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# *THE JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES*

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## NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

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**PTW BAXTER** is a Professor of Emeritus in Social Anthropology at University Manchester, England. He started his Oromo research among the Borana in the early 1950s, and also worked among Arssi in Oromia. He also carried out field research in Uganda and in Ghana, and taught in the University of Ghana for five years. He has published extensively on Oromo culture, and edited the following books: *Age, Generation and Time* (1978), *Property, Poverty and People* (1990), *When the Grass is Gone: Development Intervention in African Arid Lands* (1991), *Voice, Genre, Text: Anthropological Essays in Africa and Beyond* (1991), and *Being and Becoming Oromo* (1996).

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## EDITORIAL OVERVIEW

The editorial staff of *the Journal of Oromo Studies* is proud to present to the readers of the Oromo Studies Association and others the sound research findings of six intellectuals who have different scholarly backgrounds. This volume focuses on the central problems of the Oromo people and their relations with others in the modern world system. Contributors to the volume explore the negative impact of US foreign policy on the Oromo national struggle; the current status of Oromo studies; the issue of consonant clusters in the Oromo language; the perspective of the Sidama people and the significance of coalition building against Ethiopian settler colonialism; the danger of mineral exploitation by the Ethiopian colonial state and its collaborators, multinational corporations, and environmental degradation in Oromia; and the relevance of historical discourse on the issue of the Oromo homeland. Contributors to the volume have made an excellent effort to make us understand these relevant and timely issues.

In "The Ideological Foundations of Current US Foreign Policy: the 'Promotion of Democracy' and its Impact on the Oromo National Movement," Political Economist Sisai Ibssa examines the historical and ideological evolution of US foreign policy and how the US government through its institutions and agencies aborts the struggle for genuine and popular democracy by using democratic discourse in peripheral and semi-peripheral countries. Ibssa argues that since the 1980s the US has openly endorsed the idea of the expansion of democracy, in theory, in Third World countries to manage and control the broadening struggles for popular democracy. He asserts that the rhetoric of "democracy" by the US and the discourse of "socialism" by the USSR had similar results of promoting corporate capitalism and state capitalism. According to Ibssa, these two superpowers ignored the principles of democracy and socialism and supported authoritarian regimes in Third World countries under the guise of democracy and socialism to build their respective blocs.

Ibssa argues that with the decline of the Soviet Union and its bloc, the US-led corporate capitalism has emerged as a victorious paradigm in the modern world system. He asserts that recently the policy of "democracy promotion" has been intensified by the US to protect the interest of American corporate capitalism and to maintain "stability" in global capitalism. Applying his theoretical arguments to the conditions of the Third World in general and to that of Oromos in particular, Ibssa explains how the policy of

“democracy promotion” has been used to develop transnational functionaries at the cost of the national movements. As a result, most professionals and intellectuals who used to be sympathetic to popular and national struggles have changed their political positions and emerged as transnational functionaries and supporters of corporate capitalism. Exposing the main danger facing the Oromo national struggle because of the policy of “democracy promotion”, Ibssa asserts that the US legitimated the colonial subjugation of Oromos and the exploitation of Oromia, and intensified the dilemma of Oromo professionals and intellectuals by creating obstacles for the struggle of Oromos for national self-determination and genuine and popular democracy.

Ibssa argues that Oromo professionals and intellectuals must resolve this dilemma by recognizing that the participation of Oromos in the modern capitalist world system through subordinating to Ethiopia perpetuates Ethiopian settler colonialism and the underdevelopment of Oromia. He notes that if some Oromo elites remain Ethiopian intermediaries while others become transnational functionaries, they cannot play decisive roles in developing Oromia and changing the condition of the suffering Oromo people. He further comments that since Oromo professionals and intellectuals are valuable elements of Oromo society, they must be persuaded by Oromo nationalists to join and to remain in the camp of the Oromo national movement and to provide their acquired skills and expertise and other resources to the Oromo struggle. Recognizing the permanent change in the capitalist world economy, Ibssa recommends that Oromos should boldly face this change without abandoning their basic cultural values and search ways of positively reconciling the change with the Oromo interest. He suggests that Oromos benefit if they participate in the modern world economy as Oromos with their own civilizational and political projects by rejecting the Ethiopian dehumanizing colonial projects.

PTW Baxter’s essay, “Changes and Continuities in Oromo Studies,” shows how Oromo studies recently emerged from obscurity to recognition; it also explains how this field of study has developed both in depth and scope since 1984, although it has faced formidable problems from the Ethiopian government and scholars who support the government. Professor Baxter notes how Oromo studies began to develop with the emergence of the Oromo national movement. Further, he acknowledges that with the emergence of Oromo researchers and writers, Oromo studies have expanded from narrow and specialized issues to critical and broader ones. He also



recognizes that these changes have introduced some tensions between Oromo scholars and some non-Oromo scholars. Professor Baxter identifies scholars who have made significant contributions to Oromo studies, and suggests some ways of further developing this field.

“Consonant Clusters in *Afaan Oromo*,” by Linguist Tilahun Gamta, introduces us to the complex issue of the Oromo language in general and consonant clusters in this language in particular. Professor Gamta creates and develops various formulas and tables to explain consonant clusters in this language. In elaborating his scientific work, Professor Gamata compares and contrasts Oromo consonant clusters with those of other languages. He suggests that the future development of the Oromo language requires such detailed and complex studies.

In his article, “The Coalition of Colonized Nations: The Sidama Perspective,” Economist Seyoum Hameso introduces the perspective of the Sidama people for creating and building a coalition among the colonized nations to challenge Ethiopian settler colonialism. Since he believes that such a coalition cannot be created without understanding common past experiences and future hopes of the colonized nations, Hameso explores the history and culture of the Sidama nation, and how its history was erased and its culture was repressed systematically by the Ethiopian state machinery and the Habasha knowledge elites. According to Hameso, the Sidama nation has been culturally underdeveloped and economically exploited by successive colonial Ethiopian governments like other colonized nations in the Ethiopian empire.

Hameso argues that these colonized nations have similar historical and contemporary grievances of exploitation and oppression and similar hopes for national self-determination and human dignity that can enable them to form a coalition against Habasha domination. Since Hameso recognizes the impossibility of democratizing and rehabilitating the Ethiopian empire, he suggests that the colonized nations must develop a collaborating political strategy to overthrow Ethiopian settler colonialism and to build a better future based on consensus, human respect, democracy, and self-determination. Hameso does not only identify the problems of colonized nations, but also proposes steps required for forming this coalition.

Historian Guluma Gameda’s essay, “Political Domination and Exploitation of the Mineral Resources of Oromia: From Menilek to Meles,” explores how successive Ethiopian colonial leaders have exploited the mineral resources of Oromia with the collaboration of multinational corporations without considering the environmental and economic problems of the Oromo

people According to Gemed, the exploitation of Oromian resources, including minerals, did not contribute to the development of Oromia since they have been siphoned off by Ethiopian intermediaries and their global supporters. Oromos have been left with the destruction of their forests and fertile lands and toxic and other dangerous chemical wastes that have been endangering the lives Oromos and their animals.

Feyissa Demie's essay, "The Origin of the Oromo: A Reconstruction of the Theory of the Cushitic Roots," reminds us of the controversies and debates on the issue of the Oromo homeland. Based on the previous research findings, Demie asserts that the Oromo were one of the original peoples of the regions that were designated by the names Abyssinia (later Ethiopia) and Kenya since the "scramble for Africa." He argues that Oromia, the Oromo homeland, was overshadowed by these names until 1991, when the Oromo struggle forced, at least, the Ethiopian government to recognize Oromia. He refutes the Ethiopian and Euro-American theoretical paradigms that have attempted to deny Oromos their homeland and historical space. Demie suggests further linguistic and archaeological research to further learn the relationship among the various Cushitic peoples of the Horn of Africa

Asafa Jalata,  
Editor  
July 1998

## THE IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CURRENT US FOREIGN POLICY: THE "PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY" AND ITS IMPACT ON THE OROMO NATIONAL MOVEMENT

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Sisai Ibssa

Since the 1980s, a new global order has taken shape in which one of the two former superpowers, the Soviet Union, has lost its former influence while the United States has entered a phase of global dominance without a serious rival. This new positioning naturally has significantly affected the design and implementation of United States' foreign policy. The changes are regularly reported by journalists and scholars alike. Ironically, however, even beyond any journalistic account or commentary from academic spokespersons, officials in the US State Department itself are loudly declaring a change in foreign relations, pointing out a new commitment to democracy abroad and hailing the onset of a new era of "democracy worldwide." It is my position that despite claims that the United States has taken a new direction overseas, the ideological foundations of current US foreign policy remain unchanged. In fact, the ideological roots of US foreign policy can be traced back to the 1890s.

Some who believe most strongly in the idea that a fundamental change has occurred in United States' foreign policy are well-educated professionals of the Third World. They observe with interest and with relief that the United States has apparently shifted from its previous strong support for autocrats and authoritarian rulers to what appears to be support for new "democracy" movements in various parts of the world. Whether these professionals were trained in the West or in the Soviet-dominated Eastern bloc, all see that new opportunities for employment abound for them in the global environment created by US-sponsored "democracy." This perception affects both personal and

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group decision-making and has far-reaching implications for the way Third World countries will organize themselves internally and for the way that they will be integrated into the global economy.

Although the US has, in fact, officially announced a new "democracy" policy toward the Third World and has indeed made highly visible moves to support so-called "democracy" movements while announcing breaks with former authoritarian allies, the underlying direction and the guiding ideology of US foreign policy has not been altered. It has been refined and intensified. The programs carried out as "democracy" promotion are best understood as instruments adopted in part to protect long-standing US interests in the midst of changing global forces. One challenge posed to US interests, for example, came from national movements that threatened the US view of "stability" deemed necessary for business to operate in the Third World. The form of "democracy" endorsed by the US ultimately undermines popular movements in the Third World by seducing the professional sector away from those movements by making available on a global scale individual opportunities and private comforts. The same professionals who believe that US foreign policy has changed are the very group specifically targeted by this policy.

There is no doubt that the highly visible and self-conscious move of the US to embrace and promote "democracy," as the United States currently defines it,<sup>1</sup> offers an interesting variation in the pursuit of long-standing foreign policy goals. In the late 1970s popular resistance to authoritarian rulers had become so pervasive and so powerful in the Third World that market conditions were seriously negatively affected. To make matters worse, educated professionals openly joined ranks of the popular movements, strengthening them significantly.

The US "promotion of democracy" program contains a formula for implementing the long-standing commitment of the US to opening markets and keeping them open in this era. It allows US-led institutions to extend the corporate reach into new relatively inaccessible territories,

to maintain profit through the introduction and control of financial institutions, and to protect those arrangements by quelling actual or incipient new forms of resistance to that process which could lead to "instability," as the US perceives it. One way to weaken that resistance has been to provide a means for integrating into a global system the professional elements who had joined or were on the verge of joining national resistance movements.

Third World professionals may find this position hard to believe or difficult to accept. For that reason, I have traced from its inception in the 1890s to the present the development and some of the refinements of US foreign policy as it affected the Third World. Regarding the evidence that Western-trained and Soviet-trained persons function equally in the new "democratic" framework, the paper argues that throughout the period of their dramatic rivalry, the US and the USSR in reality practiced variant forms of capitalist imperialism. This explains the ease with which persons trained in these competing systems can work together within the current US-dominated "democratic" economies. The paper also addresses the rise of three transnational classes, particularly that of the transnational functionaries, which embraces all these Eastern and Western trained professionals. The paper concludes with a discussion of the dilemma that the present global strategy of the US poses both for Third World professionals and for national liberation movements, with a focus on the Oromo.

### **A Look Back at the Expansion of Corporate Capitalism**

The ideological foundation of the "promotion of democracy" policy is simply put. Its guiding idea is the aggressive promotion of an open market on a world scale. This notion was born in America in the late 19th century when European powers controlled the resources of the world through direct colonization, with the exception of the North American continent. The effect of this control was that American capitalists could not gain access to the raw materials or the vast markets

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controlled by these powers. Their desire to break into the world market forced American intellectuals, businessmen, educators, and statesmen all to debate the future of the US role in the world economy and, by extension, the future of capitalism itself. They concluded that a colonial monopoly was the enemy of a market economy<sup>2</sup>. For a market economy to survive in the long term, they decided, capitalists abroad must join with them to exercise an "open door" policy. The US acted in a very nationalistic fashion but reached a very global decision. This conclusion was in direct opposition, of course, to the European moves during that period toward closing the boundaries of the world market by creating colonial empires in which the market was restricted exclusively to the powers who ruled the empires (Louis 1978). The US position was that the market should be shared and that all must be brought in to participate on the basis of their investments. Each investor should earn from his investment according to the size of his investment. They argued that complete annexation of a territory could only lead to war

The idea of "investment imperialism" was initially introduced by the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee of the Congress of the United States in 1884. After an extensive discussion regarding how to bring about change in colonial empires and the prospects for a new proposal, capitalist investment imperialism, the Senate reintroduced the bill for amendment on March 21, 1890 and it was ultimately passed by the Judicial Committee on April 8, 1890. The bill was known as the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. By 1914, it was finally signed into law, legally replacing the old English-based law and creating the United States' Federal Trade Commission.<sup>3</sup>

Looking back, it is evident that the Federal Trade Commission and Clayton Anti-Trust Acts contained the seeds of the new ideological order. With their passage and signing, the corporate model for the promotion of capitalism became the new order and the dominant mode of organizing world affairs for the future. Thus what has alternatively been termed "corporate capitalism," "finance capitalist imperialism" or

"investment imperialism" was launched by the United States, guided and supported by the Federal Trade Commission Act. The challenge then became taking this basic ideological approach to other parts of the world and negotiating how the corporate model of global investment could be implemented as a viable alternative to monopolistic colonial structures. First the idea and then the policies necessary to put an open market policy into practice were shaped in direct opposition to the formation and consolidation of the colonial empires which benefited the powers of Europe.

This "open door" model then provided the basis for policies that were designed and developed through negotiations between US capitalists and capitalists from the other world powers of Europe and Japan. Subsequent to the acceptance of this model, it fell upon the US to show what the benefits would be, how the program would work abroad and to demonstrate that they all needed each other to accept open competition, free trade exchange and an open world market. The US also pointed out the necessity to modernize the colonial market to share not only profits but also costs

Once the US had the agenda at hand, its proponents argued that under the new system it would be necessary to upgrade the political institutions and upgrade the social structures in the former colonial regions where this new trade was to be carried out. What was developed was a rationale for thoroughgoing intervention in all societies where capitalist investment was to take place. Penetrating changes were anticipated. Such changes as were proposed at that early stage in history have been carefully described by Martin J. Sklar in his book *The Corporate Construction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916*. He writes

It required "modernizing" the host government's fiscal, budgetary, and taxation systems; the host society's laws of property and contract law with its judicial administration; the host society's class structure in the direction of the commoditization of land and the

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creation of a wage-earning working class. It required the introduction and spread of secular and instrumental modes of consciousness at the expense of religious and traditional modes, through the institutions of education, media of communication, and otherwise. Investment imperialism required, as well, the tying of the host society's monetary and banking system into the international monetary, banking and investment system, so that the transfers of capital, foreign exchange, and repatriation of profits could proceed smoothly and routinely. In all these requirements, the large corporations and investment banking houses, both in their private operations and in their cooperation with government, were the chosen, of the only existent and conceivable, instrumentalities. The domestic and international dimensions of the corporate reorganization of capitalism were inseparable (Sklar 1988: 81).

The US agenda was clear: to enter the world market and to reorganize the world order to make it user-friendly for capitalism. As it turned out, the United States did not have the chance to take its negotiations as far as necessary to implement globally the program it envisioned and planned. The First World War broke out. The USA became a neutral player and a peace-maker who might seize the chance of pushing her open-door policy agenda upon the world stage after the imperialists had fought it out with each other. The United States stayed out of the European war primarily because of the US commitment to introducing its new model for a world system. By staying out of the war, the US would be on neither side and thus in a better position to promote the design of the corporate model operating on a world scale.

Since European countries were engaged at war with each other -- in this case, England and France on one side, Germany, Japan and



Italy on the other -- the production of food and war material in those countries was in great demand. The US began to supply produce for whatever Europe demanded until the German navy attacked a US ship in the Pacific, forcing the US to enter World War I. It is safe to say that US intervention led to the defeat of Germany, Italy and Japan (see Kennedy 1987). The United States emerged from that war with money, military might, and a highly developed modern industry. This increased the US incentive to continue with the proposal for restructuring the world system. After the war, the USA introduced a new paradigm for world order.

### **A New Proposal for Restructuring the World Market: the League of Nations**

The United States indeed produced a model for peace in the world organized around its new design for a corporate world, a model of "collective security" (Scott 1973). This model was called The League of Nations, to be composed of all the independent states. The US proposed that all colonies of Germany, Italy and Japan be decolonized and be brought under the administration of this new world association as "mandate territories." This meant that under the guidance of the big powers of the League, nations were to be administered by the representatives of both neutral and member forces.<sup>4</sup> Lord Lugard wrote regarding this plan, "the mandate system was essentially a negative set of checks on colonial administration" (Korten 1995: 97). Indeed it was. That was the primary objective from the point of view of the US agenda. It was a means by which the US could become engaged in the colonial market without outright territorial war.

The mandate territories were to be organized and prepared until they were able to administer themselves according to criteria determined by the new ideological system. However, even though the League of Nations was planned by the United States and represented the cutting edge of the new US program for implementing its investment

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imperialism globally, for domestic reasons the US did not become a member of the League (Scott 1973). Before the idea matured, world war was renewed between what came to be known as the Allied forces and the Axis forces. While this conflict was underway, the USA continued to make suggestions for adopting a corporate model of organization for the world as a whole. As if to assert its power through opposition, the USSR condemned the war as "imperialist" and called for opposing it. By the end of World War II the weakened European countries had no choice but to accept the US proposal and program for the future of the world system (see especially Louis 1978). After the end of World War II, two new superpowers formed, each wanting to expand its own advantage by entering the colonial market. The United States, while promoting the United Nations model, called for all the great powers to consider how the world system could be organized.

### **The United Nations Design to Open the Colonial Markets**

This time with a more concrete program, the USA called upon the Allied forces to meet to formulate the future of the world system, both political and economic. The USA proposed "decolonizing the colonies" and forming an association of all independent states, whether the industrialized or non-industrialized countries of Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe, or Canada/USA. This was the old League of Nations model brought back as the United Nations. It introduced a new paradigm, and proposed a means by which all the nations of the world might eventually be brought into a single world order, although not on equal footing. The colonies were to be brought in under a UN "trusteeship" design by which the independent countries were to be the collective guardians for the "trust" territories until the UN would decide that each colony could manage its own affairs. All present, including the USSR, agreed and endorsed the proposition. The United Nations was formed<sup>5</sup> and the Third World was born.

The United Nations established a Trusteeship Council to look after the "interests" of the new trust territories. To develop the capacity demanded of the colonies (for the market to function properly), to help advance their "capacity," the United Nations organized several agencies. The structure of the United Nations actually represents the ideal structure of the new order. Although it was not fully operational at all the levels represented, its organization legitimized the intervention and development of specified dimensions of the former colonial societies. The structure included, ILO -- International Labor Organization, FAO -- Food and Agriculture Organization, WHO -- World Health Organization, and UNESCO -- United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

To assist the reconstitution of war-damaged Europe and to upgrade the capacity of the colonies to meet the new standards, that is, to create a central bank for the world that could serve all, the World Bank and the IMF were organized in 1944; the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) followed in 1947 (Kuttner 1997: 29). The function of these financial institutions was to provide the transition to corporate investment. The Bank was a place where members of the world community, small or large, could find money to organize the institutions designed. IMF was organized to "promote exchange stability, maintain orderly exchange arrangements among members and avoid competitive exchange depreciation, establish multilateral system of payment in respect of current transactions between members and in the elimination of foreign exchange restrictions which hamper world trade" (Kuttner 1997: 71). By the 1940s and 1950s all this infrastructure for the future world system, regardless of objections from the former colonial powers, were fully set in motion as planned by the USA.

### **The Battle for the Former Colonial Market**

At the conclusion of World War II, two major world powers emerged and faced each other, each having an interest in the former

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European colonial regions. The interest of these two superpowers converged in desiring to have the colonies "independent" as soon as possible through the UN system in order that they could be recruited to become client states. The USSR and the USA waged propagandistic (often referred to as "ideological") war against each other in order to influence the soon-to-be-independent colonies to take shelter under the wing of one power or the other, either of the USA as the leader of the corporate finance capitalism or of the USSR as the leader of what can best be described as "state capitalism."<sup>6</sup> What has generally been regarded as a serious ideological battle between "democracy and modernization," advocated by the United States on the one hand, and Marxist-Leninist "scientific socialism" advocated by the USSR on the other, can really best be interpreted as a propaganda war designed to win clients.

An examination of this period reveals that despite the rhetoric both superpowers were committed to a variant of capitalism which needed clients. Neither superpower demonstrated any consideration for the independent development of the former colonies on their own terms. So the colonies did take shelter, with the full knowledge that with no major repercussions they could switch sides when it suited their purposes. That they did, too. Gradually, throughout the late 1950s and 1960s many African and Asian countries became "independent" according to the grand scheme of the US-designed UN system. Each of the newly independent countries sought patronage from one of the superpowers. Some went the way of the USA, some the Soviet way, some remained as colonies.

"Independent" Africa was forced to take shelter under the patronage of one of the superpowers because the standards for "independence" were selected by the United Nations' Trusteeship Council, a body dominated by the superpowers. Through this mechanism the UN effectively enforced the will of the powerful countries who had imposed corporate criteria as the sole basis for bestowing independence. The new world economy demanded, and the

UN program required, corporate criteria. If we take education as an example, according to UNESCO's survey of 1960, "Adult illiteracy in many countries is between 80-85%. As for higher education, only two children out of a thousand have a chance to go to college." This is, in fact, too high a percentage for Africa. With this standard of education, Africa could not function within or use of any of the institutions required by either the USA or the USSR in their plans for the future of the country in question. President Kennedy, in his address to the UN Assembly stated: "The mysteries of outer space must not divert our eyes or our energies from the harsh realities that face our fellow men. Political sovereignty is but a mockery without the means of meeting poverty, illiteracy, and disease. Self-determination is but a slogan if the future holds no hope" (Eicheleberger 1965: 101). He predicted what African independence was and is, a mockery and a slogan.

President Kennedy was right. What is self-determination if the politically sovereign state cannot have its own expertise in transforming its own know-how. How could a country be independent when it had not developed or upgraded the norms and values of its own people? In the case of Africa, Africa did not learn how to develop on its own terms, so had to borrow from outside. Is it not what the Africans have been doing all along? In what is known as "independent" development, both the US and the USSR received more economic gains than the African countries. The project organized by the US and supported by all countries, the World Bank, and the IMF which was supposed to help self-reliance, actually developed more dependency. As Korten puts it, Rather than increasing their self reliance, the world's low-income countries, under the guidelines of the World Bank and the IMF, continue to mortgage their futures to the international system each year (Korten 1995: 165). Although the entire war over European-style capitalism played out in monopolistic empires was over by the end of World War II, a new battle began to be carried out within the new world order. The two superpowers, the USA and the USSR could not agree on what the future of the world should be.

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### Competing Expressions of Capitalism: State Capitalism vs. Corporate Capitalism

As I have argued above, the "Cold War," as it is called, between the superpowers was not truly an ideological war, as it is often taken to be. There was no basic contradiction between the two economic models. It was rather a struggle over two expressions of the same paradigm -- capitalism, on the one hand, corporate capitalism (or "investment imperialism") led by the USA, and on the other hand, state capitalism, known as "Soviet socialism," led by the USSR. This struggle was not opposed to either imperialism or communism, the struggle was over the control of the ex-colonial territory or market. The colonies were also trapped within this state of affairs. They were called "independent" and had two powers to choose from. The choice came down to who would give them the most help for their new undertaking and who is going to give them the greatest opportunity to stay in power longer. This is what determined to which camp they would go and what they would call themselves.

In actuality, the program that had been adopted by the whole body of the UN was replaced by the USA's and the USSR's programs that dominated the process of "independence." Here is what the alignment of the major actors looked like as the former colonies began to embark upon "independence:"

*The Ideological Foundations*

	<b>SLOGAN</b>	<b>SOLUTION</b>	<b>PROGRAM</b>
<b>USA-based</b> corporate or international <i>finance capital</i>	Anti-colonialism, open door policy	self-determination market economy, independence, <i>collective security</i>	Organize a world body (UN) and agencies financed by World Bank, IMF, suppress <i>revolutionary</i> forces
<b>USSR, state</b> capitalism seen as champion over feudalism, seeks market in colonies	Anti-colonial	Self-determination, independence, command economy	Accept UN/USA model for colonies Finance Revolutionary war to assist future allies to achieve freedom
<b>Colonies want</b> independence controlled	Freedom, anti- colonialism	Accept UN prescription	No program except UN directives, by USA and USSR

The two world powers stood facing each other, each of them promoted its own value system, rather than the value system of the colonies. As time passed, the USA and USSR clashed head on, each defending a variant of capitalist economy, whether it is called a planned economy or a market economy. Each threw accusations at the other, tried to outsmart the other, and agitated the former colonies against each other. They have gone so far as physically attacking each other in such conflicts as the Vietnamese, Angolan and Korean wars. Even divisions within the national liberation struggles can be traced to the "ideological," what I prefer to call propaganda, war between the two superpowers over which formula for imperialism would triumph.

What can be observed is that when the colonies did take sides, they took on the label of the superpower whose wing they chose for

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shelter -- "democrat," if they chose the USA, or "socialist," if they chose the USSR. However, the struggle was between corporate imperialism and state capitalism.

In the second phase, the conflict appeared as follows:

	<b>SLOGAN</b>	<b>ACTUAL POSITION</b>
<b>USA</b>	Anti-Soviet communism Pro-democracy	Promotion of finance capital
<b>USSR</b>	Anti-US imperialism	Promotion of state capitalism
<b>Colonies</b>	Popular demands for justice and the rule of law	Elites are divided into pro-US and pro-USSR stances to retain power

Since among the former colonies the regimes supported by the USA generally came to be identified as authoritarian right wing or reactionary forces, not much was expected of them by the people. But since the USSR gained its support largely by selectively endorsing the agendas of mass-based national liberation movements of one type or another, and then by securing that leadership in power, (even though at base it had an imperialist agenda), higher popular hopes and expectations were held for these regimes. In the final analysis, when the groups supported by the USSR came to power, they became ruthless dictators, identifying any opposition as "reactionary," "pro-imperialist," and "enemy of the people." It was a simple approach, "If you disagree with me, you are my enemy." Splits within these movements took place. Dissatisfaction with dictators in both camps became rampant and public opposition to authoritarian rule filled people's day-to-day activities. National liberation movements grew in strength, demanded democracy and rallied support from even the educated professionals.



## **The Triumph of the Corporate Model**

During the 1980s, the USSR's state capitalist system could not hold on and began to reveal its nature, that at its core it is nothing but a capitalist system in decline. The corporate model proved to be more powerful an expression of capitalism. This was proven when the nature of the corporate changed from an international system to a transnational one which was capable of absorbing the national bourgeoisie, the petit bourgeoisie of the non-industrialized countries, and even Soviet state capitalism itself. In short, the market became a money market and it has transnationalized everything -- merchandise, personnel etc. This development has introduced the beginning of third major phase in the consolidation of corporate capitalism globally. It ushered in the phenomenon which has been identified by Samuel P. Huntington as "The Third Wave" of democratization (Huntington: 1993), which is rather the Third Wave of Corporatization.

What has characterized this period of capitalism most dramatically is the shift in the way some classes that used to be localized primarily within nation states for the administration of capitalist institutions, have fairly quickly merged into a global transnational class. This is true of the "socialist" (state capitalists) who quickly shed their socialist skin and joined their counterparts in the corporate system to create a transnational (de-nationalized) elite of investors, planners, and decision-makers. This group is a true elite, the new bourgeoisie. It is also true that those groups which comprised the petit bourgeoisie and the compradore bourgeoisie have merged to form a general category of transnational functionaries. One mechanism by which this merging of formerly disparate groups occurs is through the worldwide "promotion of democracy" policy and associated programs introduced and directed by the United States. Here is where it becomes timely to take a look at the nature and development of the groups targeted for inclusion in the new democracy promotion programs.

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### The Rise of Transnational Functionaries

The term "petit bourgeoisie" has referred to the class that traditionally served the interests of the decision-making class above them. It has been a class that has shared in the knowledge of the system's operations, but that did not share the position in the ownership or power retained by the bourgeoisie. It is a group trained to serve as functionaries, to carry out the role of making functional the economic designs generated by the capitalist (bourgeois) class. Now, in the current economic order, this petit bourgeois group is joined by former compradore bourgeoisie as both are invited to serve global corporate needs as "transnationals." I prefer to call this combined group transnational "functionaries." In the current corporate world both the capitalist (bourgeois) class and the petit bourgeoisie have been transnationalized, so the term "transnationals" can introduce confusion over which group is meant. I also prefer the term "functionaries" because this group takes direction from the class of transnational owners, the true global elite.

The economic and social position of this middle group, the "functionaries," is the position most affected by any changes that occur in the way the system adjusts within its global environment. The elite group of owners and decision-makers continues to issue plans and to shift the design for conducting business and the working class continues to sell its labor at a price fixed by others. But the functionaries have to make sure the system works. It is this functionary group that is targeted by the international "democracy promotion" program.

The paradigm shifts that accompanied the economic shifts from merchant capitalism to monopoly capitalism (or colonial empire) and then from colonial empire to a corporate capitalist investment paradigm have changed the design of many of the institutions that once shaped the way business was conducted and ideas were implemented. Each set of changes revolutionized the means of communication, introduced new modes of management, and reorganized the operations

and the functions of the educational system, particularly the university. The changes involved increasing the standardization and internationalization of the educational curriculum. As the corporation's international reach became wider, the teaching of specific skills necessary to keep the system operational became increasingly global. This process has proceeded until what is taught from one end of the globe to the other is relatively uniform (*Economist* 1997: 71-72). Industry was diversified, which led to specialization and professionalization of the work force. This meant that all workers were made globally interdependent and all the functionaries were sent scrambling to respond to the vast institutional changes involved. These were not partial changes. This was a total shift (Coser 1965: 251-292.)

The process of globalization of institutions, products, and education created a class of multinational petit bourgeoisie. The group of functionaries no longer needed to be located primarily in the First World. When the shift of operations as fundamental as the globalization of the work force took place, its functions and consequently the functionaries that are central to its operation had to change with it or be replaced. And, as it happened, when the corporate structure became multinational, one important item on its agenda was to produce or mold a sizable group of functionaries who could become the ideologues as well as the operatives of the newly refurbished multinational corporation. At this point, the role of universities abroad became especially crucial. Teachers were dispatched to introduce a new curriculum. Various media, such as movies, music, sports, religion, fashion, food, tobacco, dance, etc. became powerful instruments of the globalization process and served to make the social behavior and attitudes of the West attractive forms of seduction and socialization (Coser 1965: 275-93; Greider 1997: 263).

The universities became the crucible in which the behavior and attitudes of the West were adopted by the growing category of new "professionals" within the Third World society. They regarded acting and behaving like Europeans and Americans as an achievement. The

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non-industrial peoples were enthusiastic about the glittering materials and fashions that they had never seen before. To live and dress like Europeans and Americans quickly gave them status. At a higher stage they came in contact with technology such as cars, radios, TVs, refrigerators and new modern materials that proved to be so seductive that, for all intents and purposes, this class abandoned its home area (Greider 1997) and the West realized a big return on its investment in overseas educational institutions.

So the industrial West did not only turn its business international and its businessmen and women international, but it also developed the professional classes abroad that could be easily turned international (Drucker 1993: 210-218). The material and even psychological links with home regions became weaker as international opportunities increased (Greider 1997). The attachment and satisfaction derived from the urban culture were sufficient to keep this group loyal to business. The class of transnational functionaries was filled by a professional group that can be employed by the multinational corporation in any capacity globally. This class is a group whose members hail from many national backgrounds who are tied together through a loyalty to a business ethic they have acquired in their formative years in a transplanted university. Members of this class are prime candidates to serve the new global system because they are often more influenced by Westernization than they are influenced by their own national background (see Peter Drucker's discussion of "The Educated Person" in 1993: 210-218). They replace their national values with Western values (*Economist* 1997: 217). Sometimes they do not even realize that they have already divorced themselves from their own background. They perform nicely in the urban disco, but lose the ability to dance the dances or exercise the culture of their own home.

What has happened is that this group does not follow or feel a particular loyalty to a national line; it is a party line they follow, only now the "party" is any organization to which they choose to subscribe. People become extremely excited about loyalty to their "organization,"

though they find it possible to shift absolute loyalty from one organization to another. Such an attitude or orientation is easily adapted to business loyalty and identification with the firm with which one is employed.

How is it, one might ask, that this new transnational group of functionaries was formed? It appears that the operations of the multinational corporation globally created the conditions which enabled or enticed the national bourgeoisie to join the new forces that govern the world. The national bourgeoisie saw the advantages in greater income and higher prestige by joining the ranks of the multinational companies and looking at and relating to the world beyond the vantage point of their own national base. The old compradore bourgeoisie were relieved of their former duties of representing the interests of international capitalists and, with the newly-developed petit bourgeois professionals, they joined the ranks of the transnational functionaries. Among this new professional group, whether they were originally the product of the East or the West, the assignments of global concern are divided between those who travel abroad and those who carry out the local or national assignment while maintaining a global perspective.

The professional group that, as a group, makes up the transnational functionary class is unable to be significant or act as a class nationally, and does not possess the real technical and managerial skill in its own national territory to operate independently from the new global order. They remain to play the role that they have been created to play at the mercy of the Western world, or the corporate world. This is so because, at home they no longer have a solid base. A difference over the allegiance to conflicting values has become the social basis for a new emergent dilemma. The professionals hold Western values in the highest regard while the Western corporate values that are understood by the professionals are not understood by the peoples of the nations in question. The corporate design does not include a means or strategy for honoring or utilizing the values of the small non-industrialized nations. As the trained professionals increasingly respond to the

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corporate world, they themselves no longer understand their own people as well as they understand the system that educated them.

While in training, the professional group became a select group, acquiring two expectations from education: 1) that it is a means to live like a king with a professional job, and 2) that it is a means to state power. This group demonstrates an attitude that because they know the global scene, they are the only ones who know what is best for their fellow nationals. Their attitude betrays their values: "because I was educated at such and such university in Europe or America that makes me the best equipped to know what is good for 'my people.' " If some individual from this group challenges another, proposing that s/he is better, the matter is resolved by determining which university in the US or England each has attended. Yet neither of them possess a quality for understanding their "own" people to know what is best for them. They begin to operate in a system in which the fathers now work for the sons (Berry 1985).

These new professionals only seem to adhere to one set of globally-recognized values, without understanding its true source -- status, prestige, power, success, etc. They are losing understanding of their own people because they have allowed themselves to be culturally uprooted. They have become "Mr. Smith" far from their psychological home in their thoughts and ideas. This group is in danger. Its members will be socially rejected by their own society to the extent that they reject the norms, values and beliefs of their own people. They do not function like a nationally grown product any longer. Ultimately the people of the non-industrialized countries come to see that the bite of a snake is still the bite of snake, no matter what its origin. The local people realize that oppression, whether it is carried out by alien settlers or by nationals operating institutions and following rules laid out by the settlers, is the same (Korten 1995: 133-140).

There was a point, not too long ago when this educated professionalized group appeared to be wavering on the edge, poised and ready to respond to their people's outcry against the harsh rule of

dictators from both the right and the left. Their ambivalence and apparent sympathy for the plight of their people, and their willingness to join them in opposing the systems of repression that were endorsed by both the USA and the USSR gave rise to the promotion of democracy as a foreign policy.

I have established that in the last decade, the USA has declared that it is promoting democracy in the global setting. The Third Wave of democracy, whose origins Huntington (1993) tries to pinpoint even to the exact day and time that it started, actually began at the point when the USA began to notice that the movements and the cry of the suffering people had *intensified and realized that the members of educated professional groups were beginning to join them and support them*. The USSR, the competing hegemonic force, was losing the battle for the people's loyalty. The people turned against dictators, whether they were once sponsored by the USA or the USSR, and cornered them. The intellectuals, both those trained by the West or by the East, as an opportunistic class, saw the direction of the people and began to support their goals. The balance of forces was beginning to lean toward the national aspirations and demands.

The US, having observed that it was becoming the single superpower, made a strategic decision to find a way publicly to endorse and then undermine from within rather than publicly to oppose and fight this natural "wave" of popular demand for democracy. In reality *the public endorsement covers up an active suppression of the foundations of popular democracy*. This new shift in public discourse or public paradigm was not in reality meant to support the democratic process per se, but to quell the opposition of the rebelling elements of the democracy-seeking elites<sup>7</sup>.

Once surprised and confused by the US advocacy of democracy, the professional group has been pleased to be invited to participate in building "democracy" in a new way, that is, according to a US plan made available in their home countries in a way only they, the educated, could appreciate and participate in. They have been welcomed into the

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"grand plan" of the new global democratic order supported by the USA. Had the promotion been for genuine popular democracy, it would not have imposed its own form of democracy or offered its redefined democratic values and elections schemes as a replacement for the peoples' demands. Instead, the US procedures substituted imported "democratic" values to replace the popular aspirations. The US imposed the values of the World Bank and the IMF, which do not have any means of taking into account the values of popular groups operating in the Third World. They had no intention or capability of helping Third World countries on their own merit as equal partners or as people who are neighbors in a global village (Korten 1995: 149-158

argues that this approach originated in marketing strategy). Rather they imposed something not locally relevant

The USA as the single leader of the corporate world's promotion of democracy has an ideological foundation which is a refined and updated version of investment imperialism. It is a modernized version of the "open door policy" which has finally brought the USA, the USSR, and the members of the former colonies together to make the world a better place for the perpetuation of corporate capitalism.

### **The Impact of Transnational Democracy upon the Oromo National Struggle**

The immediate effects of the United States' promotion of democracy program on the Oromo struggle have been: 1) to re-introduce and intensify the subjugation and exploitation of Oromia and Oromos through US recognition and legitimation of Ethiopian control over Oromia under the guise of "democracy<sup>8</sup>," and 2) to heighten the dilemma posed for specific segments of the Oromo population, particularly for the nationalists seeking Oromo self-determination and



for the sector of professionals trained to function in an international capitalist arena.

For the nationalists of the liberation movement, it forces a reformulation of the question how to achieve national independence and self-determination in a tightly interdependent world. The challenge to nationalists of all backgrounds is to assert leadership by articulating Oromo core values and principles in such a way that uniquely Oromo institutions can be strengthened to organize the society toward the goal of determining its own future. The struggle to redraw national boundaries and attain a separately constituted state structure within those boundaries loses its potency if that state does not embody the Oromo moral and cultural codes of conduct that have been violated by the Ethiopian state.

This raises the dilemma that the "democracy promotion" strategy has forced upon national liberation movements, including the Oromo movement. A significant sector of the population who were expected to participate in changing the condition of their people at home and to help attain liberation at a national level are abandoning the movement in body and in spirit. These are the professionals who have been groomed, trained and educated both by the West and the East. The corporate appears to be winning the struggle over the allegiance of this group with offers to join the corporate world. As they accept, these professionals become transnational functionaries. They have no more boundaries. They are people with high incomes who live the "good life." Though they can appear to be national in some of their actions, by their class nature they do not advocate popular democracy. Their knowledge of the culture, norms, and values of their respective nations pales by comparison with their knowledge of and appreciation for corporate culture. They have, by their choices, proven their commitment to corporate culture and way of life. Since they truly believe that their national culture is backward, they are not the ones who can play the leading role in revitalizing it. Instead many of them

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choose to become agents for promoting corporate values in direct contradiction to the nationalists at the home front.

The Oromo national struggle faces the task of repatriating these Oromo professionals, who through their education have acquired skills useful to the nation but highly desirable in the international arena. Although these professionals are all at risk of being seduced away from Oromo causes, their repatriation may yet occur if the leadership of the national movement effectively challenges them to utilize their skills for the benefit of their nation rather than solely for their own personal benefit. Posing this challenge is a tricky business, requiring a clear-headed assessment of what is really required from these professionals who stand on the brink of joining the ranks of the transnational functionaries, if they have not already done so.

Nearly all transnational functionaries are trained professionals, but it is important to note that not all trained professionals have become transnational functionaries. Not yet. Some have remained squarely in the Oromo nationalist camp, which means that they acknowledge that the direction and the pace of the national struggle comes from the base of the Oromo population, particularly in how the people interpret and express the core Oromo values and aspirations that historically have shaped the Oromo society. The difference lies in determining to what purpose the professional will use his/her skill. What is required from the professionals is not leadership, since unfortunately through the process of acquiring their international skills they have been too far removed from the daily potent expression of Oromo values to lead in the areas that most strongly unite the bulk of the population. What is required from them is service in the best interest of their people. Their technical skills are akin to the skills of an architect who draws up blueprints for a structure based upon the specifications laid out by the people, upon the needs that the people articulate and upon the resources that the people bring to the task.

Oromo professionals, following leadership and direction from within the national movement, are capable of integrating the national

norms and values into the current global conditions. Once the blueprints are drawn, according to a plan or design that all agree to, most of the society can be turned into builders of the Oromo nation/state. To carry this analogy further, all systems have to be synchronized as they are in building construction -- the water system, the foundation work, the heating and cooling plans, the energy sources -- all have to be coordinated and not conflict with each other internally or with the external environment in which the building will operate.

The first thing that Oromo nationalists should realize is that the change in the world order is real and permanent. The environment in which the Oromo operate is forever altered. We must also know that these changes can work to the good of the Oromo people. One aspect that the Oromo can use to their advantage is that the Oromo have no place to go any more to borrow ideas or models such as "planned economy" vs "market economy," as the people in the struggle before them have tried to do. Those options are gone and can no longer give us a false sense of security or dependence. We must also know that the market economy is now guided by a transnational ideology. We do not want to clash head-on with this force. Transnational elites do not want it either. We must avoid collision, but we must not fear its might and power. Instead, we should proceed peacefully to deal with global forces. Having said that, let me present the choices that I think the Oromo have if they want to live and lay down a groundwork for their children.

Under the global order, the Oromo people currently face two real choices. One is to be part of Ethiopia and to fit into the Ethiopian paradigm and model that has been arranged for the Oromo. The second choice is to arrange Oromo life and institutions according to the Oromos' own formula. There is no need to subscribe to an Ethiopian formula which has made the Oromo people miserable. If Oromos choose to join the world community as part of Ethiopia, the Oromo fate remains unchanged and the professionals who enter into this arrangement in effect accept their subordination and their second-class

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citizenship. They will have positioned themselves only to serve the interests of the Ethiopians who dominate the Oromo and whose paradigm is designed to fortify that domination. To arrange an Oromo way of life takes much more effort, especially for individuals who are part of the tiny sector of Oromo professionals, to put national interest above personal interest, that is, to overcome the attraction of short term benefits, the so-called high income, precious status, power in the global institutions.

This is the dilemma that educated Oromo professional face: if an individual accepts all the money, status and power offered to him or her within an imported formula for success, but his nation Oromia is not free, has s/he gained any real advantage? Or, put another way, has s/he made the greatest use of the training, position and opportunities provided to him/her? Due to the Oromo history of subjugation under Ethiopia, the size of the Oromo professional group is very small; the process that they have passed through to reach their current position between the world and their nation has been long and rough. Compared to the total number in the Oromo population, the handful of trained persons produced by the global system is statistically insignificant.

We should understand that the Oromo as a people have been alienated from the world, isolated economically and politically, while offering the world only their labor. Oromo nationalists argue that the Oromo should not be participating in the world arena on the basis of their brute labor alone. They should enter into the world community on the basis of other dimensions. The world has no idea that the Oromo have their own tools to build with and a great deal to contribute to the well-being of the world. The Oromo face the challenge of proudly producing what is uniquely Oromo and bringing it in their own right to the global arena. Then it will become clear to all that what the Oromo bring not only adds to the beauty of world culture but serves to enrich the sophistication and the depth of its social and political organization. The challenge to the professionals is to become a part of

that effort. Almost all Oromo see a great compatibility of the Oromo value system with many of the time-honored values that the world has already come to recognize. What the Oromo know the world should come to know, too, that Oromo culture provides a basis for a notable contribution to philosophy, science, politics and social organization (Jalata 1996). It remains for the Oromo to create the space and to develop its culture in such a way that the proof of Oromo faith and their conviction in the value of their indigenous system will be evident by the rapid future development of Oromia.

It is up to the Oromo national liberation movement to reach out for the Oromo professionals and hold up for them a competing vision of what role they might play for their people and what rewards might be attained in the long run rather than the short run; otherwise, they will be lost. These professionals are standing in two worlds right now, one foot in the Oromo world, where they are pulled by the interest of their people and the other foot in the wider world, which until now has always meant the Ethiopian world first, then the world beyond. Until now the promotion of democracy in the Horn of Africa region has been solely within the framework of a so-called "Ethiopian democracy". Oromos must enter on the world stage either as Ethiopians or de-nationalized.

It is natural for the Oromo professionals to want to join the transnational force because that is the only real option they see for themselves as individuals. Their dilemma should be acknowledged by Oromo nationalists with the reminder that a better way exists, that is, for Oromo to succeed in the global arena as a nation first, forcing the world to accommodate that reality. This dilemma highlights the urgent need for the Oromo to come up with a formula for their own participation and the participation of the Oromo people in the global order in their own right and according to their own values. The way that the "promotion of democracy" has proceeded globally, it is clear that the US will never provide a means ready-made for the Oromo to step onto the world stage. The formula for Oromo liberation and self-

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expression as a nation the Oromo are going to have to devise by themselves for themselves using their own resources. The world can then acknowledge that formula and relate to it.

It is clear that the United States has defined its own national interest as expanding a free market globally. That remains the long-standing ideological commitment of the United States, as this paper has argued. Oromo nationalists and professionals must realize that this objective, and not democracy as the Oromo have understood it, is the guiding idea behind the "promotion of democracy," and behind the establishment of "Ethiopian democracy." This knowledge should not intimidate the Oromo. If anything, it should have the effect of forcing the Oromo to realize that this is the global terrain in which the Oromo must express its own national interest. The Oromo from any sector have nothing to gain for their people by running toward the Ethiopians. Becoming Ethiopian will not solve the Oromo problem. In fact, unencumbered by the Ethiopian problem, the Oromo stand a better chance of negotiating a place for themselves on the world scene, given their location, natural resources and labor force, than they do under the umbrella of the Ethiopians.

The world, led by the United States, will have no reason to cling to the Ethiopian formula when it becomes aware of the Oromo people and their real and potential contribution in their own right to the global scene. This is not to say that the US position should be the determining factor. It is not. This generation of nationalists should immediately undertake the task of elaborating the Oromo interest and of overseeing the drawing of blueprints for how the world, including the US, might relate directly with the Oromo rather than through the crippling intermediary of Ethiopia. This can be done by understanding the global system and the global economy, and finding ways to assert what is Oromo within that system on Oromo terms.

All sectors of the Oromo society must understand that the promotion of democracy policy is dangerous in the Oromo case especially because it presents an illusion of popular democracy which

denies the past and continuing colonial domination of Ethiopia over Oromia (Jalata1993) Because of this denial, it is up to the Oromo to produce their own stepping stones away from their present impasse. For this project, the Oromo national liberation struggle needs its national professionals. They are a national resource. They have an important role to play for their people. The effect of the "promotion of democracy" approach globally is to remove that valuable resource, the professionals, away from the national struggle, thus leaving the massive majority of the nation behind. All sectors of the Oromo society should be made aware that such a "democracy" is not compatible with Oromo national aspirations. If the professional sector of the Oromo people is lost to the struggle, it will be a serious setback to the cause of national liberation in this era. Understanding this prospect and taking action to integrate this sector is a key step toward protecting and defending the future of the Oromo as a nation.

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## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Recent work carried out by William I. Robinson in, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention and Hegemony*, (1996) explores the evolution and implementation of the United States' "promotion of

democracy" policy. Anyone looking at this subject seriously must encounter Robinson's persuasive argument. For an advocate's view, see Samuel P. Huntington (1993) one of the foremost ideologues of US democracy promotion who has written, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*.

<sup>2</sup> See Holcomb and Ibssa (1990: 27-69), a chapter titled, "The Changing World," which situates Ethiopia in relation to world dynamics, traces the United States' challenge to European empire building and draws attention to the United States' attempt to open up those colonial markets, beginning in the first part of the 1900s.

<sup>3</sup> For an account of the passage of the Anti-Trust Acts of 1884 and their impact on the fashioning of corporate capitalism, see Martin J. Sklar (1988), especially pages 86-173.

<sup>4</sup> Wm Roger Louis and R.D. Pearce write of this period, the processes initiated by the US, the British reaction to US proposals and its implications for British politics in Louis (1978) and Pearce (1982).

<sup>5</sup> The process by which former colonies of the European empires were brought under collective guardianship is examined in Holcomb and Ibssa (1990:54-65.) In that book the impact of this process upon the Oromo, who were subject to Ethiopian control, is also addressed.

<sup>6</sup> There has been a long-standing debate over the nature of the Soviet economy beginning with Rosa Luxemburg's outspoken critique of Soviet socialism during Lenin's time (see *The Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, 1971). The evidence that state capitalism best characterizes the Soviet economy is ample. It lies in the separation of the direct producers from the means of production and in the pattern of distribution adopted by the state. Also it lies in the political administrative hierarchy occupied by personnel who have had elite socialization, in widespread nepotism and extensive patronage, and in

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the relation of direct exploitation between the Third World countries and the USSR functioning as an imperial power. For further reading concerning the controversy over the USSR's political/economic system see, *The Soviet Union, Socialist or Social Imperialist? Essays Toward the Debate on the Nature of Soviet Society*, compiled by the Editors of *The Communist*, RCP Publications: Chicago, 1983; Adam Bergson's *The Economics of Soviet Planning*, Yale University Press, 1964; Maurice Dobb, MA, *Soviet Economic Development*, International Publishers, New York, 1948 and 1968; Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggle in the USSR: First Period, 1917-1923*, Monthly Review Press, 1976, and Hedrick Smith, *The New Russians*, New York, 1991. Also see discussion below, pp. 8-10.

<sup>7</sup> See William Robinson's assessment of this shift in US policy (1996)

<sup>8</sup> See Holcomb (1997) and Robinson (1997).

## CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES IN OROMO STUDIES

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PTW Baxter

"You can't be universal without being provincial" Robert Frost

This paper compares my impressions of the current "State of Oromo Studies" with some observations on the same topic which I made in 1984, when I presented a "Resume" (1986) to Joseph Tubiana's seminar in Paris.<sup>1</sup> My current impressions have been influenced by the collection of essays entitled *Being and Becoming Oromo. Historical and Anthropological Enquiries* (1996), which Jan Hultin, Alessandro Triulzi and I recently co-edited, and by the Gothenberg seminar from which that volume derived. The following observations are then, in part a sort of postscript to that volume, and in part a look at the wealth of studies which preceded it and made its production possible. The years 1984 and 1996/7 have no particular significances or resonances in themselves, they are merely handy reference pegs on which to hang these observations, other dates could have served.

In 1984 it would not have been possible to produce such a wide ranging collection of essays as *Being & Becoming Oromo*; there were not enough contributors; the time was not ripe. But by 1996 many Oromo had established their scholarly credentials and were publishing books and papers; indeed, there were many more able Oromo scholars than we could afford to invite to the Gothenberg seminar. Both Oromo identity and the Oromo language had by that time also come to be accorded a substantial degree of recognition within Ethiopia itself. Two of the contributors to the volume, indeed, hold academic posts in the University of Addis Ababa. The developments which have taken place in Oromo Studies do not satisfy all Oromo aspirations but that there have been marked moves forward is incontestable. That it was possible to produce such a general survey volume in 1996, whatever its naïveté

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and however many gaping holes in our knowledge it reveals, just in itself is an indication of the growth and maturity of Oromo Studies. The essays in *Being & Becoming* indicate both some of the continuities and some of the changes which have taken place in Oromo Studies in response to political and scholarly developments.

The 1984 paper was a restrained celebration of the emergence of Oromo Studies as a recognised scholarly pursuit. That there could be a distinctive body of knowledge named Oromo Studies was still a relatively new concept; until only a few years before articles and books written about the "Galla" had frequently been considered to be just an extremely peripheral attachment to mainline Ethiopian Studies. The very name Oromo itself had only recently become standard in publications: the first uses of the word Oromo in the 180 titles listed in the References to the 1984 paper were dated the early 1970s; they were *the Oromos: Voice Against Tyranny* (1971) Haile Fida's *Hirmaatadubbi Afaan Oromo* (1973), which was privately printed in Paris, and Bonnie Holcomb's "Oromo Marriage in Wallaga Province, Ethiopia", which appeared in the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* (1973). In 1975 Triulzi published an article on the "Gudru Oromo and their neighbours" and Hultin published one on Oromo expansion. In 1976 the linguists Andrzejewski, Gragg and Hayward each published articles with Oromo in the titles; Andrzejewski's, incidentally, was an argument for using Roman script to write Oromo. In the same year Richard Pankhurst published "The Beginnings of Oromo Studies in Europe". The word Galla just faded away without any fuss and the name Oromo entirely replaced it in common international usage; I do not think Galla appears in any title after 1980. It would now be considered rather freakish to use Galla, unless in inverted commas or in a quotation. Indeed, the understanding and recognition of Oromo has so broadened that, at least among students of Africa and of nationalism, it is no longer necessary for each paper to start with an explanation of who the Oromo are, where they live and that they used to be known as Galla; for those of us who write about Oromo this is an economy and a relief

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That Oromo is no longer an unfamiliar name is an achievement. The recognition, of course, has been more a consequence of political events and changing sentiments in Oromia<sup>2</sup> and Ethiopia, especially the politicisation of the Oromo people, than of scholarly enlightenment but, nevertheless, students of Oromo have had some influence on the perceptions that were held by outsiders both of Oromo culture and of Oromo nationality, if only because it was they who wrote about them.

In 1984 it was not difficult to compile a comprehensive list of publications on Oromo because Oromo studies was a small field: most students of Oromo kept in touch with one another and the published output was not large. It would be much harder to compile such a list today, and I do not attempt to do so. Interest in Oromo Studies has increased greatly, especially among Oromo themselves, as is most obviously demonstrated by the activities of the Oromo Studies Association and the journals *The Oromo Commentary* (1991) and *The Journal of Oromo Studies* (1993)<sup>3</sup>. The range of specialised journals in different disciplines in which articles on Oromo now appear has also widened, as the far from complete list of References which appears at the end of this paper demonstrates (see, in particular, those listed under Asafa Jalata and Mario Aguilar). Happily, as the Oromo are becoming more widely known, specialists are not only writing for a wider range of readers but are writing on a much wider range of topics. Oromo scholars, such as Gufu Oba, Bichaka Fayissa and Asfaw Beyene, are also making their names within their own scientific fields while retaining scholarly interests in their own histories and cultures. Lemmu Baissa and Addisu Tolesa have made significant contributions in Oromo cultural studies.

The community of students of Oromo has become so wide, and publication so diffused, that members cannot know one another nor keep up with all the publications, let alone with serious reviews of new books. This information gap is partly covered by articles and references in *Commentary* and the *Journal* and, on human rights, by *Sagalee Haaraa* (1994), the newsletter of The Oromo Support Group. *Nouvelles de*

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*L'ARESEA*, the newsletter of the Association française pour le développement de la Recherche Scientifique en Afrique de l'Est, and the annual issues of *Africa Bibliography* produced by the International African Institute are also useful sources of information. Nevertheless gaps remain, for someone based in Europe, for example, it is difficult to keep up with publications brought out in the USA and in Finfine. I have to rely on friends, such as Obsaa Tegegn in Finfine or Mohammed Hassen in USA, to keep me in touch but I still miss quite a lot (Ficquet 1996; Mohammed Hassen 1996). Contributors to the *Roundtable. The State of Oromo Studies* session at the November meeting of the US African Studies Association drew my attention to gaps in my coverage, especially on environmental and language studies. I hope that either the *Journal* or *Commentary* will be able to publish review articles on these topics in the near future. It would be an extremely useful service if either the *Journal* or the *Commentary* could maintain a running bibliography of publications both in *afaan Oromo* and on Oromo. The recently established Biriftu Diramaa Association may possibly provide a useful information link in the future.

One consequence of the increasing input from Oromo writers has been the introduction of fresh perspectives which, as one would anticipate, can lead to some tensions. They became apparent, for example, during the seminar from which *Being and Becoming Oromo* developed. There are crucial differences in experience and in response between those who are involved and those who are merely observers. The distinction which Nadine Gordimer makes between writers is apposite;- "One must look at the world from Africa to be an African writer, not look upon Africa from the world" (quoted in Head: 6). The sufferings which the Oromo participants had endured had created in them a faith in the redemptive powers of nationalism which their non-Oromo colleagues, whose own backgrounds of experience were very different, could not entirely share. These differences meant that most of the Oromo contributors tended to be primarily concerned with the past and present as the foundations on which to create a viable Oromia;



they could be impatient with those who seemed to regard Oromo primarily as subjects of detached scholarly interest, however concerned that interest might be. To quote from the "Introduction": "Though we all shared many assumptions and sympathies, the expectancies of the Oromo and non-Oromo contributors were not identical. In the event the tensions that sometimes quivered were, we think, productive and creative...but the differences in expectancies and orientations remained..."(9). I think that these differences must remain for the foreseeable future and that, therefore, we should recognise them and exploit them creatively.

The collapse of Haile Sellasie's government in 1974 and the turmoils which surrounded the establishment of the *Derg* created a great swell of political and nationalistic feeling but publications, by both Oromo and by friends of Oromo, continued to be almost entirely concerned either with studies of localised traditional cultures and histories or with establishing the historical and theoretical justice of the Oromo cause. Up to 1983 little had been published on future problems and practicalities. The practical problems that must follow, (for example, on the use of *Afaan Oromo* as an officially recognised written language when few had learned to write it, or on the political recognition of Oromia) were only considered by student journals and in the reports and publications of the OLF<sup>4</sup>, both of which combined limited circulations and ideologically based optimism. For example, my own papers on "Ethiopia's Unacknowledged Problem: The Oromo" (1978) and on the 1969 election (1980) outlined some of the disabilities under which the Oromo suffered, but did not even hint at any practical proposals for their amelioration. At that time the establishment of an internationally recognised Oromo political identity was still a minority aspiration rather than a foreseeable likelihood. The need to contemplate problems that the future might bring did not seem pressing, which was possibly one reason that the OLF was later caught wrong footed when the *Derg* collapsed.

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The few publications, on either the consequences of economic exploitation or the possibilities for development, that had appeared were almost entirely concerned with the pastoral Boran, Sakuye and Gabra<sup>5</sup> and with the Orma of the Tana River in Kenya (Hogg 1980, 1981, 1983 a & b; Dahl 1977, 1978, 1979; Ensminger 1984 a,b & c and 1985) Oromo identity was not then a relevant issue in Kenya though it has since become so (Abdullahi Shongollo 1996); the problems which were besetting the pastoralists were identified by governments as ones of development, which meant that they were not turned into a controversial political issue, and research was permitted and even encouraged. This interest in the development of threatened pastoralists, or recent pastoralists, continues to be a topic of continuing interest in development circles and has, if only as an unanticipated byproduct, contributed extensively to Oromo studies (Bassi 1990; Coppock 1994; Cossins & Upton 1988; Ensminger 1992; Gufu Oba 1990 & 1994; Hogg 1990 a & b, 1993; Kelly 1990; Upton 1986)

An irony of Oromo Studies is that probably the best known of the Oromo people in Europe and north America are those arid land pastoral people whose populations are relatively small, because it is they about whom most has been published. In 1984 they were the most intensively studied of the Oromo people (see Baxter 1986; 60-4 and Tablino, "Foreword", forthcoming). The production of excellent data on their culture and social organisation continues, ten of the nineteen papers in *Being & Becoming Oromo* are concerned with them Bassi (1996) and Aguilar (1998) have both recently produced model monographs and a series of articles on the Boran. Ensminger (1992) has done the same for the Orma of the Tana River. As the References to this paper demonstrate the flow of publications which demonstrate the complexity, resilience and adaptability of Boran culture and tradition to drought, commercialisation and unsympathetic regimes continues: Dahl, Baxter, Hogg, Helland, Kassam, Legesse and Tablino, who were all active before 1984, have continued to publish valuable articles: Gufu Oba, Abdullahi A Shongolo, Sahlu Kidane, Gemetchu Megerssa, A.B.

Bashuna, Gunther Schlee, Layne Coppock, N Cossins, Michael O'Leary and Michael Upton have all published original research. Publications in and about *afaan Boraana*, which were numerous before 1984, have also continued to flourish. I shall return to this topic when I consider developments in language studies.

Several contributors to both the *Commentary* and the *Journal* have recently been endeavouring to fill the deficiencies in studies of development and planning and are publishing preliminary analyses and proposals, notably Mekuria Bulcha (1992, 1995), Boru Gammada (1997), Sutuuma Waaqo (1994), Kano Banja (1994), Belletch Derasa (1993, 1995), Bichaka Fayissa (1994), Gobena Huluka (1996), Feyisa Demie (1997) and Assefa Kuru (1997). At the *Roundtable* I learned of other work that has been or is about to be published, but there is no doubt that much more needs to be done. I do not know what work is being done in Ethiopia itself, but I have heard some mutterings from aid and development workers that the proposals they receive from Tigre and Eritrea are more professionally presented than those which they receive from Oromia.

Most of the publications listed in the 1984 Resume were on the histories (pre-conquest), languages or cultures and social organisations of different Oromo groups such as the Boran, Gabbra, Arssi, Mecha, Orma, Guji, Jimma, Sayyoo and Gudru (I use the spellings of the time). These traditional topics, which have concerned almost every friendly observer since d'Abbadie, continue to be central and to provide important scholarly publications, though there are still immense gaps in our ethnographic and historical knowledge. Of those who appeared in the list of References to the *Resume* Asmarom Legesse, Bartels, Blackhurst, Dahl, Ensminger, Helland, Hogg, Hultin, Hinnant, Kassam, Kelly, Lewis, Mekuria Bulcha, Mohammed Hassen, Tesema Ta'a, Triulzi and Tablino are still publishing. Abbas Haji, Abdulahi A Shongolo, Gemetchu Megerssa, Mengesha Rikitu, Sahlu Kidane, A. B. Bashuna, Mario Aguilar, Marco Bassi, Eloi Fiquet, O. E. Arnesen, Gunther Schlee, John Wood and Thomas Zittelmann have all published papers

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and/or books since 1984. These mainline studies of the components of Oromoness provide the essential line of continuity in Oromo Studies. I have not the space nor the time to consider the contributions individually. That Mohammed Hassen's path breaking *The Oromo of Ethiopia: a History 1570-1860* remains the only full length historical monograph, though others such as Mekuria Bulcha and Abbas Haji have contributed important papers, shows that much still remains to be done.

Careful research into the histories and the traditional and contemporary cultures of the various Oromo peoples must continue to be the core of Oromo Studies: research, that is, which concentrates on the particularities and actualities of changing daily life and speech. Such scholarly studies are not just a luxury for academics who are shielded from the daily struggles, without them Oromo Studies risks degenerating into rhetorical aspirations. The strength of Oromo nationality, as with all vibrant nationalities, stems from its roots in the rich diversity of its varied cultures and local economies, in the lively and adaptive provincialism of Oromo daily life. This series of overlapping provincialisms is not divisive but life-giving, as my epigraph from the poet Robert Frost implies; I urge that to ignore local differences can only diminish the national whole. I cannot imagine a passionate supporter of his/her national football team who is not also a passionate supporter of a local team. Sadly there are many Oromo local cultures and histories in Ethiopia about which we still have no published record at all.

The strengths of Oromo cultural diversity are related to the "python like assimilation"<sup>6</sup> by Oromo of other peoples, by conquest, hospitality and marriage, which has been such a consistent feature in Oromo history. The crucial importance of this invigorating diversity can easily be cloaked in the restrictive environment of the diaspora and the political exigencies of nationalism<sup>7</sup>.

Language is generally held to be one of the markers of Oromoness; its official recognition in education and in government has

long been a key issue. Many individuals who had lost Afaan Oromo are now endeavouring to learn it. Following on Gragg's great Dictionary (1982), which incorporated an invaluable (at any rate for learners) 'Systematic Index', there have been great leaps forward which have been accompanied by the rapidly extending use of *qube* (Tilahun Gamta, 1993; Mekuria Bulcha, 1993 & 1994)<sup>8</sup>. Tilahun Gamta's pioneering *Dictionary* (1989) and *Grammar* (1994) combine the use of *qube* with analytical method, and are the most obvious examples and the ones most accessible and best known to Oromo readers. There are other pioneering works;- Ton Leus, Joseph Van de Loo and George Cotter produced *A Vocabulary*, of 7,700 English words with their approximations in the Maca, Guji and Borana dialects of the Oromo language, in 1992. This was only a small edition and copies are difficult to obtain. The enterprise has not been taken further which is unfortunate, because a comprehensive English/Oromo dictionary is badly needed by students who are endeavouring to learn Afaan Oromo. The 852 page Hamid Muudee's *Oromo Dictionary* (1995) fills this gap on the Borana-Italian dictionary produced by Father Venturino in the early seventies. It is designed as a "book for the study of language and culture": it is extremely comprehensive and gives multiple examples of the constructions in which words are used and of their variant meanings. I have found it most useful. Borello's rare *Dizionario Oromo-Italiano*, published in four parts between 1945 and 1970, has been edited by Sasse and Tablino and published as a book (1995). Scholarly linguistic analyses have been published by Owens (1985), Stroomer (1987) and Griefenow-Mewis and Tamene Bitima (1994)<sup>9</sup>. How I wish such a useful and knowledgeable study as Hukka Warrio's thesis *Tonal Accents in Boorana* (1993) had been available to me when I was struggling with Boorana in the field.

The development of language studies has been briefly recounted by Tablino (in press) and Baxter et al (1996; 11-2). *Afaan Booran*, as with studies of Boran *aada* and *seera*, has received considerable attention, a special feature has been the contributions made by the churches and by

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David Dida and others of the Borana Literacy Centre in Marsabit. The full Bible *Kitaaba Waaqa, ka kitaaba Deutarrokanikol/ apokrifa qabu* was published in 1994

The active political agenda which is now so prominent in Oromo studies has only become really central in publications from 1980 onwards. *Oromia* was published in that year under the resonant pseudonym Gaada Melba. The *Horn of Africa* reprinted "The Oromos: Voice against Tyranny" (Anon, 1973) and published Richard Greenfield and Mohammed Hassen's "Interpretation of Oromo Nationality". The commonly and passionately held histories, myths, icons and symbols which are essential for any national movement were rapidly created, disseminated and completely established by 1996. Mohammed Hassen, Mekuria Bulcha and Asafa Jalata have been especially conspicuous in this endeavour, but many others have played and are playing their parts as a glance at the *References* to this paper show.

The growth of studies of Oromo national identity and nationalism is probably the most striking development since 1984. The Resume did not include one item which specifically examined the distinctiveness of Oromo ethnicity or delineated its creation and development. Holcomb & Sisai Ibssa and Asafa Jalata have produced the key books. Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa in the *Invention of Ethiopia* (1990), and in a series of papers delivered to the Oromo Studies Association, have provided detailed analyses of the colonialist interventions in the Horn which led to the incorporation of Oromo into the Ethiopian Empire. Asafa Jalata in *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict* (1993b), and a series of articles, has contextualised the historical and political emergence of Oromia. Herbert Lewis, Mekuria Bulcha, Mohammed Hassen and Jan Hultin all contributed essays on these themes to *Being and Becoming Oromo* (1996). I have published on the moral components of Oromo ethnicity and nationalism (1994a & b, in press)

Mekuria Bulcha had already started on the research which was to lead to his path finding *Flight and Integration. Mass Exodus from Ethiopia*

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*and Problems of Integration in the Sudan* (1988) in 1984, but the Resume did not list one item on the Oromo diaspora, even though the active Oromo writers were among the diaspora. Zittelman has carried out geographically widespread and meticulous research and has published a discerning book (1994) and several papers on the development of Oromo identity among Oromo of the diaspora. Fiquet has written on Oromo intellectuals in exile and Greg Dow is currently researching into Oromo identities in Melbourne, Australia. As far as I know no one is studying the large Oromo populations in North America or the Gulf. I have not heard of any studies of the emerging entrepreneurial and professional classes in or outside Ethiopia.

There have been immense climatic and political upheavals throughout the Horn which have led to great movements of people and a sequence of intra-continental diaspora. No one, as far as I am aware, is carrying out research among the innumerable displaced Oromo who have been sucked or driven into Finfine, Nairobi or the other swelling towns of the Horn. We just do not know how they have reconstructed their lives and their cultures. We badly need studies, carried out bravely and with sensitivity, which tell us how war shattered cultures and societies adapt; Sharon Hutchinson's *Nuer Dilemmas: Coping with Money, War and the State* and Anna Simons' *Networks of Dissolution: Somalia Undone* would be excellent models. The above are all great gaps in our knowledge as are our ignorance of so many traditional local Oromo cultures. If Cupitt is correct, and "around the world the forces tending to liquidate traditional identities are much stronger than any attempts to conserve them can hope to be" (94), then these gaps must be filled soon or never. If they are not then Oromo cultural identity risks being diminished to images of a blissful bucolic past.

In summary my overall impression simply confirms that much has been done, much is being done and that much more still requires to be done, particularly if Oromo Studies are to break away from the constrictions of "Orientalism" and become firmly established within African Studies.

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*Sagalee Haaraa* Newsletter of the Oromia Support Group, The Willows, 6 Orchard Road, Malvern, Worcs, WR14 3DA, UK.

*The Journal of Oromo Studies* Department of Sociology, 901 McClung Tower, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996-0490, USA.

*The Oromo Commentary*, Ringstedsgatan 36, 164 48, Kista, Sweden.

An Appendix

The meticulously edited and magnificently produced three volumes containing 158 papers presented to the XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held in Kyoto, 12-17 December 1997 are now available. The following papers are particularly relevant to Oromo Studies

Volume 1:

Tesema Ta'a "The Bonayyaa Incident and the Italian Occupation of Naqamtee (1936-1941), 263-285.

Volume II:

Aguilar, Mario "The Poetics of Boorana Prayer: Emic Challenges to the Construction of Oromo Nationalism" 250-261.

Taddesse Berisso "Socio-Cultural and Environmental Impacts of Mengistu's Villagization Program on Guji-Oromo of Southern Ethiopia" 299-313.

Gemetchu Megerssa "The Oromo and the Ethiopian State Ideology in a Historical Perspective" 479-485

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Schlee, Gunther "Cross-cutting Ties and Interethnic Conflict: The example of the Gabbra Oromo and the Rendille" 577-596.

Soga, Toru "The Camel Exchange System among the Gabra: Patterns and Consequences of Inheritance" 597-615.

Tagawa Gen "Rituals of the *Gada* System of the Borana: With Special Reference to Latecomers of a Generation-set" 616-631

Assefa Tolera "Spontaneous Migration, Ethnic Interaction and the Problem of Land Resource Use in Rural Ethiopia: The Case of Indigenous Oromo and Amhara Settlers in Wallaga" 632-645.

Fugich Wako "Of Mending Cracked Earth and Earths that don't Crack: *Gada* as Indigenous Model of Conflict Prevention and Resolution among the Borana Oromo" 646-651.

Tadesse Wolde "Cowrie Belts and Kalashnikovs" 670-687

Wood, John C "Inside the Outside: The Construction of pastoral Identities at the Margins of Kenya and Ethiopia" 688-705.

Volume III:

Gascon, Alain " 'Fair Borders' for Oromiyaa" 362-378

## ENDNOTES

1. Earlier versions of this paper were presented to a *Roundtable: The State of Oromo Studies* at the meeting of the US African Studies Association, Columbus, Ohio in November, 1997 and to XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Kyoto in December, 1997. I am grateful for the comments and corrections made by participants and especially to those of Mohammed Hassen.

Two Ethiopians made a vociferous mini-demonstration during my presentation at the Paris Seminar and shouted out that I had been an ardent supporter of the Emperor's government when I was their teacher at HS I University and that now I was a hired agent of the Oromo and therefore untrustworthy. I have never taught in Ethiopia. I do not think the interrupters knew who I was. I have no idea who they were.

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2. List most works of OLF Oromo Organization Such UONA, UOE, USA

3 All students of Oromo are greatly indebted to Mekuria Bulcha, Mohammed Hassen and Asafa Jalata for their publications, their editorial labors and for the constructive passion with which they have badgered others into productivity

4. Such as the illustrated Primers produced for both children and adults in 1980 in the series *Barmoota Afaan Oromoo*.

5. In 1984 the Gabra were considered to be, and considered themselves, part of the Boran confederacy *naggaya Boraana*, but now some Gabra contest this and, tragically, both Boran and Gabra have even participated in raids against each other during 1997. For a sympathetic and insightful analysis of the recent situation see Wood 1997.

6. I take this simile from Sharon Hutchinson's recent brilliant and touching study of the Nuer of the Sudan (1996; 37 & 331). The Nilotic peoples of the Sudan have also suffered greatly from the cultural arrogance of their government.

7. "... the more any human group identifies itself, the more it sees itself as surrounded by enemies... The more identity you have, the more ethnocentric you are and the less you love foreigners... the more you will develop a victim psychology" (Cupitt, 1997; xiii)

8. The Camden and Islington Health Authority in London publish their information leaflet on the National Health Service in an Orom translation which uses *qube*. See also Elias Aberra 1994/5.

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9. It would be a boon if this Lehrbuch were translated into English. If not I fear that, like Haberland's great ethnography, it will not have the influence which it deserves. This comment also applies to Bassi 1996a. I learned at the *Roundtable* that there have been publications, both in Finfinne and in USA, which I had not heard about. Hopefully JOS will review recent publications

## CONSONANT CLUSTERS IN AFAAN OROMO

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Tilahun Gamta (Xilaahun Gamtaa)

### Introduction

The Oromo people are the largest ethnonational group comprising one-half of the 55 million population of Ethiopia. Their language, Afaan Oromo, is one of the Cushitic languages, closely related to Somali, Afar, Sidama and others. The purpose of this article is to describe the consonant clusters (CC) of Afaan Oromo in order to find out which combinations are possible, and to propose a template for helping develop lexical items of the language. Since Oromo has just recently been written, hundreds of spoken words in regular use and in people's memory have not yet been reduced to print.<sup>1</sup> Table 3 provides a template for lexicographers to use when looking for such untapped words.

### The Significance of the Study

This study is important for four reasons. First, it is useful for those who are interested in the comparative study of consonant clusters of different languages. A consonant cluster is a blending of two or more consonants in succession. For instance, English permits 3 CCC's word initially and 4 CCCC's word finally as in "streets" (s-t-r) and bursts (r-s-t-s). Spanish and Arabic allow only 2 CC's word initially and word finally, respectively. In Georgian, and languages of the Caucasus, clusters of up to six consonants can be found word initially.<sup>2</sup> Second, knowledge of the existing Oromo consonant clusters is important for those who, of necessity, coin new words or adopt words from other languages. The words to be borrowed or coined must conform to the

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existing cluster pattern to avoid pronunciation difficulties. While Afaan Oromo permits, for example, “-fs” cluster, it does not allow “-sf-”, a probable linguistic reason why some Oromos pronounce the Amharic name “Asfaawu” and the English word “asphalt” as “Afsaawu” and “afsaalti”, respectively. Awareness of such facts could help enable one to extrapolate future linguistic behavior of Oromos. Third, metathesis, i.e., transposing the order or position of CC is common in the language. For instance, the word “jirbii” (cotton) may be dominant in one part of Oromia whereas its variant “jibri” may be common in another. To give a specific example, the dominant pronunciation is “dhosku” (to hide) in Jimmaa region whereas it is “dhoksu” in Illubabor. Obviously, the so called dialectal variation is not as serious as has been unduly exaggerated; in the case of “jirbii/jibrii” and “dhoksu/dhosku”, it is only a reversal of the letters of “-rb-” and “-ks-” to read “-br-” and “-sk-”. It is useful to know all the existing CC’s in general and the reversible ones in particular. Incidentally those that can be transposed include:

- bd – abdaarii or adbaarii (deity)
- lb – aalbe or aable (knife)
- lf – kolfa or kofla (laughter)
- lph – salphina or saphlina (shame)
- rb – durba or dubra (girl)
- rf – arfan or afran (about four)
- rg – margu or magru (to sprout)
- sk – foksu or fosku (clean utensils)

Fourth, some individuals write words in which three consonants (CCC) occur in succession word medially. For instance, writing words like “arrabsu” (to insult) incorrectly as “arrabssu” has been common. It is hoped that after reading this paper they will be convinced that Afaan Oromo allows only two consonants (CC) in succession word medially



## *CONSONANT CLUSTERS IN AFAAN OROMO*

### **Qube, i.e., the Oromo Alphabet**

Afaan Oromo has 33 phonemes, i.e., 23 consonants and 10 vowels, all of which are described in Table 1 for the benefit of those Cushiticists who may not be familiar with qube.<sup>3</sup>

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Table 1: Qube, The Oromo Alphabet

Phoneme A. Consonant	As in Oromo Word	Approximate Eng. Equivalent	Comment
b	baru (learn)	big	
c	siico (dregs)	-	glottalized palatal.
ch	galchu (cause to enter)	such	Not common word initially. Geminated when preceded by a vowel.
d	daaraa (ash)	day	
dh	dhaqu (to go)	-	Glottalized, alveolar stop
f	fayyaa (health)	fat	
g	gatii (price)	gun	
h	haaraa (new)	harm	
j	jirbii (cotton)	jar	
k	kana (this)	kiss	
l	laga (river)	land	
m	mataa (head)	moon	
n	nagaa (peace)	name	
ny	nyaara (brow)	-	The "n" as in Spanish senior
ph	suphe (clay)	-	Glottalized, labial stop. Not common word initially.
q	tuqu (to touch)	-	Glottalized, velar stop
r	rafu (to sleep)	run	
s	sodaa (fear)	socks	
sh	bishaan (water)	shoulder	
t	tapha (game)	tank	
w	waggaa (year)	want	
x	xinno (small)	-	Glottalized, dental stop
y	yaada (idea or thought)	year	
<b>B. Vowel</b>			
a	bara (year)	bunch	A single final "a" in a word is schwa.
aa	baala (leaf)	arm	
e	benii (mellow)	guess	
ee	beeia (hunger)	tail	
i	fixu (to finish)	dip	
ii	fiixee (summit)	teach	
o	bofa (snake)	stop	B.B.C English pronunciation
oo	doomaa (blunt)	load	V.O.A English pronunciation
u	muka (tree or wood)	put	
uu	suuta (slowly)	boom	

## CONSONANT CLUSTERS IN AFAAN OROMO

### Consonant Clusters (CC)

A consonant cluster is a gathering closely together of two identical or different consonants in a structure (word), as “-rr-“ in gurra (ear) and “-rb-“ in gurbaa (boy). In other words, it is a succession of two consonants occurring in a structure without a vowel coming between them. Abutting consonants are not considered as clusters. For example, “-sb-“ does not qualify as a CC if it is obtained by joining the final “-s” and the initial “b-“ of two adjacent words, as in “as buli” (Spend the night here).

### Admissible and Inadmissible CC's

Consonant clusters occur only in polysyllabic words, as in these two-syllable words ganna/abdii (winter/hope). They never occur in monosyllabic words such as bor/fon (tomorrow/meat). Another important fact is that Afaan Oromo permits clusters of only two consonants word medially. Clusters do not occur word initially and word finally. Table 2 shows both the admissible and the inadmissible CC's of the language. The “+” indicates that it is possible to blend the consonant on the vertical column with that on the horizontal column, in that order. In other words, these 115 CC's, e.g. “-bb-/-bd-“, as in dubbii/abdii (talk/hope), are permissible in Afaan Oromo. The “-“ shows that blending is inadmissible. There are 414 inadmissible clusters such as “-bc-/-cb-“.

Both the admissible and the inadmissible CC's are presented in Table 2.

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Table 2: Admissible and Inadmissible CC's

	b	c	ch	d	dh	f	g	h	j	k	l	m	n	ny	ph	q	r	s	sh	t	w	x	y
b	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	-
c	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ch	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
d	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
dh	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
f	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-
g	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
h	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
j	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
k	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
l	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	-
m	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-
n	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-
ny	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ph	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
q	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	+
r	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
s	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
sh	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
t	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
w	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	w	-
x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
y	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+

As can be seen from Table 2, clusters that begin with the letters “r-, n-, l-, f-, m- are” the most dominant/numerous in the language. More specifically, 18, 14, 15, 10, 10 clusters are formed with “r-, n-, l-, f-, m-” respectively, as initial components of a CC whole, as in “-rb-“ (h)arba (elephant), “-nn-“ fannisu” (hang) and “-lm-“, galma (hall).

Eight consonants, namely, c, ch, dh, ny, s, sh, w, and y do not occur as initial component parts of a CC whole. In other words, in a C1C2 cluster, they do not occur as C1, though except for ny and w, the other six can occur as C2. However, all of these 8 and the other 14 consonants (barring h) can occur as geminates, i.e., as a doubled consonant sound, as in (h)adhdhaa (poison) and biyya (country). Incidentally, geminates are regarded as clusters in this paper.

On the opposite extreme, there is a lone phoneme, h, with which no consonant, including h itself, can combine to form a CC.

## CONSONANT CLUSTERS IN AFAAN OROMO

Another feature of this phoneme is that it is the only consonant that can optionally precede almost all the words that begin with a vowel and cause them to be pronounced as (h)VCC as in (h)iddu (to sting). In this paper, the parentheses round (h) indicate that it is possible to pronounce, for instance, (h)amma or amma, depending on the dialect of the speaker.

### Positions of Consonant Clusters in a Structure

As already stated, consonant clusters do not occur in monosyllabic structures; they occur only in polysyllabic structures. On the basis of a tally made/obtained from every 5th page in Oromo English Dictionary (Addis Ababa University printing Press, 1989), by Tilahun Gamta, there are 670 (38.90%), 829 (48.14%), 216 (12.54%), and 7 (0.41%) two-, three-, four-, and five-syllable words, respectively.

There are more consonant clusters (CC's) than there are single consonants (SC's) in most of these polysyllabic structures. The breakdown is as follows:

Polysyllabic Structures	No of Structures Containing CC's	No of Structures Containing SC's
Two-syllable	330 (49.30%)	340 (50.75%)
Three-syllable	554 (66.80%)	275 (33.17%)
Four-syllable	175 (81.02%)	41 (18.98%)
Five-syllable	7 (0.40%)	- -

### Three-syllable Structures

In terms of the positions of the CC's in the 554 three-syllable structures:4

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268 (48.38%) CC's fall between the 1st and the 2nd syllables, as in (h)abbuuqu (h)VCCVCV,(sip);

148 (26.71%) occur between the 2nd and the third syllables, as in sooromsu CVVCVCCV, (make rich); and

138 (24.91%) occur on both syllables simultaneously, as in fottoqsu CVCCVCCV, (rive).

### Four-syllable Structures

Of the 216 four-syllable words, only 41 are made up of SC's, as in (h)araaramu (h)VCVVCVVCV, (be reconciled) Consonant clusters

occur in the remaining 175 structures in various positions as detailed below:

In 34 words, CC's occur between the 1st and the 2nd syllables, as in buqqifatan CVCCVCVCVC, (they up rooted for self);

In 35 words, CC's occur between the 2nd and the 3rd syllables, as in (h)ijaarratan (h)VCVVCCVCVC, (they built for self);

In 29 words, CC's occur between the 3rd and the 4th syllables, as in garagalchu, CVCVCVCCV (to turn up side down);

In 22 words, CC's occur on both the 1st and the 2nd syllables simultaneously, as in cuffachchiisu, CVCCVCCVVCV (to cause to bite off);

In 16 words, CC's occur on both the 1st and the 3rd syllables, as in tattaafachchu, CVCCVCVCCV (to strive);

In 23 words, CC's occur on both the 2nd and the 3rd syllables, as in (h)aguuggachchu (to cover head); and

In 16 words, CC's fall on all the syllables; as in (h)ambabbessa, (h)VCCVCCVCCVV, (a kind of tree)

### Five-syllable Structures

Five-syllable structures are not common in the language. There























































## CONSONANT CLUSTERS IN AFAAN OROMO

As can be seen, Table 3 presents many useful linguistic facts. For example, it is possible to state as principles<sup>7</sup> that in the CaCC... environment when the CC is “-bb-“:

- (a) only words that begin in b-, c-, d-, dh-, g-, (h)a-, j-, l-, r-, s-, t-, y- are permissible;
- (b) words that begin in ch-, f-, k-, m-, n-, ny-, ph-, q-, sh-, w-, x-, are not permissible,
- (c) when the consonant cluster is -bd-, no word is allowed in a CeCC... environment; and
- (d) that in a CVCC/VVCC... environment in Table 3, vowels do not occur word initially when the CC is fl, fq, gl,kf, ld, lj,lph, lx, mc, mj, mx, nj,phn,qf, rsh, rx, sk, and xn.

Many other interesting and useful observations can be made. For instance, one can state that:

- (e) in a CVCC.../CVVCC... environment, words that have bch, bj, bsh, db, fq, fr, fsh,gl,gr,lph,nch, msh, rph in them are the least common in the language;
- (f) the CC's labeled g, namely, bd, bn, dn, fn, ft, gd, gn, jn, kn, kt, mn, sn are more common as grammatical structures rather than as lexemes, important information for a lexicographer who may decide not to include grammatical items in his/her dictionary;
- (g) when the clusters bs, fs, gs, ks, ms, ns, qs, rs, are preceded by a syllable with a short vowel in it and when the causative form is to be used, the causative indicator “-iis-“ is affixed e.g sobsiisu (cause to lie); and
- (h) that when the clusters listed under (g) are preceded by a syllable with a long vowel in it and when the causative form is to be used, however, the causative indicator “-is...” is affixed e.g mooqsisu (cause to paddle).

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### Conclusions

Those who are seriously interested in the written development of Afaan Oromo have to study details such as consonant clusters which, to some may seem a needless drudge. The writer, who incidentally has been highly fascinated by this useful but laborious research that has taken him almost six months to complete, strongly believes that it is futile to attempt to resolve the burning issue of standardization without such data. Thanks to *qube*, an Oromo alphabet adapted from Latin, a scientific description is now possible because the vowels and the consonants, unlike the Amharic syllabary in which each of the 287 symbols represents both vowel and consonant, are separate and distinct.



## CONSONANT CLUSTERS IN AFAAN OROMO

### End Notes

1 Professor John Fanselow, Teachers College, Columbia University, not only read the manuscript and made invaluable comments, but also helped the writer in elaborating on the purpose of this article. The writer is most grateful for this.

2 Abercombie, David. 1968. *Elements of General Phonetics*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 74-75.

3 The writer is very grateful to Professor Dick Hayward, SOAS, University of London, whose constructive suggestions have enhanced the quality of this paper.

4 There is no need for reporting position as regards two-syllable words because, in any case, single consonants and consonant clusters only occur between the 1st and the 2nd syllables, as in *bara* CVCV and *torba* CVCCV. Of course as already stated, 49% of two-syllable words contain consonant clusters.

5 The Oromo words in Table 3 are not glossed for lack of space. The English equivalent of almost all of these words can be found in *Oromo English Dictionary* (1989) or in *Galmee Jechoota Afaan Oromo* (1996) (GJAO). As a part time employee of the Ministry of Culture for over two years, the writer spent a lot of effort editing GJAO, originally written in Amharic syllabary which made the work look like an algebra book because of the diacritical marks used to indicate gemination, length, etc. Fortunately, it is later changed to *qube*, thus making the work perhaps the only Oromo-Oromo dictionary written in *qube* to date.

6 Tentatively, it can be stated that the sound represented by the symbol “ ‘ ” could very well be an abbreviated form of “ -dh- “. In other

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words, what could have been said or written as “baldhaa”, for example, must have been shortened to “ba’la”. Other examples include “baaldhaa, dildhu, faldhaana, jaaldhachu, maldhato, mildhu, qalldhaa”, normally written as “baal’aa, dil’u, fal’aana, jaal’achu, mal’ato, mil’u, qal’aa”. Similarly, “r” could be considered as an abbreviated form of “-rdh-”. Thus, what we now write as “har’a” or “mar’achu” could be the abbreviated form “hardha” or “mardachu”

7 Principles that can be stated vary with the kind of template used. If, instead of CVCC ..., for instance C1VC2V ... is selected, it is possible to state that in a C1aC2V ... environment when C2 is “d”, words that begin in c-, ch-, dh-, j-, l-, ph-, r-, sh- are not permissible in the language. In other words, there are no words like cada, chade, dhadaa, jadii, lado, aphadaa, radu, shadu.

## THE COALITION OF COLONIZED NATIONS: THE SIDAMA PERSPECTIVE\*

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Seyoum Hameso

Little is known about the Sidama nation, its people, history, and culture because it has been systematically underdeveloped by Ethiopian history and historiography. This lack of information resulted in enormous confusion and ambiguity in identifying the people, their culture, their history and contemporary developments underlying change and continuity in the political economy of this nation. Relentless efforts by Oromo scholars, enabled to locate Oromo studies, but little is known or made known of the other colonized nations in Ethiopia. This paper aims to address the void in the articulation of the historical and current condition of the Sidama people by making data and reasoning accessible to the general public.

At the same time, by elaborating enormous problems posed by successive Habasha rule, different possible courses of action are indicated. In order to counteract what have been unleashed in the form of social injustice, political corruption, economic predation and poverty, the future progress of the Sidama nation lies in directing concerted efforts towards the attainment of cultural self-respect, political self-government, and freedom to design appropriate economic policies. The attainment of these objectives requires designing a broader political strategy. This paper focuses on the Sidama perspective, and on building a coalition; nonetheless, this paper is not intended as a political manifesto. If it looks one, it is only because of the political approach adopted in view of the problem at hand. Like any other intellectual enterprise, the current effort is neither conclusive nor all-inclusive. In order to arrive at the necessity of a coalition, readers are advised to

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thoroughly examine and compare the common patterns in the other colonized nations and that of Sidama.

### **Background to The Sidama Nation**

The Sidama nation is situated in northeast Africa, the southern part of Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup> The population is estimated at 4 million. This estimate is based on the sample survey carried out in November 1995 by the Sidama Development Program.<sup>2</sup> Another source takes the 1989 population estimate of Ethiopia of which Oromos make up 40 per cent, Amharas 25 per cent, Tigres 12 per cent and Sidamas 9 per cent.<sup>3</sup> The US State Department source takes the 1995 population estimate of Ethiopia as 55 million of which Sidamas account for 8 per cent (about 4.4 million).<sup>4</sup>

These figures contradict the official Ethiopian population data that are inaccurate and statistically deficient. For example, the 1984 census puts the Sidama population at 1.5 million. Recent Ethiopian official figures report 2.5 million. Both the old and new official figures are inaccurate. First, the counts did not include areas involved in armed conflicts. Secondly, they intentionally did not reflect social reality, thus succumbing to the political sensitivity of the ruling circles. Whenever politics weighs heavily important data, including censuses, could be fiddled with or massaged both at the design and implementation stages. The data favor the 'politically correct' group by understating the 'politically wrong' group.

According to a recent study, the Sidama country covers an area of about 16,000 square kilometers.<sup>5</sup> A significant part of the Sidamaland lies at altitudes of 4,500 feet to 10,000 feet. A significant part of the Sidamaland involves highlands and midlands. Much of the lowlands are located in the East African Great Rift Valley. The highlands exhibit high levels of rainfall while the contrary is the case for the lowlands despite several undeveloped water sources.

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The Sidama country shares common territorial boundaries with Oromia in the north and east, with Wolayita in the west, and the Gedeo country in the south. Geographically, Sidama has a variety of landscapes, lakes, big rivers, and climatic zones. Major rivers flow from the highlands and lakes in and around Sidama. They include Loggita, Gambeltu, Gennale, Colla, and Gidawo. The bigger lakes are Hawwasa (often referred to Awasa) and Lake Abaya. This diverse natural environment constitutes an evergreen nation with all varieties of tropical vegetation. Sidama is rich in resources suitable for agriculture, mining, industry, and other modern service sectors. It produces foodstuffs, fruits and vegetables, cereals, and cash crops. Wesse is the main staple food while coffee is the major export product.

### Map of Sidama



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### History, People, Culture and Language

Sidama has a long and rich oral history. Written records on and about Sidama are contemporary phenomena. Historical and cultural research has been severely circumvented by Habasha colonial domination. The Habasha system has undervalued and undermined knowledge creation and dissemination on the non-Habasha cultures and societies. From a scanty literature made available to us by foreign scholars (most studies are of social anthropological vintage), we learn that the Sidama were given different names. A browse through the works of scholars like John Hamer, Jan Brogger, Norberto Vecchiato, Ulrich Braukamper, G. Hudson, S. Stanley, and E. Cerulli indicate the use of different names at different times<sup>6</sup>

John Hamer noted the problem of nomenclature in his later works and agreed to the usage of the name used by the Sidamas themselves.<sup>7</sup> For a long time, however, scholars used terms like Sadama, Sidamo or referred to one of the Cushitic-speaking peoples of Southern Ethiopia. What is more ambiguous is the use of the term 'Sidamo' to describe the Cushitic language group(s) which in addition to 'Sidamo' proper also includes Hadiya, Kambata, Alaba, Darasa and Bambala and sometimes to their neighbors to the west: the Ometo, Kafa, Gibe, and Janjero.<sup>8</sup> Among Sidama intellectuals, Betana Hamano openly criticizes the lack of precision in the naming of Sidama and the general lack of useful sources of Sidama studies.<sup>9</sup> The problem of nomenclature is noted not only among scholars, but also in popular parlance. No wonder that the Habasha rulers and their historians deliberately refused to recognize Sidama, preferring to use the term Sidamo. This is a mere geographic description given to a southern province which includes five to six southern nations.<sup>10</sup> The problem of terminology also exists with an Oromo usage of the term Sidama referring to Amharas, to strangers, or to enemies.<sup>11</sup>

Partly as a result of intentional discouragement in studying Sidama society in the past, informed debate on the Sidama political

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economy was bound to rely on oral tradition, rituals, and symbols all of which remain a matter of further research.<sup>12</sup> There is no doubt that the Sidama have lived in their present environment for centuries with inevitable internal and external population movements affecting their settlement. The available written sources do not give precise and conclusive periods as to the internal movements and settlements.

From the external dimension, the most critical and one of the most perverse events in the Sidama historical account was the conquest by the army of Menelik in 1893 that brought about the colonial system of *gabbar-nafxanya*.<sup>13</sup> The conquest resulted in the promotion of the authoritarian ethos of Habasha values of a master-slave relationship and the demotion of the Sidama system of governance inculcated in *balaale* ideology<sup>14</sup> and the *Luwa* system.<sup>15</sup> The latter has elements of egalitarianism and consultative decision-making that are also similar to the *Gada* system.<sup>16</sup> Sidamas still value these belief systems despite Menelik's Orthodoxization which hardly goes "beyond the sphere of influence of the military colonists (*chewa*) from the northern Ethiopia".<sup>17</sup>

In terms of culture and language, the Sidama people, like other comparable social groups, possess a tradition of tracing their origins to common ancestors. The Sidama language serves in maintaining common cultural values. Except for local differences of accent and local dialect, the Sidama language is spoken by almost all of the Sidama population. Much of the cultural ethos of Sidamas is based on community life. In terms of belief, as Hamer points out, Sidamas believe 'in a creator sky deity, *Magano*, who once lived on earth, but returned to the sky after people continued to complain about having to make a choice between reproduction and eternal life'.<sup>18</sup> The production of a cash crop economy as well as the expansion of non-Orthodox Christian denominations have influenced the beliefs, the day-to-day activities, the attitudes, and the reactions of the people.<sup>19</sup>

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### Economy

The majority of Sidamas depend on agriculture for their economic welfare, but this sector is neglected by policy makers. It has remained almost exclusively rain-fed without proper investment and a suitable land-use policy. On the other hand, a single and heavy-handed emphasis is placed on procuring the products of the land and of peasant laborers.

The existence of huge arable land enabled the growth of indigenous plants like *wesse* (or *insete*, a plant resembling a banana tree and the source of staple food, *wassa*) and a variety of other cereals and crops. The main cash crop is coffee. Sidamas produce large quantities and a high quality of coffee for world markets. Yet those who produce it suffer from it rather than benefitting from the revenues. In the seventies and the eighties, coffee prices were centrally fixed substantially below world market prices. Farmers' pay was meager in comparison to the world coffee prices. The pricing policy itself was an added tax to the producers. On the other hand, the Sidama farmers were forced to pay for rising prices of industrial products and services with disastrous terms of trade. During those tumultuous years of *Derg* rule, this author observed farmers resorting to cutting down coffee trees to replace them with other food stuff items. While a heavy burden of taxation forced them to continue producing coffee, low fixed prices discouraged them from improving their productivity.

Mixed agriculture is practiced in much of Sidama country with cattle rearing in the lowlands. In these areas, there are severe health hazards both for humans and for animals. Malaria is endemic and claims thousands of lives every year. Health facilities are inadequate in relation to the population numbers and density. It is a surprising fact that the capital, Hawwasa had no hospital; and until quite recently, the only hospital was based in Dale (Yirgalem). This hospital was supported by foreign aid.



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Other forms of infrastructure, including transportation and construction are not developed. In the rural areas, few all-weather roads exist and these are designed to facilitate easy access for coffee transportation. Currently, even these roads are out of use because of lack of maintenance. They were constructed exclusively in coffee-growing midlands, not highlands or lowlands. There is only one highway which connected the Ethiopian capital, Finfinne, (Addis Ababa), to Moyaale, a border town of Kenya, passing through Sidama. No rail connection exists and there is no airport. There is no public transport even in Hawwasa City where the private sector is ill equipped in the provision of the services. There are hardly construction industries. For that matter there are barely modern industries. A textile factory was set up a few years ago as a show project catering for external market with little backward and forward linkages to the local economy. There are no central coffee processing and exporting plants except numerous primary coffee processors that are badly managed and riddled with corruption

### **Sidama in Ethiopian Historiography**

Ethiopian studies ignore the issues of the colonized nations Sidama studies have been virtually absent for serious treatment, and even for mere academic purposes. In a similar case, Shack noted that "lack of critical scholarship had inadvertently distorted the human achievements of conquered peoples like the Oromo, including transformations of their social, cultural and political institutions" <sup>21</sup>

From the Sidama perspective, the contemporary Ethiopian empire state was formed when the army of Menelik conquered the Sidama and other free nations. The patterns and effects of this conquest coincided with European colonial rule in Africa. Keller argues that "The Ethiopian state as we know it was the result of a unique case of African imperialism."<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, Habasha settler colonialism led to the confiscation of land from the rightful owners and its distribution among

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armed settlers. In Sidama, this dispossession was followed by severe coercion against dissent. While easy-go collaborationists were co-opted, local chiefs were arbitrarily picked, baptized, and given foreign titles such as *balabats* and *dejazmatchs*. State and church were fused and imposed to reinforce the physical, cultural and spiritual slavery in the conquered lands. The same happened elsewhere in Africa as Ngugi wa Thiongo notes:

Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent military dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relation to others. For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer.<sup>23</sup>

When European colonialism physically departed from the rest of Africa in the mid-1950s, the Habasha colonial rule and settlers still remain in Sidama as well as in other colonized nations. The legacy of colonial domination and exploitation was maintained and upgraded by the "modernizing autocracy" of Haile Selassie, first as a regent to the imperial throne and later as an emperor. The collective memory of the Sidama of this "modernization" is the modernization of their oppression. This author recalls a lamentation by a Sidama elder. Speaking of what has changed since Menelik, he said that people do not travel to Shawa to pay tribute, "giwire," but that the tax collector has come to their homes alongside a semi-police officer. They improved methods of exaction, namely, the system of tax collection, army recruitment, and bureaucratic personnel. In these periods, land

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dispossession, force, myth and external support were essential means to maintain the spoils of the conquest

With the advent of what might be called, the military revolution in the 1974, Mengistu Hailemariam, an army colonel and admirer of the brutal conquerors before him, took over the empire ruling and ruining it in a Soviet style, Marxist-Leninist ideology. In the name of building a socialist state, severe repression, villagization, militarization, and massive poverty were imposed on the people. In this task, the *Derg* military regime counted on massive aid in terms of armaments, military personnel, and economic and political support from the “socialist bloc”. Despite its support, the demise of the *Derg* was inevitable. Soon it was replaced by other northern elites that have been effectively locked out of imperial power for almost a century.

The year 1991 is noted for the ascendance to power of the Tigayan insurgency movement. Perhaps no Habasha regime came closer to the correct diagnosis of the fundamental problems of the empire, but none has failed like it. The very nature of the formation of the empire state precluded the TPLF/EPRDF leadership from reckoning with the past misdeeds. In its bid to assume central power, the TPLF regime pretended to echo the fashionable rhetoric of “competitive” politics and economics. If true political democracy, and freedom of economic enterprise were to become the rule, the TPLF thought that it would lose. Hence it soon thwarted all genuine moves in that direction. Yet, it did not stop bantering about freedom, peace and democracy. Looking at the performance of the last few years, one could see how hollow the claims have been for there is no place for mundane freedoms of political and civil rights such as freedom of association, freedom of information, and freedom of the press. On the contrary, repression, creating and propping up surrogate parties, building Tigray at the expense of the devastation of others in the guise of ‘free market economy’ along with embezzlement and corruption are common.

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**Table: Summary of Main Events in Ethiopian Empire: 1890s-1990s**

NOTABLE PERIODS	POLITICS	ECONOMY	PEOPLE	CULTURE/ LANGUAGE
Emperor Menelik (1890s-1913)	Conquest: medieval feudalism; foreign military support	Slave Trade; <i>gabbar/nafsunya</i> system; compulsory labor	War-lordism; destruction and death; land expropriation	Imposition of conqueror's culture, language and religious beliefs on oppressed nations
Haile Selassie (1920s-1974)	Consolidation of absolutist state; feudalism, force external political military support	Modernisation of few economic sectors and areas	Modernised domination; expropriation of land and property; famine	Promotion of Amhara values and language and culture in social and political life
Mengistu Hailemariam (1974-1991)	Military dictatorship/brutal aggression: military/force; external support	State ownership forced co-ops villagization; military conscription; foreign aid	Repression; red & white' terror; war and genocide; famine and hunger	Acculturation systematic repression of oppressed national cultures and languages
Meles, Zenawi (1991-?)	Faceless dictatorship; colonial federalism; northern rule: diplomatic and military support	TPLF cadre enrichment; widening poverty; environmental damage; foreign aid	Repression force; exaction flagrant human rights abuses; genocide	Superficial recognition of national languages and cultures; rising tide of 'wind of change'

The table above describes the main events that underlie the transfer of power among subsequent Ethiopian regimes and their effects on the social, political and economic patterns in Sidama as in the rest of the colonized nations. The problems lie in the formation and the operation of the empire

## **The Problems of Empire**

If we perceive the problems caused by the empire in terms of the fashionable standards of the day: democracy, peace, development, and freedom, we find that these are the very terms upon which consecutive regimes of Ethiopian empire state have faltered.

First, let us ask if the empire system and democratic practices augur well. The answer is obtained by looking into what democracy entails. It is important for democracy that the population consents to the political structure proposed to it. Has there ever been a time when the nations and people within the Ethiopian empire were asked to consent? Was the empire formed on consensual basis? The answers are decidedly no. This is contrary to the assertions by the military government of stage-managed elections, or claims by the EPRDF government, that the elections of 1992, 1993 and 1995 constitute the consent of the people.

Owing to its very nature, colonial rule knows no consent. If asked to consent, people will vote for themselves and that is not good enough for the rulers. As the logical corollary to this, if consent does not exist, why should a person be compelled to obey rules? What is the basis for legitimacy of such rule? None whatsoever. In the absence of legitimacy, the empire system relies on force, coercion, and depends on anachronistic tradition, and manipulative marriage. These remained the central elements to the edifice of the empire. All of these are illegitimate and at times they are immoral. To reform the Ethiopian empire in a democratic manner is an uphill, almost non-winnable race for any social reformer. It is immediately not clear how the system founded on cruelty, one which was framed to denigrate humanity, one which denies and decries human cultures and languages outside of itself, could be rectified in any way short of eventually resorting to the people's right to national self-determination -- a democratic right par excellence. This is a logical conclusion because the current government like its predecessors, is undemocratic, repressive, and it is therefore not based

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on the consent of the governed.<sup>24</sup> The current wave of repression of independent media, cruel methods used against notable personalities, intellectuals, and elderly people from the colonized nations, the refoulement of refugees from neighboring states, and so on, is reminiscent of the heavy-handed tendency inculcated in Habasha body politics.<sup>25</sup>

Peace is another elusive issue with the contemporary Ethiopian empire State. Peace implies stability and that people go on their daily businesses without fear of violence and death. But the horrific century of imperial/colonial history of Ethiopia is hardly one of peace, stability and tranquillity. On the contrary, it has been one where feuding northern warlords extended instability, warfare, and accompanying famine to the surrounding territories guided by militarist ethos often given to civil strife, violent repression, and subsequent external intervention.

Development is another indicator for measuring performance. Taking per capita income levels for purposes of international comparisons, it is evident where the residents of the empire state led their subjects: to rank last or nearly the last in the league of world nations. Even when development is assumed to exist, it has been extremely lopsided, often based on shanty-towns close to the center of power holders. We have a situation where extreme poverty prevails hand in hand with unabashed prosperity of a predatory Habasha class manipulating political power. No time has this been magnified as in the contemporary era where predation, corruption, and crippling dependence on external alms have exposed different societies, including the Habasha-cum-Ethiopian poor, to the vagaries of severe poverty and uncertainty.

Still on the economic front, bad governance engenders bad economic and social policies. Destructive wars in different fronts have consumed vital resources. They also have wrecked havoc in societies by forcibly fragmenting families, the basic units of society. Forced collectivization carried out by the *Derg* ruined the fabric of rural life by

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imposing unduly artificial and alien constructs, and by taking the land of the people and rendering them landless (we note that land is still the property of the state which decides on its use and lease). For much of the imperial era, for instance, the land ownership system in the north was based on what is called the "rist" system (one of individual and communal land ownership) while a different system operated in the majority of South (a system of tenancy where the armed settlers and the imperial state owned most of the land and where the people had the right to till and toil for subsistence).

Some changes were introduced by the *derg* which partly demolished the Habasha feudal state system but replaced it with Ethiopian-cum-Habasha 'communist' state system. Land was then become the state property. The *derg* not only fiddled with land, but also with its products. These were done through agricultural marketing and pricing policies, the system of heavy taxation, pervasive social controls through so-called peasants and urban dwellers "associations." The EDRDF was initially cautious to change the land policy of the military regime in spite of ceaseless pressure from the formerly advantaged Amhara elite for rapid sale of land, particularly in the South and in the towns. This regime seems more concerned with what follows a change in land holding system than the long-term welfare of the people. It rather concentrates on the speedy and short-term exploitation of the resources of the lands thus leading to environmental degradation, pollution and health hazards. All these combined have negative effects on the actual and potential situation in the economic welfare of the oppressed people.

What about freedom? If one perceives freedom in terms of individual civil liberties and collective rights of a society or community, the latter includes the right to choose the system of governance. Western liberalism places an emphasis on the individual with the presumption that the state, which is also assumed to be a social guardian, will take care of society and collective rights. But the situation at hand is different. A state in the many parts of post-colonial Africa in

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general, and in Ethiopia in particular is not representative of its resident peoples. Instead, it serves as a personal fiefdom of despots owned by members of a certain, often ethno-national community. It is such a state which denies not only the expression of individual identity, but also the national or communal identity of the colonized nations.

In the case of Ethiopia, imperial politics produce and perpetuate poverty, ignorance and anti-democratic tendencies. What we have witnessed, so far, is the perpetuation of an extractive state run by the northern-based elite. The southern nations are exposed to the vagaries of nation-building elsewhere, not to mention repayment of the debt incurred by past irresponsible regimes to buy armaments to keep and control the south. In effect, amoral power holders have stayed in power with their equally immoral values and norms that are not of enterprise but of officialdom, not of appraisal but of contempt for the common man. This *lumpen* class upholds an instrumentalist world view where everything in the lands is for manipulation including the family, state, language and society. In this context, we see what the TPLF rule is causing to the Sidama nation.

### The Current Regime and its Policy in Sidama

While noting some positive changes initiated by the current regime, in comparison to the age-old habasha rule, the prevailing picture does not give room for fulfilment. The following are details of what is occurring in Sidama since the replacement of an overly arrogant central rule by a deceptive federal one. First, in economic terms, the TPLF regime continues to underdevelop the Sidama nation. Earnings from the vital products of the nation, such as coffee, hides, and skin finance projects in the home towns of the ruling elite. At the same time, the Sidama farmers bear the long term cost of the transfer of wealth. Also, the human resources of Sidama are squandered to benefit the short-term interests of the ruling elite in the center. Educated persons and entrepreneurs are discouraged from their activities through different



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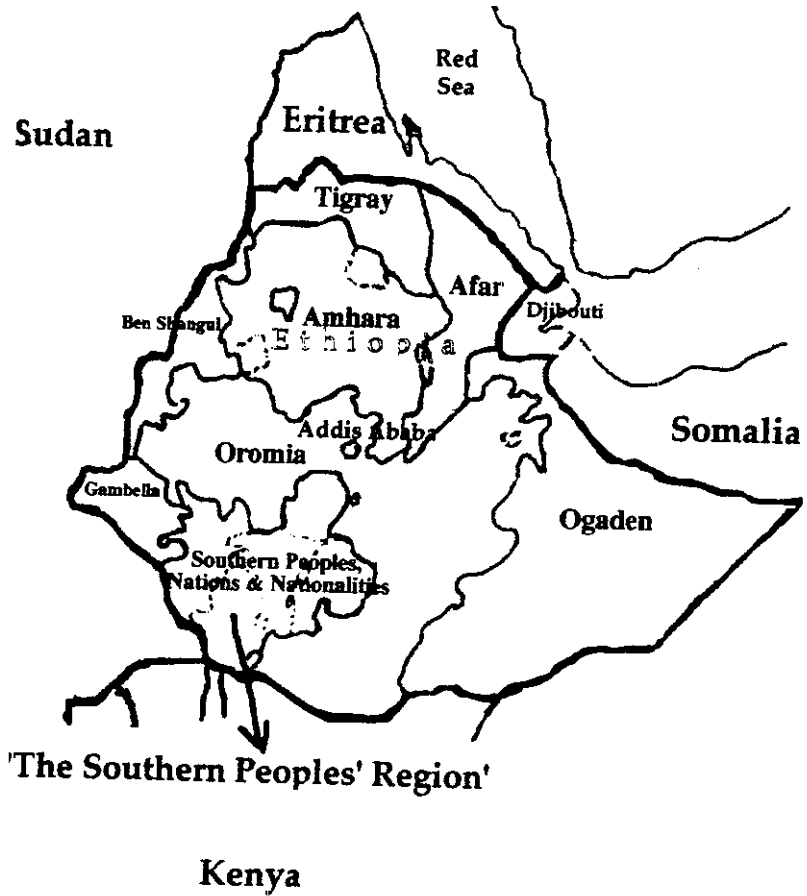
political and administrative measures. Despite vast potential resources, natural and human, the majority of the people remain poor while disease and famine visit some parts of Sidama. On the other hand, the Sidama were kept at a distance from the “garage” sale of former state property to the members and the supporters of the new regime in the policy of ‘privatization’.

Second, on political grounds, soon after and in some cases even before assuming power, the EPRDF manufactured surrogate parties. For Sidama, it created the Sidama People’s Democratic Organization (the Sidama version of the many PDOs). It armed, supported and financed this PDO while terrorizing other groups, including the members and supporters of the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) and independents. In this task, it used prisoners of war and people who earned little or no respect from the populace. By promoting subservient personalities, it demoted the bright, independent, and creative people. Deceptive, weak and passive characters were advertised to the Sidama society as models to follow. Active, creative and inquisitive thinking is denigrated. This is but part of the systematic abuse of Sidama’s national potential.

Being unstable itself, the TPLF regime continues to harass, detain and intimidate the Sidama people who question the validity or the legitimacy of its rule. It worked to undermine the symbols of Sidama nationhood. This is done throughout the so-called Southern Region which is nothing but an amalgam of different people and cultures. Typical of Habasha strategy, to weaken Sidama nationalism and that of other colonized nations, this multi-ethnic amalgam uses a colonial language, Amharic, as its lingua franca because it found it impractical to use all other languages of the constituent nine, or so, different groups. Moreover, the new northern settlers in the nation do not speak the Sidamuaffo, the Sidama language, and urge the use of Amharic as an official language and the medium of education. This has direct bearing on the future of the Sidama language <sup>26</sup>

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## MAP: Southern Peoples' Region



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Third, through one of its clone organizations, the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Front (SEPDP), the TPLF/EPRDF took over the Sidama national capital, Hawwasa. This has contributed to unplanned growth of slums, shanty areas, the spread of diseases, environmental pollution, and congestion in the capital. Plans to make Hawwasa a regional administrative capital under the control of the central government heightened insecurity among Sidamas since they have grave consequences for the nation's economic, political and social development.

Fourth, the regime has continued to create and spread discord and conflict among the colonized nations, for example, between Sidamas and Oromos who live in adjacent territories. The regime sponsors conflict (even warfare) while it later enters the conflict as a do-good, non-partisan mediator. Several prominent Sidamas have lost their lives in these incidents. This author recalls the death of widely respected individuals, such as Fissa Ficho and Gassa in such skirmishes. The old Habasha tactic has always been to separate the oppressed nations from each other so that they cannot initiate a common struggle. The Habasha government has been encouraging educated Sidamas to be ignorant of their near neighbors (i.e., the Oromo, Kaficho, Wolayita, Hadiya, their cultures, histories) while laboring to teach them, the language and the values of the oppressors from the north.

If memory serves us well, those few people who joined the only university in the empire were forced to study colonial history and language. During the *derg* rule, many of Sidama students who graduated were dispatched to the north where they hardly come back to visit their families in Sidama. This trend was temporarily reversed with the ascendance to power of the EPRDF, but then the development of Sidama's human resources are blocked by political considerations. Those who are put in decision-making positions are either incompetent or corrupt. They are there because they are "acceptable" to the center. The misuse and abuse of human resource potential is evident.

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The concentration of the administrative personnel of the so-called Southern Peoples Region in Hawwasa without the commensurate provision of socio-economic facilities is contributing to hitherto unheard of social evils: prostitution, drug abuse, unethical drug trade, and unemployment. Furthermore, unplanned and unwarranted expansion of the town has resulted in the displacement of Sidamas. The sense of unease and despair are reflected in popular apathy on matters of practical significance; adherence to a fatalistic world view which surrenders all solutions to even simple worldly problems to the supernatural has increased. A multitude of semi-religious organizations preach the virtues of partial slavery on earth on the promise of emancipation in another planet. The most subversive and even perverse of all is the credo of a church whose leaders call themselves adherents of the "Full Gospel." This takes place in Sidama while the ruling regime protects the traditions and religious faiths of the north from undesirable external influences. The time has arrived when people have become beggars in their homes. What is worse than the famous slogan of "Ethiopia or Death?" Death, the inevitable, is posed as a choice in a necessarily fundamentalist world view. They are not choices; the Sidama people have suffered from both.

The author argues that no government formed and based on the Habasha capital, be it Meqele, Gondar or Shoa, can hope to bring about democracy, development and prosperity to the Sidama nation. On the contrary, the very concept of a Sidama nation is antithetical to the tenets of centralism, predation and exclusion unique to the empire state system. What is needed is a way of articulating the solutions and presenting them to the wider public in the most palatable language possible. For we do not intend to form an autarchy or a separate island, we have to deal with national and international concerns about building a coalition.

### **The Coalition: The Sidama Perspective**

The Sidama nation, like other deeply aggrieved nations, reserves the right to pursue and to achieve national self-determination. This need puts the Sidama nation at par with people who have similar problems, intents and aspirations. In order to achieve their goals and to change the current situation, a coalition of the colonized and equally aggrieved nations is vital. The belief remains that the future is better served if such nations pool their resources toward the attainment of self-respect. Alliance is not only necessary, it is almost indispensable, and it should aim at the right of the Sidama and other similiar nations to national self-determination, long denied by Ethiopian rulers.

Those who understand the need for and the urgency of such a coalition are welcome to join such a coalition, recognizing that the right to decide the destiny of the Sidama nation belongs to the Sidama people. They will decide as they see fit concerning the system of governance that will consider the aspirations of other colonized nations. But these choices will occur only outside the current apparatus of domination and colonial rule. The grounds to invoke the right to national self-determination are as follows:

First, the Sidama people, as part of other colonized peoples, have suffered systematic discrimination and abuse by the Habasha rule. They have been denied opportunities to improve their lot. It is now more evident than ever that the Sidama nation cannot expect to be served fairly by any northern-based colonial elite. No hope, progress, and freedom would be forthcoming from a predatory class that preaches ignorance, imposes darkness, and ignites violence. Neither decent living standards nor modern growth is foreseeable in the colonized nations with the dependent, militarist, poverty-perpetuating Habasha colonial rule. An unwavering belief is that the colonized nations can be served better only if they govern themselves, if they are ruled by the laws they set, by the language they speak, by the justice they

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trust and by their own people. No one knows one better than oneself, as the saying goes.

Second, the gap between the world views of the colonized nations and the predatory ones is widening; often melancholic, status-oriented, racist and conservative values are promoted by the latter. On the rise are also contested historical symbolization, aspirations and identification. For example, the heroes and symbols of oppressors from the center are the symbols of subordination of the colonized nations in the south, west, and at times even in the north. In other words, the symbols of pride of the oppressor are the very symbols of suffering and shame for the oppressed people. Few of the examples include Menelik's conquest, imposition of a belief system based on Coptic Orthodox Church, and the socio-linguistic dominance of Semitic language(s). Similarly, the perception of the past, the diagnosis of the current problems and prescriptions of solutions for the future, are divergent if not diametrically opposed. Domination is what the oppressed people inherited, but the current generation is wise enough not to bequeath these to posterity.

Even if there is cultural and ethnic diversity among many of the colonized nations, the central values of cultural and political traditions and the shared experience of domination promise a likely basis for unity of action. While similar perception of history leads to similar aspiration, the desire of an oppressed people for national self-determination stands in contrast to the wishes of the rulers who clamor about the disintegration of the 'motherland'. If disintegration is bad, then they have only themselves to blame because they made their 'motherland' so appalling to the majority of people in the oppressed nations. The people will form the best kind of unity based on free will. They will maintain unity because it is born out of their understanding and consent. Even when they make mistakes, they will learn through the process and they will defend that unity. People defend what they consent and what they know.

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Third, the ethnic affinity and geographic proximity of the colonized nations put their destiny together. Those who articulate the concerns and the future aspirations of oppressed people may need to work out formulas for peaceful survival and co-operation and the effort may need to start immediately. This will have several interconnected advantages. It promotes understanding of the past and the future of the colonized people; it preempts the likely conflicts arising from territorial claims and counter-claims; it will pool disparate resources for a united action; it will enable far-reaching social and political change in the nations concerned; it will render people to think and focus on long term development with peace

Fourth, the 'wind of change' or the growth of national consciousness in the colonized nations warrants change of significant proportions. A stage is arrived where the oppressed said: enough is enough. The people in the villages, in the towns, in the schools and almost in every part of the oppressed nations have begun to resist and to oppose the Habasha tyranny. As any one who observes the pattern of the world's famous social transformations would attest, this is a trend to look into with curiosity. The nationalism of colonized nations in the empire is in its prime since the cumulative effects of the past misdeeds exceeded any tolerable limits.

Therefore, individual nations that are bound by similar inheritance of colonial domination and cultural suppression, are required to understand their common problems and search for mutually intelligible solutions. Once this understanding is reached, then the need arises to work on common strategies to end tyranny. In this project of nationalist enterprise, popular solidarity rests first on ideas and principles. The national struggles of the colonized nations is a just struggle against century-old suffering and hardship at the hands of merciless and ruthless Ethiopian rulers. The respective peoples are united in the search for justice and against domination. They stand for freedom and democratic rights. Besides these principles, these nations are bound by ethnicity and cultural affinity, for there is no readily

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available reason why all the Cushitic-speaking nations should remain subservient to alien rule

Here ethnicity could serve as an organizing principle. Ethnic solidarity could be relied on to lead not only to freedom from domination and oppression but also, and more importantly, beyond that freedom. In this heroic but inevitable venture, the coalition may aim to include the international community. Being part of the world, particularly in the face of "economic globalization," one has to deal with it. In the past, there has been understandable reluctance by the outside world to recognize the cultural, political, and economic rights of "new" nations. The world state system is better suited to the status quo; it functions well with the existing frameworks but it is not immune to change. It adapts to changes when there is every reason to do so. For example, Eritrea in Africa, and many other new nation states in the then eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were added to the list of the United Nations. If there is a compelling internal case, the international/external environment is never a rigid stumbling block and this should be noted.

### **Conclusions**

Since coming into existence in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Ethiopian empire state system has been based on the paradigm of invasion, domination and exploitation of the subject people. These invasions have produced civil wars, and massive poverty, leading to starvation and hunger. The resources of the colonized nations were misappropriated while their peoples and their cultures were denigrated. Currently, the prospects for progress and for human improvement are effectively blocked by the ascendance of another power-hungry Tigrean elite which draws its social and political support from its homeland and from the outside world. Given this situation, the future of the colonized peoples would be better served if they pool their



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resources together toward the attainment of self-respect and self-determination.

The proposal to forge a united front is simple. It is to put forth effort and time to think and work for the betterment of all by constructing a system which is morally superior and lofty in its ideals. It is to form a viable long-lasting coalition. It is now abundantly clear that, bound by brotherhood and good neighborliness, the colonized nations should offer a lesson to the warring polity: a lesson of living in peace.

In all that is being written above, there is no reason to paint a rosy picture of bliss following the demise of Habasha tyranny. Leaders and opinion makers should discuss arrangements so that the future will be one of hope and enlightenment, not of despair, darkness and ignorance. They should seek to avoid future conflicts based on claims based on territory, language and economic relations among the peoples.

One should seek not only national self-determination for respective societies, but also nation-building. The task is not only to deconstruct but also to construct; it is not for destruction or disintegration but the formation and building of nations. The tasks are so monumental, and so noble, that we need to think of mechanisms of establishing consensus based on society-based organic unity rather than an unpalatable artificial union witnessed so far. The coalition can take several forms and it is the subject of discussion among the participants. The Sidama contribution toward that effort has been the creation and dissemination of information on aspects that have common effects, collaborating on mutual aims in terms of information provision, indicating the need to organize and arrive at memorandum of understanding between the like-minded organizations.

Practical implementation of much of the recommendations of this paper depends on far-sighted leadership. In every country in Africa, since independence in the fifties and sixties, political leadership has proven to be decisive for leading countries either to ruins or to

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prosperity. We expect the respective nationalist leaders and opinion formers to be acutely well-informed, accountable and responsible

Once the need for a coalition is agreed upon, the next important questions will ask: what forms will it take, and what implications will it have in the future? In the mean time, this is an issue for further discussion. From the Sidama perspective, I envision the types of coalition to take forms such as social/educational, intellectual co-operation, political co-operation based on continued consultation and even political union of loose federations with nations that share a common past and future aspirations. Otherwise, it is too early to set the precise picture of future arrangements. There is one certainty, however. Economic necessity requires that there will be strong economic co-operation and interaction among nations to reinforce political interaction.

### **Points for Discussion and Research**

1. Finding ways to promote scholarship and research on the problems and prospects of the nations under Ethiopian rule.
2. Developing a collaborative critical research and scholarship on original cultural foundations of colonized societies so that democratic cultural values and norms that will assist the formation of coalition and political alliance will be identified and developed.
3. Focusing on clearing several sources of distortions and misunderstanding pushed upon the people by the colonial rulers to divide and rule. For instance, derogatory usage of the term Sidama should be discouraged in political and cultural discourse including in music and dance.

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4. Designing strategies that assure the colonized nations of living and working peacefully in the future in a friendly and good neighborly atmosphere. This includes preempting potential conflicts arising from territorial claims and counter-claims for the good of the respective societies, their long-term stability, peace and prosperity

### **END NOTES**

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1. In this paper, we refer to nation as the concept involving a people with common language, culture, shared history and political peoplehood. (I dealt with the terminology of nations and nationalism in other publications: See, for example, S. Hameso, *Ethnicity and nationalism in Africa* New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1997. See also *Ethnicity in Africa: Towards a positive approach*. London: TSC Publications, 1997). The main elements of Sidama nationhood are all prevalent today despite a century of Habasha colonial rule which subjected the Sidama to relentless oppression and domination. Under the circumstances, the terms nation and country are used interchangeably, so are the oppressed and colonized people/nations.

2 See, for example, the Sidama Development Program, *A Socioeconomic Profile*, Hawwasa, July 1996, see also *the Sidama Concern*, Vol. 2, No. 1, April 1997, pp. 5-6. The survey further shows that of the 3.7 million population, 50.9% were males and 49.1% females. Note that the Addis Ababa based Ethiopian statistical figures for Sidama are stuck in a stationary 1.5 million people. The Sidama Development Program is run by Sidamas supported by

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external development assistance which, as it now stands, seems unique in the history of foreign aid. This program is the only cushion against extremely unfavourable political atmosphere from the center. The program offers, inter alia, basic education and health services, development planning, data publication and information provision, women- and poverty-oriented development activities. We believe that the program contributes to improvement of economic welfare.

- 3 *The Hutchinson Encyclopedic Dictionary*, London: BCA, 1991, p.368.
- 4 U.S. Department of State, *Country Profile: Ethiopia*, Released by the Bureau of African Affairs, December 4, 1997.
- 5 Sidama Zone Planning office, Awasa, 1997. Precisely for the same reasons of lack of documented information, we have been forced to use different figures including 7,000 sq km and 10,000 sq km. The figure of 15,588 sq km was arrived at after Sidama wide survey carried out by the above mentioned office.
- 6 See among others, works by John Hamer, Jan Brogger, Norberto vecchiato, Ulrich Braukamper, G. Hudson, S. Stanley, E. Cerulli, et al.
- 7 See for example, John Hamer, 'Inculcation of ideology among the Sidama of Ethiopia', in *Africa*, 66 (4), 1996.
- 8 A.Tucker and M. Brayan, *The Non-Bantu Languages of North Eastern Africa*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1956. See also Jan Brogger, *Belief and Experience among the Sidamo: A Case Study Towards an Anthropology of Knowledge*. Norwegian University Press, 1986, p. 22. Oslo; and P. Murdock, *Africa: Its People and their Culture History*, New York, 1959, p.123.
- 9 Betana Hoteso, *Sidama: Its People and its Culture*, Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Press, 1990, [in Amharic]. Currently, Sidama studies are developing in the Sidama Diaspora. A quarterly publication, *The Sidama Concern*, has established contacts among the Sidamas as well as scholars keen on Sidama studies.

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- 10 For these accounts, see Hallalle Shanqo, 'The Sidama Chronicle: Part I & II' in Seyoum Hameso, *Notes on Empire and other Stories*, London, 1996, pp.15-23. See also *The Sidama Concern*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1 and 2, 1996.
- 11 See Gamachu B Tuke, 'Sidama and Oromo: A problem of Name', *The Sidama Concern*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1996. In his core study area, Kembata-Hadiya, Braukamper uses terms like 'strangers' and 'enemy' as relating to the word Sidama. See U. Braukamper, 'The Ethnogenesis of the Sidama', *Cabier*, No 9, 1978. The author of this paper upholds the view that such a usage needs to be discouraged in popular Oromo parlance.
- 12 A gap still persists in the knowledge creation about the historiography, about the studies of economic, social and cultural values, about the importance of local knowledge in offering solutions to the different problems.
- 13 The term refers to tenant-settler-soldiers relationship.
- 14 Professor John Hamer defines halaale ideology as principles of a moral code governing the relationship between people. The term halaale literally means 'truth' or 'a true way of life'. See J. Hamer, 'commensality, process and the moral order: An example from Southern Ethiopia,' *Africa*, 64 (1) 1994, pp 126-144. Also J. Hamer, "Inculcation of ideology among the Sidama of Ethiopia," *Africa*, 66 (4), 1996, pp. 526-551.
- 15 Generation age grade system which bestows authority on wisdom, often emanating from age.
- 16 See *The Sidama Concern*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1997, pp.6-7 for comparisons. Asmarom Legesse provides a classic work on the Gada system. See A. Legesse, *Gada: Three approaches to the study of African society*, New York: Free Press, 1973.
- 17 Ulrich Braukamper, 'Aspects of religious syncretism in southern Ethiopia', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXII, 3, 1992, p.197

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- 18 For this aspect see John and Erene Hamer, Impact of a cash economy on complementary gender relations among the Sadama of Ethiopia, in *Anthropological quarterly*, The Catholic University of America Press, 1994, p.188
- 19 Hamer, *ibid.*
- 20 Discussion with a health worker from Sidama, July, 1997.
- 21 William Shack, quoted in Asafa Jalata, 'The struggle for knowledge: the case of emergent Oromo studies', in *The African Studies Review* Vol. 39, No.2, 1996 p. 95.
- 22 Edmond Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From empire to people's republic* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, p.45.
- 23 Ngugi wa Thiongo, N. *Decolonizing the mind. The Politics of Language and African Cultural Literature*, London: James Currey, 1986, p. 16.
- 24 See Trevor Trueman, 'Democracy or dictatorship', in Seyoum Hameso, et al (eds) *Ethiopia: conquest and the quest for freedom and democracy*, TSC Pubs., London, 1997, pp. 141-52.
- 25 See the publications of *the Sagaalee Haaraa* and Urgent Action newsletters of the Oromia Support Group, Malvern, UK. The reports by *Africa Watch*, *Amnesty International* and other organizations represent the human dimensions of the human rights violations by the Ethiopian regimes.
- 26 Seyoum Hameso. A talk given to the London International Book Fair seminars, March 1997. See also S. Hameso, 'The language of Education in Africa: The key issues', in *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, Vol. 10. No.1 1997, pp. 1-13.

## POLITICAL DOMINATION AND EXPLOITATION OF MINERAL RESOURCES IN OROMIA: FROM MENILEK TO MELES

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Guluma Gemedda

The discovery and exploitation of mineral resources often produce mixed results. In some cases, the mining industry has stimulated the economic development of a nation. It has also enriched some people. On the other hand, reckless and irresponsible mining has displaced communities and contributed to the poverty of many people. When minerals are exhausted, the mining industry leaves dangerous, hazardous waste behind.<sup>1</sup> Usually, prospectors, multinational corporations and the state amass the wealth and leave the waste to local populations to fix.<sup>2</sup> In most cases, mining contracts between political authorities and multinational corporations, are made without the knowledge of the local population or contrary to their interests. In this regard, the current deals between the Ethiopian government and international mining companies raise serious concerns for the Oromo on whose land most of the mineral resources are located.

Since coming to power in May 1991, the current Ethiopian government has offered generous terms to foreign corporations to attract capital investment.<sup>3</sup> Initially the response was slow, but since 1995, it has gained momentum. During the last two years, foreign investors have shown more interest in exploring and exploiting minerals than in any other aspect of the economy. Apparently, there is a convergence of interest between the government and international corporations in exploiting minerals. Mining offers the government highly needed foreign capital and attention from multinational

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corporations. At the same time, it promises foreign companies a generous profit margin at a minimum risk. With modern technologies, mining corporations can exploit more minerals than the capital they are investing in the field. Both expect immediate rewards.

To some extent the current convergence of interest between the Ethiopian government and international mining corporations is reminiscent of the situation at the turn of the century. After conquering Oromo territories, Emperor Menilek (r. 1889-1913) granted generous concessions to foreigners to extract the mineral resources of the region. Then, as now, foreigners were more interested in acquiring monopolistic concessions in mineral resources than investing in other enterprises. Similar to the current policy of the government, Menilek readily granted mining concessions to foreigners, and in return received sums of money and a share in the profits of the minerals extracted.

While enriching Ethiopian rulers and contributing to the profit making schemes of foreign capitalists, the mining business has infringed upon the rights of the Oromo, particularly those who live in the mineral rich areas. In some areas, Oromo peasants lost their land to mining enterprises and were forced to work on the mines for little or no financial compensation. According to Frank Hayter, a British adventurer who visited some mining sites in western Wollega in the 1920s, some concessionaires, for example, washed gold dust carelessly so that "each rainy season the waste from the washing covered" the field down hill "to a depth of two to three feet, making working [on the field] impossible."<sup>4</sup> Hoping to make more profit, concessionaires cared less for the safety of the mine workers. "[I]t was not unusual for as many as fifty natives to be killed" when the tunnel method that the miners used collapsed<sup>5</sup>

How much environmental or worker's safety is written into the current mining contracts is not clear. There is, however, a legitimate fear that the deals between the government and multinational corporations might neglect the rights and environmental concerns of the local population. Given the attitude of past Ethiopian governments and the



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policy of the current regime towards the Oromo in particular, mining could unfortunately displace some farmers and pollute their fields. This paper outlines the history of mineral exploitation -- particularly gold and platinum -- in Oromia by successive Ethiopian rulers from the late nineteenth century to the present. It also evaluates the environmental consequences of the current mining activities in the same region.

### **Conquest and Exploitation of Gold and Platinum: the Menilek Era**

To say that one of Menilek's motives for the conquest of the Oromo was to exploit their resources is probably belaboring the obvious. While building his political power base in Shewa and exploiting the natural resources of the Oromo and other peoples in the south, Menilek had also helped transfer part of the revenue to the north.<sup>6</sup> The northern provinces which had passed through successive years of devastating wars and famine contributed very little to the empire's wealth at the time. Conquest also facilitated the process for foreign concession-hunters and prospectors.

Menilek's generosity towards foreign concession hunters was unprecedented. Earlier Ethiopian rulers were rather fearful of foreigners and unwilling to share their knowledge of the country's mineral wealth. Departing from such traditions, Menilek granted gold and platinum mining monopolies to foreign speculators.

Most of these concession hunters, however, failed to exploit much gold mainly because they were speculators who did not have the necessary capital and skill to run a mining company, as illustrated by the case of Arnold Holz. Holz, a German adventurer and speculator, was granted a mining concession by Menilek in 1904, two years after his arrival in Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup> But he failed to extract much gold because of his own inept management. He finally left the country around 1914 without the fortune he had originally hoped to create.

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Although the concessionaires like Holz failed to tap the minerals, Menilek used gold tribute to increase his wealth. The emperor, for example, demanded and received tribute in gold from Oromo leaders. His gold revenue between 1902 and 1904 was estimated at \$1,213,400.<sup>8</sup> At the same time his wife, Taitu, had received about 2966 ounces of gold as a gift.<sup>9</sup> The gold tribute that both Menilek and Taitu received from 1898 to 1902, which came mainly from Wollega, was estimated at 47,694 oz (See Table 1).

**Table 1. Gold Revenue Received, 1898-1902 (mainly from Wollega)<sup>10</sup>**

Menilek		Taitu
Year	amount	(Oz)
1898	1,821	
1899	2,351	
1900	4,280	
1901	5,940	
1902	8,189	873
1903	9,621	1,018
1904	12,526	1,075

The gold tribute was in turn used for making more profits by lending it to merchants. By the early decade of the twentieth century, the king was regarded as the leading money-lender to foreign merchants. According to Lord Hubert Harvey, a British diplomat, "the emperor holds mortgages on most of the trading concerns of Addis Ababa, and it is by the means of the capital advanced by him that a number of Indian merchants carry on their business."<sup>11</sup>

### **Exploitation of Gold and Platinum, 1920s-1975**

Like Menilek, Tafari/Haile Sellassie (r. 1916-74) was interested in the exploitation of mineral resources. Initially, however, he was not enthusiastic in granting mineral concessions to foreign capitalists. As far as possible, he wanted to keep the mining enterprise under his personal control, even though his government lacked the necessary capital and technology for extensive exploitation. As one foreigner observed in the 1920s, mining concessionaires were discouraged by Tafari's reluctance and the opposition from local governors. The observer noted, a foreigner who wanted to obtain a mining concession, "will first approach the Regent [Tafari] and purchase the concession, probably with the help of his Legation. This will be a lengthy and expensive proceeding, and at the end of it the Regent will cease to interest himself in the matter knowing full well that the concession is valueless owing to the certain opposition of local Governor[s]. Indeed, after a month or two he will not hesitate to sell the same concession over again to a second or even a third concessionaire, since he knows that, though he cannot control the provincial Governors, he can safely count upon them to do their utmost -- which is enough -- to keep the white man out"<sup>12</sup>

Apparently, there is an element of exaggeration in this report. After all, Tafari/Haile Sellassie was not helpless in controlling the provincial governors. Although cautious in involving foreigners in mining, Haile Sellassie indeed granted some concessions to new speculators. In the 1920s, for example, he granted concessions to Ethiopian dignitaries and foreign nationals. New concession holders included Hiruy Wold Sellassie, Deressa Amante and Dr Workneh Martin. Among foreigners, Alfred Prasso and Zappa were granted platinum mining concessions in Wollega in 1924.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these grants, mineral exploitation during the early period of Haile Sellassie's rule was relatively limited (See Tables 2 & 3.) From the 1920s onward the export trade shifted more to agricultural

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commodities such as coffee, hides and skins rather than gold and other precious minerals. Even with limited production, however, there were times when gold was a crucial source of imperial revenue. During the early 1940s, when the country was recovering from the effects of the Italian invasion, gold helped to cover budgetary shortfalls. In 1945-46, gold contributed about 2,952,000 pounds to the imperial revenue.<sup>14</sup>

Mining received greater attention after 1950. Hoping to use mineral wealth for economic development of the country, Haile Sellassie's government initiated intensive geological surveys and mineral explorations. To coordinate these activities, the Mining Board was created in 1953.<sup>15</sup> During the First Five Year Plan (1957-1961), prospecting and exploration focused on gold and platinum. Thus the gold and platinum fields in Oromia were particularly targeted for exploitation during this and subsequent plan years. Despite the efforts, however, actual mining was still limited.

The Second Five Year Plan (1962-1967) again emphasized the importance of mining for the development of future industries. For this reason, "the highest priority" was given to surveying and prospecting minerals throughout the 1960s. To facilitate exploitation, private enterprises were encouraged to participate.<sup>16</sup> By the early 1970s, the imperial government had created several agencies directly concerned with the development of mineral resources. In the meantime, a new Mining Code was issued to encourage the participation of more private enterprises in the extraction of precious minerals.

But there are no reliable figures to assess the extent of gold exploitation during the whole period of Haile Sellassie's regime. Over all, available evidences suggest that the contribution of minerals to the imperial revenue was rather marginal. According to some sources, for example, the mineral industry contributed no more than 1% to the country's exports during the last two decades before the revolution.<sup>17</sup> Apparently, the contribution of gold was probably more substantial than official figures suggest. This is because a considerable amount of

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gold went into "the palace coffers" and did not enter into the official record

**Table 2. Estimated Gold Production and Value, 1955-1974<sup>18</sup>**

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<b>Year</b>	<b>volume (kg)</b>	<b>value (birr)</b>
1955/56	714.9	
1961/62	497.8	
1965/66	726.0	1,829,000
1966/67	669.4	1,686,000
1971/72	683.2	2,474,610
1972/73	791.3	2,856,248
1973/74	525.2	5,126,375
1974/75	621.1	

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**Table 3. Platinum Production (1926-1975)<sup>19</sup>**

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<b>Year</b>	<b>Production (kg.)</b>
1926-1935	1309.6
1936-1945	484.9
1946-1955	51.9
1956-1965	63.3
1966-1975	73.3

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### Mining During the Derg Period, 1975-1991

The economic policy of the *Derg* era was obviously more interventionist than that of the Haile Sellassie regime. It is now clear that even the widely acclaimed nationalization of rural lands ultimately served the military regime's goal of tight political and economic control. As in the previous years, mineral resources were beyond the reach of the local communities. But lacking both the capital and the technology to run a modern mining industry, the military government agreed to established partnerships with foreign businesses. The *Derg's* Economic Policy Declaration in February 1975, put mining under the category of "joint venture".<sup>20</sup> However, precious metals like gold and silver were exclusively reserved for state exploitation. Even in other mining activities where foreign capital was allowed, the consolidation of the socialist system in practice discouraged potential investors. In essence, therefore, the military government retained absolute control over the mining industry.

Retaining such exclusive rights over gold mining, the *Derg* dreamed of using it to offset its financial difficulties. While exploiting the existing gold mines at Adola, for example, it carried out extensive explorations in Wollega, Illu Abba Bor, Sidamo and Hararge regions to locate more mineral deposits. By the mid-1980s vast iron ore and gold deposits were reported to have been discovered in Wollega and Sidamo respectively.<sup>21</sup> But the biggest was the Laga Dambi gold mine which opened shortly before the demise of the *Derg* in 1991. Located in the famous Adola area, Laga Dambi is believed to have an enormous accumulation of gold. At the beginning of the operation, annual gold production was estimated to 3000 kilograms.<sup>22</sup>

The *Derg's* dream for gold, however, remained elusive. Although it is not clear how much gold the military regime was able to extract from the old mines, annual production was apparently much lower than the government expected. According to official reports, annual gold production of the government-run Adola gold mines in

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1981-82 was 500 kilograms or about \$6.6 million.<sup>23</sup> Over all, the mining industry contributed only 0.3% of the GDP in 1983-84.<sup>24</sup>

The *Derg's* plan for the exploitation of mineral resources was circumscribed by several factors. Bureaucratic corruption, mismanagement, and outmoded mining equipment undermined the *Derg's* ambition of the exploitation of minerals. Second, its socialist economic policy excluded the involvement of foreign capital. Unable to control unlicensed local miners and frustrated by a lack of progress, the *Derg* finally relaxed its mining policy shortly by the end of the 1980s

The low level output during the *Derg* regime, as suggested by the figures above, does not necessarily mean Oromia's gold deposits were spared. Official figures, as was the case during the Haile Sellassie regime, concealed the substantial amount of unrecorded gold mining. In the 1980s, for example, it was widely believed that the government was paying the Soviet Union in gold for its arms imports. Russian experts were indeed involved in the management of the Adola gold mines at the same time. Moreover, a considerable amount of gold was smuggled across the border, apparently, with tacit participation of government officials.

### **Continued Domination and Exploitation: the 1990s**

The *Derg* regime collapsed in 1991. It was replaced by transitional government which was dominated by the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Upon coming to power, the EPRDF promised to end the policy of political domination and exploitation of the nations and nationalities in Ethiopia. The establishment of a new Charter in July 1991 and its declared ethnic policy initially claimed to end ethnic domination. But the discrepancy between the declared objectives and the actual practices of the government soon became clear. Despite its official claims to the contrary, the transitional government was dominated by the Tigrean

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People Liberation Front (TPLF).<sup>25</sup> Now it appears that the regime has far reaching plans for the systematic exploitation of mineral resources in Oromia and other regions in the south.<sup>26</sup>

From the outset the Meles regime was not satisfied with the level of exploitation attained during the *Derg* era. In its economic policy for the Transitional Period, the new government stated that "gold mines have been exploited and that any new project would need intensive investment."<sup>27</sup> Thus the Transitional Government started negotiations with foreign financial institutions to obtain capital intensive mining. As of 1992, the African Development Bank has agreed to loan \$27 million for the development of phosphate mining at Biklal in Wollega.<sup>28</sup>

But the government needed more capital. Hoping to attract more foreign capital it has issued a generous investment code in 1993. Due to the unsettled political situation, however, international mining companies were slow to respond. To publicize its mining policy, a government delegation met with potential investors in Denver, Colorado, in 1994. After the event, about twenty eight companies showed interest in exploring Ethiopia's potential gold deposits.<sup>29</sup> In August 1994, the Vice Minister of Mining and Energy Resources reported that Ethiopia has vast unutilized mineral resources which, when exploited, would reverse "a legacy of famine and massive deaths from starvation that have plagued Ethiopia", in recent years.<sup>30</sup>

Early in 1995, Golden Star Resources Ltd, a Canadian mining company, signed a contract with the government. The agreement permitted Golden Star to explore gold in the Dul area, near Assosa. Dul is long suspected to have rich gold deposits. The Company was granted a concession to make a comprehensive exploration of 1,801 Sq.km for three years. During the exploration phase, Golden Star agreed to spend \$10.7 million.<sup>31</sup> By July 1996, it "has ascertained the existence of gold deposits in its contract area".<sup>32</sup>

Since 1995, besides Golden Star, several American, Canadian and Italian, South African, and Ghanaian mining companies have been negotiating for licenses to explore and exploit minerals in different parts



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of Oromia. In September 1995, for example, Canyon Resources, a Colorado-based American firm, signed an agreement with the Ethiopian government for the exploration of gold. The agreement entitled the company to an "exclusive right" over 60 sq kms around the Adola gold mining center in Sidamo.<sup>33</sup> By then a Swedish mining firm, Trelleborg, was close to obtaining another concession for a similar exclusive right at Dawa Digati, near Adola.<sup>34</sup>

In December 1996, a Canadian firm, Rift Resources of Toronto acquired a license to explore gold in the Moyale area of Southern Oromia. By the end of 1997, the same company held three exploration permits extending over 104,000 hectares of land, and was negotiating for additional 85,000 hectares.<sup>35</sup>

In 1996, the government also put up the Laga Dambi gold mine, the richest mining center, for lease or sale. Since 1990, when it came into full operation, the Laga Dambi mine has produced about 100,000 ounces of gold annually. Obviously, it is an important source of revenue for the government. For about a year after leasing, mining companies competed to take control of the Laga Dambi. Prospective buyers were required to promise to "boost current [annual] production five-fold".<sup>36</sup> In September 1996, the Minister of Mining and Energy Resources emphasized the need for a firm commitment by a prospective investor to "introduce the latest technology and increase gold output without delay." Then, the government was willing to "consider complete sale of the mine, a management contract or a joint venture."<sup>37</sup>

In July 1997, the Laga Dambi gold mine was sold to Mohammed Hussein Alamoudi, for \$175 million.<sup>38</sup> Until now, most of the mining companies were engaged in the exploration of minerals. Alamoudi's National Mining Corporation (NMC), is, therefore, the first company to move from exploration to actual exploitation of gold. NMC has acquired a license to produce and sell gold from Laga Dambi for the next twenty years, and explore 85 sq.km. of the surrounding area. The government holds 2% stake and 35% of the profit from this

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mining<sup>39</sup> So far, the number of mining companies exploring gold and other minerals in Ethiopia has reached twelve.<sup>40</sup>

At the moment, the government is still negotiating new contracts with mining companies. Lately, Johannesburg Consolidated Investment (JCI) of South Africa has signed an agreement to explore gold in Oromia. This latest agreement involves 523 sq km near Gimbi in Western Oromia. JCI will allocate \$1.2 million for exploration during the next three years.<sup>41</sup> Those already exploring gold are expected to begin extraction of the precious mineral very soon.

**Table 4. A Partial List of Mining Companies Licensed to Explore Gold since 1994**

Company	Year	Area (sq.km )	Capital	Nationality
Golden Star Resources Canyon	1995	1801	\$10.7 m.	Canada
Resources Asteria	1995 1996	60	2.3 m US	Italy
St Genvieve Rift Resources Alamoudi & Co.	1997	450.36	1.75 m	Canada
JCI 1997	523	1.2	175	Eth/Saudi SA

Hastily negotiated contracts can subject the local population to several risks. In short term, Oromia's mineral resources could be exploited without benefitting its people. It is not clear, for example, what portion of the profit from mining would go to Oromia's development or to other regions from which the minerals are extracted. How are the farmers who could lose their lands be compensated? What kind of short and long term environmental protection plans are

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included in these agreements? Are the local communities informed about the potential hazards of the mining waste? In the absence of environmental watchdogs and community participation, it is rather unlikely to expect much protection for the local population settled in the mining areas.

Thus, in the long run, what the government and the mining companies extract might be less troubling compared to what they might leave behind. Without strict environmental laws and regulations, mining could leave behind polluted fields and contaminated rivers.<sup>42</sup> Mining companies are, for example, routinely using cyanide to extract gold from low grade ores. Yet it is a toxic chemical and, unless handled with care, it is lethal to humans and animals. Cyanide is also destructive to the environment.<sup>43</sup>

Apparently, such environmental destruction is already taking place around the gold mines in southern Oromia. Some troubling information is now coming out. Recently, authorities in the Borana region of southern Oromia have, for example, reported that the sodium cyanide used by the Adola Gold Exploration Enterprise is damaging the environment. According to this report "birds, as well as wild and domestic animals are now dying after drinking the water mixed with sodium cyanide. A number of people who bathed in the polluted water have suffered from corrosive effect of the chemical. [and] dead fish are seen floating on the Dawa River [which is also] polluted by the chemical."<sup>44</sup> The Mining Enterprise has used over 2,600 tons of sodium cyanide between 1991 and 1997.<sup>45</sup>

Besides the environmental consequences of mining, the current regime's investment strategies and budget allocations are setting structurally uneven development pattern vis-a-vis the mineral rich regions like Oromia. For example, it is widely reported that while extractive industries like mining are directed at the southern regions, development projects are concentrated in Tigray, the ethnic power base of the TPLF.<sup>46</sup> During the last five years the region of Tigray has received about 45% (birr 2.1 billion) of the private investment while

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Oromia, whose gold and coffee contribute over 70% of foreign exchange, received only a mere 13% (birr 613 million worth of investment).<sup>47</sup> Moreover, in budgetary allocations, Tigray is given preferential treatment over other regions.<sup>48</sup> (See table 5)

No doubt, such a system of resource allocation and investment practice raise serious concerns for the Oromo and other peoples in Ethiopia. In the long run, biased resource allocation and investment policies could create uneven development between the regions. Mineral-rich states like Oromia could be condemned to supplying raw materials to industrialized areas, an outcome no less disastrous than the political conquest of the late nineteenth century.

**Table 5. Distribution of Investment Capital, 1992-97**

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Region	Capital (in Millions B.)	Percentage
Afar	564	12.0
Addis Ababa	886	18.4
Amhara	146	3.1
Beni Shangul	160	3.4
Dire Dawa	5.5	0.1
Gambela	22	0.5
Harari	1.4	0.03
Oromia	613	13.0
Southern Peoples	235	5.0
Tigray	2100	44.7
Total	4700	100.0

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Source: *Addis Tribune*, July 11, 1997 (Percentages slightly adjusted).

## **Conclusion**

As indicated above, Oromia's mineral resources have been exploited by successive Ethiopian rulers. Gold, platinum and other minerals have contributed, in some ways, to the prosperity of these rulers, if not to the country or the people. However, the damage could have been even greater if they were not handicapped by bureaucratic corruption, and technological and financial constraints. Had the speculators of the Menilek era or the ambitions of Haile Sellassie or the *Derg* succeeded, the mineral resources of Oromia might have been exhausted. In a sense, the weakness of the previous governments has been a blessing in disguise for Oromia.

Since the 1994, this situation has changed dramatically. More than ever before a new partnership is being forged between the mining companies and the current Ethiopian government. For the government, mining serves two purposes. First, generous mining concessions help publicize its new economic policy and lure more foreign investors. Second, the mining industry is offering a much needed foreign currency. On the other hand, mining is relatively less risky for foreign investors. With the latest exploration and mining technologies they can earn more profits than they are investing in the region. Apparently, both the government and the mining companies are trying to take advantage of this window of opportunity.

*Historically, mining has contributed to a rapid economic development. In some cases, the mining industry has facilitated industrialization. The current partnership between the Ethiopian government and mining companies, however, raises concerns for the future of Oromia and its people. If the present exploration turns to exploitation, the mineral deposits of Oromia can be exhausted very quickly without providing any substantial benefit to the local population.<sup>49</sup> Mining can lead to the eviction of the local population from their lands. Also, mining can leave behind dangerous environmental problems that could cost millions to fix long after the*

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current government and the mining companies are gone.

### End Notes

1. The uneven impact of mining on society is very well illustrated by the cases from South Africa and the American West, and Southeast Asia. In most cases, prospectors and mining magnates prospered while the indigenous populations were ruined. On South Africa, see Geoffrey Wheatcroft, *The Randlords: The Exploits and Exploitations of South Africa's Mining Magnates* (New York, 1986); Peter Richardson and Jean Jacques Van-Helten, "Labor in South African Gold Mining Industry, 1886-1914," in *Industrialization and Social Change in South Africa*, eds., Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (New York, Longman, 1982). On the American West, see Paula Mitchell Marks, *The Precious Dust: The American Gold Rush Era, 1848-1900* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1994), 284-88. For cases in Southeast Asia, see Barbara Rose Johnston and Daniel Jorgensen, "Mineral Development, Environmental Degradation, and Human Rights: The Ok Tedi Mine, Papua New Guinea," in *Who Pays the Price? The Sociocultural Context of Environmental Crisis*, eds., Barbara Rose Johnston (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1994), pp. 86-98.

2. See Barbara Rose Johnston, ed., *Who Pays the Price?*

3. The present regime liberalized its mining policy and invited foreign investors in 1993. To make it more attractive, recently it has further reduced mining income tax by 10% and its equity stake from 8% to only 2%. Investors are also promised generous remittance of profits and duty free imports of necessary equipment. This clearly

shows the government's desperate effort to entice foreign capital investment. *Addis Tribune*, May 15, 1997.

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4. Frank E. Hayter, *Gold of Ethiopia* (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1936), p.18
5. *Ibid.*
6. Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia, 1844-1913* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
7. Bahru Zewde, "Concessions and Concession-Hunters in Post-Adwa Ethiopia: the Case of Arnold Holz," *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies* (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1988), pp.65-69.
8. MacGillivray's report to Sir E. Palmer, enclosed in John Harrington to Lord Cromer, 14 March 1905. FO 401/8.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. "General Report on Abyssinia for the Years 1907 and 1908", Lord Hubert Harvey to Sir Edward Gray, February 1, 1909. FO 401/12
12. "Who Lives by Bribery", *Westminster Gazette*, January 19, 1925; Enclosed in J. Loder Park to U.S. State Department, December 21, 1926.
13. Danilo A. Jelenc, "Yubdo Platinum Deposit," *Ethiopian Geographical Journal*, 4:1 (June 1966), pp.17-29.
14. Cook to Iliff, 29 March 1946, FO 371/53446; Harold G. Marcus, *The Politics of Empire: Ethiopia, Great Britain and the United States, 1941-1974* (Lawrenceville, NJ, Red Sea Press, 1995 reprint), p 43

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15. "Charter of the Imperial Mining Board, General Notice, 167/1953," *Negarit Gazeta*, 13:4 (October 1953).
16. Imperial Ethiopian Government, *Second Five Year Plan, 1963-1967* (Addis Ababa, 1962), p. 70.
17. U. S. Bureau of Mines, *Mineral Industries of Africa* (Washington, D C., 1976), p.29.
18. Getaneh Assefa, "The Mineral Industry of Ethiopia: Present Conditions and Future Prospects," in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed., by Sven Rubenson (Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1984), pp 618-19.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 621.
20. *Declaration on Economic Policy of Socialist Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, February 7, 1995); *Negarit Gazetta*, March 11, 1975.
21. *Ethiopian Herald*, November 26, 1985.
22. *Africa Research Bulletin Economic Series*, 28:2 (1991), 10311
23. Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 121.
24. *Ten Years Perspective Plan*, p 108; Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, p.119.
25. Meles Zenawi, the President of the Transitional Government, and currently, the Prime Minister of the Ethiopian government is also the leader of the TPLF.



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26. Currently, many Oromo peasants, businessmen and scholars are suffering from political harassment, imprisonment and displacement by the TPLF-dominated regime. See Human Rights Watch/Africa, "Ethiopia: The Curtailment of Rights," 9:8(A), December 1997
27. *Africa Research Bulletin: Economic Series*, 28:10 (1991), 10580
28. *African Research Bulletin [ARB]: Economic, Financial and Technical Series*, 29:2 (1992), 10744. The phosphate deposit in Wollega is estimated to 127 million tons. *ARB, Economic, Financial and Technical Series*, 31:12 (1994), 11990.
29. *Press Digest*, August 25, 1994.
30. "Poor Ethiopia Looks to Minerals for Growth", *Reuters*, August 11, 1994.
31. *Horn of Africa Bulletin, (HAB)*, January-February 1995 ([http://www.sas.edu/African\\_Studies/Newsletters/aBULLET.html](http://www.sas.edu/African_Studies/Newsletters/aBULLET.html)); *Reuters*, September 6, 1995
32. *Ibid.*
33. *The Horn of Africa Bulletin*, 7:5 (1995), p. 16; "Ethiopia Signs Gold Deal with Canyon Resources," *Reuters*, September 6, 1995
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Africa Research Bulletin*, 43:11 (1997), 13268.
36. *Reuters*, July 24, 1996. When the plan is implemented, the Laga Dambi gold deposits, estimated to 200 tons, can be exhausted within a decade

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37. *Reuters*, September 6, 1996
38. *Reuters*, July 18, 1997; *Africa Research Bulletin*, 34:11 (1197), 13267. Alamoudi has also purchased the Marble Company in Wollega and other manufacturing enterprises. Currently, he is the leading capitalist in Ethiopia.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Addis Tribune*, May 15, 1997.
41. *Addis Tribune*, September 19, 1997.
42. It is not clear what practical measures the government is taking to protect the environment. The author does not have the details of the "Environmental Policy" adopted by the Council of Ministers in April 1997. Judging from its current political disposition, however, it is unrealistic to expect the government implementing strict environmental policies regarding the mining industry. It is equally naive to expect the mining companies to follow sound environmental standards while exploiting minerals in their contract areas. Even in the United States, where environmental protection laws are strong and public awareness is high, mining companies are reported to have abused the environment. See, for example, Barbara Rose Johnston and Susan Dawson, "Resources Use and Abuse on Native American Land: Uranium Mining in the American Southwest," in *Who Pays the Price?* pp.142-153.
43. Hans von Michaelis, "Role of Cyanide in Gold and Silver Recovery," paper presented at the "Conference on Cyanide and the Environment", Tucson, Arizona, December 11-14, 1984 The author disputes the long term impact of cyanide on the environment

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44. "Sodium Cyanide Affects Fauna, Flora in Borana Zone," *Addis Zaman*, August 27, 1997.

45. "Adola Gold Denies Danger of Chemical Exposure," Addis File, September 20, 1997.

46. In Tigray, the TPLF's ethnic power base in the north, only one mining company, Ashanti Gold Fields, is reported to be operating in collaboration with the Ezana Mining Company, apparently dominated by the TPLF. Ezana Mining Company holds 51% of the assets when extraction begins. *Press Digest*, March 7, 1996

47. "2.1 Billion Birr Projects Implemented in Tigray", *Addis Tribune*, July 11, 1997.

48. Very few details are available regarding the government's criteria for the allocation of budgets to the regions. The report for the current fiscal year (1997/98) simply mentions "the size of the regional population, b) infrastructural backwardness, c) efficiency in tax collection." "The Struggle for More from the Ethiopian Budget", *Addis Tribune*, July 4, 1997; <http://etonline.netnation.com/addis-tribune/1997/07/04-07-97/budget.html>.

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49.       Apparently, with sophisticated mining technology, mining companies do not even need invest much on building infrastructure. Thus local populations may not benefit much from the operations.

# THE ORIGIN OF THE OROMO: A RECONSIDERATION OF THE THEORY OF THE CUSHITIC ROOTS

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Feyisa Demie

## Introduction

The origin of the Oromo people has been a matter of speculation and of open-ended debate since the 16th century. The question of their original homeland has been discussed at length by Paulitischke (1888, 1893-96), I.M Lewis (1959, 1960), H. Lewis (1966), Cerulli (1957), Haberland (1963), Braukamper (1980), and Hassen (1990). Despite these studies, scholars do not agree on the origin of the Oromo people. The traditional view until 1960 was that they occupied the corner of Northern Somalia until the Somali pushed them to the South and South-West from the shore of the Horn of Africa (I.M Lewis, 1960; Cerulli 1957, Trimmingham, 1955; Huntingford 1965). Others, including H. Lewis (1966), Haberland (1963), Braukamper (1980), Melbaa (1988) and Hassen (1990), have rejected this line of argument suggesting the Oromo cradleland to be in the region of Bale and Sidamo in the present Ethiopian empire. Some scholars have even speculated that the Oromo migrated from Asia or the Arabian Peninsula to Africa (Trimingham, 1952; Huntingford 1955).

The present hypothesis, however, points out that the Oromo as one of the Cushitic peoples originally lived on the current Ethiopian highland. The Cushitic people settled on the central Ethiopian plateau as early as 5000 B.C. (Ehert, 1976) and were differentiated into subgroups. The Oromo formed one such group that moved southwards (Melba, 1988). A basic consensus on the Oromo origin is far from being achieved. There are challenges particularly for

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linguists, to investigate the relationship between the Oromo language and the Eastern Cushitic languages, and for archaeologists to look at indigenous cultural artifacts related to modes of production.

This paper, therefore, critically examines the literature on the origin of the Oromo and attempts to raise some questions in relation to the theory of the Cushitic roots to reconstruct the origin of the Oromo people.

### **The Presence of the Oromo and Other Cushitic Peoples in "Ethiopia"**

The earliest written reference to the presence of the Oromo and Somali peoples in the Horn of Africa is found in the writing of a 13th century Arab geographer, Ibn Said (H.S.Lewis 1966). A number of other studies, including those by Cerulli (1957), I.M. Lewis (1959, 1960), Trimingham (1952), and Wiedner (1964) also located the Oromo in Northern and Central Somalia. The Somali came to present day Somalia much later than the Oromo (Trimingham 1952; Huntingford 1955; Wiedner 1964).

Recent studies by Mohammed Hassen reveal new evidence and confirm that some Oromo groups lived in the region of Walabu and the historical Bali around the 12th century. Mohammed Hassen's remarkable contribution to Oromo Studies now enables us to extend our knowledge of recorded references to Oromo to 800 years. Antoine d' Abbadie, on the basis of genealogical information from the Gibe Oromo region, recorded that Borana lived at Wallal around A.D. 1400 (Hassen, 1983). Studies by Greenfield and Hassen (1980) also show that Oromo communities existed around Shoa by about the ninth and tenth centuries and around lake Tana by about the fourteenth century. Others, such as Pauitschke (1889), reported that the Oromo were in North-East Africa at least during the Aksumite period (200 B.C. - 800 A.D). Greenfield (1967) also suggested that the Raya and Azebu

Oromo moved directly to their present homeland from the coast of the Gulf of Aden long before the coming of Islam, and their oral tradition supports that the Oromo preceded Abyssinians in the area. Other evidence also shows that the Oromo were in North-East Africa before the Semitic speakers who migrated from South-West Arabia and colonized the area inhabited by Cushitic speakers: "The emigrant Semites landed in a continent of which the North-Eastern appears to have been inhabited by the Eastern group of Hamites, often called Cushites, who also include the Gallas, Somalis, Danakil and Kaffas" (Perham, 1969)

Trimingham (1952) and Huntingford (1955) also indicated that the Oromo, Somali, Afar and Saho lived in the area long before the Semitic speakers' migration from Southern Arabia began.

The Oromo and other Cushitic groups were established in the area as settled communities before being pushed out Semitic emigrants. We now know that the original family of the Cushitic peoples lived in the central highlands of the area which is known today as 'Ethiopia' for thousands of years. The Cushitic presence in Ethiopia was reported as early as 5000 B.C. The Semetic speaking people, who claim that the Oromo arrived later, did not appear in the area until 1000 B.C. (Ehret 1976; Tolesa 1990) We are convinced, as Christopher Ehret points out, that proto Cushitic speaking communities spread from the North through the East and South of the present Ethiopian empire.

Archaeological evidence suggests the movement of the Cushites and other groups into North-East Africa began at a very remote date. Some of the early Cushite groups probably remained on the Red Sea coast, yet others followed the line of the Rift valley through Ethiopia onto the highlands of East Africa (Hallett 1970: 75-76). Furthermore, comparative evidence of the Cushitic language portrays a gradual migration of the Cushitic people from the North to the South and East (Tolesa 1990: 37). Through this migration they differentiated into separate linguistic and cultural groups. They broke up into four

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different language speaking groups known as the Northern Cushitic, represented by the Beja; the Central Cushitic, represented by the Agaw; the lower Eastern Cushitic, represented by the Oromo, the Afar, the Saho, the Somali, the Konso, and others; and the highland Eastern Cushitic, represented by Kambatta, Haddiya, Walayitta, and others. The Southern Cushitic speakers are found in Tanzania. There are forty different Cushitic linguistic and cultural groups in Africa. The eastern cushitic speakers were connected in terms of history, geography, language and culture and their separation probably took place 3000 to 4000 years ago. Available anthropological, linguistic, and historical data link the Oromo to eastern Cushitic peoples who have lived in the Horn of Africa for as long as their history is known (H. S. Lewis 1966).

### **Oromo Origin Studies and Some of Their Weaknesses**

The study of the Oromo people, whose history and origin are rarely mentioned before the sixteen century, has recently attracted a growing number of scholars. The oldest written record which mentions the origin of the Oromo was written by an Abyssinian Priest, Abba Bahrey. He wrote *History of the Galla*, 1593. According to Bahrey "The Galla came from the West and crossed the river of their country which is called Galana, the frontier of Bali, in the time of House Wannag Sagad " It is difficult to derive correct information about the origin of the Oromo people from Abba Bahrey's work for two reasons. First, the author was not an objective observer in regard to the conflicts between the Oromo and the Abyssinians. The author portrayed the Oromo as "pagans" and "evils" who were ready to kill people. He popularized the word Galla to misrepresent the history of the Oromo people. Second, Bahrey's leading concept identifying the origin of the Oromo was 'Galana' which means 'river' in Oromo. There are a number of rivers in the area, including the Galana Sagan, Galana Dulei,



and others. From this writing, it is difficult to be definitive about which river he meant.

An interesting and unusual Portuguese map compiled by M De Almeida also mentions the name Galla in 17th Century, and locates the homeland of this people at north of Lake Zway and in the borderland between Bale and Doaro (Dawaro). Almeida's map was based on Bahrey's document, but the accuracy of the information on the map is now questioned by scholars (H.S. Lewis 1966). In 1769 James Bruce, the Scottish explorer, visited large parts of northern Ethiopia, including Aksum, Gondar and the Oromo region to the South of Lake Tana and wrote that the Oromo started the expansion from Sennar in Sudan, entered the Ethiopian highlands, and invaded Bale and Dawaro in a southward. Bruce's suggestion is not unusual for the travellers of the time and many European travellers in Africa have suggested the origin of different tribal groups to be where they met for the first time. In most cases, as is true with James Bruce, they happened to be peripheral areas. However, there is no evidence that shows the Oromo ancestors came from Sennar.

The first scholar who emphasized the need to study the origin of the Oromo people was Philipp Paulitschke. In fact, until he raised the issue at the end of the 19th century, no serious research studied the Oromo country of origin. Paulitschke's pioneering work was based on anthropological, archaeological and linguistic investigation. He focused on records reporting the custom of taking the male organ of a defeated enemy, grave studies, and on examples of comparative etymology. His study concluded that the ancestors of the Oromo lived in the country of Zeng, located at the time in the coastal area of the Horn of Africa. A number of other researchers, including Burton (1966), Cerulli (1957), Huntingford (1955), Trimmingham (1952) and Lewis (1955), pointed out that the Oromo once lived in Somalia where Somalis pushed them from the valleys of the Shabile and Juba river basins. Later, they spread west and southwards. The Oromo presence in the area of Somalia is

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supported by evidence from a region's name. The theme of Galkayo region of Somali literally means the place where the Oromo were driven away.

Other areas also indicated the origin of the Oromo. Charles Beke (1848) believed the Oromo came from the southwest through Wallaga from beyond the Baro river. John Bucholzer (1956:29) hypothesized that the Oromo migrated from Asia to the Horn of Africa through Tanganyika and Kenya. Recent studies by H.S. Lewis (1966), Haberland (1963) and Braukamper (1980) challenge these assumptions by locating the Oromo cradleland in the highlands of Southern Ethiopia. Some confusion about Oromo origins has arisen from mistaken attempts to identify the Oromo presence in Somalia and other parts of the Horn of Africa with their original homeland.

The confusion was further compounded by the sixteenth century Oromo history written by the Amhara monk, Abbay Bahrey, mentioned above. He perpetuated the myth that the Oromo attacked the Historical Bali around 1522. On the basis of Bahrey's unreliable information, a number of Ethiopianists accepted the date as the beginning of the Oromo arrival in the area. This is now viewed by most scholars as an incorrect presentation of the Oromo history. As noted above, evidence shows the presence of some Oromo groups, not only in historical Bali, but also in the Shoa administrative region before the 12th century. However, because of the distortion of their history, the Oromo were regarded by some Ethiopianists as newcomers to Ethiopia, not original inhabitants.

Contrary to the distortion of Oromo history, the sixteenth century is not a period the Oromo appeared in "Ethiopia," but it is the turning point for the end of isolation, the period of glory and undoubted might in Oromo history. During this period the Oromo successfully halted the Southern expansion attempted by Abyssinia, and developed a highly advanced political institution and uncontested military capacity in the area. It is interesting to note here, at the time

when Europe had hardly developed the republican political institution, the Oromo people developed a highly complex democratic and republican political system which has become a source of great interest and research. The Oromo developed a political system known as *gada* based on a sophisticated calendar which shows a high degree of cultural advancement attained by the Oromo people. The *gada* system provides for the distribution of state power between the legislative, and the executive bodies and their respective independence from one another. Elections are held for offices, including that of the head-of-state, every eight years.

### **Oral History and the Origin of the Oromo**

Until archaeological and comparative linguistic research is undertaken in Oromo studies, the most relevant information that helps us increase our knowledge of the origin of the Oromo people is the oral tradition. Using Oromo oral traditions, H. Lewis (1966), Haberland (1963) and Baukamper (1980) and Hassen (1990), challenged the hypothesis that the Oromo homeland was somewhere in Somalia. As noted by H. Lewis, the Oromo oral tradition does not claim northern Somalia as the homeland. "The Oromo do not claim to have lived in the Horn of Africa, nor do they speak of any homeland other than south-central Ethiopia. Although there are minor differences of detail, virtually all the recorded traditions of the Galla indicate an origin in or near the Boran region. Some Galla claim to have come from Borana itself. Other Galla say that they came from the area of Mt. Wolabo, which is located about thirty miles east of Lake Abaya, just north of Borana... The third place of origin recorded in Galla traditions is Bahrgamo."

Lewis has broadened our knowledge of Oromo people by providing useful information about their origin and raising questions for further research. He used the oral tradition and linguistic evidence to

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dispute the theory that the Oromo original homeland was Somalia. He used the oral tradition recorded by Cerulli from the Gombichu Oromo of Shoa and the Arssi Oromo of the upper Shebeli basin, and the data he himself collected from Jimma Oromo and by Cecchi, Ratzel and Budge from different parts of the Oromo region. Furthermore, Lewis used linguistic information and place names such as Lake Shano, Galana Sagan, Galana Dulei and Bargama which appeared in Bahrey's text and Almeida's Portuguese maps for his reconstruction of the Oromo origin. Also, Herbert Lewis did not accept the claim that the origin in or near the the Borana and the area of Mt. Walabo is sufficient information for reconstruction of the origin of the Oromo. Instead, he considered the Barigama view of the Oromo and concluded that Bargama is an administrative region in the south of Abyssinia and located the Oromo country of origin in the region of Lake Abbaya.

The weakness of H. Lewis's argument is related to the written source he used. He has not recognized the weakness of Bahrey's source as historical data and the incorrectness of Almeida's map. This led him to conclude that all ancestors of the Oromo came from Gamo Gofa.

Eike Haberland, who did field research among the Oromo, concluded that their original home was in the highland of Bale. "It appears quite certain to me that their true ancestral home was the cool highland in the region of Bale. There they lived with a mixed cattle rearing and grain growing economy, until for reasons unknown to us, there was a very rapid rise in the population" (Haberland 1963:772). Like H. S. Lewis, Haberland also used the Oromo oral tradition to support his claim that the Oromo locate their origin in the highlands of the middle south. Moreover, according to Haberland, the early Oromo were not pure nomads, but they practiced a mixed economy based on cattle breeding and barley cultivation. He noted that the main cereal crop of the Oromo is barley and the domestic animals are cows and sheep that are typically raised in the highland farming systems. Using

this thesis, Haberland rejected the hypothesis of the Oromo origin from the semi-arid lowland.

Ulrich Braukamper (1980) has recorded the Oromo Oral tradition and tried to reconstruct the Oromo Country of Origin. He noted that the Macha and Arssi Oromo groups consistently claimed that their ancestors originated in Borana, and the Barentu group reported that they started their migration in Debanno (Liban) which is located in the central part of present Borana. However, it is important to note the widely accepted oral tradition of Barentu refers to their ancestors from Mormor in Bale. Mormor is regarded by the Barentu Oromo not only as their original home, but also as the holy shrine of pilgrimage to *Abba Mudda* (Hassen, 1983:85). More recently, another recorded oral tradition from the Macha and Tulama Oromo who inhabit the central and Western Oromia, regards Haro Walabu as the birthplace of their ancestors. The Macha-Tulama lived together under one 'chafe' assembly in Harro Walabu which is located some 48 to 64 kilometers direction of Lake Abbaya, 20 kilometers east of the Ganale in the lowland of Dallo, near Bediru village in Bale (Hassen 1983). The Borana Oromo group regard Harro as the first Oromo man who came down from heaven, and they say "Ummen Walabu Baate." This means a "life came out of Walabu," and it was expressed a long time after the Tulama and Macha left Harro Walabu (Hassen 1983). Harro Walabu is the holy shrine for the pilgrimage to Tulama and Macha Oromo. The *Abba Muuda*, a spiritual leader for the Oromo, resided here. Pilgrimages to Harro Walabu were recorded by Cerulli from the Bale region and by Asmrom Legessie from Wallaga and Shoa.

The Arssi oral tradition also confirms that the original homeland was Bareedduu Kurkurtuu in Bale, located between the Walmali and Maura Rivers, near Mormor. Mormor is also claimed by Oromo who are settled now in the Harar area and their Oral records are in remarkable agreement with that of the Arssi Oromo Oral traditions (Hassen 1983). The oral tradition of Borana Oromo in Northern Kenya

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is also useful for the construction of the original homeland of the Oromo. Similar to the Tulama and Macha, the Arssi and Barentu groups' oral traditions clearly point to the Bale region. The Borana in Northern Kenya claim Tullu Nama Durii (The Hill of the Ancient People) as the home of their ancestors while the Orma in the Tana region of Kenya claim Tullu (Hill) as the place of origin (Werner 1915; Tolesa 1990). Geographically, Tullu Nama Durri is located in the area between the Ganal river and the Wamali river in Bali. The oral tradition of the Borana proper further indicates that their ancestors came from Tullu Wallal, located in North-East of their present territory on the side of the Ganale river. Wallal is not far from Tullu Nama Durii which is consistently reported by other Oromo groups as the original homeland of their ancestors.

There is, however, another recent Oromo origin theory that the Oromo lived together at place called Fugug, before each Oromo group separated and moved to different regions. As Mohammed Hassen observed. "In one Oromo tradition, there is a reference to a faraway land, the birthplace of the nation, this land is known as Fugug. Today the land of Fugug and Mount Fugug are located in the administrative region of Arssi, the heartland of historic Bali" (Hassen 1990:4). Further research and collection of the oral tradition are needed to test the Fugug origin theory because we have insufficient data to support or reject the hypothesis. However, we have better Oral information on the homelands of different Oromo groups. All evidence so far points out that Harro Walabu, Bareedu Kurkuritu, Mormor, Tulu Nama Duri, Tulu Wallal in Bale and northern Borana were extremely important in the oral traditions of many Oromo groups. From these oral traditions, the location of the original home of the Oromo differs, but all of the places mentioned by different Oromo groups as their ancestors' homeland are close to one another.

The Oromo trace their origin to the ancient founder, Orma. The Ilmaan Orma (that is the children of Orma) maintained a loose

cultural center at Haro Wallabu. All major clans in Oromia and those in Kenya and Somalia sent their Jila (representatives) for consultation to Haro Wallabu on laws, culture, and other concerns with Abba Muuda. The Abba Muuda served as the center and guardian of the Oromo culture. The Jila from different clans and regions took messages from their gada Leaders and informed the Abba Muuda at Haro Wallabu about conditions in their region. They also brought back from the Abba Muuda blessings and advice to their leaders and people.

### **Oromo Origin Studies and Some Methodological Issues**

Our knowledge of Oromo ancient history is yet in its infancy and its reconstruction is not an easy task. To increase our knowledge of the origin of the Oromo, it is vital to we know where and when the Oromo differentiated and separated from the other Eastern Cushites. Archaeological studies, linguistic studies of Eastern Cushitic groups, language distribution, and migration theories can increase our knowledge beyond oral and written records.

The works of Lewis (1966), Braukamper (1980), Haberland (1963), Hassen (1990) provide only part of the information that gives insight on some of the Oromo groups. The historical construction made up to now on the basis of oral and written records cannot clarify the confusion surrounding Oromo origins and their separation from the eastern Cushitic language groups. Currently, our understanding of the origin of the Oromo and the differentiation of Eastern Cushitic groups in the Horn of Africa is very limited

It is astonishing that not a single archaeological exploration has been undertaken to study the Oromo past. No object has been identified as Oromo in any museums anywhere in the world. It is also surprising that no linguistic investigation has studied the separation and differentiation of the Oromo language from Eastern Cushitic groups. It is possible to reconstruct the social and economic development of

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different Eastern Cushitic group in the Horn of Africa over the past three millennia using language and lexicostatistical analysis (N A. Mohammed, (1985) Based on linguistic evidence drawn from 100 core vocabularies of some 40 Somali dialects (which are said to be resistant to change and to borrowing), Mohammed deduced and reconstructed the past history of the Horn of Africa and concluded that the first Somali dialects separated from the Eastern Cushitic ancestral language as early as 2000 years ago. This approach and reconstruction have important implications for future Oromo studies in particular and Cushitic studies in general. Comparative linguistic evidence is useful information for reconstructing the origin of an ethnic group. Furthermore, in some ways, the Oromo language is older than any of the eastern Cushitic languages and may have separated before the Somali. On the basis of comparative language and lexicostatistical analysis it is possible to reconstruct the separation of the Oromo language from other Eastern Cushitic languages. This methodology is not new and has been extensively used by historical linguists such as Christopher Ehret (1985, 1986), and deserves serious consideration in Oromo origin studies

### **Conclusion**

The Oromo are the major Cushitic group and are among the indigenous peoples of North-East Africa that includes Agaw, Afar, Beja, Sidama, Somali. Linguistic, anthropological, and historical evidences link them to Eastern Cushitic speaking peoples who may have been in the Horn Africa for about 5000 years. All evidence from oral and recorded history show that some Oromo Groups lived at Harro Walabu, Bareddu Kurkuitu, Mormor, Tulu Nama Duri, Tulu Wallal in Bale and Northern Borana over 900 years. On the basis of this evidence, there is a clear gap between our present knowledge of the Oromo origin and the differentiation of the Eastern Cushitic families in



the Horn of Africa. Further research is needed on this subject because there is inadequate information on the separation of the Oromo from the Eastern Cushitic families.

Oromo origin and history need to be studied afresh, should not be based only on recorded and oral history, and must include linguistic and archaeological studies. Hence, this research indicates the significance of historical linguists in the relation between the Oromo and Eastern Cushitic family languages; it also invites archaeologists to end their practice of concentrating on the Abyssinian areas and to look at indigenous cultural artifacts of the Oromo and other Cushitic peoples in the Horn of Africa. Serious linguistic and archeological research on the differentiation the Eastern Cushitic peoples will enrich our understanding of the origin of the Oromo people

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## BOOK REVIEW

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Woodward, Peter, **The Horn of Africa: Politics and International Relations**, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996, pp. 226, price \$59.50 (cloth).

The Horn of Africa, which takes its name from its likeness on the map to an upturned rhinoceros horn, includes, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and the tiny Djibouti. However, since the early 1990s two new states--Somaliland and Eritrea--have been added to the list of countries in the troubled Horn of Africa, where Africa's human tragedy and state collapses have been played out in their crudest and cruelest forms. Somaliland, which declared her independence after the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, has not yet been recognized by the international community. Eritrea, which defeated the largest armed forces in Africa in 1991 and gained formal independence by the referendum of 1993, is a member of the United Nations (UN), the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and other international fora. The new states not only have shrunk the size and altered the maps of Somalia and Ethiopia, but also have had a strong impact on the politics and international relations of the Horn of Africa.

The focus of *The Horn of Africa: Politics and International Relations*, however, is mainly the Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia--the three major states which have uncertain futures. This is an interesting study by a leading British scholar, whose previous book, *Sudan: The Unstable State, 1889 to 1989* (1990) is one of a very fascinating collection of informative and educative books on the Sudan. The author, an editor of *African Affairs*, has also written about the politics of Sudan.

Author Peter Woodward states that "much of Africa has been experiencing major problems, politically, economically and socially, but few other regions of the continent appear as devastated as Somalia, Ethiopia and the Sudan." This resulted from the "concentration of

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indigenous conflicts, ambitions of a regional character and superpower rivalry." (p. 2) Warfare, drought and man-made famine combined with ill-conceived economic policies, corrupt leadership, reliance on guns and terror for governance, and a total lack of respect for human rights, led to the destruction of lives and property. The author did not stress the extent of destruction in the Horn of Africa, but others estimate that more than a million people may have perished since 1980, and many more millions have been displaced. In the 1980s, the Horn of Africa earned the disgraceful distinction of being the second largest refugee-producing region after Afghanistan, and the biggest graveyard in the whole world! Death from the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85 and forced resettlement policy of the communist Ethiopian military regime is estimated to be between one-half million and one million.

In Chapter 1, the *Horn of Africa* shows the influence of the Nile River, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Indian ocean on the peoples of the region, but commits simple historical errors that could have been avoided. For instance, the author claims that "the first large-scale society to develop was that of the civilization of Meroe" that emerged in the third century B.C. (p. 11). What about the Kingdom of Kush or Nubia, which ancient Egyptian records mentioned as early as 2000 B.C.? What about the Kingdom of Napata, which flourished from c. 1000-590 B.C.? Meroe did not emerge in the third century B.C., but emerged shortly after 590 B.C., following the collapse of the Kingdom of Napata. The author claims that the Kingdom of Axum arose in the second and third centuries A.D. (p. 12) but in reality, that development took place towards the end of the first century B.C. and the beginning of the first century A.D.

Furthermore, Axum was not the first state to be formed in the northern highlands of Ethiopia. What about the Da'amat state which flourished from ca. 500 B.C. to the first century A.D.? Axum eclipsed and replaced the Da'amat state, because of its natural resources and international trade, which combined to bring wealth and power and fame to the Axumite state. The author also is incorrect to claim that the



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sixteenth century pastoral Oromo migration was "...swiftly followed by a short-lived conquest by a Muslim from the Somali coast--Imam Ahmad Gran" (p. 12). On the contrary, it was Imam Ahmad's conquest (1529-1543) which facilitated the process of pastoral Oromo migration. The author appears to lack a true picture of the history of the Oromo, one of the most original and most indigenous people of what is today Ethiopia. As original inhabitants of Ethiopia, the Oromo have lived in the region for thousands of years. The 16th century pastoral Oromo migration was only a chapter in the long history of the Oromo nation. Furthermore, Imam Ahmad did not come from the Somali coast, but from the city Harar, one of the oldest urban centers and the seat of Islamic civilization in eastern Ethiopia.

Author Peter Woodward is at his best when he discusses the Sudan as he does in Chapter 2 and in several other sections in the book. According to the author, the Sudan became independent under a "Westminster-style constitution" with two major parties, the Umma and the National Unionist Party (p. 36) beset by sectarian politics, which intensified deep-seated rivalry creating political instability, resulting "...in Prime Minister Abdullah Khabil inviting the army to intervene, supposedly to calm the situation, in November 1958" (p. 37). Thus, Sudan's experiment with democracy lasted only two years. The Sudanese military establishment, one of the oldest on the continent, was the second to intervene in politics (the first being the 1952 Egyptian coup), and the first to be driven from power by civilian resistance in 1964. The second parliamentary regime in the Sudan was overthrown in May 1969 by Nimeiri (1969-85) who crushed the challenges from the right and left, the Mahdists, and the communists (p. 43).

Nimeiri of the Sudan, Siad Barre of Somalia, and Mengistu of Ethiopia came to power through military coups. They indulged in similar rhetoric by declaring "socialism" to harness and to exploit their peoples' aspirations for democratic renewal and economic development, but succeeded in shattering their economies and inflicting misery on their people.

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Chapter 3 discusses political developments in Somalia, which started independent existence in 1960 under a multi-party democracy which lasted until 1969. However, according to Professor Woodward, "lack of clear political leadership and consequent policy drift contributed to the eruption of clan-born parties, [numbering] 63, in the election of 1969, pointing to the high potential for fragmentation in Somali domestic politics..." (p.66). The assassination of President Shermarke in 1969 was followed by General Siad Barre's bloodless coup on October 21, 1969. Siad Barre's coup was inspired and supported by the Soviet Union, which built a formidable Somali military machine with which Siad Barre planned to realize the dream of Greater Somalia. That dream was crushed during the Ethiopian-Somali war of 1977/78 when the Soviet Union abandoned Somalia in favor of Ethiopia. With Cuban and Ethiopian soldiers, the USSR defeated and destroyed Somali's military machine. The dream of Greater Somali which was the basis of Somali nationalism "...had been crushed: instead of successful expansion, Somalia began in the wake of its failure on the path to an implosion of clan rivalry as earlier frictions and tensions multiplied" (p. 69).

Chapter 4 deals with the drama of Ethiopian politics. The author states that "...the nineteenth-century scramble for Africa had given the opportunity for Ethiopia to become a form of indigenous imperial power in its own right" (p. 89). Probably because of this view, the author regards the Ethiopian colonial misrule in Ogaden as harsher than the British and Italian rule (p. 25). One might add that the colonial experience of the Oromo and other people of Southern Ethiopia was just as crude and cruel.

According to the author, Ethiopian intellectuals believed that "Marxism-Leninism seemed particularly appropriate to Ethiopia, despite its having one of the most backward economic systems in Africa" (p. 90). Thus the revolution of 1974 in Ethiopia was inspired by revolutionary intellectuals, who exposed the weakness of the imperial regime and undermined its legitimacy, preparing the way for the young

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military officers to overthrow Emperor Haile Sellasie on September 12, 1974. Peter Woodward claims that "Mengistu was supported by the NCO's and junior officers in particular because he was more radical than senior figures and less tainted by proximity to the old imperial government" (p. 90). This is not true. Of all 120 members of the Dergue (the military committee that seized power in 1974), colonel Mengistu was the one who had close proximity to the old imperial government through his blood relation with *Dajazmach* Kebede, a key palace official since the 1920s. Mengistu, an officer with little education, who decimated the revolutionary Ethiopian youth, established his undisputed dictatorship and became the most powerful uncrowned socialist emperor of Ethiopia. Sadly, however, Mengistu used his enormous power mainly for destructive purposes, and in the end destroyed the basis of his own power.

It is historically incorrect to assert that the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was destroyed by the attack from the Ethiopian military and the Eritrean People's Liberation Forces (EPLF) (p. 95). The Ethiopian military successes in 1978 forced both the ELF and EPLF into retreat. What destroyed the ELF in 1980/81 was the co-ordinated and systematic attack by the EPLF and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Professor Woodward claims that the TPLF was not a secessionist movement at the beginning (p. 96). Indeed, the TPLF was a secessionist movement up to the mid 1980s, when it adopted a pragmatic policy of not only overthrowing the military regime but also of replacing its socialism with the TPLF's Albanian-style communism. For the purpose of capturing state power in Addis Abeba, the TPLF transformed itself into the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary democratic Forces (EPRDF) in 1989. Professor Woodward claims that the EPRDF became an umbrella movement "...for other developing groups, of which the most notable was the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)" (p. 97). Nothing could be further from the truth. The OLF is an independent Oromo movement formed in 1974. It never joined the EPRDF. The TPLF, which tried and failed to bring the OLF under its

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wing, created in 1990 the Oromo People's Democratic Movement

(OPDO) from prisoners of war under its control. It is the OPDO, and not the OLF, which is part of the EPRDF.

Professor Woodward made two very interesting and original observations in the politics and international relations of the Horn of Africa: first, it was with "...Kuwaite" supplied patrol boats and Syrian-donated ammunition" (p. 98) that the EPLF was able to capture the port city of Massawa in 1990, which unravelled the Ethiopian military establishment in Eritrea. Interestingly, after its military victory in May 1991, the EPLF immediately changed its pro-Arab stand to pro-Israel policy. It is doubtful whether without support from the Arab world, Eritrea would have been able to pose such a formidable challenge to the Ethiopian military force for almost three decades. However, once victory was achieved, the EPLF leaders realized that good relations with Israel was the key for getting support from the U.S. government and other western countries! Second, it was with support from the Sudan and EPLF, that the leaders of TPLF/EPRDF were able to capture power in Addis Abeba in May 1991. "The collapse of Mengistu's regime was more than simply a change of rulers. It was the end of the most far-reaching Marxist-Leninist experiment in Africa that had gone further than other self-proclaimed Marxist regimes" (p. 99). Much more than this, the collapse of Mengistu's regime was a major landmark in the history of modern Ethiopia. It marked a dramatic and radical shift in the balance of power from the Amhara ruling elite to the Tigrayan one.

Such a revolution in the balance of power in Ethiopia took place only in 1889, when the death of Emperor Yohannes IV of Tigray was followed by the rise of power of Menilek (the Amhara King of Shawa) as the Emperor of Ethiopia (1889-1913). Interestingly, Yohannes was killed by the Mahdist forces of Sudan (p. 119) and his death marked the disintegration of the power of Tigray. It was a cruel irony of history that in 1991, the TPLF, which represents the rise of the power of Tigray, was brought to power partly by military support from Sudan, (pp. 123-

24) thus ending a century of the Amhara elites' political supremacy in Ethiopia. The collapse of Mengistu's regime was a real tragedy for the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) under the leadership of John Garang. It was a tragedy, because in 1991, the SPLA was attacked by the combined forces of EPLF and TPLF and the Sudanese soldiers. As a result, the SPLA not only suffered militarily, but also split into two rival factions with opposing ideologies. The latest twist to this drama, which is not mentioned in the book, is that today John Garang's faction of SPLA is fully supported by both Ethiopia and Eritrea. It is reported that Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers have been fighting alongside the SPLA, to topple the Muslim fundamentalist regime in the Sudan. One important conclusion which flows from this drama of shifting alliances of friendship and enmity is that in both Sudan and Ethiopia, governments have changed since the 1980s, leaders have changed, and even ideologies have changed. But what remains permanent is the victimization of the peoples of Southern Sudan and Southern Ethiopia.

Chapter 5 deals with the politics and internal dynamics of Eritrea and Djibouti. Both have internal conflicts, and depend heavily on foreign aid. Since gaining independence in 1977, Djibouti has been an island of stability in the region cursed with instability. It is doubtful, given Djibouti's bleak economic prospects, the rivalry between the Afar and Issa ethnic groups, and interference from her neighbors, that its past stability will be sustained in the future. The author discusses the strength of Eritrea under the EPLF leadership, but does not mention that the EPLF leaders are using their formidable military muscle to project their country as the "super power" of the Horn of Africa. Consequently, Eritrean soldiers are openly involved in the conflict in Ethiopia. Eritrea has also initiated conflicts with Djibouti, Yemen and Sudan. In fact Issayas Afewerki, the Eritrean president, has openly called for toppling the government of Sudan.

Part two of the book includes Chapters 6 through 9. The inability of states to control their borders effectively (p. 118), leads to "one dimension of state collapse." Of the three major countries in the

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Horn of Africa, it was the Somali state that faced total collapse, but all three states are "among the world's poorest with an average per capita income in 1991 in U.S. dollars at: Ethiopia, \$120, Somalia and Sudan \$340" (p. 166). "The super powers were unmatched in their injection of armaments into the Horn" (p. 148), "and of the three states, it was Sudan that was the most integrated ...into the international economic system" (p. 169) and Ethiopia, the least integrated of the three. The Sudan had the most developed civil society, which was "...at the forefront of the movements which twice led to the overthrow of military regimes in 1964 and 1985" (p. 200), while Ethiopia had the least developed civil society.

Finally, despite many shortcomings, *The Horn of Africa: Politics and International Relations* is a very interesting and useful book that depicts in a comprehensive manner, the complex, intricate and intriguing politics and international relations of the Horn of Africa. It is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the politics of the Horn of Africa and will remain useful for years to come.

Mohammed Hassen  
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# Oromo Commentary

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## Aims:

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

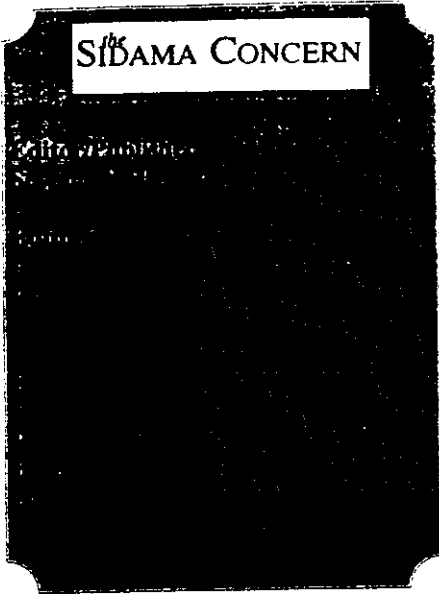
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*A Magazine of National Affairs*

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# JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

## Dr. Gunnar Hasselblatt A Tribute

The editors and readers of *The Journal of Oromo Studies* mourn the tragic loss of Dr Gunnar Hasselblatt, one of our founding editors and greatest supporters. He died in Germany on July 7, 1997, just after our last issue went to print. As a scholar, a writer, a teacher, a courageous seeker for truth and a tenacious friend of the Oromo people, Dr Hasselblatt heartily endorsed the objectives for which the Journal was launched. He served on the Editorial Advisory Board from the first issue. His own writing of books and articles on Oromo issues, his maintaining an extensive correspondence, teaching, lecturing, debating, traveling, and interviewing contributed greatly to the growth of Oromo studies. He also played a very important role in encouraging Oromo scholars, intellectuals, musicians, writers and artists to develop their individual skills and to mobilize resources for the benefit of the Oromo people at large, as he himself did.

Dr. Gunnar Hasselblatt worked tirelessly in public education on behalf of the Oromo people. In supporting and defending the Oromo cause abroad, he exhibited a rare form of moral courage, unwavering in the face of intimidation. In Gunnar's case, the intimidation was so great that in March, 1982 his detractors in the Ethiopian military regime tried violently to take his life in order to silence him. The plot against him had the opposite effect. When a bomb intended for him accidentally exploded prematurely in a major downtown Berlin hotel, blasting out the side of the building, killing one member of the assassin squad and maiming another, the front page coverage and the discovery in room wreckage of the plans to target Gunnar confirmed his message about the nature of the enemies of the Oromo. It also found him and his message a whole new audience. He continued to raise the funds required to send highly-qualified international researchers, writers, and film makers into Oromia to document conditions and life there in order to introduce the plight of the Oromo nation to the wider world. Many in Europe were introduced to the cause of Oromo liberation through the efforts of Gunnar Hasselblatt.

Gunnar brought many skills and interests to his work on behalf of the Oromo. He was an ordained pastor whose formal studies were in theology and Semitic languages followed by Islamic studies and even Arabic, eventually earning a Doctor of Theology degree. His interests remained wide-ranging. As a Christian pastor he developed a keen interest in Oromo Muslims and Muslim centers and in developing a general Christian-Muslim dialogue. He supported the creation and the growth of the Oromo Relief Association. Both his compassion and intellect were always at the service of the Oromo people, whether it was in assisting refugees, championing Oromo human rights, developing Oromo literacy and development, engaging in spirited discussions about the past and future of the Oromo nation, or exposing injustice against a people whose culture he embraced with joy. We will sorely miss his intellectual contributions to our pages, his presentations at the annual conference of Oromo Studies Association (where he often gave papers and served as Keynote speaker), his support and encouragement for Oromo scholarship and research, as well as his genuine interest in the development of literature in the Oromo language. Besides being a true friend of many Oromo individuals, he was a genuine friend of the Oromo nation. The inspiration he provided throughout his life continues to influence Oromo scholars and the field of Oromo studies.