from focusing only on cultural nationalism to focusing equally on both cultural and political nationalism by developing the Oromo language and writing its history. It was after this ideological shift that he became a revolutionary scholar-teacher, whose call for developing the Oromo language and Oromo cultural renaissance, played on the nerve strings of the Oromo youth in Hararghe. In his poems and other literary works, Shaykh Bakrii questioned and challenged the legitimacy of Ethiopian rulers.⁹¹ In doing this he created the basis for a new Oromo literature, which reflects much of the condition of the Oromo during his lifetime.

He was also committed to the flowering of Oromo culture, especially traditional Oromo songs and dances. Though a deeply religious man, he was not a fanatic Muslim. For him, conversion to Islam did not mean a renunciation of Oromo cultural heritage. While contemporary Muslim Oromo scholars attached the traditional Oromo dance known as *Shagooyyee*,⁹² as “un-Islamic” practice that should be banned, Shaykh Bakrii not only praised *Shagooyyee*⁹³ as the heart and soul of Oromo tradition but also danced it himself, while he was young, and encouraged Oromo youth to indulge in it.⁹⁴ He said, “... as Muslims we follow our religion. But as Oromo we respect our tradition, enjoy our traditional music and cultivate its development as Arabs and other Muslims in different parts of the world do.”⁹⁵ From this perspective, it is not surprising to realize that Shaykh Bakrii wrote love songs and even attempted to stretch his talent to singing.⁹⁶ His love songs dealt with love of family, country, human dignity, social justice, freedom of the soul and human spirit and above all freedom from hunger, poverty, ignorance, diseases, political oppression and cultural subjugation.⁹⁷

In short, from 1941, when Emperor Haile Selassie was restored to power to 1963, when the Macha and Tulama Association (1963-1967) was formed in Addis Ababa, it was Shaykh Bakrii’s ideas, his poems, his teaching and cultural nationalism that dominated the thinking of Oromo elite in Hararghe, especially in urban areas such as Dire Dhawa. During those years he gained popularity as the storehouse of knowledge, the fountain of wisdom, and the living encyclopedia of *Afaan Oromoo*. As a militant teacher, he produced some of the most radical Oromo nationalists of the 1960s, including Ayub Abubakar,

who barely escaped execution by the Ethiopian government in 1963 and fled to Somalia. There he was instrumental in the beginning of the Oromo language radio program from Mogadishu which played a crucial role in raising political awareness among the Oromo. What is most remarkable about Shaykh Bakrii was that he was secretly sending advice and poems to the Oromo radio program in Mogadishu,⁹⁸ which were read by Ayub Abubakar without mentioning the author's name. The Oromo language radio program was so effective in mobilizing public opinion against Emperor Haile Selassie, that the regime sent a secret agent to Mogadishu and murdered Ayub Abubakar in 1966. Ayub Abubakar was the first of Shaykh Bakrii's students to be killed by two Ethiopian regimes. Besides, his secret contact with the radio program in Mogadishu, Shaykh Bakrii also kept in contact with the leaders of the Macha and Tulama Association.⁹⁹ Even after that association was banned in 1967, Shaykh Bakrii kept secret contact with its leaders. When General Taddesse Birru, one of the leaders of the association, was detained in the town of Galamso in the late 1960s, Shaykh Bakrii (who was himself under house confinement in Dire Dhawa ,see below) managed to secretly visit the famous general twice.¹⁰⁰ This, more than anything else, reflects his interest in and commitment to pan-Oromo nationalism.

Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo's writing system

The second source of his popularity among the Oromo in Hararghe derives from his invention of a writing system for Afaan Oromoo (See, appendix 1). It is not possible to know exactly when Shaykh Bakrii started working on his new writing system. According to Aliyi Khalifa, it was during the time when he established his third center of teaching at Ligibo (1948-1953) that he completed the work on his writing system.

The Ligibo period was remembered by most of his students as the time when Sheikh Bakrii started active interaction with the villagers and the surrounding communities through his

poetry. It was also said that Bakrii completed his invention of alphabet here at Ligibo and the new alphabet was given special attention in his Quranic schools.¹⁰¹

But there are reasons to believe that Shaykh Bakrii started thinking and planning about his writing system shortly after Emperor Haile Selassie was restored to power in 1941. I say this for the following seven reasons. First and foremost, it has been reported that it took him ten to twelve years to complete his Oromo orthography.¹⁰² This means, that he started working on it either in 1941 or 1942 and completed it by 1952 or 1953. Secondly, what forced him to embark on this decade long journey of invention was Haile Selassie's ban on the public use of Afaan Oromoo. It has been said and rightly that:

... from 1942 onwards, Amharic was promoted as the sole national language of the empire and all other national languages, particularly Afaan Oromoo, were suppressed. The regime prohibited the use of Oromo literature for educational or religious purposes.¹⁰³

Shaykh Bakrii fought with his pen against the deliberate policy of suppressing Afaan Oromoo, which in his eyes was the richest and the deepest bond that unites the nation. Shaykh Bakrii wanted Oromo children to learn in their mother tongue, just like the Amhara children. Third, Shaykh Bakrii wanted the Oromo to have their own language radio program just as the Amhara, the Afar, Somali, Tigre and Tigrinya had their government financed radio programs. He wrote the following poem urging the Oromo to rise up and fight in order to open the doors of opportunities for themselves in every facet of life.

Afaan orma kanii tolchee kabajaa
Ka isaatin wajji radiyoo naqamaa
Odoo ka'anii tolchani lolanii
Xalaatni cabe batatee dhabamaa
Hulaan cuccufaa martinuutu banamaa¹⁰⁴

He [Haile Selassie] respects the languages of other people
[that is why] he has radio programs for them

along with his language [i.e. Amharic]
 If they [Oromo] rise up and fight well
 The enemy will be crushed, scattered and disappear
 Then all doors of opportunities will open up [for
 Oromo]¹⁰⁵

Fourth, Shaykh Bakrii “. . . is reported to have said that a people such as the Oromo, possessing glorious historical traditions and a uniquely democratic society, was nevertheless condemned to obscurity without a means of writing.”¹⁰⁶ Fifth, for Shaykh Bakrii, lack of a writing system was a mark of shame on Oromo democratic heritage.¹⁰⁷ Sixth, Shaykh Bakrii appears to have secretly rejected the hegemony of the Amharic language through which Emperor Haile’s twin policies of Amharization and Christianisation were implemented in the conquered territories. He expressed his attitude about this in the following poem.

Boruu fi’amee nigangee moo sigaalaa?
 Ifii ml’ate maa Dasetaa Zigaalaa
 Boruu kai wan sadii dhabuun sigeesse
 Isii a’amuun yoo namaati gubaalaa
 Afaan Oromo, dachi kan sadeesa diini
 Azaabaa kami bala sitti buutee caalaa.¹⁰⁸

Boruu are you a mule or camel, a [beast of burden]?
 Why do you forget yourself while pretending to do
 everything for Dasetaa?
 Boruu awaken you are going to loose three things
 If loosing these things burn you (hurt your feelings)
 They are Afaan Oromo, your land and religion
 What hell is worse than the danger hanging over you?¹⁰⁹

In the above poem as well as in many others¹¹⁰, Shaykh Bakrii uses the names of Boruu and Dasetaa. The former is an Oromo name, while the latter is an Amhara one. Shaykh Bakrii’s extensive use of Boruu and Dasetaa invites a brief discussion of his imaginative metaphor. He coined this celebrated metaphor in order to make his message familiar to the Oromo while making it ambiguous to the Amhara.¹¹¹ “Occasionally a figure of speech is thought to encapsulate

so thoroughly an idea or concept that it passes into the language as a standard expression of that idea.”¹¹² Such is the case with Boruu and Dasetaa. The latter is a name that encapsulates so thoroughly the privileged social status of the Amhara landlord class, which dominated Boruu (Oromo serfs) while controlling “the military, judiciary, and political power, institutionalizing the monopoly of [the landlords] advantages.”¹¹³ In other words, Boruu and Dasetaa is a metaphor that expressed the unequal relationship between Amhara landlords and their Oromo gabars (serfs). “Metaphor not only “may render the underlying idea more concise or concrete” but also “may make it more striking or memorable by the drama of substitution.”¹¹⁴

The contrast between the condition of [Amhara landlords] and that of ...Oromo gabars was striking: there were power, glory, pride, wealth, deeply seated feelings of superiority, pomp, arrogance and luxury on the side of [Amhara landlords] while powerlessness, landlessness, rightlessness, suffering, injustice, poverty, all manners of abuses and dehumanization were the lots of the Oromo gabars, who were physically victimized, socially and psychologically humiliated and devalued as human beings.¹¹⁵

At another level, Shaykh Bakrii’s “vivid metaphor”¹¹⁶ encapsulates the Oromo exclusion from political power. Before 1975 in Hararghe, the Amhara:

...excluded the Oromo from participation in the government even at the lowest level. It was [Amhara] themselves who served as soldiers, policemen, judges, governors, government officials, tax collectors, prison officials, lawyers, priests, teachers, secretaries, secret agents and even as guards. In short, at least in Hararghe the entire colonial state machinery was stuffed from top to bottom by [Amhara].¹¹⁷

Shaykh Bakrii’s metaphor probably coined during the 1950s anticipated the famous slogan of “Land to the Tiller” hoisted by Addis Ababa University students in 1965, which faded from Oromo memory only later, with the radical land reform program of March 1975, which

destroyed the economic foundation and political power of the Amhara landlord class. According to eight of Shaykh Bakrii's poems,¹¹⁸ Dasetaa is a cruel and crude master, a parasite that feeds on the labor and produce of Boruu. Cruel because Dasetaa fattened himself,¹¹⁹ while the children of Boruu died of hunger; crude, because Dasetaa despises and abuses Boruu who lives in fear and terror.

Seventh, it appears that Shaykh Bakrii invented his writing system for the purpose of reducing illiteracy among his people. "It is difficult to find words to express adequately" the extent to which he wanted to educate his people. This "...was not simply a duty he imposed on himself. It was deliberate conscious" decision that grew out of his political awakening".¹²⁰ Teaching the people and reducing illiteracy seems to have been his major aim in his professional career.¹²¹ It was his search for teaching his people in their own language that for over two decades, Shaykh Bakrii tried using Arabic script for writing in Afaan Oromoo, but did not make much progress because of problems inherent in Arabic orthography. According to Mahdi Haamid Muudde, the author of *Oromo Dictionary*:

Arabic based orthography is very common among Moslem [Muslim] Oromo clerics in Wallo, Harar, Arsi, Bale and Jimma the problem with Arabic-based Oromo orthography was its failure to represent the Oromo consonants (dh, g, c, ch, ph, ny).¹²²

Muslim Oromo scholars tried to overcome the problems of vowel length adding what is known as "al Muddah" and that of gemination by adding what is known as "ash Shaddah".¹²³ However, they were unable to overcome the problem of consonants, as "Arabic letters gave Oromo words distorted meaning."¹²⁴

Shaykh Bakrii tried using Ethiopic script but found out that as Arabic, it has shortcomings. First, the Ethiopic script "has only seven vowels as opposed to ten vowels" of Afaan Oromoo. What is more, vowels of the Ethiopic script "do not have sound representation for"¹²⁵ Afaan Oromoo. Second there is a difference in consonants and glottal stop. Thirdly, there is the problem of gemination.¹²⁶ In short, the Ethiopic script "does not show the gemination of consonants and it is

ill-fitted to represent the vowel sound.”¹²⁷ Since “vowel length and gemination are common features of Oromo language” Ethiopic script’s “failure to represent them made [it] very inadequate.”¹²⁸

Shaykh Bakrii knew the Latin alphabet and its advantages including its 26 letters as compared to 182 letters of Ethiopic script. And yet, he did not consider using the Latin alphabet because his ultimate objective was to glorify Afaan Oromo with its own writing system, the objective to which he probably devoted a decade of his life. His orthography was a purposefully designed system “in which all the major issues of Oromo phonology are properly provided for.”¹²⁹ His invention of a writing system represents his life long efforts to develop Afaan Oromoo, and to expand and enrich its written literature. In the process Shaykh Bakrii became “the uncontested literary figure” a cultural hero, whose achievement “was so profound as to dwarf,”¹³⁰ all his contemporary Oromo scholars both Muslims and Christians. The invention of a writing system was his greatest achievement, which expressed his profound concern for the development of Afaan Oromoo.

... Shaykh Bakrii was the first Oromo who saw clearly the problems inherent in attempting to write the Oromo language by means of orthographic systems which had been devised primarily for other languages.¹³¹

Shaykh Bakrii demonstrated that Afaan Oromoo needed its own writing system, and also anticipated the adoption of the Latin alphabet in the early 1970s, which became Qubee Afaan Oromoo in 1991.

Those who hated the development of Afaan Oromoo started harassing Shaykh Bakrii as soon as they heard about his writing system. This started in 1953 when the Amhara settlers around Ligibo (his third center of teaching) harassed him to stop teaching his writing system.¹³² Amhara settlers as well as officials were “. . . adamantly opposed to the idea of Oromo being written in any form, let alone in a script other than Ethiopic”¹³³ in 1953 just as their children are opposed to the use of Qubee Afaan Oromoo in 2003! Pressure from Amhara settlers forced Shaykh Bakrii to move to Kortu, a semi-arid area further from the reach of those settlers. Shaykh Bakrii wrote the following poem in 1953 about that incident.

Nuu godaana irra kaanee naftagna Libigboo dha
Gariin guddaan isaani hattu dhaa
Kijiboodha. Takka hin agarree, hin dhageenyee
Kan akka isaani dhiboodha
Biyya diiniin xilaataa [Nyaapha] dinnee torba heboodha.¹³⁴

We were forced to migrate from Ligibo by the
pressure of the naftannyna [i.e. Amhara settlers)
Majorities of them were thieves
We neither saw nor heard such liars
They are trouble some people, who are Narrow minded
It is a country, in which a religion is an enemy.¹³⁵
We reject it seven¹³⁶ times as a puzzle.¹³⁷

After he moved to Kortu in 1953, Shaykh Bakrii secretly continued teaching his new writing system.

Having developed the alphabet, the Shaykh taught it to all his students and to others as well to a limited extent people began to exchange letters in the new alphabet. In addition to letters, Shaykh Bakrii himself employed his alphabet for writing his poems and other works.¹³⁸

With his teaching and literary work, Shaykh Bakrii became the conscience of his time, and the hope for a better future. By the 1950s he had already devoted more than a quarter of a century to serving his people. His labor of love planted his name in the minds of those who read or heard his poems. What brought him his people's love and admiration and the popularity that accompanied it, was his tireless efforts to improve the social, political, economic and spiritual life of his people.¹³⁹ He continued to be at the forefront in fighting with his pen for the cause of his people until he was forced into exile in 1978 (see below). In my extensive discussion among the Oromo diaspora in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Australia and South Africa, I have not met a single Oromo from Hararghe, who does not mention his name with affection, awe and admiration. Ineed, he “. . . had become the best-known and most popular”¹⁴⁰ scholar and a shining figure of

his time among the Oromo in Hararghe. He was a Quranic teacher by day and a revolutionary nationalist by night.¹⁴¹

As a scholar Shaykh Bakrii had three outstanding qualities. The first was his devotion to teaching and learning. For him, teaching was a duty and service at the same time.¹⁴² The second was the generosity with which he put his knowledge at the service of Oromo political cause and interest. He was an activist teacher and eloquent speaker and a gifted poet, who was infused with fire and fortitude to awaken his slumbering people.

Third, as a revolutionary nationalist, Shaykh Bakrii followed political developments in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and other parts of the world. He listened daily to British Broadcast Service Arabic language program, and the voice of the Arab radio program from Cairo. He read *Al-Abram*, the most influential newspaper in the Arab world. He shared with others what he read or heard over the radio. He wrote powerful poems on the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis, the Algerian revolution and the Vietnamese revolution.¹⁴³ He got interested in the independence movement in Africa during the 1950s and 1960.¹⁴⁴ The independence of the neighboring state of Somalia in 1960, appears to have radicalized Shaykh Bakrii's activities. By 1963 he was involved in a secret fund raising project for the purpose of sending young men to Somalia¹⁴⁵ for military training. He liked to engage people in conversation about Oromo politics, which was the center of his life.¹⁴⁶

Expressed under the guise of Islamic teaching, even his religious poems were wrapped around a political message. He appealed directly to the Oromo to join hands against the oppressor.¹⁴⁷ He even called on the Oromo to join him in his jihad (see below) and be the agents of their own liberation. His call for jihad created the specter of Islamic menace. This coupled with the Oromo armed struggle and the capture of Shaykh Bakrii's writing system from Oromo guerrillas in Bale by Ethiopian government soldiers¹⁴⁸ alarmed Ethiopian authorities, and propelled them into action. According to Shantam Shubissa:

Top Amhara officials in the city of Dire Dawa asked him why he did not use the Ethiopian writing system. Is it to oppose our writing system that you invented your own writing system? Shaykh Bakrii told the officials that he does not

oppose the Ethiopian writing system, but added that it is not suitable for writing in the Oromo language. Shaykh Bakrii was asked why he was writing in the Oromo language? He answered it by saying that he wanted to educate the Oromo about Islam in their own language. Since the Oromo do not know both Arabic and Amharic languages, he wanted to teach them in the language they understood.¹⁴⁹

It is reported that Shaykh Bakrii wrote a 19 page letter explaining why he invented his writing system and why he continued to use it for Afaan Oromoo.¹⁵⁰ His explanation did not satisfy the Amhara officials who banned the use of the Oromo writing system and subjected its inventor to ten years of house confinement.¹⁵¹ According to Mahdi Hamid Muudde, Shaykh Bakrii's writing system "was used clandestinely in parts of Harar, Bale and Arsi."¹⁵² Once it was banned, using it became a criminal offense, thus deterring the people from using it. As a result, the Ethiopian authorities damaged the chance of the Oromo alphabet from becoming widely familiar and a workable writing system.¹⁵³ The use of the new Oromo writing system was limited to a narrow circle of Shaykh Bakrii's students and friends, who continued using it for secret correspondence, just as some of his former students are still doing it, nearly four decades after its use was banned.¹⁵⁴ Ethiopian government authorities accused Shaykh Bakrii of raising Oromo political consciousness thus endangering their empire. However, Emperor Haile Selassie, whose regime, in 1965 was facing a very serious Oromo armed struggle in Bale, the peaceful but massive activities of the Macha and Tulama Association in Addis Ababa and the very effective Oromo radio program from Mogadishu did not want to further alienate the Oromo masses by either imprisoning or executing Shaykh Bakrii.

In spite of the extreme gravity of this charge the authorities did not resort to execution, or even brutality. In fact the Shaykh was treated with great magnanimity, his punishment being nothing worse than 'honourable confinement' This was put into effect in 1965, when Shaykh Bakrii was confined to the city of Dire Dawa. Here he was actually permitted to continue teaching. In 1968 an even more generous concession

was granted, which allowed him to visit [Kortu] two or three times a week. So it was that for the next ten years he was free to shuttle to and fro between these two places.¹⁵⁵

Despite the fact that Shaykh Bakrii was confined, he was involved in intense secret activism. No political or cultural issue was too sensitive or too risky for his interest.¹⁵⁶ In 1967 the fate of Macha and Tulama Association dominated his thinking. Though under confinement he twice visited General Taddesse Birru, who was in detention in the town of Galmasso.¹⁵⁷ While in confinement, Shaykh Bakrii wrote several poems and a twenty page pamphlet “entitled ‘Shalda’ literally meaning ‘sharp knife’.”¹⁵⁸ Shalda is of interest in that its ultimate goal was sharpening Oromo political consciousness in and beyond Hararghe.

Making use of the new alphabet and purporting to be a work of religious instruction, this composition is from beginning to end a caustically worded indictment of Amhara colonial oppression and an account of the suffering of the Oromo under this regime.¹⁵⁹

In one of his letters in his own orthography, Shaykh Bakrii condemned the Ethiopian administration and predicted the eventual victory of the Oromo revolution.

May this reach our children, the excellent, respected key-men of the revolution ... and the brave people who are in league with [you]. God be with you What I want to assure you of is that you and I are engaged in a jihad[ic] struggle] I am fighting with prayer, even as you are fighting with weapons of war. Have no doubts that the objects(for which you are fighting) are well known and widely accepted. It is apparent that many people are engaged in (this) jihad day and night. Moreover, God is my witness that I have been in a jihad of prayer every night for twelve years. Indeed for the last twenty-three years I have been earnestly teaching the people about these things. God inspired me to speak about everything you are now engaged in, and He has shown me what will come hereafter We have no doubt that the [enemy] will be defeated.¹⁶⁰

From the content of this letter it is clear that Shaykh Bakrii was a revolutionary nationalist, who was influenced by the anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism socialist rhetoric that swept the continent of Africa in the late 1950s and the 1960s. As an Oromo nationalist, he was far ahead of his time. As a militant scholar, he was a thorn in the side of imperial administration, which subjected him to ten years of confinement, though he was not banned from teaching and writing.¹⁶¹

When the government of Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in September 1974 by military officers, Shaykh Bakrii was seventy-nine years old. At that advanced age, most of his contemporary activists had long abandoned activism and settled for a peaceful life of prayer at mosque, blessing people including government officials. But not Shaykh Bakrii, for whom political activism was the core of his very being.¹⁶² With the overthrow of Haile Selassie's regime, his confinement ended giving him a good opportunity to meet freely with a lot of people, discussing political issues and encouraging the Oromo to be the masters of their own destiny. In other words, by 1974, Shaykh Bakrii was as an active and sharp thinker as when he invented his writing system in the early 1950s. In fact, the change of regime in Ethiopia in 1974 was a sigh of relief and moment of joy for Shaykh Bakrii, as it was for the overwhelming majority of the peoples of Ethiopia.

For the next few months, a limited freedom of the press, which Ethiopia had never known before, created a lively atmosphere in which a barrage of criticism about the inequalities of Ethiopian peoples was written and openly discussed. The twists and turns of events which the future held were still unclear and, for the time being, the prevailing mood was one of euphoria it appeared that the dawn of a new era was about to begin. Those were days of undreamt of hopefulness for the equality of all Ethiopians.¹⁶³

It was because of that hopefulness that Shaykh Bakrii wrote a “. . . twenty-one page letter to the Dergue urging them to create a

country based on equality of the people, their culture, languages and religions, rather than Amharic and Christianity.”¹⁶⁴ In effect what Shaykh Bakrii demanded from the officers, who replaced the emperor in 1974 was to: “. . . right the old wrong, redress the old injustice, heal old wounds, more importantly, ensure the genuine equality of all Ethiopians in every facts of life - political, economic, social, cultural, and religious.”¹⁶⁵

It was this hopefulness which probably inspired the outpouring of his numerous poems, thus making him “the father of revolutionary Oromo poems.”¹⁶⁶ With the beginning of the first Oromo weekly newspaper, *Barrissa* in 1975, Shaykh Bakrii had at last, “a public stage” from where to reach the Oromo elite everywhere in Oromia. At the age of eighty, Shaykh Bakrii lived with the knowledge that his poems now reached every town in Oromia, where *Barrissa* was sold and read. He used the pages of *BARISSAA* to widen the influence of his revolutionary poems, which became the model for other writers, who flooded the newspaper with exhilarating revolutionary poems along with aspirations for freedom, equality and democracy. Rarely had aspiration for freedom, equality and democracy and terror against the Oromo been such close neighbors as they were in 1977-78 in Hararghe.

Following the quick Ethiopian victory over the invading Somali army in early 1978 in Ogaden (eastern Hararghe), “narrow nationalism” was declared as the main enemy of the “revolution.” Narrow nationalism then was a code name of Oromo nationalism as it still is today. Under the pretext of liquidating “narrow nationalists” and “reactionary” religious leaders, the Ethiopian military regime wanted to execute Shaykh Bakrii as it executed so many prominent Muslim scholars in Hararghe in 1978. At the very moment when Ethiopian soldiers were trying to execute him, Shaykh Bakrii saved fifty - six Amhara nationals from execution by Somali guerrillas on the railway line to Djibouti.¹⁶⁷ When asked why he saved them, Shaykh Bakrii is reported to have said “while we struggle for our own rights, we should not violate the rights of others, including that of the Amharas.”¹⁶⁸ By so doing, he showed kindness of heart, generosity of spirit, and soul of humanity. His final act of humanity, in the face of Ethiopian government terror, was to enable the Oromo to distinguish a system from the people. Those who hate the Oromo even denied him the right of dying peacefully and

being buried in the land of his birth, among his people, for whose cause he struggled for almost six decades.

. . . Shaykh Bakrii and his wife succeeded in escaping to Somalia where they were admitted to the refugee camp in Hiran. He was now in his eighty-third year. He had hoped to be taken to Mogadishu and be free to work there, if possible, bringing to publication some of his many writings; but permission to proceed beyond Hiran was never forthcoming. The rigorous and deprivation of the camp proved too much for the old [scholar], and his health soon broke down. At the end of a prolonged bout of illness, Shaykh Bakrii died on 5 April 1980, aged eighty-five.¹⁶⁹

One of the literary giants of the Oromo nation and the great scholar was buried in an unmarked grave at a refugee camp in northern Somalia! This reflects the sad reality of the Oromo situation in Ethiopia. Notwithstanding the sad end of his life, Shaykh Bakrii still lives in the great heart of the Oromo nation.¹⁷⁰ Perhaps it is not out of place to end this section with an extract from the closing lines of Shaykh Mohammed Rashad's obituary poem:

Sha'abii biyya teenya lubbuun saanii Bakrii
 Dalagaa isaani qalbiin laalii barii
 Qadriin Sheykh Bakrii qalbii tee haataatu
 Akka zalaalamiif sii wajjin jiraatuu
 Diina [amantii]keetiif du'ee kan akkaan qabattu
 Biyya teetiif du'e kan akkaan jaalattu
 Namni biyyaaf du'e baraa hin duunee
 Qalbii saba saatii abadu waan bannee
 Yaa rabbi teessisi jannata kee keessaa
 Nuufissabrii[obsa] kenni waan nu qabbaneessa

Bakrii is the very life of our countrymen
 Consider his work and learn!
 Let his spiritual greatness be in your heart
 To be with you forever!
 He died for the faith you embrace

He died for the country you love
One who dies for his country does not ever die
He is never lost from the heart of his people.¹⁷¹

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to show that Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo was a scholar and a celebrated poet who devoted his life to teaching and the development of literature in the Oromo language. His most conspicuous talents were the production of elegant poems and his invention of a writing system. Most of his poems “. . . deal with the political phenomena of the day and the oppression and exploitation under which the Oromo were living. . . Bakrii articulated [Oromo] burdens and tried to arouse popular awareness to stand for their rights, humanity and dignity.”¹⁷²

From his long experience, Shaykh Bakrii realized that the Oromo had no power, no unity and no organization with which to mobilize *their human, material and spiritual resources* to effectively challenge the oppressive Ethiopian colonial rule. He believed in the ability of the Oromo to overcome their weakness if their political consciousness is raised.¹⁷³

Through his revolutionary poems he provided the Oromo with a fund of knowledge by showing how other colonized peoples in Africa and Asia defeated colonialism and achieved their independence. His works reflect his concerns for his people, his wishes for their freedom and his commitment to that cause. He realized that both Arabic and Ethiopic scripts are unsuitable for writing Afaan Oromoo. He faced the wrath of Amhara settlers and officials, which never deterred him from expanding and enriching written literature in Afaan Oromoo. Even after his arrival in a refugee camp in northern Somalia, he was active for a while, in correspondence with an intellectual Oromo circle in Mogadishu. His goal was to arrive in the Somali capital to facilitate the publication of his works. In sickness and health, at home and in exile, Shaykh Bakrii never stopped urging his people to struggle for their own liberation. By the time he was forced into exile, Shaykh Bakrii was eighty-three years old. He faced considerable hardship, hunger, poor health and lack of medical care all of which combined to end his

remaining days on earth. “In the final analysis . . . the most important aspect” of Shaykh Bakrii’s life “. . . was his self-sacrifice”¹⁷⁴ in the interest of his people. He made their cause the very core of his being. It was his love for his people that gave him “the strength to do what he incredibly did”¹⁷⁵ as a teacher, a scholar, a poet, an inventor of a writing system and a kind and generous human being. His personal suffering and sacrifice, however, was not in vain. He cultivated the soil and planted the tree of Oromo literature, which has been flowering since the 1980s and holds great promise for the future.

What facilitated the production of literature in Afaan Oromoo was the transformation of the Latin alphabet (which the Oromo Liberation front has been using since 1974) into Qubee Afaan Oromoo in 1991.¹⁷⁶ As a result in 1993 and 1994 alone eight million copies of fifty-eight textbooks were published in Afaan Oromoo.¹⁷⁷ Among the writers in Afaan Oromoo, the rising star is the novelist-playwright, Dhaabaa Wayyessaa. His works include (but are not limited to): (1) *Dukanaan Duuba* (“Beyond Darkness”), (2) *Utuu Hinsein* (“Without Meaning It”), (3) *Gaaddidu Farra* (“Evil Shadow”), (4) *Gurraacha Abayya* (“The Black of the Nile”), (5) *Heeruma Galgalee* (“Galgalee’s Marriage”), (6) *Kennaa Abbaa* (“Father’s Gift”), (7) *Jennaan* (“Said and So”), (8) *Imimmoon* (“Tears”). By far the greatest of all works is *Godaannisa* (“The Scar”) a novel based on the hardship of life - treachery, betrayal and deprivation.¹⁷⁸

. . . To produce books, plays, magazines and short stories in a short period of time requires diligence, commitment, patience and literary creativity. To achieve this at such a young age and single-handedly is almost impossible. Yet, it is a measure of Dhaabaa’s essential optimism, self-confidence and courage that he has been determined to succeed as a writer.¹⁷⁹

The Qubee based literature that has been developing since 1991 reflects the joy and sorrow, the strength and weakness, conflict and harmony, unity in diversity, bravery, nobleness and greatness of soul and spirit of Oromo unity. It cultivates a feeling of pride, and a sense of belonging to a great nation. The new literature expresses profound

Oromo yearning for the return to the Gada democracy. It provides the most delightful and enduring thought process to the Oromo language. It articulates Oromo aspiration for self-determination and nourishes their determination to achieve that goal. In short, the new literature reflects the Oromo mind, the Oromo soul, the Oromo spirit, the Oromo view of the universe and their place in that universe. It also reflects the beauty of Oromia, its rivers, valleys, mountains, hills, its animals and other economic resources.¹⁸⁰ The focus on the new literature is on the Oromo as a people, the greatness and tragedy of their history and their place in the future political landscape of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Thanks to the selfless endeavor and personal sacrifices of Shaykh Bakrii and thousands of other men and women, Muslims and Christians:

Today the Oromo are free in their mind, soul and spirit. Those who torment the Oromo now must realize that they will never be able to kill the spirit of freedom, the love and yearning for self-determination that now resides in the Oromo nation.¹⁸¹

Though he was not destined to witness the consolidation of Oromo Nationalism that “has fundamentally altered the Oromo perception of themselves and how they are perceived by others,”¹⁸² Shaykh Bakrii planted the seed and cultivated the soil in which Oromo Nationalism grew.¹⁸³ Thus the spirit of the great scholar and the father of revolutionary Oromo poetry lives on through Oromo Nationalism, that has captured the heart, the mind and the soul of the Oromo nation, infused them with an unquenchable thirst for freedom and self-determination.

Finally, written literature in Afaan Oromoo, to which Shaykh Bakrii devoted most of his life, faces a very uncertain future at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This is because those who hate the development of the Oromo language are doing their best to stop or ban the use of Qubee for production of literature in Afaan Oromoo.¹⁸⁴ Those who see Qubee as a testament to the empowering production of literature in Afaan Oromoo have transformed it into the “devil script.” “This recalls the old image of the ‘devil tongue’ which the Oromo language had in the Christian tradition of the Ethiopian Empire.”¹⁸⁵

Linking Afaan Oromoo, Qubee and the devil is part of the new demonization of the Oromo.¹⁸⁶ Banning the use of Qubee in Oromia will never stop the Oromo from developing their language. It is too late for that to happen. Instead of stopping or retarding the development of Afaan Oromoo, banning Qubee, will totally alienate the Oromo from the Ethiopian political process thus making the demand for independent Oromia universal.

The Oromo have always struggled to develop their language. But never more than now. They have always produced cultural heroes but never more than now. The Oromo need for profound dedication to the growth of literature in their language springs from the fact that the new literature nurtures their unquenchable desire for freedom and human dignity. The new literature has captured the heart, mind and soul of the Oromo who will find inner fountains of fire not only to defend what has been achieved so far, but to build on, expand and enrich it for posterity.¹⁸⁷

NOTES

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¹ Mahdi Hamid Muudde, 1996. *Walaloo Bariisaa* (Atlanta: Sagalee Oromoo Publishing Co., Inc.): 135-136.

² Mekuria Bulcha, "The Language Policies of Ethiopian Regimes and the History of Written Afaan Oromo, 1844-1994," *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2 (Winter 1994): 93-96.

³ R.J. Hayward and Mohammed Hassen, 1981, "The Oromo Orthography of Shaykh Bakri Saphalo," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, (University of London, Volume XLIV, part 3): 550-566.

⁴ I interviewed Shaykh Mohammed Rashad (56 years old) on July 15, 16, 17, 1980 in Mogadishu, Somalia. I am deeply indebted to Shaykh Mohammed Rashad for providing me with a 56-page manuscript of Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo and other useful information about his great teacher.

⁵ I am indebted to Dima Yonis not only for gathering information on my behalf, but also for translating it into English and typing it out. I thank him for inspiring me to write a detailed article on Shaykh Bakrii's contribution to the development of Oromo political consciousness.

⁶ I interviewed Shantam Shubissa (50 years old) on May 31 and June 1, 1998, in Atlanta, Georgia. I am indebted to him for providing me with some of Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo's poems and inaccessible information about the life of his teacher.

⁷ I interviewed Mohammed Nur (37 years old) on July 20 and 21, 1998, in Portland, Oregon. I am indebted to him for providing me with the family history of his grandfather and some of his poems.

⁸ Aliyi Khalifa, 2000, "The Life and Career of Sheik Bakrii Saphalo (1895-1980)" B.A. Thesis, Addis Ababa University.

⁹ Mahdi Hamid Muudee, 1996. *Walaloo Bariisaa* (Bariisaa Poems) (Atlanta: Sagalee Oromoo Publishing Co., Inc.): 135-147.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹¹ My general approach in this article has been influenced by the insights of Gordon Wood's review of *Benjamin Franklin* by Edmond Morgan, *The New York Review of Books*, Volume XLIX, Number 14 (September 2002): 44-46; Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press); Toyin Fayola, *Tradition and Change in Africa: The Essays of J.F. Ade Ajayi* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000); Toyin Falola, *Yoruba Gurus Indigenous Production of Knowledge in Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999); Edmond Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation between Church and State* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

¹² Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, 551.

¹³ Khalifa, 9.

¹⁴ Martial de Salviac, *Un peuple antique au pays de Menelik: les Galla grande Nation Africaine* (Paris: H. Oudin, 1905): 307.

¹⁵ Abbas Haji, "Arsi Oromo Political and Military Resistance Against the Shoan Colonial Conquest, 1881-1886," *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Volume 2, Numbers 1 and 2 (1995): 21.

¹⁶ According to Mahdi Hamid Muudee, *Ibid.*, 135, Shaykh Bakrii spent a total of 33 years studying Islamic education. However, he does not document the source of his information.

¹⁷ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, May 31, 1998.

¹⁸ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁹ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁰ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

²¹ Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 20, 1998.

²² Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, 551.

²³ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁴ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 26. According to this source, Shaykh Bakrii married six women through his long life. However, according to Mohammed Nur (interviewed on July 20, 1998) his grandfather married nine women. Both sources agree that Shaykh Bakrii followed strict Islamic Sharia and never married more than four wives at a time.

²⁵ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁶ Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 20, 1998.

²⁷ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

³¹ I am indebted to Paul Baxter for his wording of this section.

³² According to Mohammed Nur (interviewed on July 20, 1998) Shaykh Mohammed Siraj teaches at Kortu rather than Qalicha.

³³ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 32-33.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 64. Khalifa does not discuss the criteria that makes a person be recognized as a “saint” in Islam. I am not sure if there is a long process of examination as in the Roman Catholic Church.

³⁵ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, May 31, 1998.

³⁶ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁷ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, May 31, 1998.

³⁸ Abubaker Ibn Usman, *Kitaab Irsaal Sawarikh Ila Sama al Tawarika*, (edited by Shaykh Mohammed Rashad, Mogadishu, Somalia, 1979): 44-45.

³⁹ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, May 31, 1998.

⁴⁰ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 39. According to Mohammed Nur, Ethiopian government soldiers collected and destroyed Shaykh Bakrii’s manuscripts.

⁴¹ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 37, 39.

⁴² I believe the civil war in Somalia during the 1980s and the collapse of the Somali state in January 1991, may have disrupted the scholarly productivity of Shaykh Mohammed Rashad, who was forced to leave Somalia.

⁴³ Translation by Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁴ Translation by Khalifa, *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Translation by Khalifa, *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, 552.

⁴⁷ When I interviewed Shaykh Mohammed Rashad in July 1980 in Mogadishu, he informed me that some of his teachers’ manuscripts would be published soon. Probably they were published either in late 1980 or in 1981, but I have not been able to obtain copies.

⁴⁸ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁹ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, 552.

⁵⁰ Khalifa, *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Translation by Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵² Translation by Khalifa, *Ibid.*

⁵³ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, and Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁵⁴ Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.

⁵⁵ Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.

⁵⁶ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ In the Oromo tradition a cow was given a particular name just like a person. Ayyani was the name of the cow that gave birth to the brown heifer that was given as a bribe to the Amhara officials who imprisoned Shaykh Bakrii in 1934.

⁵⁹ My translation is slightly different from that of Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶⁰ Muudde, *Ibid.*, 139-147.

⁶¹ Mohammed Hassen and Richard Greenfield, "The Oromo Nation and Its Resistance to Amhara Colonial Administration," *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Somali Studies*, eds., Hussen, M. Adam and Charles L. Gesheker, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992: 572.

⁶² Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶³ My translation.

⁶⁴ Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini Fascism and Colonial Experience*, London: 1985: 160.

⁶⁵ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, 579.

⁶⁶ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.* 553.

⁶⁷ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 54-55.

⁶⁸ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

⁶⁹ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 47-49.

⁷¹ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

⁷² Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.

⁷³ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

⁷⁴ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 49.

⁷⁵ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

⁷⁶ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷⁷ My translation.

- ⁷⁸ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 53.
- ⁷⁹ My translation.
- ⁸⁰ Khalifa, *Ibid.*
- ⁸¹ My translation.
- ⁸² I plan to write another article on his poems.
- ⁸³ Muudde, *Ibid.*, 139-147.
- ⁸⁴ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 54.
- ⁸⁵ Muudde, *Ibid.*, 135-138.
- ⁸⁶ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 55.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁸ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
- ⁸⁹ Greg Gow, *The Oromo in Exile from the Horn of Africa to the Suburbs of Australia*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002: 58, 74.
- ⁹⁰ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 62.
- ⁹¹ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
- ⁹² Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998. However according to Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 53, "Shaykh Bakrii denounced Shagooyee. This may have happened before he became a militant Oromo Nationalist.
- ⁹³ Shagooyee is the traditional dance of the Oromo in Hararghe.
- ⁹⁴ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
- ⁹⁵ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
- ⁹⁶ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
- ⁹⁷ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
- ⁹⁸ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 56.
- ⁹⁹ Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.
- ¹⁰⁰ Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.
- ¹⁰¹ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 24.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 42.
- ¹⁰³ Bulcha, 1994, *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁰⁴ Mahdi Haamid Muudee, 1995. *Oromo Dictionary*, Volume 1, English-Oromo (Atlanta: Sagalee Oromoo Publishing Co., Inc.): XXVI.

¹⁰⁵ My translation is slightly different from that of Mahdi.

¹⁰⁶ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, 553.

¹⁰⁷ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰⁹ My translation.

¹¹⁰ Muudde, *Ibid.*, 139-147.

¹¹¹ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹² Daniel L. Dreisbach's *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation between Church and State*, New York: New York University Press, 2002: 2.

¹¹³ Mohammed Hassen, "The Militarization of the Ethiopian State and the Oromo," *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on the Horn of Africa*, May 26-28, 1990, New York: 1991: 94.

¹¹⁴ I have drawn on D. Reisbach, *Ibid.*, 111.

¹¹⁵ Hassen, *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Reisbach, *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁷ Hassen, *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Muudde, *Ibid.*, 139-147.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹²⁰ I have drawn on Morgan, *Ibid.*, 30.

¹²¹ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²² Muudde, *Oromo Dictionary*, XIX.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹²⁵ Feyisa Demie, "Special Features in Oromiffa and Reasons for Adopting Latin Script for Developing Oromo Orthography," *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Volume 2, Numbers 1 and 2 (1995): 25.

¹²⁶ Mohammed Hassen, "Review Essay: *De Mystifying Political Thought, Power and Economic Development* by Tecola Hagos, *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Volume 9, Numbers 1 and 2 (2002): 222.

¹²⁷ B.W. Andrzejewski, "Some Observations on the Present Orthography of Oromo," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. By J. Tubiana, Rotterdam: A. A. Balkam, 1980: 127.

¹²⁸ Muudde, *Ibid.*, XX.

¹²⁹ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, 555.

¹³⁰ I have drawn Falola, 1999, *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³¹ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, 553.

¹³² Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³³ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Khalifa, *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ The reference is to Islam, which was then regarded as the religion of the enemy.

¹³⁶ *Rejecting something seven times is a powerful cultural expression among the Oromo in Hararghe.*

¹³⁷ My translation.

¹³⁸ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, 553.

¹³⁹ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

¹⁴⁰ I have drawn on Falola, 1999, *Ibid.*, 31-32.

¹⁴¹ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁴² Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

¹⁴³ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

¹⁴⁴ The independence of the neighboring states of the Sudan in 1956 and that of Kenya in 1963, did not appear to have fascinated him as much as the independence of Somalia in 1960.

¹⁴⁵ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.

¹⁴⁸ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

¹⁵⁰ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

¹⁵² Muudde, *Oromo Dictionary*, XIX.

¹⁵³ I am not sure if this writing system would have been generally taken up by the Oromo elite who are familiar with the advantages of the Latin alphabet.

¹⁵⁴ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 43-44.

¹⁵⁵ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, 554.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.

¹⁵⁸ Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁵⁹ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, 554.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 565.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

¹⁶² Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

¹⁶³ Hassen and Greenfield, *Ibid.*, 584.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.

¹⁶⁵ Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History, 1570-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 200.

¹⁶⁶ Muudde, *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.

¹⁶⁹ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*, 554.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

¹⁷¹ Hayward and Hassen, *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Khalifa, *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁷³ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

¹⁷⁴ I have drawn on Wood, *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁷⁵ I have drawn on Morgan, *Ibid.*, 314.

¹⁷⁶ Tilahun Gamta, "Qubee Afaan Oromoo: Reasons for Choosing the Latin Script for Developing an Oromo Alphabet," *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Volume 1, Number 1 (1993): 36.

¹⁷⁷ Ben Barber, "Coming Back to Life: Will the Oromos' Cultural Revival Split Ethiopia?" Unpublished (1994 Paper).

¹⁷⁸ Kifle Djote, "A Glance at Oromo Arts and Literature," *The Oromo Commentary*, Volume II, Number 2 (1993): 22-23.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Mohammed Hassen, "A Brief Glance at the History of the Growth of Written Oromo Literature," *Cushitic and Omotic Languages: Proceedings of the Third International Symposium* (eds.) Catherine G. Now-Mewist and Rainer M. Voigt, (Berlin: Koppe Verlag, 1996): 268-270.

¹⁸¹ Mohammed Hassen, 1997: "Review Essay: *Gezetena Gezot Macha and Tulama Self-Help Association* by Olana Zoga, *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Volume 4, Numbers 142: 236-237.

¹⁸² Mohammed Hassen, 1996. "The Development of Oromo Nationalism," *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries*, edited by P.T.W. Baxter, et al. Upsala: Nordisk Afrika Institutet: 79.

¹⁸³ Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

¹⁸⁴ The explosion in production of literature in Afaan Oromoo from 1991-1997, already trickled down to droplets by 2000 owing to direct and indirect pressure on the use of Qubee in Oromia.

¹⁸⁵ Thomas Zitelmann, 1996. "The Return of the Devil's Tongue: Polemics about the Choice of the Roman Alphabet (Qubee) for the Oromo language" *Cushitic and Omotic Languages, Proceedings of the Third International Symposium* (eds.) Catherine Griefenow-Mewis and Rainer M. Voigt (K'ppe Verlag): 290.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Hassen, "A brief Glance at the History of Written Oromo Literature," *Ibid.*, 268.

The Oromo Writing System of Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV
	C	C _a	C _b	C _c	C _d	C _e	C _f	C _g	C _h	C _i	C _j	C _k	C _l	C _m
ʔ/ɸ	፩	፪	፫	፬	፭	፮	፯	፰	፱	፳	፴	፵	፶	፷
b	፸	፹	፺	፻	፼	፽	፿	፾	፿	፻	፺	፻	፺	፻
d	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
d'	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
h'	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
w	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
z	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
ʔ ²	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
t	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
y	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
k	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
l	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
m	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
n	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
s ¹	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
f	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
s ²	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
k	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
r	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
s	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
t	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
z	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
s	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
g	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
g'	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
h	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
h'	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻
ɸ	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻	፻

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The Making of Oromo Diaspora: A Historical Sociology of Forced Migration, by Mekuria Bulcha, Kirk house Publishers, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2002, pp. 272

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This book is a sequel to Dr. Mekuria Bulcha's widely received first book, *Flight and Integration: Causes of Mass Exodus from Ethiopia and Problems of Integration in the Sudan*. While the focus his first book is on the mass flight of Oromos and others from the repressive regime in Ethiopia in the 1970s and early 1980s to the Sudan and the refugee integration process that ensued, the current book provides a valuable continuation and excellent "account of forced migration from Oromoland over a substantial period, prior and subsequent to the Abyssinian conquest. It discusses some of the socio-political and economic factors which led to the uprooting and scattering of thousands of Oromos at different times and in different directions," p. 13.

The book has nine chapters in three parts. In general, Part one deals with the slave trade and the migration that it elicited from Oromoland or Oromia. In particular, chapter one gives the conceptual underpinnings of the sociology of forced migration in a historical context. The chapter defines diaspora, distinguishes captives from refugees, domestic slavery from slave trade, and clearly shows how the institution of slave trade was reinforced by the firearms market in pre-colonial Africa, and how "the slave trade industry may have tended to integrate, strengthen, and develop unitary territorial authority, and that the firearms were decisive in consolidating such authority," (p. 25).

Chapter two traces the history of slave trade in Abyssinia. It explores the values, norms, and economic interests which served as a basis, not only of domestic slave-holding, but also the Red Sea slave trade. Based on historical data, it also posits that the Red Sea slave trade was a joint Christian and Muslim business venture and that the Muslims were, therefore, not the only culprits as has often been portrayed.

Chapter three explains the links between the slave trade and firearms in northeast Africa. It analyzes the regional political

consequences of the vast stockpile of firearms imported by the Shewan King (1865-1889) and Ethiopian Emperor (1889-1913) Menelik II with respect to the regional balance of power, human security, and the widespread state-sponsored mass killings that characterize the Ethiopian state (p. 7).

Part two consists of three chapters (four, five, and six) which deal with the bygone Oromo diaspora. Chapter four examines the experiences of the slaves in the societies into which they were imported. It provides a brief description of the demographic characteristics of the enslaved and the treatment they received from their owners. Chapter five gives short biographies of men (Malik Ambar, 1550-1626 and Onesimos Nasib, 1855-1933) and women (Billile Mahbuba, 1825-1840 and Aster Ganno, 1871-1962) who were captured in childhood or as adolescents. While slavery was more or less a life-long curse for most of the captives, it was a brief, traumatic interruption of their lives for the above men and women (p. 115). It is in that light that the author states “that the fate of the enslaved was not always life-long degradation and social obscurity,” (p. 7).

Chapter six explores the contributions of former slaves to the development of Oromo literature in the diaspora during the latter part of the nineteenth century and their role in the expansion of literacy and modern education in Western Oromoland in the twentieth century. In fact, the author has widely written several articles which appear in the reference on the contributions of especially Onesimos Nasib and Aster Ganno to Oromo literature and by extension to Oromo studies.

Part three discusses how forced migration was precipitated by Abyssinian conquest and the socio-political structure that has characterized the Ethiopian state since 1880s. Chapter seven deals with the internal and external migration which was caused by the war of conquest and several decades of Oromo resistance against Ethiopian tyranny. The chapter further attempts to lay bare nostalgic feelings of homeland as being felt by Oromos in exile through poetry and songs composed by the refugees themselves (p. 178-183). Chapter eight surveys and discusses the various Oromo organizations including political, humanitarian, cultural, and others which are in struggle to change the conditions they perceive as detrimental to the survival of

the Oromo as individuals and as a nation. Even though the Oromo diaspora is not as strong and as visible as the other diasporas and emigrant communities in the politics their countries, its contributions to Oromo scholarship and the development of Oromo language have been significant (p. 205). Their efforts have been bolstered the use of mass communication technologies which make it possible for Oromo communities scattered around the globe to create networks for information-sharing and resource mobilization in order to voice their grievances to be heard and felt by the international community (p. 205).

The last chapter draws some conclusions based on the forgoing chapters. Analyzing the ideology and use of language underpinning slavery, the author concludes that slave-owning Abyssinian society was not only hierarchical, but was also manifestly “racist.” The notion of benignity of Abyssinian slavery held by many scholars is, therefore, a myth. Abyssinian society was Manichean in its beliefs and practices in that the master was human and, therefore, superior, destined to own a slave, while the slave was inherently inferior, less human, and destined not only to serve the master, but also to be sold as a chattel. These beliefs still exist in parts of northern Ethiopia, where slavery persists in its classic form (p. 207-208). Finally, the author concludes “...that the problem of the Ethiopian state is not that it was created by war and conquest, but that the Abyssinian elite failed to provide for change, peace, and prosperity. Had they done so, social and political integration of different peoples could have been achieved (p. 220).

In spite of the fact that “... a process which started long ago by the slave trade has led to the accumulation of firearms, the creation of Abyssinian cum-Ethiopian empire, conflict, and diasporas, there were processes within the process whose outcomes were positive. The study provides examples of courageous attempts at defiance by young slaves who were not just victims of the slave market, but also human actors, many of whom became makers of history and prestigious members of their host societies. The creation of written Oromo literature by ex-Oromo slaves in exile and the development of literacy in western Oromoland are just some of the positive results” (p. 221). The book makes a substantive contribution to Oromo literature and scholarship. It is a must read book for scholars, the general public, and the

international community at large who are interested, not only in understanding the root causes of the century-old colonial conflicts which have been built on the twin evils of slavery and the firearms enterprise, but also in constructing a lasting solution to the human suffering of the Oromo and other oppressed nationalities in the Ethiopian empire state.

The United States and the Horn of Africa: An Analytical Study of Pattern and Process, by Okbazghi Yohannes, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 353.

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In the past several years, I have read many books written about the countries in the Horn of Africa, and foreign powers' support for dictatorial regimes in that part of Africa, but none compares with Professor Yohannes's *The United States and the Horn of Africa: An Analytical Study of Pattern and process*, in terms of its originality, depth in analysis, logic in reasoning, sophistication in argument, lucidity in presentation, clarity in purpose, and above all, in discussing thoroughly the economic, political, and strategic motives behind successive American administrations' support for dictatorial regimes in the Horn of Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular. What drives the American foreign policy is neither its concern for human rights violations nor the abuse of democratic principles by dictatorial regimes in the Horn of Africa. On the contrary the

. . . American foreign policy has historically been driven by economic and/or strategic determinants rather than by humanitarian or more benign consideration Certainly the geo-strategic location of the region has been far more important than its raw materials potential in the minds of U.S. policy makers, for the proximity of the African Horn to the oil-producing states of the Middle East, coupled with its location on the western shores of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, has endowed the region with a commanding position to control naval communication between the Mediterranean World and the Indian Ocean (p. 7).

It was the strategic location of Ethiopia, its demography, and its control of the resources of Oromia which attracted the United States to and sealed “. . . a commercial treaty with Ethiopia in December 1903” (p. 13). The relation between the United States and Ethiopia was radically transformed after Haile Selassie discovered through bitter

defeat during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941) the “inexorable relationship that existed between power and glory, between power and international prestige, between power and accumulation of wealth, and most importantly, between power and self-preservation” (pp. 21-21). Once the British restored Emperor Haile Selassie to power in Ethiopia in 1941, he made the creation of strong military power with American support “. . . the centerpiece of his foreign policy (p. 21). Interestingly, it was Yilma Deressa, “Vice Minister of Finance” who was instrumental in securing the first large scale shipment of American weapons for Ethiopia 1943 (p. 21). As a result of a generous American response to Yilma Deressa’s request for weapons, and economic assistance, Emperor Haile Selassie and the ruling class he headed felt that:

. . . They had ‘crossed the Rubicon’ and, therefore, an unlimited stream of American arms and dollars would flow in their direction . . . Since the Ethiopian elites expected the U.S. to underwrite the enforcement of domestic pacification and the pursuance of external ambitions, they saw no value in the necessity of instituting reforms, the requisite conditions for averting peasant revolts and ethnic tensions in the country (pp. 29-30).

Ironically, Yilma Deressa, a graduate from London School of Economics, a man who established Ethiopian Ministry of Finance, was removed from his position and replaced by Makonen Habte Wolde,¹ whose brother Aklilou was Ethiopia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs. According to Professor Yohannes, “Makonen was reported to have complained on many occasions to the Emperor that matters as important as finances should not be handled by an Oromo” (p. 48). While Makonen complained about Yilma Deressa serving as Minister of Finance, Aklilou Habte Wolde, instructed General Tadesse Birru not to spread literacy among the Oromo,² a point not discussed in the book under review. What is amazing is that while one U.S. Embassy document from Addis Ababa characterized “. . . the Amhara ruling class [as] a tribute gathering collection of rascals” (p. 45), successive U.S. administrations continued providing massive military and economic assistance to the Ethiopian

regimes. Dr. Okbazghi Yohannes documents not only the Amhara ruling elites' skill at manipulating the American attitudes towards their empire, thus becoming a "major beneficiary of American aid to Africa" (p. 44), but also depicts their ability at projecting the international image of their empire according to the political climate of the time. For instance, up to the late 1950s, Ethiopia was projected as a non-African state. However:

... by 1958, the Emperor realized that the self designation of the country as a non-African state was yielding diminished returns. Consequently, he made a vertical leap and effectively tapped into the African sentiments about Ethiopia, which had assumed mystical proportions . . . as the source of African pride, African hope and the last bulwark of African independence. This facilitated a profound geographic transformation of Ethiopia from being a "Europeanized" Middle Eastern state which competed with Europe for the appreciation of Judeo-Christian values into being, not only an authentic African nation, but also a champion of African causes (pp. 61-62).

During the 1960s, while enjoying the reputation for championing African causes, Ethiopia was receiving ninety-four percent of United States military aid to the countries in the Horn of Africa (p. 65). Surprisingly, even after Haile Selassie's regime was overthrown in September 1974, Ethiopia continued receiving massive economic and military aid from the United States. During the 1980s, when the Ethiopian military regime embarked on massive villagization and collectivization programs³, ". . . 90 percent of Ethiopia's economic aid came from the West, while almost all of its military aid came from the Soviet block, the best of both worlds" (p. 90).

In 1992, when the TPLF regime aborted the democratization process in Ethiopia and declared war on the Oromo Liberation Front and the Oromo people, the United States rewarded the TPLF regime with millions of dollars "in economic aid." Under effective American pressure,⁴ Western governments and international lending institutions together provided Ethiopia with \$4 billion between 1992 and 1994 in

fresh money while at the same time rescheduling Ethiopia's \$4 billion in external debt" (p. 99). The period from 1992 to 1994 when two U.S. administrations rewarded the TPLF regime with billions of dollars, not to mention an all out political support for the regime at the time when 45,000 to 50,000 Oromo political prisoners were detained at four concentration camps, namely Hurso in Hararghe, Agarfa in Bale, Belate in Sidamo and Didessa in Wallaga. According to Susan Pollock, these political prisoners included ". . . farmers . . . civil servants, and nine doctors [who] were refused permission to help the sick. A total of about 3,000 people died from malaria, malnutrition and diarrhea between the four camps during this time [i.e. 1992-1994].⁴

The book under review has four parts: Part One deals with the United States and Ethiopia during the twentieth century, while Part Two deals with how the United States' Administration, after the second world War, was instrumental not only in federating Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952, but also depicts how successive U.S. administrations helped Haile Selassie and the Dergue regimes to suppress Eritrean Nationalism. Part Three deals with the United States and Somalia, while Part Four deals with the United States and the Sudan. Professor Yohannes is not a historian by training and yet he has encyclopedic knowledge of the history Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, the Sudan as well as the history of the colonization of Oromia and economic exploitation and political marginalization of the Oromo. *The United States and the Horn of Africa* is original in its scholarship, a path-breaking work on its focus among others, on the motives behind American involvement with dictatorial regimes in the region, the U.S. lip service about human rights violations in the Horn of Africa, and how the U.S. support for dictatorial regimes inflicted endless pain and sufferings on the Oromo, the Eritreans, the Somalis, the Sudanese and other Ethiopians. The book also presents a nuanced discussion of superpowers' rivalry in the Horn of Africa, coupled with corrupt and inept regimes of Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Sudan that have inflicted death and destruction on the Oromo and other peoples of the Horn of Africa. The book under review is as much a modern checkered history of four countries in the Horn of Africa as it is the history of successive American administrations' relationships with those countries.

This is an excellent book which demonstrates Dr. Yohannes' intellectual maturity and his profound understanding about "the substance and contours of American foreign policy [which] have historically been determined and driven by economic forces" (p. 335) and strategic considerations. It is its strategic consideration that drives American policy in the Horn of Africa. As in the past:

... Ethiopia still remains the fulcrum of American orientation toward the region as exemplified by the amount of aid it has been receiving from Washington since 1992. ... The centrality of Ethiopia to the regional order is further highlighted by the fact that the World Bank announced on December 22, 1996, that Western donors had agreed to lend Ethiopia \$2.5 billion in order to jump start its three year economic development program ending in 1999. The Ethiopians were reportedly struck by the extraordinary 'generosity' of the donors who granted them a half a billion dollars more than the Ethiopians had originally requested (p. 340).

Finally, what emerges from *The United States and the Horn of Africa* is the fact that the regimes of Emperor Haile Selassie and Mengistu Haile Mariam depended on generous American economic aid as the regime of Meles Zenawi is depending on extraordinary American economic generosity. It is the American economic aid that has enabled successive Ethiopian regimes to suppress Oromo Nationalism, a point hinted at but not fully articulated in the book under review. According to Professor Yohannes, "... American policy toward the region is likely to be characterized by continuity rather than reduced involvement" (p. 7). Anyone who is interested in understanding the skill with which the Amhara and Tigray elites manipulate American strategic interest in the Horn of Africa will find rich food for thought in this fascinating book. The book is elegantly written, a great joy to read and is captivating to the end. This is an invaluable and much needed book on American long-term interest in the Horn of Africa.

NOTES

¹Makonen Habte Wold did not receive any modern education much less training in economics. His only qualification was Ethiopian Orthodox Church education. "With his strong connection with the clergy, Makonen was seen as capable of moving the Emperor to the right and against progress" (p. 48).

²Olana Zoga, Gezatena Gezot, *Macha and Tulama Association* (Addis Ababa: 1993): 25.

³The purpose of villagization and collectivization programs were to control the labor, produce, and movement of peasants. As a result of these programs, over 8 million Oromo peasants were uprooted from their traditional villages and resettled into "New Villages," a euphemism for the regime's version of concentration camps, where Oromo labor, resources, and movements were totally controlled.

⁴Susan Pollock, "Ethiopia: Human Tragedy in the Making," *The Oromo Commentary*, Volume VI, No. 1 (1996): 12.