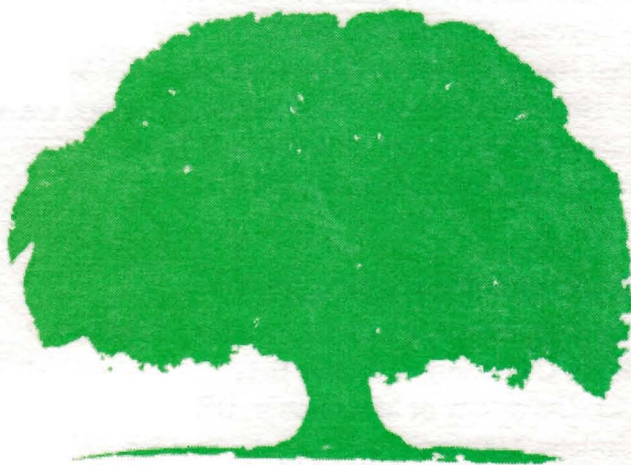


# THE JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

---

VOLUME 8, NUMBERS 1 and 2, JULY 2001



## **EDITOR**

Bichaka Fayissa, Middle Tennessee State University, USA

## **ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

Demissew Ejara, University of Massachusetts, USA

## **CONTRIBUTING EDITORS**

Lemmu Baissa, SUNY Institute of Technology at Utica/Rome, USA

Asfaw Beyene, San Diego State University, USA

Belletech Deressa, Global Mission, USA

Mohammed Hassen, Georgia State University, USA

Bonnie K. Holcomb, George Washington University, USA

Asafa Jalata, The University of Tennessee, USA

Addisu Tolesa, Indiana University, USA

## **EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD**

Mario I. Aguilar, University of St. Andrews, Scotland

George Banti, University of Rome, Italy

Paul Baxter, University of Manchester, UK

Mekuria Bulcha, University of Uppsala, Sweden

Bahiru Gametchu, Medical College of Wisconsin, USA

Richard Hayward, University of London, UK

Jan Hultin, University of Goteborg, Sweden

Said Samatar, Rutgers University, USA

Sidney Waldron, SUNY Cortland, USA

# THE JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

VOLUME 8, NUMBERS 1 AND 2, JULY 2001

THE JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES  
P. O. Box 189 MTSU  
Middle Tennessee State University  
Murfreesboro, TN 37132-0189

**The Journal of Oromo Studies (JOS)** is a multi-disciplinary international journal of the Oromo Studies Association, and it publishes original research and book reviews on Oromo studies and other related issues twice a year. **JOS** welcomes contributions in all areas of Oromo studies and related fields. The acceptance of articles for publication is made by the editor based upon comments and recommendations of anonymous peer referees in the appropriate field. It is our commitment to work with authors by responding to them with comments whether or not we publish the manuscript. Articles published in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of the Oromo Studies Association or those of its officers; individual authors carry full responsibility for the accuracy of the facts and for opinions expressed in the articles.

© 2001 *The Journal of Oromo Studies*

All rights reserved

ISSN 1070-2202

**Subscriptions:** Published twice a year. One-year individual, \$20.00; one-year institutional, \$40.00. Single copies: \$10.00 for individuals; \$20.00 for institutions. Add \$5.00 for mailing outside of the USA.

Please send manuscripts, business, and editorial correspondence to: Prof. Bichaka Fayissa, Editor, *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, P. O. Box 189 MTSU, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN 37132-0189.

Manuscripts must be submitted in three copies (typed, double spaced) with an abstract of about 200 words. Figures, tables, and maps must be camera-ready. Authors must follow the latest edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Separate notes and references should be at the end of the manuscript. Accepted articles must be submitted in a hard copy and on a floppy disk using Microsoft Word.

# ***THE JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES***

**VOLUME 8, NUMBERS 1 AND 2, JULY 2001**

<b>Editorial Overview</b>	i-iv
The Lesser of Two Evils Paradigm of Colonial Rule: A Comparative Study of Colonialism in the Sudan and Ethiopia <b>Ezekiel Gebissa</b>	1-34
Understanding Oromo Nationalism: An Historical Perspective <b>Okbazghi Yohannes</b>	35-72
Forms of Subject and Object in Afaan Oromo <b>Tilahun Gamta (Xilaahun Gamtaa)</b>	73-98
Some Features of Traditional Oromo Education <b>Melaku Mekonnen</b>	99-109
Famine as an Instrument for Nation-Building and State Consolidation: Ethiopia's Resettlement and Villagization Programs of 1978-1991 in Retrospect <b>Mekuria Bulcha</b>	111-154
An Overview of Some Factors Limiting the Migration of the Oromo to Addis Ababa <b>Benti Getahun</b>	155-172
Book Reviews	173

## NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Ezekiel Gebissa**, Ph.D., is OSA Board member and Assistant Professor of History at Kettering University, Kettering, Michigan

**Okbazghi Yohannes**, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky

**Tilahun Gamta** was an Associate Professor of Education and Language at Addis Ababa University before he retired in June 1996. In addition to many articles, he has published, two major works, namely: *The Oromo English Dictionary* (Addis Ababa University Printing Press, 1989), and *Seera Afaan Oromo* (Berhanina Selam Printing Press, 1995).

**Melaku Mekonnen**, Ph.D., Director of Residential Life at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan

**Mekuria Bulcha**, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Sociology, and Senior Researcher at Uppsala University and Malardalen University, current Vice President of Oromo Studies Association, author of a book entitled: *Flight and Integration: Mass Exodus from Ethiopia and Problems of Integration in the Sudan*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1988, and the editor of *Oromo Commentary*

**Benti Getahun**, Ph.D., is current Treasurer of OSA and Assistant Professor of History at Southern Illinois, Carbondale, Illinois

**Paul T. W. Baxter**, Ph.D., is Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at University of Manchester, UK. He has edited many books, written book chapters, and many journal articles on the Borana Oromo. He is on the Editorial Board of *The Journal of Oromo Studies*.

**Mohammed Hassen**, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of History at Georgia State University, current OSA Board member, and past president of OSA.

## EDITORIAL OVERVIEW

This volume of *The Journal of Oromo Studies* addresses substantive issues related to colonialism in the Sudan and Ethiopia, the origins of Oromo nationalism, the development of Oromo language, traditional Oromo education, famine as form of state consolidation, and an analysis of the barriers to Oromo migration into Addis Ababa.

In his article, **Dr. Ezekiel Gebissa** argues that the creation of the Ethiopian state has recently emerged as one of the most controversial subjects in the Ethiopian historiography. The debate was engendered by the change in the political life of the nation rather than by a discovery of new evidence that called for a reassessment of the previous interpretations. The antagonists are establishment scholars for whom Ethiopia is an ancient nation which remained independent throughout much of the time Europe ruled Africa while nationalist scholars are those who argue that Ethiopia is a colonial state which emerged in its present form during the European scramble for Africa.

The advocates of the former see the latter's analysis as a malevolent distortion of Ethiopia's otherwise glorious history and hence a serious threat to the very foundation of the Ethiopian state. They deride nationalist scholars as academically incompetent and their works as methodologically deficient. This essay attempts to provide a reassessment of past arguments about the creation of the Ethiopian state through a comparative study of developments in the Sudan under the British rule and in the southern lands of modern Ethiopia following the establishment the Abyssinian rule. Dr. Ezekiel argues that nationalist scholars have a good deal invested in the task of reclaiming and making history and that their works are as legitimate any scholarly pursuits. Furthermore, if the past were to be an avenue to the future stability and improved way of life in Ethiopia, the views of nationalist scholars must be welcomed and be subjected to constructive criticisms, not vitriol and invectiveness.

**Dr. Okbazghi Yohannes'** article traces the historical contours of the Oromo anti-colonial narrative. At the outset, Dr. Yohannes suggests that perusal of Oromo historiography suggests that the Oromo

contention to the existing state of affairs in Ethiopia revolves around five points

First, the conquest and absorption of Oromia into traditional Ethiopia was a classic case of colonialism. Therefore, the Oromo people, as colonial subjects, were and still remain entitled to decolonization and the establishment of their own State. Second, the colonization of Oromia was partly the result of an intra-Abyssinian contradiction, a contradiction that necessitated outward expansion during the last quarter of the 20th century in search of transferable economic surpluses. Third, the Ethiopian colonial plunder of Oromia was carried out with the connivance and, indeed, with active European diplomatic and military support without which Ethiopia could have hardly succeeded in achieving its colonial ventures. Fourth, the current Ethiopian constitution is more an exercise in political chicanery than in substance. The Tigrayan-dominated regime conveniently uses constitutional federalism as a guise to perpetuate Ethiopian colonial domination over Oromia and the continuation of the Amhara-Tigrayan hegemony. Fifth, the historical and analytical relevance of the above facts to the contemporary Oromo situation has been obscured by the mystification of the Ethiopian State as a historically evolved organic whole.

Finally, he observes that both Ethiopian and Western scholars are equally culpable in obfuscating the Oromo question to the extent that they furnished the intellectual context to the official Ethiopian version of history. These five salient arguments, forming the core of the Oromo thesis, pose serious historical and theoretical challenges to the national political configuration of the Ethiopian empire today and thus mandating closer examination.

In his article entitled “Forms of Subject and Object in Afaan Oromo,” **Professor Tilahun Gamta** carefully and painstakingly presents the rules governing a subject and an object in Afaan Oromo. One of the rules states, “Verbs that end in *-yu*, are preceded only by a consonant, not by a vowel. Examples: *iyyuu* (to yell), *fayyuu* (to be well again). In a workshop on verbs, which Professor Tilahun was chairing, a Finfinnee University student from Bale raised his hand and said, “What about **booyuu** (to weep)?” He tried to defend his rule by saying, “From where he comes, they say **boowuu**, not **booyuu**.” The other students



from Eastern and Southern Oromiyaa agreed with him, he thanked the student and promised to change the rule. It has now become clear that verbs that end in *-yu* can be preceded by a vowel. Some such examples are: *bayuu/bawuu* (to get out), *dayuu/dawuu* (to give birth), *gayuu/gawuu* (to be enough), and *fooyu/foowu* (to spin)

In his conclusion, Professor Tilahun invites the readers of his article to make constructive suggestions on the different ways people in different parts of Oromiyaa speak as a test of the rules for the subject and object forms in Afaan Oromo. The variant, which is short and mostly understood, can be selected for the consistent use and standardization of a written Oromo language.

**Dr. Melaku Mekonnen's** study addresses the nature of traditional Oromo education. He notes that Oromo families traditionally educate their children at home in a pedagogical design and approach that has fundamental similarities to the home schooling practices employed in contemporary Western societies. His paper outlines some of the features of traditional Oromo education from the points of view of school organization, curriculum constructs, and instructional approaches. The article is based on his professional experiences and observations while working as an educator for over a decade in the western region of Ethiopia which is predominantly inhabited by the Oromos.

In his article, "Famine as An Instrument for Nation-Building and State Consolidation: Ethiopia's Resettlement and Villagization Programs of 1978-1991 in Retrospect" **Dr. Mekuria Bulcha** deals with the resettlement and villagization which were designed as parts of a package program implemented simultaneously to increase state control over peripheries in rebellion and politically unreliable regions. Dr. Mekuria observes that resettlement and villagization were implemented in Bale while only the resettlement scheme was undertaken in Wallaga. The programs were conceived and implemented by the state without the participation of the affected population. Consequently, the people experienced a tremendous physical hardship in moving from one place to another.

He further notes that peasant households were exposed to far-reaching social and economic deprivations and that the Dergue's sinister

plan to use famine relief for state consolidation, however, back-fired. The TPLF and EPLF used famine relief to consolidate their movements which culminated in the demise of the Dergue.

In its broader historical context, **Dr. Benti Getahun's** article addresses the relationship between the Oromo and the Amhara since the colonization of Oromia in the last one hundred years. The period witnessed continuous economic, social, political, and cultural interactions between the two major ethnic groups. These interactions were, however, characterized by unequal partnership and the Amhara who controlled the political power manipulated the relationship to their own advantage. Imposing conditions that limited the migration of the Oromo to Addis Ababa was part of the Amhara drive to dominate the political, social, and economic life in the city and in the whole empire as well. To realize this objective, the Amhara used different mechanisms ranging from physically evicting the Oromo to imposing Amhara-Christian culture and language that made it difficult for them to live in the city.

Finally, I want to extend my thanks to the contributors of articles and book reviews without which *The Journal of Oromo Studies* could not have succeeded in its mission of expanding the frontiers of knowledge about the forgotten Oromo people. I would also like to thank the anonymous referees for their valuable contributions by reading and making constructive suggestions for the authors. The need for quality articles which address issues related to the Oromo and the Horn of Africa at large continues to exist. I would hope that you would accept the challenge by making JOS as one of the main outlets for your scholarly contributions. With your cooperation and contributions, we can certainly produce and disseminate a first rate journal to individuals, institutions of higher learning, governments, and nongovernmental agencies such that there is no excuse for ignorance about the Oromo people. Each of you has a key role to play in the collective mission of Oromo studies which is to broaden our understandings of the Oromo people.

Bichaka Fayissa, Editor  
Professor of Economics  
July 2001

# THE LESSER OF TWO EVILS PARADIGM OF COLONIAL RULE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF COLONIALISM IN THE SUDAN AND ETHIOPIA

---

*Ezekiel Gebissa*

## **Introduction**

In the historiography of the creation of the Ethiopian state, epic stories, peculiar anecdotes, and fabulous narratives abound with examples of methodologically inadequate approaches that tend to reinforce popular beliefs about the country's allegedly glorious history and impeccable heritage. For decades, the notion that Ethiopia is a country with three thousand years of civilization permeated most historical writings and the belief in the authenticity of the account was so profound that questions about evidence and logic were dismissed as perfunctory remarks hurled around by those who advocate the dissolution of the state.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of history was to serve as the foundation of the state and deviation from it often entailed grave consequences. Few dared to confront established notions lest they endanger their career or even their lives. There seemed to be no dividing line between an etiological charter and a historical account. As long as the construction of a unitary state remained the goal of the political and academic elite, there existed no place for an honest and free scholarly debate concerning Ethiopia's political history.

Based on the existing literature, one could discern three main interpretations regarding the origins of the Ethiopian state and history. The first goes beyond the realm of the historically ascertainable. The story begins in about 800 B.C.E. with the legendary founding of the Solomonic dynasty which connected Ethiopian kings to the chosen people of Israel and through them to Christ, the Lion of Judah. It runs uninterrupted through the first and second millennia, progresses through the establishment of a modern state in the late nineteenth-century, and climaxes with themes of reunification, centralization and modernization. The story and its attendant arguments are based on sources and views

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

from the Abyssinian heartland and are advanced by the ideologues of the Ethiopian empire-state.<sup>2</sup>

The second category is comprised of works by researchers who, while concurring with the ideologues' basic theme that the modern Ethiopian state has its roots in antiquity, admit that the contemporary Ethiopian state is a product of the late nineteenth-century conquests and subsequent absorption of societies and lands to the south of the kingdom of Shewa into Emperor Menelik's (r 1889-1913) state.<sup>3</sup> Because these works are based on research conducted among the conquered peoples, they would naturally be expected to give voice to the colonized people. Unfortunately, the authors did not capture the subject people's views of Menelik's conquests and the state that emerged subsequently. Menelik is portrayed in these works as both a freedom-fighter and an imperialist, his conquests as a typical process of nation-building in Africa, and the conquered people as an ungrateful horde who could not see that they were rescued by Menelik from falling prey to a European imperialist. Even Charles McClellan, a scholar whose work among the Gedeo is considered as pioneering in presenting a view from the receiving end of Menelik's conquests, could not help but depict Menelik as a deliverer while admonishing the "Somali and Oromo [to admit] that their own subjugation was part of a much larger anticolonial struggle. . . [without which they] would have been subjugated, if not by an emergent Ethiopia, then by one of the surrounding European powers, most likely by Britain or Italy."<sup>4</sup> This kind of an analysis not only shows a superficial understanding of the conquered peoples' views of their own past, but also the author's blatant disregard for their anti-imperialist/colonial struggles. Analyses such as this are often strung together by the apologists of Abyssinian colonialism who, for personal reasons, found it necessary to get along with the ideologues rather than present an analysis that accurately reflects their source material.

A third category of the literature emerged rather conspicuously in the late eighties and more forcefully in the nineties. It comprises the works of scholars who combined their training with their personal commitment to exposing the plight of Ethiopia's colonial subjects. Three

considerations distinguish the positions taken by these scholars from those of the ideologues and of the apologists. First, they view Menelik's conquests not as a heroic defense of the southern peoples against European imperialists, but as a process by which Ethiopia's colonial order was imposed on hitherto independent states and communities. Second, they stress that the subject people are not voiceless victims of colonialism but very much capable of making and writing their own history independent of the Abyssinians. Third, because their loyalty rests with the conquered, they are well-positioned to best articulate the views of millions of peoples in Ethiopia whose identity and voice were destroyed in order to rework them into those of the colonists.<sup>5</sup>

At issue in this debate is whether Ethiopia in the nineteenth-century returned to her ancient lands or incorporated new lands and peoples in her imperialist drive to carve out as much territory as possible before a European imperialist had laid claim to the southern lands of today's Ethiopia. For the ideologues and the apologists, there is no doubt that the conquests marked Ethiopia's recovery of her former lands. Indeed some of the territories added to Menelik's expanding empire had been subject to earlier Abyssinian emperors, mainly as tributaries. But west of the Gibe and southeast of the Awash, little of the new territories had previously been part of the Christian empire of which Shewa is thought to be the successor kingdom. Even in the territories that had once been tributaries, by the late nineteenth century, the demographic situation had greatly been altered, owing to the Oromo population movements of the sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Another core issue in the debate is whether or not the kind of relationship that developed between the Abyssinians and the peoples they had conquered could be described as colonial. From the standpoint of the ideologues and the apologists, such a relationship develops only when the colonizer crosses a body of water to get to the colonized and the former is from a different race than the latter. By this standard, a colonial relationship cannot develop when the territory of the colonized is contiguous with that of the colonizer. The conquest and subjugation of one black nation in Africa by another African nation likewise could never be regarded as a colonial undertaking. Thus, Menelik's nineteenth-

century conquests constituted merely the return of Ethiopia to its lost provinces and they can only be viewed as an effort aimed at empire-building for the benefit of the conquered. In reality, it is incontrovertible that modern Ethiopia is a product of Shewa's late nineteenth century landward expansion which occurred precisely during the European scramble for Africa. The opposition to the characterization of Menelik's expansion as a colonial enterprise stems not from what transpired in the past but from the implication of the past for the future survival of the Ethiopian state. The goal is the preservation of a state, not a genuine advancement of historical knowledge<sup>7</sup>

Putting the debate on the appropriate pedestal requires starting with a larger view of colonialism. Broadly defined colonialism is a form of *domination* characterized by the control by individuals or groups over the territory and/or behavior of other individuals or groups; a form of *exploitation* which hinders and distorts the advancement of indigenous peoples; and a process of *culture change* among the colonized that would ensure the hegemony of the colonizer<sup>8</sup> While such a broad definition is incomplete and requires more specificity as it applies to any situation, it will suffice for our immediate purposes. In the present provisional configuration, our definition addresses the areas of change in the status of the colonized versus the colonizer in the areas of political domination, economic exploitation and cultural hegemony. In this paper, focusing on the period roughly between the last decades of the nineteenth century and end of the First World War, I will compare the ideas, initiatives and policies pursued and implemented by the British in the Sudan and by Abyssinians in new areas in the south as both established their authorities in the lands they had conquered. My goal is to show that the relationship that developed between the Abyssinians and the conquered southerners was similar to the one that developed between the British and the Sudanese. The upshot of this is simple: if there is sufficient comparability between the undertakings of the British in the Sudan and the Ethiopians in the south, then there should be no basis for dismissing nationalist histories as political slogans and for rejecting the argument that contemporary Ethiopia was created by the same historical force that created the Sudan in its present form: colonialism.<sup>9</sup>

Sudan was chosen for comparison for three reasons. First, both the Ethiopians and the British had to interact with societies at various stages of political evolution, societies ranging from segmentary forms to ones with experience within some form of an organized state. Second, both the British (through the Egyptians) and the Ethiopians justified their conquests by claiming longstanding territorial claims over the territories they conquered. Third, the lands of the colonized were contiguous to the land of the colonizers, Egypt being the staging ground for the southward foray of the British into the Sudan.

My objective is at once polemical and constructive: my polemical purpose is to expose that the historiography of the creation of the Ethiopian state was shaped by politics, rather than genuine scholarly pursuits; my constructive purpose, which takes much more space, is a practical demonstration that life for the peoples of southern Ethiopia under Shewan rule in many ways resembles that of the Sudanese under British rule. If that is shown to be the case, the effort of some scholars to present the view from the receiving end of Abyssinian colonialism need not be maligned as a desultory adventure in fabricating history for the task of reconstructing nationalist history is a scholarly inquiry as legitimate as those undertaken by establishment scholars. For the purpose of a crisper juxtaposition of historical experiences in both areas, I will focus on the two most important features of colonialism—political domination and economic exploitation. The forms of rule in both cases will be examined to compare the mechanisms of political domination while land and labor will serve as categories of comparison to demonstrate the nature and extent of economic exploitation in the two areas.

### **British Colonialism in the Sudan**

In 1896, alarmed by Ethiopia's victory over the Italians at the Battle of Adwa and to some extent by the appearance of French troops on the Upper Nile, the British and Egyptian governments dispatched a joint military expedition against the Mahdist state of the Sudan. The reason for this act obviously had less to do with the situation within the Mahdist state and more with the relations among European powers.

This expedition, led by General Horatio Herbert Kitchener, routed the Mahdist forces at Omdurman on September 2, 1898. The Anglo-Egyptian victory brought about the complete collapse of the Mahdist movement.

Once conquered, the Sudan had to be administered. In setting up an administrative structure, the British had to contend not only with the vastness of the land but also with the diversity of its inhabitants. Moreover, under no circumstances were they prepared to hand the Sudan over to the Egyptians whose abusive government, the British believed, had previously provoked a violent revolt in the Sudan. Neither did they have a freehand to annex the Sudan to the British Empire without dealing a shocking blow to Egypt's historic claims and precipitating a diplomatic uproar from their European competitors over the Sudan. The dilemma was solved by the concept of condominium, a brainchild of Lord Cromer, the British proconsul in Cairo and the real power-wielder in the Egyptian government. The formula envisaged a shared sovereignty by the Khedive of Egypt and the British Crown. The government of the Sudan was to be invested in a governor-general, appointed by the Khedive at the nomination of the British government. In practice, the condominium was dominated by the British, after the Egyptians were maneuvered out of the rights they claimed to be theirs by an astute legal agreement.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Political Imperative: Organizing an Administration**

In establishing an administration in the Sudan, the British had to take into account Sudanese political realities. Sudan had a long experience of life within some form of a state, a foreign (Turco-Egyptian or Turkiya) and a shorter but no less important indigenous (Mahdist) rule, whose geographic limit approximated the territory that the British came to control. Under the Turco-Egyptian rule the Sudan was administered by a *bakimdar* (governor-general) and the provinces were run by *mudirs* (governors). The province itself was split into *quisims* (districts), each with a *qismanaziri* to administer it. Sudanese village leaders and sheikhs were co-opted into the structure as local administrators.<sup>11</sup> The Mahdist



administration slightly differed from its Turco-Egyptian predecessor. In most cases, four chief officers were responsible for running the provinces: a collector of taxes; a treasurer to transfer the revenue to the central treasury in Omdurman; a clerk responsible for communications with the capital; and a commandant of the *jihadiyya*, the police force. The provinces were divided into districts, each placed under a *wakil* (agent). In the remoter provinces there were governors, essentially local military commanders, with sub-commanders, tax collectors, and titled notables under them.<sup>12</sup>

The British eventually established an administrative structure that closely resembled that of the Turkiya. At the top of the new hierarchy was the governor-general, until 1924 also the *Sirdar* or commander-in-chief of the Egyptian army. The provinces were administered by *mudirs* or governors who were also provincial military commandants drawn from the ranks of British military officers of the Egyptian army. The provinces, in turn, were divided into districts which were supposedly supervised by British inspectors (*muffatish*) assisted by an Egyptian and Sudanese *ma'murs*. At the outset, the administrative personnel was entirely military, a fact that prompted Sanderson to describe British administration as "an improvised 'civil affairs branch' of the Egyptian army, directed by [Sir Reginald] Wingate as military commander-in-chief."<sup>13</sup>

With a handful of British officials and a limited number of Egyptian subordinates, it was quite impossible for the British to maintain their administration in the Sudan while trying to keep costs down. Inevitably, they had to seek to make some use of an indigenous social structure. Despite the damage caused by the 1889 Mahdist revolt that evicted the Egyptians from Omdurman, there was still sufficient basis for the new rulers to resuscitate the system which had earlier been formally recognized and institutionalized by the Turco-Egyptian rulers. The British integrated into their administration a revived Turkiya structure which included a hierarchy of local administrators whose titles were known as *nadirs*, *omads*, and *shaykhs*.<sup>14</sup>

Another aspect of building a new administration on an earlier foundation is exemplified in the way the British dealt with Islam. The

new rulers regarded Islam as a stagnant religion, full of superstitions and incapable of contributing to a new era of development ushered in by Christianity, and thus an impediment to their “civilizing mission” They were also concerned about Islam’s capacity of stirring up “fanaticism,” as exemplified not so long ago by the Mahdiyya. Cognizant of the cost that any attempt at destroying Islam might entail, the British opted to diffuse the danger not by repression but by a policy that sought to erect an acceptable and quiescent body of Islamic officials, the *ulemma*, to assist them in governing.<sup>15</sup> Under the initiative of Rudolf von Slatin<sup>16</sup> a board of *ulemma* was established to oversee the administration of what was in effect government-sponsored Islamic life. Under the direction of a board of *qadis*, employed by the government, Islamic law governed many aspects of family and religious life in the north. The *qadis* were also responsible for the administration of mosques and the running of an Islamic college in Omdurman. The government supported pilgrimages to Mecca and the *kuttub* (religious schools), where boys studied the Koran under the tutelage of orthodox Muslims.<sup>17</sup>

Trade and commerce are yet another example where the British used an earlier social structure to maintain stability. They encouraged merchant activities and as such expedited the process of Sudanese reintegration into the world economy which had been obstructed by the *Mahdiyya*.<sup>18</sup> In general, the collaboration of the pre-existing order with the British was crucial in establishing an effective administration as was conquest in subduing the Sudanese for it was this nascent Sudanese establishment that underwrote the new order. Coercion was still employed in response to early resistance, but even that often led to a remarkable collaboration as epitomized by the co-optation of the son of the Mahdi.<sup>19</sup>

Provincial administration in the southern Sudan was structurally similar with that in the north. The provinces were run by a hierarchy of inspectors, *mudirs*, and *ma'murs* all of whom were endowed with some powers of their northern counterparts. In the early years, there were no British inspectors (*muffatish*) in the southern Sudan, but in the areas where they existed, they spent much time trekking constantly from village to village, leaving the administration of the decrees of the government

in effect in the hands of the *ma'murs*. This arrangement did not prove entirely successful. Unlike the north, which had accepted defeat and decided to settle and develop economically and socially, the southern Sudan continued to defy British authority. The languages the southern Sudanese spoke and the religions they practiced were completely different from the north. In view of the fact that the experiences of the administrators in Khartoum were confined to the Arab and Muslim north, the inspectors in the south paid little attention to the administrative dictates of their superiors. They regarded themselves as patrons of the people they administered to a point where they defied the provincial government and even the central administration in Khartoum, purportedly in defense of what they considered to be the best interest of the Africans they ruled.<sup>20</sup>

Contrary to the British claim that they had taken over the protection and administration of the whole Sudan immediately after the Fashoda crisis of 1898, most of the southern provinces were not brought under British control even in the 1920s.<sup>21</sup> Having observed the frequency of military operations in the south, one British officer concluded that the administration of the south was a "failure."<sup>22</sup> It was clear that the system of administration prevailing in the north, employing methods and personnel of direct rule, was unworkable in the south. In response, the government adopted an administrative policy of "devolution of power" for the entire southern Sudan whereby rural areas were to be administered by indigenous leaders who, under the guidance of British officials, regulated their internal affairs according to their own customary law.<sup>23</sup> After a protracted period of gestation, what later came to be known as "Southern Policy" was promulgated in 1930. Nonetheless, no sooner than it was promulgated had the policy come under nationalist attacks. As the result, the policy's real importance remained symbolic since it did not solve the administrative difficulties in the south. In reality, southern Sudan was not brought under an effective British administration for the greater part of the colonial period.<sup>24</sup>

In Khartoum, from Kitchener's time to the departure of Wingate, the governor-general was assisted by the financial, legal and civil secretaries, whose positions were to grow in importance down the years.

The civil secretary in particular, with responsibilities for administration, later came to resemble a chief executive of the government. The roles of the secretaries were institutionalized in 1910, with the establishment of the Governor-General's Council, consisting of the three secretaries, an inspector-general, and a handful of other nominees of the governor-general.<sup>25</sup> This structure was kept relatively unchanged until after the First World War. The most important innovation before this time was the introduction of British civilian administrators, which began in a small way but later developed to an elaborate institution called the Sudan Civil Service, the administrative branch of which came to be known as the Political Service.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Economic Imperative: Organizing Land and Labor**

The most daunting economic problem the British had to confront was the question of land. In order to ensure the revival of agriculture after the destruction wrought by the Mahdiyya and to increase government revenue, the Sudan government acted as an arbiter of land disputes arising from the dislocations caused during the Mahdiyya and the appearance of "owners" with conflicting claims over the same land. In response, a number of ordinances were enacted during the early years of the condominium to regulate land ownership and use rights. Claimants were required to possess some kind of a document to be eligible for ownership titles, unless they had been dispossessed by force during the *Mahdiyya*. Nonetheless, the rules were leniently interpreted and enforced, and, in difficult cases, commissioners awarded alternative land to unsuccessful claimants.<sup>27</sup> Overall, there was little British interference with land issues. Distribution largely followed customary lines, combining Moslem precepts and local traditions.<sup>28</sup> The government claimed all land not privately held and reserved for itself the right to acquire more compulsorily.<sup>29</sup> In southern Sudan, land registration and dispute settlement were not carried out and government intervention was limited. A report on the southern district of the Bahr al-Ghazal commented that "the country... is so vast . . . that no question of ownership of land is likely to arise," . . . [and there was] "no such a

thing as individual ownership of land”<sup>30</sup> Whenever they arose, disputes were referred to local officials and were settled in customary ways

The issue of organizing agricultural labor was another matter of concern for the Sudan government. Slave labor was available, but both Cromer and Kitchener were aware that its use will pose a juridical and political problem to the administration. It is clearly stated in the condominium agreement that “the importation of slaves into the Soudan, as also their exportation, is absolutely prohibited.”<sup>31</sup> However, in keeping with Cromer’s intention to leave slavery alone, domestic slavery was permitted to continue to provide much needed agricultural labor. The British adopted a policy of tolerance towards slavery based on a recognition of its pervasiveness and its essential contribution to the economy without being totally insensitive to European susceptibilities.<sup>32</sup> Officials in the Sudan government tried to disguise the use of slave labor through semantic niceties and euphemisms; ‘servants’ not slaves, for instance. At other times they ducked the issue. Kitchener’s first Memoranda to the Mudirs was classic in its evasiveness: “[S]lavery is not recognized in the Soudan, but as long as service is willingly rendered by servants to masters it was not necessary to interfere in the conditions existing between them.”<sup>33</sup> As demand for slave labor increased, attempts were made to supply it from prisoners of war and convicts, seasonal workers from Egypt and Ethiopia, and by encouraging the settlements of the *fallata* (West African Muslims traveling to and from the *hajj*).<sup>34</sup>

Although the schemes did not supply the required numbers, consequent high wages continued to attract slaves. Before a daily maximum wage of 3 piasters was set in 1910, unskilled laborers were earning between 90 and 130 piasters a month at a time when 10 to 15 piasters are said to be sufficient for subsistence. Instead of solving the problem, this resulted in a decrease in full-time employment, driving wages even higher. In response, the Vagabonds Ordinance was devised, immigration was encouraged and wages were fixed at low level. A particular case in point is the southern Sudan where local wage was fixed at one or two piasters per day.<sup>35</sup>

British economic policy in the Sudan was geared towards appeasing the majority of the Sudanese by the lightness of demands of the government. Taxation was deliberately kept low, owing to the belief that oppressive exaction had earlier motivated support for the Mahdist revolt. In the south there was no systematic taxation until 1910. Only one or two pastoral groups paid tribute, from their point of view, as a payment for the government's goodwill. The idea of keeping taxes low remained the cardinal principle of the condominium both to encourage economic activity and to avoid recurrence of political disturbance.<sup>36</sup>

By the time Sir Reginald Wingate left the governor-generalship in 1917, the foundations of British rule in the Sudan had been firmly laid. In the north, while a resurgence of Mahdism was still feared, potential threats to the government were largely eliminated. There was no major military campaign in the north between 1900 and 1916, the year when the swift and comparatively bloodless conquest of the previously autonomous sultanate of Darfur took place. A fully developed administrative system also evolved during Wingate's long tenure as governor-general. The efforts to settle land issues and the attempts to organize agricultural labor were generally successful. By the end of the First World War, Northern Sudanese society had become prosperous by local standards without a perceptible sign of instability. In the south, however, administration was still characterized by punitive expeditions. Perhaps owing to the violent dynamics of southern politics or the government's failure to offer to the southern Sudanese the financial and political inducements that had pacified the north, military operations were routinely used in place of an effective administration. The volatile situation was exacerbated to some extent by developments on the Ethiopian side of the border which was as unstable as the southern Sudan.

### **Ethiopia's Domination of New Areas in the South**

In the last third of the nineteenth century, there existed a number of kingdoms and principalities in the region Ethiopia occupies today. In the north, the historic Abyssinian polity had disintegrated into petty fiefdoms and dominions that occurred in the eighteenth century.

Attempts by some of the potent provincial lords, namely Tewodros and Yohannes, to unify it did not result in the formation of a unified state. In the south and south-west there were a number of Oromo and Sidama kingdoms and entities at different levels of socio-political evolution. In the east there was the emirate of Harar, whose independence was interrupted by the Egyptian rule of the city between 1875 and 1885. In the central region was the kingdom of Shewa, an entity that remained virtually isolated from the rest of historic Abyssinia since it was cut off from it by the Oromo population movements of the sixteenth century. Toward the mid-19th century Shewa gained control over the districts which composed the core of the kingdom.<sup>37</sup>

From this base, Menelik of Shewa took to the field against the peoples of the south. Beginning in the 1880, the Shewan kingdom conquered and annexed vast territories inhabited by various peoples whose history, language and customs were vastly different from those of the Shewans. The speed with which this great extension of an empire proceeded owes a great deal to the advantage of military technology which likewise carried the British into the Sudanese territory and other European powers into Africa's heartland.<sup>38</sup> With his conquests, Menelik established a secure access to the resources of the south, and from there was able to extend his authority to the northern highlands after Yohannes' death in 1889.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Political Imperative: Organizing an Administration**

In most cases, the Shewans established their authority in the lands they had conquered by means of force.<sup>40</sup> Peaceful submission was, of course, much cheaper than a military campaign, but the Shewans actively pursued the latter policy to demonstrate to the next people that their fate will be the same if they resisted submission. Wars were also fought when the conquered people decided to resist rather than submit. Menelik's generals who conquered or forced into submission most of the southwestern Oromo monarchies and Oromo moieties in the east ruthlessly mowed down all those who resisted.<sup>41</sup> The Wolayita and the Arsi as well as the Nole Oromo rejected the option of submission and

resisted and, for their decision to do so, their countries were destroyed, their indigenous structures obliterated, and their properties confiscated<sup>42</sup>

Peace had to be established in the newly acquired territories for security, stability, law and order were the primary preconditions to make the colonies pay for their conquest and maintenance.<sup>43</sup> It was also important for Menelik to demonstrate to the European powers in the region that he had fulfilled the “effective occupation” imperative required of a legitimate “colonial power” as stipulated by the Berlin Conference of 1884-85. To bolster his claim, Menelik also settled the conquering soldiers in the land of the vanquished. Military garrisons known as *ketemas* were built throughout the conquered regions and later became the administrative centers of Shewan rule.<sup>44</sup>

The way conquest was carried out determined the form of administration that was subsequently set up in the newly acquired areas. Three types administrations were dominant.<sup>45</sup> First, in areas where the Shewans encountered resistance from the local people, the conquering generals were installed as governors in each newly incorporated area and northern soldier-settlers, or *neftennya*, were moved in. *Ras* Gobana was appointed governor of the Gibe states, *Ras* Mekonnen of Harar, *Fitaurari* Habtegiorgis of Wolayita, and *Ras* Darge of Arsi and with each of them an army of northern Abyssinians was named to do the job of customs and tax collection. These officials and the soldier-settlers drew no payments from the government and they lived off the land and labors of the local farmers, or *gebbar*. This practice eventually gave rise to the so-called *gebbar* system. In Oromo areas, the *gebbar* were administered by elements of the local elites, the *ballabat* and *gorro*. As local administrators, these officials mediated between the *neftennya* and the subject people.<sup>46</sup>

Second, in regions where independent kingdoms existed and the conquerors encountered no resistance, the former kingdoms were made tributary to the crown with their rulers left in place, subject to the acceptance of the Shewan king’s suzerainty and the payment of an annual tribute<sup>47</sup> After witnessing the destruction meted out on the Gojjames at the battle of Embabo, Moroda Bekere (r. 1868-1889) and his son Kumsa (r. 1889-1932), submitted to Menelik without resistance.<sup>48</sup>



The king of Jima, Abba Jifar II (r. 1878-1932), avoided war and managed to remain king of his domain by agreeing to pay an annual tribute to Menelik. It may be argued that Menelik ruled these areas indirectly through the indigenous ruling families who remained in place throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>49</sup>

Third, the far peripheries had neither monarchs to deal with nor were they comfortable enough for soldier-settlers to move in. Here no recognizable structure of administration was ever established. These areas were exploited through tribute collection and by ivory and slave traders.<sup>50</sup> One contemporary observer reported that the Anuaks in the provinces of Wellega and Illubabor, and the Shoa-Ghimirra were not brought under Abyssinian rule until the 1930s and, even thereafter, the Ethiopian government exercised intermittent supervision over them. Similarly, the Tishana refused to submit to northern governors and their troops, and revolted in 1935. Until the 1940s, these areas did not really come under the direct control and permanent administration of Ethiopian authorities.<sup>51</sup>

The governors enjoyed very ranging civil and military powers and authority over the allocation of land and the collection and utilization of taxes and tributes. They were obliged to pass a portion of the tax collected to the palace. Apart from these roles of the governors, a modern or uniform administrative system with defined administrative units did not emerge until the 1930s. Holcomb and Ibssa claim that boundaries were arbitrarily drawn dismembering the meaningful units of the previously existing societies to create administrative unites, namely *awrajas*, *woredas*, and *mikitil-woreda*.<sup>52</sup> But these administrative units did not come into existence until after 1941.

### **The Economic Imperative: Organizing Land and Labor**

Redistribution of land during and after the conquest was patterned based on the way the region was brought under Shewan rule. Local ruling classes who peacefully submitted to Shewan bayonets were allowed to keep parts of their landed property. More often they were allotted a third of their previous holdings known as *siso* lands, even though the

size of the land original owners were allowed to keep did not always amount to a third. In Wellega (Leeqa Nekemte and Leeqa Qellem), for instance, in a major land tenure reshuffle, about three-quarters of the land was expropriated from the original holders. The local ruling family retained about a quarter of the land and they definitely fared much better off than the peasantry who lost all.<sup>53</sup>

In time a new type of land tenure evolved. One category was the *gebbar-meret*, a private holding on which the proprietors paid taxes directly to the palace. The purpose of this type of holdings was to redirect payment of taxes and tribute away from the local ruling elites and directly to the Shewan treasury. The Ethiopian church also received its share of land, known as *semon-meret* with *gebbars* who provided the necessary labor. Government officials collected taxes in lieu of salary from *maderiyameret*, land granted for service rendered to the government or simply as a royal favor.<sup>54</sup>

In the areas where the Ethiopians met resistance land was wholly appropriated and redistributed. In Arsi, for instance, an extensive land alienation and re-distribution was carried out as the military governors confiscated land from the people and allocated it to their armed retainers who had moved in as soldier-settlers.<sup>55</sup> The soldiers who received land in these areas paid dues to the governors once or twice, after which part of their newly acquired land was converted to *rist* (permanent, inheritable possessions) from which they collected taxes and tributes for themselves in lieu of reimbursement for their military services. Officers obtained large estates. A major received up to 30 *gasha*<sup>56</sup> while a lieutenant acquired as many as 10 *gasha*. Non-commissioned officers were given up to 5 *gasha* and private soldiers were assigned a couple of *gasha*.

In Harer the estates of the ruling emirs and communal lands were appropriated and distributed among soldiers, the newly-appointed administrators, and the clergy who followed the state in all its ventures to new territories in the south. The old Turco-Egyptian offices of the *garad* and *malaq* were recognized and the office-holders were allowed to retain their authority over the land and tenants they supervised before the conquest.<sup>57</sup> Communal lands run out soon. In 1894 Ras Mekonnen

undertook a series of measures to free up more land through reductions from the holdings of farming families. A land measurement unit known as *salad* (a rope 75 meters long) or *gasha* used elsewhere in the empire was introduced and measured plots were parceled out of private holdings. In the vicinity of Harer, owing to a relatively high population density, one *gasha* out of the holdings of eighty *garads* was confiscated and registered as government domain. In the *garad* Malady and eastern Chercher, owing to a relatively low population density, one *gasha* was carved out of the holdings of ten *garads* and registered as crown land. Wherever *salad* land was available, it was distributed among soldiers and civil servants as *maderiya* and to a few voluntary emigrants as *rest* i.e., ownership by reason of settlement or long-term use.

The new overlords commandeered peasant laborers for their own enterprises but—unlike the emirs or the Egyptians who expected to be paid only in labor—they demanded tribute increasingly in cash. Alienation was rampant, on account of failure to pay taxes and promises of taking care of aged title-holders and “friends,” a dubious arrangement meant to disguise forced acquisition. In the process, more land came under the possession of the state, the church and powerful aristocrats including Ras Tafari (later Haile Sellassie) who, in effect, became the landlord with vast tracts of land in Chercher and most of the Harerge highlands.<sup>58</sup>

Land without labor is obviously unproductive and thus of no value. In most regions of the south, the problem of agricultural labor was resolved by the allotment of *gebbars* to the enforcers of the new order. Since neither the governors nor their retainers were paid salaries, they derived their income from the service of the *gebbars* who were granted to them for that purpose.<sup>59</sup> The number of *gebbars* allotted to each person depended on the recipient’s rank and social position. The highest ranking officials obtained up to a thousand, the intermediate ranks up to 300, while the low ranks received ten to twenty *gebbars*. The *gebbar* was treated as nothing more than a chattel by the *neftennya*. The *gebbar* tilled the landlord’s plot, erected the house of the *neftennya* and also provided the household of the latter with food, drink, and firewood. In some cases, the *gebbar* continued to serve the family of the *neftennya* even after the latter’s death. Indeed the obligations of the *gebbar* in the

south were on all counts more intensive and onerous than in the north. Describing the conditions of the *gebbar*, one observer wrote:

As the *neftennya* ... claimed the right to exact from [the *gebbar*s] four days' of work and a cash equivalent, they might seize the residue of their wages to pay their due, leaving them to subsist on what they could produce for themselves or perhaps obtain from their masters: girls and boys under fifteen belonging to the *gebbar*'s family often had to live at their master's house and work for nothing.<sup>60</sup>

In many ways, the position of the *gebbar* was comparable to slavery. Indeed one British visitor who saw the conditions of the *gebbar* in the 1930s had described it as "much worse than slavery."<sup>61</sup>

The kind of north-south relationship that emerged after the conquest was one of economic exploitation which took a number of forms ranging from the introduction of the *gebbar* system, to direct tribute, to plunder, and finally to the alienation and sale of local lands. All of these served to revive the economy of the Abyssinian state, easing the tribute burden of the northern farmer, while shifting it on to the southerner. It is fair to state that the modern Ethiopian state survived difficult times largely through the exploitation of the southern lands. As Donald Donham observed some time ago "this subsidy of the core by the periphery, a part of an ancient expansionary pattern, is perhaps the secret of Ethiopian history."<sup>62</sup>

As a result of Shewa's expansion, the social structure of the conquered people was substantially modified. Political authority gradually came to be concentrated in the hands of the *neftennya* who were made the landowners, tax collectors, judges, priests, and enforcers of the law. They attained even stronger control over the conquered in terms of language and religion as Amharic gradually became the dominant language and Orthodox Christianity the official religion. There were instances whereby southerners were forcibly baptized. For example:

[O]n Menelik's orders, groups of five hundred Galla [Oromo] were assembled and ordered to go to some nearby watercourse. Then the Amhara priest necessary for the

occasion divides the group into two, gives those who are on the right the name of Wolde Michael and to those who are on the left the name of Wolde Giorgis; then ... he distributes meat slain by Christian hands. The Galla and the Abyssinians who have witnessed this ceremony are profoundly convinced that it is a perfect baptism and that it imprints on the unhappy [Galla] the indelible mark of the Christian.<sup>63</sup>

These practices, along the redistribution of land and allocation of labor, played a major role in consolidating the social, economic and political power-base of the northern landed aristocracy. These were represented by the imperial family and the governors who ended up on top of the ruling hierarchy. Below them were the armed retainers of the respective governors, followed by the local *ballabat*. Holcomb and Ibssa, contend that the northern soldier-settlers related to the indigenous people as a group, and internal differentiation within their group was of secondary importance to the former relation. In the long run, there emerged a convergence of interest among the new comers as they consolidated their power and position. A new kind of relationship evolved between oppressors and the oppressed along ethnic lines.<sup>64</sup>

This relationship was expressed in a number of ways. The northern peasants came to believe that they possessed innate superiority over the conquered. This sentiment is expressed by *neftennya* informants, interviewed almost four decades ago, who described southerners “as primitives, without culture and effective government, and as lazy, dirty, and warlike heathen who needed the word of God”<sup>65</sup>. Overtime, this attitude became the central component of the settler’s outlook which still deters mutual understanding between the two groups of people.

### **Britain in the Sudan and Ethiopia in the South Juxtaposed**

One European traveler described Menelik’s conquest and incorporation of parts of the southern lands as “one of the remarkable works of colonization” and praised the policy as “simple, practical and intelligent”<sup>66</sup>. The ideologues of Ethiopian imperialism capitalize on this comment by touting Menelik’s accomplishments as a successful

“civilizing mission.” The apologists would argue that the south has benefitted from the superior agricultural technology of the north, Christianity and national political life. The notion that colonialism usually brings immense benefits to colonized peoples is the foundation of most colonial ideologies especially those of the nineteenth century European colonial enterprises. This paper has no purpose trying to establish a balance sheet of the benefits and losses of imperialism. But we are certain that, for the people conquered by Menelik, at least, everything was not as “simple, practical and intelligent” as colonial ideologues and apologists might want us to believe.

As has been shown in this paper, the British conquered and occupied the Sudan not because they saw a potential financial reward from occupying a country one half of which was rocky desert and semi-desert plains. Authorities agree that Britain’s main motive was the protection of the course of the Nile River much of which run through Sudanese territory. The British acted because they heeded the danger posed by the presence of the French in the Upper Nile and the Belgians further south and the defeat of their watchdog, Italy, by the Ethiopians. Leaving the source and the course of the Nile, Egypt’s artery of life, in the hands of rival powers would have made their position in Egypt extremely precarious.

A debate concerning Shewa’s motives for her southward expansion may continue to rage among historians. But there was no doubt in Menelik’s mind as to why he decided to send expeditionary forces against the societies that lay south of his kingdom. In the famous circular he sent to several European monarchs in April 1891, he expressed his ambition and objectives in no ambiguous terms. He wrote: “Ethiopia has been for fourteen centuries a Christian land in a sea of pagans. If powers at a distance come forward to partition Africa between them, I do not intend to be an indifferent spectator.”<sup>67</sup> Menelik’s desire to revive the economy of northern Ethiopia by the resources of the south may well have been a factor in prompting him to expand his kingdom. But arguments about Ethiopia’s recovery of former lands or those about Menelik’s benevolence in saving the southern societies from Europeans are really mute concepts. Unlike the ideologues and the apologists who

are experts at parsing his words to decipher his intentions, Menelik makes no effort to conceal his awareness of the European scramble for Africa and that he too wanted to get his slice of the “Magnificent African Cake” King Leopold of Belgium craved for. As a conscious and active participant in the scramble for territories, Menelik’s motives were no different from those that took the British into the Sudan.

The way in which the Sudanese and southern peoples were subdued was also similar. The conquests of both areas were carried out following the principle laid out by Lord Lugard, one of the architect of British imperialism. Speaking of his strategy in Uganda, Lugard is reported to have said that the only way to subdue resistance fighters is to “thrash them first, [and] conciliate them afterward... the policy of trying to make omelettes without breaking the eggs... is not the way our Raj has been established in India or elsewhere. These people must learn submission by the bullet—it is the only school.”<sup>68</sup> The brutality with which the campaigns of the Ethiopians against the Oromo in Arsi and Harer, the Wolayita and the Kaffa were conducted bear an eerie resemblance with the slaughter of the Sudanese at the Battle of Omdurman. Of the latter, one English observer wrote: “[I]t is not a battle but an execution. The bodies were not in heaps... but they spread evenly over acres and acres.”<sup>69</sup> And of the campaign against the Wolayita, an eyewitness to one of the bloodiest battles reported: “One had the feeling of witnessing some kind of infernal hunting where human beings rather than animals served as game.”<sup>70</sup> The fate of the Sudanese at Omdurman was eventually inflicted by Menelik on all southern peoples who resisted Ethiopian rule: they were blown away by a superior military force.

In establishing their administration, both the British and the Ethiopians initially assigned military officers, appointed by the Khedive and the Shewan king, respectively, to be the administrators and military commanders of the areas they had conquered. Overtime, the administration of the two areas took separate courses. The British military officers were generally replaced by civilian authorities who worked within an institutionalized framework, while the Ethiopian military governors and their retainers in the south remained in place.

and worked with no effective supervisory authority above them well into the 1940s. Furthermore, both the British and the Ethiopians coopted the preexisting rulers into their administration. In the Muslim north and central provinces of the Sudan, the British resuscitated the old traditional administrative structures while the Ethiopians left in place the traditional ruling families of those areas that submitted without resistance. The comparability offered in this respect is that both the British and the Ethiopians in some cases allowed the continuation of preexisting legitimacies and administrative structures, thereby establishing some form of 'indirect rule' in the conquered regions.

In both the Sudan and Ethiopia's south, the areas which were in the extreme peripheries were left largely unadministered except for the intermittent collection of taxes and other valuable commodities. In the southern Sudan, years of punitive expeditions and indiscriminate raids often resulted in the confiscation of cattle, but were rarely followed by a settled administration. By the end of the First World War, more than two decades of British presence in the Sudan had not produced a recognizable and functional system of administration in much of the southern part of the country. The experience of the Abyssinians in most parts of the south parallels that of the British in southern Sudan. The Abyssinians and the British frequently raided into the peripheries, collecting valuable commodities. Through several agreements, the territorial extent of the empires they had created was defined on paper, but both did not succeed in bringing the peoples in the borderlands under an effective administration until long after the regions were initially subdued.

The issue of land offers another parallel in a sense that, in both areas, the right of distributing it was taken over by the conquerors. Redistribution was carried out differently due to the varying local contexts. In the Sudan, in the face of a possible revolt arising from total expropriation, the British attempted to allocate lands to successful claimants and others who stood in need. Specifically, in order to forestall a resurgence of the Mahdiyya, the British often bent their regulations to grant land to Sudanese farmers. In the southern lands of today's Ethiopia, only those who peacefully submitted to the conquerors were



allowed to keep a small portion of their own land. In those areas where the conquerors encountered resistance, land was wholly expropriated and the previous holders were reduced to serfs. In the extreme peripheries, land remained out of Shewa's and later Ethiopia's control, just as most of the land in southern Sudan remained out of the British administration's control almost throughout the colonial period. In both areas, the conquerors' authority was characterized by the periodic raids and intermittent collection of tributes.

With regard to labor, both the British and the Ethiopians adopted a policy of providing labor for agricultural production. To that end, the British countenanced the perpetuation of slavery in order to ensure the supply of labor for agriculture and also for public works. The condition of the slaves did not appear to be as harsh as slavery is conventionally perceived to be because in this case slaves usually received some wages for their labor. In contrast, the need for agricultural labor in the southern lands was met by the *neftennya-gebbar* system in which former cultivators were distributed among the new comers to provide labor without any form of compensation.

Our brief look at religious policies indicates that the British and Abyssinian practices were markedly different. The British made effort to hide their disdain for Islam as a religion and its rituals. Of necessity, their policy toward Islam was one of prudence and non-interference and they made no attempts to tamper with the religion and identity of their new subjects. From the outset, the Abyssinians followed a policy whose purpose was to destroy the religion and cultural markers of the peoples they had conquered. The practices of forcible conversion represent the beginning phases of the Abyssinian's long-term effort aimed at forcing their southern subjects to assume new identities. These endeavors occurred in several areas including education, language and cultural practices which we have not considered in this paper.

The foregoing attempt at juxtaposition of the experiences of the Sudanese and southerners in Ethiopia has shown the existence of some parallels while making explicit that the latter were subjected to a rather onerous form of political domination and economic exploitation. One explanation for the differential impact of colonialism is that the Sudan

was acquired less for economic reasons than for geo-political motives whereas the annexation of new areas of the south in Ethiopia was essentially motivated by both. To be more precise, the Ethiopians were primarily motivated in launching the conquests by the devastated economic base and the need for financial resources to run their own state. On the other hand, the British conquered the Sudan to protect the waters of the Nile. Their operational and administrative expenses were paid for by the Egyptian treasury.

The financial shortage of the Abyssinian state was compounded by famine and drought which had devastated the agricultural base of much of the north and led to declining tax revenues and the collapse of the northern economy. Thus, the imperial treasury had to depend on the revenues from the south. Not surprisingly, the Ethiopians designed an economic policy that would ensure the continuous flow of revenue. They were not so much interested in the welfare of their new subjects as much as they were in the transfer of wealth and resources. It was the resource of the south that was to carry the brunt of expenses for the maintenance and defense of the “new country,” particularly the impoverished north. In view of the wealth that was to be extracted from the south, it was necessary to establish an administrative structure that would be capable of ensuring the uninterrupted transfer of capital. Added to this was the lack of a developed administrative culture on the part of the Ethiopians comparable to the experience of the British, or for that matter, the Egyptians. For the most part, the administration of the Sudan was conducted through an elaborate structure. In the case of Ethiopia, the need for resources necessary for the maintenance of the state and the political economy of the north, together with the lack of a developed administrative culture, dictated the establishment of an oppressive administrative system in the south.

After the conquests, the Abyssinian empire accorded nominal citizenship to individuals from the south fairly quickly, but submersed their nationhood in the larger nation of Ethiopia.<sup>71</sup> It is this immediate integration of the conquered people that has so far obfuscated whether or not Shewa's expansion was an imperialist undertaking and that the north-south relations that gradually evolved was colonial. It is worth-

noting that the conquerors themselves, including Menelik, talked about acquiring new lands and subjugating “other” people. They justified their conquests by the idea of a “civilizing mission” aimed at bringing the conquered people to the light of Christianity and the benefits of agricultural technology. They described this mission as “*ager magnat*” (civilizing or colonization) and referred to the lands they conquered as “*gegne ager*” (colonized lands). The conquered peoples perceive that their lands were taken over not by their kinsmen or former masters but by invading “foreigners”<sup>72</sup> One cannot find a more descriptive and a more apt characterization for this episode of Ethiopian history than the Amharic equivalent of colonialism, *ager magnat*, the very term that the conquerors used proudly to describe their accomplishments. Other characterizations are new political devices, invented long after the fact to fight new battles whose goal is to prevent the old Abyssinian empire from going the way of all empires

## NOTES

---

1. Bahru Zewde, “A History of Three Thousand Years or One Hundred Years” (In Amharic) *Dialogue: Journal of Addis Ababa University Teachers Association* 1:1 (1992), pp. 1-15. The article dismisses nationalist histories by trying to reduce them to political slogans. In fact, it is an extended tirade against new perspectives and reassessments of past historical writing. It begins by rejecting both the three thousand-year and the one hundred-year interpretations of Ethiopian history, but ends up advancing a rather absurd notion that Ethiopian history is actually seven thousand years old.
2. A series of books and a dissertation cover at least two thousand years of uninterrupted Ethiopian history. Sergew Hable Selassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian history to 1270* (Addis Ababa 1972); Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and state in Ethiopia, 1270-1527* (Oxford, 1972); Merid Wolde Aregay, “Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom, 1508-1708, with Special Reference to the Galla Migrations and Their Consequences.” Ph.D. Diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1971; Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia, the Era of the Princes: The Challenge of Islam and Re-unification*

- of the Christian Empire, 1769-1855* (New York, 1968); Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974* (London, 1991). For an example of historical works espousing the three thousand-year history, see E.A Wallis Budge. *A History of Ethiopia: Nubia and Abyssinia* vol. 1 (Oosterhout, 1966) The most recent general history of Ethiopia pushes back the beginning of Ethiopian history to four million years ago. See Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley, 1994).
3. Throughout this paper, the designation southern lands or the south refers to the whole area stretching roughly from Blue Nile counterclockwise to the Awash river in contemporary Ethiopia. The kingdom of Shewa emerged as an independent political entity under the Menz rulers in the early nineteenth century. Sahlé Sellassie (1813-1847) claimed the title of king (negus) of Shewa and thus elevated the Menz to a ruling dynasty. His grandson, Menelik, led expeditions to the southern lands from this base. It is this kingdom that came to constitute the nucleus of the present Ethiopian empire.
  4. Charles McClellan, *State Transformation and National Integration: Gedeo and the Ethiopian Empire, 1895-1935* (East Lansing, 1988), p 3; For similar analyses, see Harold Marcus, "Imperialism and Expansionism in Ethiopia." In G.N. Gann and Paul Duignan, *Colonialism in Africa*, (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 420-461.
  5. Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa* (New Jersey, 1990); Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992* (Bolder, 1993); Gaada Melaba, *Oromia: A Brief Introduction* (Finfine, 1980); Lubie Birru, "Abyssinia Colonialism as the Genesis of the Crisis in the Horn: Oromo Resistance, 1855-1913," *Northeast African Studies* 2-3, 3-1 (1980), pp. 93-98. For a sympathetic view of nonconformist Oromo history, see Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia : A History, 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1990).
  6. Richard Caulk, "Ethiopia and the Horn." In A.D. Roberts, ed., *Cambridge History of Africa, from 1905 to 1940* vol. 7. (Cambridge, 1986), pp 704

7. See, for instance, Bahru Zewde , “A Century of Ethiopian Historiography.” *Journal of Ethiopian History* (2000), pp. 1-26. The upshot of the article is a political statement that contemporary Ethiopia is in danger of another tragedy of reduction in size if establishment historians do not stand up and defend historic Abyssinia. Bahru gives an overview of the evolution of the historical profession over the last twenty five centuries to make a simple political point: that history written without the endorsement of the history department of Addis Ababa university are fabricated stories invented by “writers” (denoting Bahru’s contempt for nationalist scholars) whose ultimate objective is the destruction of the Ethiopian empire. In the author’s view, the failure of “professional historians” like himself to silence such “writers” (Eritreans and Oromo historians) has resulted in the tragic phenomenon of Eritrea’s independence. Bahru admonishes “professional historians” to stand up to Oromo nationalist scholars and “set the record straight before another tragedy is unleashed in the name of history on this hapless country of ours (p. 15). It is interesting that Bahru thinks the Oromo national question is an invention of irresponsible writers and that he could stop the wheel of history from rolling simply by denouncing Oromo scholars. It is from such patronizing attitude that nationalist scholars aspire to be free and as long as the Abyssinians remain beholden to this attitude, it will continue to be a problem for both Ethiopian historiography and the Ethiopian empire. A genuine effort at avoiding tragedies does not begin by trashing nationalist scholars, but by embracing them and trying to understand their views and grievances. Bahru’s effort simply pours fuel on the fire he wishes to put out.
8. Ronald J. Horvath, “A Definition of Colonialism,” *Current Anthropology* 13:1 (February, 1972), p. 45; Douglas Rimmer, “Review Article. The Economics of Colonialism in Africa,” *Journal of African History* 19:2 (1978), 265-73; D. K. Fieldhouse, *Colonialism, 1870-1945* (London, 1981), pp. 1-49.
9. Charles McClellan points out that the origins of the modern Ethiopian state can be traced at least from 1868, the time of Menelik’s escape from the imperial fortress at Meqdella. In a sense, he links the case to Menelik’s freedom and the beginning of a unified Shewan

- kingdom which eventually conquered the southern lands. See his "Land, Labor and Coffee: The South's role in Ethiopian Self-reliance, 1889-1935." *African Economic History* 9 (1980), p. 69.
10. For a detailed discussion of the negotiation and the agreement, see M. W. Daly, *Empire on the Nile: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan 1898-1934* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 11-18.
  11. Richard Hill, *Egypt in the Sudan, 1820-1881*. (London, 1959), pp. 22-23.
  12. Peter Woodward, *Sudan, 1898-1989: The Unstable State* (London, 1990), pp. 19-20.
  13. G. N. Sanderson, "Anglo-Egyptian Sudan," *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 6 (Cambridge, 1986), p. 640. The inspectors, owing to their extensive travel, were described by Daly as "as much explorer[s] as administrator[s]..." Daly, p. 135. See also Kitchener's *Memorandum to the Mudirs*, Printed in Muddathir Abd al-Rahim, *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 237-40.
  14. Abd'al-Rahim, p. 50; R. F. Martin, *The Sudan in Evolution*. (London, 1921), p. 48.
  15. J. S. Trimmingham, *The Christian Approach to Islam in the Sudan* (London, 1984), p. 13.
  16. An Austrian who served under General Gordon before spending twelve years in Omdurman and then escaping only to return with the reconquest of the Sudan as the first and only inspector-general.
  17. Gabriel Warburg, *Sudan Under Wingate* (London, 1981), ch. 6.
  18. Woodward, p. 35.
  19. Daly, pp. 278-281.
  20. Robert Collins, *Land Beyond the Rivers: The Southern Sudan, 1898-1918* (New Haven and London, 1971), p. 232; idem, "Introduction." In Robert O. Collins and Francis Deng, eds., *The British in the Sudan, 1898-1956: Sweetness and Sorrow* (Stanford, 1984) p. 12-13.
  21. Wingate's letter to his grandmother. Reference in Daly, p. 135.

22. Daly, p 397
23. Douglas Johnson, *The Southern Sudan*, (London, 1988), p. 4
24. Robert Collins, *Shadows in the Grass: Britain in Southern Sudan, 1918-1956*, (New Haven and London, 1983), pp. 172-178; Daly, pp. 396-404.
25. Harold MacMichael, *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (London, 1934), p. 109; Abd 'Al-Rahim, pp 46-49. Even though the administrative structure appears to have some features of the British government, it is important to keep in mind that there were still vestiges of the Turco-Egyptian administration
26. H. C. Jackson, *Sudan Days and Ways* (London, 1954), p. 15; A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, "The Sudan Political Service: A Profile in the Sociology of Imperialism," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15:1 (1982), pp. 21-48; Robert Collins, "The Sudan Political Service: A Portrait of Imperialists," *African Affairs* 71 (1972), p. 293-303.
27. Jackson, *Sudan Days*, pp. 13-14
28. Daly, p 212.
29. John Stone, *Sudan Economic Development* (Khartoum, 1955), p. 14
30. E. S. Jackson, "Report on the Southern District of Bahr al-Ghazal Province." Cited in Daly, p 214.
31. "The Anglo-Egyptian Agreement of 1889." Printed in Abd `Al-Rahim, Appendix II, pp 233-235
32. "Kitchener's First Memorandum To Mudirs." Printed in Abd `Al-Rahim, Appendix IV, pp. 232-233.
33. Daly, p 232
34. Warburg, pp. 179-189
35. Stone, pp. 52-54. For southern Sudan, see Beshir Mohammed Said, *The Sudan: Crossroad of Africa* (London, 1965), p 35.
36. P. M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*. 2nd ed (Oxford, 1970), pp. 126-127, 257-260; Sanderson, pp 757-759; Collins, *Land Beyond*, pp 233-235.

37. For details of the core districts of Shewan kingdom, see, Volker Stitz, "The Amhara Resettlement of Northern Shewa during the 18th and 19th centuries." *Rural Africana* 11 (1970).
38. M. Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia* (London, 1969), p. 294
39. Donald Donham, "Old Abyssinia and the New Ethiopian Empire: themes in social history" In Donald Donham and Wendy James, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in Social Anthropology and History* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 230-33.
40. D. Anthony Low, *Lion Rampant: Essays in the Study of British Imperialism* (London, 1973), 21-24; Marcus, "Imperialism", p. 448.
41. M. de Salvic, *Le Galla*, (Paris, 1902), p. 290. An illustrative case in point is what Menelik did in Harer before he left back for Entoto. See Richard Caulk, "The Occupation of Harrar: January 1886." *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 9:2 (July, 1971), p. 18.
42. One traveler recalls what a Shewan officer told him: "if an invasion did not completely ruin a country, the inhabitants would sooner or later rebel, and it would be necessary to send a great *zemetia* (campaign) and start all over again." Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest* (London, 1961), p. 412. For similar descriptions see Charles Michael, Vers Fachoda, (Paris, n d.), pp. 120-122; J. G. Vanderheyem, *Une exp[er]dition avec le negous M]n]lik: vingt mois en Abyssinie* (Paris, 1896), p. 131
43. Getahun Dilebo argues that law and order was maintained by force. Using the number of rifles in Ethiopia, he explains that rifles played an important role the establishment and maintenance of a "stable" system of administration. Getahun Dilebo, "Emperor Menelik's Ethiopia, 1865-1916: National Unification or Amhara Communal Domination." Ph D Diss, Howard University (1974), p. 72
44. Harold Marcus, "Motives, Methods, and Some Results of the Unification of Ethiopia during the Reign of Menelik II," *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Ababa, 1963), pp. 277-278.
45. Donham, "Old Abyssinia," pp. 37-44.
46. Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1968), passim.



47. Cerulli indicates that Aba Jifar remitted 87,000 Maria Theresa dollars to the emperor with another 15,000 towards the military expense of the empire. Enrico Cerulli, *Etiopia Occidentale*, vol. I, (Roma, 1932), chapter 6. See also Harold G. Marcus, "Some Reflections on the Development of Government and Taxation in Southern Ethiopia Around the turn of the Century," *IV Congresso Internazionale di studi Etiopici* vol. 1 (Rome, 1974), pp. 634-636.
48. Terrefe Wolde Tsadiq, "The Unification of Ethiopia, 1880-1935), Wallaga," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 6:1 (January, 1968), pp 73-86; Alessandro Triulzi, "Nekemte and Addis Abeba: dilemmas of provincial rule." in Donald Donham and Wendy James, eds , *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology*, (Cambridge, 1986), pp 51-68; Richard Caulk, "Territorial Competition and the Battle of Embabo," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 13:1 (1975), p. 84.
49. Perham, p. 304.
50. G. Montandon, *Au Pays Ghimirra, 1909-1911* (Paris, 1913), p. 28ff; H. Darley, *Slave and Ivory* (London, 1935), p. 130ff.
51. De Halpert in Perham, pp. 327, 329-330
52. Holcomb and Ibssa, p 121.
53. Tessema Ta'a, "The Basis of Political Contradiction in Wollega: The Land Apportionment Act of 1910 and Its Consequences," *Northeast African Studies* 6:1-2 (1984), pp. 184-192. Cf. Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: From the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Addis Ababa, 2000), pp. 222-225.
54. Richard Pankhurst *State and Land in Ethiopian History* (Addis Ababa, 1961), p. 142
55. Gebre Wold Ingda Work, "Ethiopia's Traditional System of land Tenure and Taxation." *Ethiopia Observer* (1961), p. 421.
56. Literally shield, but in this case, a unit of land measurement. In most cases, one gasha equals 40 hectares
57. The Egyptians adopted the emirate's landholding system and appointed officials who were charged with collecting taxes. The

appointees were known as the *malaq*, the *garad* and the *damin*. The first two terms were conferred upon officials as a title, but in the course of time they became also appellations for the land under their jurisdiction. Several *garads* and *malaqs*, usually five or six, come under the jurisdiction of the *damin*, literally a guarantor, signifying his responsibility for peace and order among his lineage. The *damin* also served as a liaison between the emir and his subordinates.

58. E. Blotto, *Il regime Della Terre Nell Govern or del Harar* (The Land Tenure System in the Government of Harer). Trans. Asmarom Legesse and Zerabrook Abera (Addis Ababa, 1966), pp. 32-40; Tsehay Berhane Sellassie, "Developments in Land Tenure in Harerge 1887-1935." In *Social Science Miscellania* 5, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University. (n.d.), p. 4.
59. C.F. Rey, *Unconquered Abyssinia* (London, 1932), p.189.
60. de Halpert in Perham 332. See also Asbe Hailu's article in Donham and James, p. vi.
61. G.T. Garratt, "Abyssinia" *Journal of the Royal African Society* 36:142 (1936), pp. 36-49. At the turn of the century, another traveler observed similar conditions of the *gebbar* and wrote about it in a more telling manner. John Boyes, *My Abyssinian Journey* (Nairobi, n.d.), p. 33. For a scholarly description of how the *gebbar* system worked in the south, see Charles McClellan, "Perspectives on the Neftenya-Gabbar system," *Africa* 33 (Rome, 1978), pp. 426-40.
62. Donham, "Old Abyssinia," p. 24; For analyses of the ecological consequences of highland Ethiopian expansion, see several chapters in Donham and James Triulzi, "Nekemte and Addis Ababa: dilemmas of provincial rule"; C. W. McClellan, "Coffee in center-periphery relations: Gedeo in the early twentieth century"; P.P. Garretson, "Vicious Cycles: ivory, slaves, and arms on the new Maji frontier"; and D. H. Johnson, "On the Nilotic frontier: imperial Ethiopia in the southern Sudan, 1898-1936"
63. Quoted in Marcus, "Motives." p. 274.
64. Holcomb and Ibssa, pp. 113-114.
65. Marcus, "Taxation," p. 637

66. P. Soleillet, *Voyage en Ethiopie*, (Rouen, 1886), pp. 233-236. Quoted in Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 153.
67. A Circular Letter Sent by the Emperor Menelik in 1891 to the Heads of State of Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia. Full text in Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History* (London, 1965). Appendix III, pp. 464-465.
68. Low, pp. 22-23.
69. Quoted in J. Ellis, *The Social History of the Machine Gun* (New York, 1975), pp. 86, 101.
70. Vanderheyem, p. 181.
71. An example of this process of integration is the case of an important Oromo ruler, Moroda Bakare, *Mooti* (king) of Leeqa Nakamte, who submitted to Menelik's suzerainty and received the Ethiopian title of *dejazmatch*. Later, his son, Kumsa, was christened with the Amhara name Gebre Egziabher and also named *dejazmatch*.
72. Robert du Bourq de Bozas, *De la mer Rouge a l'Atlantique a Travers l'Afrique Tropicale* (Paris, 1906), p. 125.

JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

## UNDERSTANDING OROMO NATIONALISM: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

---

*Okbazghi Yohannes*

### Introduction

Half a century ago, Chinese revolutionaries defined the modern era as one in which “countries want independence, nations want liberation, and peoples want revolution” Nowhere does this definition of our epoch have more express relevance than to the Ethiopian situation today. During the 20th century, Eritreans, Oromo, Somalis, and other ethno-nationalists persistently articulated the position that their countries and/or nations were under Ethiopian colonial domination, a status that entitled them to the unconditional exercise of the right to self-determination. The Eritreans succeeded in realizing that position by armed means. Oromia and other territories have not yet liberated themselves. Thus colonized nations, especially the Oromo, see in Eritrea their own future. Oromo nationalists have assured us of this prospect to the degree that they have remained determined to achieve the cultural and political liberation of Oromia by armed means, if necessary.

The focus of this article is to trace the historical contours of the Oromo anticolonial narrative. A perusal of Oromo historiography suggests that the Oromo contention to the existing state of affairs in Ethiopia revolves around five points. First, the conquest and absorption of Oromia into traditional Ethiopia was a classic case of colonialism. Therefore, the Oromo people, as colonial subjects, were and still remain entitled to decolonization and the establishment of their own State. Second, the colonization of Oromia was partly the result of an intra-Abyssinian contradiction, a contradiction that necessitated outward expansion during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in search of transferable economic surpluses. Third, the Ethiopian colonial plunder of Oromia was carried out with the connivance and, indeed, with active European diplomatic and military support without which Ethiopia could

have hardly succeeded in achieving its colonial ventures. Fourth, the current Ethiopian constitution is more an exercise in political chicanery than in substance. The Tigrayan-dominated regime conveniently uses constitutional federalism as a guise to perpetuate Ethiopian colonial domination over Oromia and the continuation of the Amhara-Tigrayan hegemony. Fifth, the historical and analytical relevance of the above facts to the contemporary Oromo situation has been obscured by the mystification of the Ethiopian State as a historically evolved organic whole. Both Ethiopian and Western scholars are equally culpable in obfuscating the Oromo question to the extent that they furnished the intellectual context to the official Ethiopian version of history.<sup>1</sup>

These five salient arguments, forming the core of the Oromo thesis, pose serious historical and theoretical challenges to the ethno-political configuration of the Ethiopian empire today and thus mandating closer examination. Oromo intellectuals contend that the colonial status of their country must be understood within the historical context of the last quarter of the 19th century during which time Abyssinian and European colonial forces converged to place Oromia under colonial yoke. The next section of the article therefore devotes a generous space to that argument. Careful attention to the social history of the present conflict should allow one to overcome the limitations inherent in static interpretations of Oromo nationalism. The third section of the paper sketches the contemporary state of affairs in Oromia. The concluding portion probes the fallacy of ethnic federalism within which the Oromo question is presumed resolved. Because the recognition of the Oromo question as a classic case of colonialism is the assumption that informs this essay, my theoretical and methodological lens heavily draws on materialist historiography.

### **The Historical Genesis of the Problem**

To an Oromo nationalist, Ethiopia comprises two historically and ethno-linguistically distinct regions: the north and the south. The north, historically referred to as Abyssinia or traditional Ethiopia, is the land of the Amhara and Tigrayans. The south, roughly approximating the

Oromo geographic definition of their country, stretches from the Somali border on the east, to the Sudan on the west, to Kenya on the south and to Amhara and Tigris on the north. Oromia, representing Half of Ethiopia's territory and population, was added to Abyssinia only in the last quarter of the 19th century by conquest in a manner that was at once contemporaneous and analogous in terms of both methodology and purpose to the European colonization of Africa.<sup>2</sup> Over the centuries, the Oromo and the Abyssinians had run numerous military incursions against each other without either side scoring decisive victory. Consequently, a sort of De Facto equilibrium prevailed between them for almost half a millennium. During the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the intensification of European rivalry over the African Horn and the relative military power accumulation by the Abyssinians converged so as to produce new objective conditions that favored the Abyssinians.<sup>3</sup>

As in Europe, the southward push of Ethiopia was motivated by economic factors, revolving around the dynastic contradiction between the Tigrayan and Amhara rulers. At the beginning of the third part of the 19th century, the Tigrayan dynasty under Yohannes and the Amhara dynasty under Menelik were locked up in a bitter struggle for the control of traditional Ethiopia. Thanks to considerable accumulation of arms, the Tigrayans were in ascendancy, which Menelik contested vigorously. Menelik, an exceptionally astute and a ruthlessly duplicitous politician, however, understood the implications of the asymmetrical relationship of power and the indispensability of sly tactics in human affairs. While he had never read *The Prince*, he took to heart the Machiavellian admonition that a ruler unarmed was a ruler destroyed. Recognizing this reality, Menelik made a conscious decision to walk a fine line between open confrontation with Yohannes and complete capitulation to him.

As part of his comprehensive political calculus, Menelik moved to cultivate new relations with Egypt which was then closing in on Yohannes's northern frontiers. To this end, he wrote to the Egyptian Khedive on several occasions proposing strategic partnership against Yohannes. Egypt quickly seized upon this idea and rewarded Menelik generously with a pledge of arms, including 500 guns, for his duplicity.<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to Menelik's anticipation, however, Emperor Yohannes decimated the Egyptian army twice in 1875 and again in 1876, capturing 18,000 Remington rifles and 30 artillery pieces.<sup>5</sup> The ability of the Tigrayans to raise and deploy an army of up to 70,000 against the Egyptians could not fail to impress Menelik. Cognizant of the superior military ratio — now almost three to one in Yohannes' favor — Menelik officially submitted to the Tigrayans in 1878. In return, the Emperor cunningly crowned Menelik the formal king of Shoa.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, Menelik had put out diplomatic feelers to different European powers in order to procure arms and to assure the conquest of Oromia and other non-Ethiopian polities, which would secure the means for his armament program.<sup>7</sup> Fortunately for Menelik, Italy was looking for a regional ally to eliminate the impediment Yohannes posed to Italian colonial probing. Accordingly, Italy sent Pietro Antonelli to Shoa to begin negotiations for a proposed Italo-Shoan alliance. Antonelli quickly developed a deferential intimacy with Menelik and was to serve as a diplomatic intermediary in dealings between the two countries for the next decade. In fact, the first series of negotiations conducted between 1879 and 1883 resulted in the two countries agreeing to accord each other most favored nation status in their commercial dealings. Menelik was rewarded with 2,000 Italian rifles for his surreptitious connection. In November of 1884, Italy and Shoa signed yet another military treaty in which the former agreed to supply Menelik's forces with 50,000 rifles over a period of ten years.<sup>8</sup>

Menelik's comprehensive armament program, when combined with his feudal obligation to pay an annual tribute to Yohannes, increasingly became a burden on the Shoan economy. In December of 1880, for example, the amount of tribute transferred from Shoa to Tigris included 50,000 talers in cash, 80,000 talers worth of national cloth, and 600 mules and horses trimmed in silver and gold and loaded with grain. Again, in May of 1881, Yohannes received from Menelik another 10,000 talers in cash, 10,000 cows, and enormous quantities of grain and flour. Facing such an immense transfer of resources to Tigris and to the militarization drive, Menelik began to prey on Oromia and other non-Ethiopian states bordering his Amhara kingdom in order to



secure the means necessary to meet his obligations. In 1881, he dispatched a group of Shoan marauders to the Oromo polity of Arsi; this raiding party returned with 100,000 head of cattle.<sup>9</sup> This southward military thrust gradually developed its own logic and momentum. As these military forays began to yield fabulous riches, Menelik continued to launch well-coordinated military assaults on weaker Oromo polities. As a result, he was able to exact exorbitant amounts of primary commodities that played a crucial role in his military bargains with Europe. Even the collection of slaves in the newly conquered States began to assume new dimension. Between June and July of 1883 alone, Menelik's own agents were reported to have sold 3,000 slaves in order to pay for his arms.<sup>10</sup>

The Shoan domination of vast territories south, east, and west of the kingdom became so securely established that the flow of primary commodities from these colonies into Shoa eventually began to change the regional military balance. In essence, the colonies provided not only the means for their own subjugation, but also sufficient resources to pay for Shoan importation of European arms. By 1887, it was becoming increasingly clear that the military balance in Ethiopia was shifting in favor of Menelik. By this time, Menelik could raise an army of up to 196,000, of which 100,000 men could be deployed anywhere in the colonies while leaving 96,000 men behind to maintain law and order within Shoa proper.<sup>11</sup>

Encouraged by Menelik's military successes and impressed by his newly found wealth, the Italians now began entreating the Shoan king to elevate their relationship from one of diplomacy to one of military partnership. This would require Menelik to double-cross his feudal master, Yohannes, in return for 8,000 Italian rifles.<sup>12</sup> This new strategic partnership was to have been consummated in a synchronized Italo-Shoan assault on Yohannes in late 1888. However, owing to mutual prevarications, the planned attack did not occur; later, it was rendered unnecessary as Yohannes was killed by the Mahdists in March 1889 as he was campaigning on the western fringes of his empire.<sup>13</sup> Following Yohannes' death, the Shoan ruler declared himself Menelik II, Emperor of Ethiopia. With the main obstacle to dynastic consolidation now

removed, Menelik focused his entire attention on completing the conquest of Oromia and other ethnic polities. This overriding objective, however, still required strengthening Menelik's external relationships. So, Italy and Ethiopia signed the Wuchale Treaty on May 2, 1889. Under the terms of this document, Italy recognized Menelik II as the only legitimate ruler of Ethiopia, while the latter recognized Italy's colonial titles to Eritrea.<sup>14</sup> The Wuchale treaty was subsequently supplemented by a number of protocols which, among other things, enabled Ethiopia to receive 4,000,000 lire as a loan and 2,000,000 rounds of ammunition in the form of gifts.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, capitalizing upon the new found Italian sponsorship, Ethiopia became a member of the Brussels General Council as its only non-European Christian participant; this entitled her to import arms and ammunition without any legal restrictions allowing the Emperor to accumulate an overwhelming military power vis-à-vis Oromia.<sup>16</sup>

With the passage of time, however, Menelik's strategic and political importance to Italy began to diminish as he became the only remaining barrier to the realization of Italian colonial ambitions in the region. Consequently, the reduction of his power became the primary object of Italian foreign policy. To this end, the Italians systematically subverted a cardinal provision in the Wuchale treaty, suggesting to European powers that Menelik had surrendered the management of Ethiopian international diplomacy to Italy — in effect, reducing Ethiopia to protectorate status. In April of 1891, Great Britain gave its *de jure* recognition to the Italian claim, thereby precipitating a diplomatic imbroglio.<sup>17</sup> France and Russia denounced the Anglo-Italian understanding and recommended to Menelik that he react negatively to this turn of events. Both France and Russia were at the time trying to secure their own presence in Ethiopia; hence, they saw Menelik as a crucial agent to thwart the establishment of an Anglo-Italian dominance.

In a lucid display of its opposition to the Italian claim, Russia dispatched an envoy to Ethiopia in October of 1891 with gifts of 10,000 francs and several boxes of rifles.<sup>18</sup> In January of 1895, a Russian contingent of 300 men and 400 animals arrived in Ethiopia with a large quantity of gifts. This was followed in April by a delivery of 400,000

rubles, 135 boxes of rifles, several machine guns, and a vast amount of cartridges. Additionally, Russian officers were attached to the Ethiopian army to train them in the handling of modern weapons<sup>19</sup>

French interest in Ethiopia was also determined by geopolitical considerations. The Anglo-French competition for control of the Nile was particularly a crucial catalyst in this regard. France needed Ethiopia to participate in the Congo-Nile French expedition to provide reinforcement and communication lines linking Djibouti with southern Sudan, crisscrossing the entire length of Oromia. Thus France viewed any change or modification in Ethiopia's status as detrimental to its own long-term geopolitical interests.<sup>20</sup>

With full Franco-Russian weight behind him, Menelik unilaterally rescinded the Wuchale treaty and began feverish preparation for a military confrontation with Italy.<sup>21</sup> He demonstrated his belligerent intentions by placing an order with a German firm in 1893 for a shipment of 100,000 rifles and 10,000,000 rounds of ammunition which the German government blocked the shipment on behalf of Italy.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, Menelik already had sufficient quantity of arms to meet the Italians on his own terms. He had at least 82,000 rifles and 5,000,000 rounds of ammunition at his disposal.<sup>23</sup> By 1895, Menelik's innovative diplomacy, coupled with his utilitarian understanding of politics, had brought about the desired outcome.

By contrast, Italy was ill-prepared for a war with Ethiopia, notwithstanding vociferous rhetoric to the contrary. The Italian appropriation in 1895 of a mere 50,000 pounds to support a 20,000-man army in Eritrea highlighted Italy's underestimation of the military situation in the African Horn.<sup>24</sup> By failing to appreciate the diplomatic significance of intra-European rivalry, Italy was unable to assess accurately the importance of the military assistance which Ethiopia was receiving from France and Russia. The only Italian who seemed to have understood properly the asymmetrical power relationship that existed between Ethiopia and Italy was General Baratieri, colonial governor of Eritrea. Cornered by political pressures from Rome and outvoted by four of his own generals, however, Baratieri acted against his instinct and military scruples by leading his 17,700 men against a well-equipped and well-trained army of 100,000 Ethiopians.<sup>25</sup>

Owing to Menelik's military buildup of two decades, mostly undertaken with the connivance and assistance of Italy itself, the Ethiopian victory at Adowa over the tattered Italian army in March of 1896 should have come as a surprise only to Italy. For those who had followed the diplomatic process and the arms race, the outcome was never in doubt. However, the political after-effects of Adowa far surpassed any predictions made. This battle instantaneously transformed Ethiopia into an epicenter of international diplomacy as diplomats from across Europe flocked into the empire seeking both to gain favors and to make deals with the victor. France in particular began to view Adowa as a vindication of its diplomacy and close military partnership with Menelik and became the first European power to seek Ethiopian partnership in its struggle to control the Upper Nile.

Between January and March of 1897, France conducted a series of negotiations, resulting in the conclusion of two conventions. Under the terms of the first convention, France received preferential treatment from Ethiopia in matters of commerce and trade, including the right to construct a railway system stretching from the nerve centers of Oromia to Djibouti. In return, Menelik received half of French Somaliland.<sup>26</sup> Under the terms of the second, the White Nile convention, Menelik agreed to provide support and reinforcement to the French Congo-Nile expedition. Again, Menelik was rewarded generously with 100,000 French rifles and 2,000,000 rounds of ammunition.<sup>27</sup>

Within a matter of days after the French diplomats accomplished their mission, a high-powered British diplomatic team arrived in Ethiopia seeking special favors from Menelik in the recolonization of the Sudan. The growing relationship between Ethiopia and France was exceptionally disconcerting to the British. Against this background, the British team offered Menelik two options: either alliance with Great Britain against France and the Mahdists in the Sudan, or neutrality in the event of military confrontation with anti-British interests in the region. In return for this *quid pro quo* relationship, Britain generously offered to compensate Ethiopia with a substantial block of territory.<sup>28</sup>

Accurately assessing British desperation, Menelik raised the ante by demanding that Britain cede British Somaliland in its entirety to

Ethiopia in return for his neutrality. In early May of 1897, after tough and protracted negotiations, the two states defined their relationship on both friendly and commercial levels, after which time Menelik was able to import arms freely through British Somaliland in return for his refusal to supply arms to the Mahdists<sup>29</sup>

Menelik's territorial gains for Ethiopia, including both the lands obtained from France and Britain and the area gained through warfare with the Oromo and the Somalis on the eastern front of the empire, added up to 80,000 square miles and extended from Harar to Sidamo — that is to say, one-fifth of present-day Ethiopia.<sup>30</sup> Menelik's maximalist strategy paid off handsomely as France and Great Britain handed over to Ethiopia significant portions of their possessions. Implicit in the Euro-Ethiopian partnership was the recognition of Oromia as the natural and logical extension of Ethiopia. In short, Ethiopia had become the recognized regional hegemon, endowed with the rights and privileges that naturally emanate from having become a great power, including the ability to carve out its own colonies. To be sure, the roots for the colonial victimization of Oromia are found in the historical context within which the Euro-Ethiopian relationships were forged, on the one hand, and in the manner in which the internal contradictions in Ethiopia proper unfolded, on the other. At any rate, the outcome of Adowa had broadened the scope of Ethiopia's forward thrust. It should be recalled that in the decade preceding Adowa, Ethiopia had already made massive territorial gains in Oromia. In 1887, Menelik had been able to capture the Oromo strategic outpost of Harar; from that location, his forces had made numerous forays into other Oromo and Somali territories, looting, murdering, and accumulating more and more land.<sup>31</sup> The drive southward to Sidama was equally destructive. According to one European eye witness, the Ethiopian invaders took 20,000 prisoners in December of 1894, either killing or enslaving them all. The imperial share of the spoil from this ruthless campaign included 1,800 slaves and 18,000 head of cattle.<sup>32</sup> A British government report suggested further that the Ethiopian destruction of Welayta alone had yielded 15,000 slaves for the marauders.<sup>33</sup>

The overall effect of Adowa had been to accelerate the further conquest and devastation of the many polities in what is today southern and southwestern Ethiopia. In 1897, Menelik dispatched an army of 31,000 strong to obtain the submission of the prosperous coffee-growing state of Kafa whose tiny defense force, equipped with a mere 300 superannuated guns, quickly collapsed.<sup>34</sup> After that time, Kafa had become the cash cow of Ethiopia. In 1904, this colony alone supplied Menelik with 350,000 thalers in cash, 15 kilos of gold, and a massive amount of furniture including special gold plates and silver cups for the Ethiopian monarch.<sup>35</sup>

The long-term consequences of Adowa have had an intellectual component as well. The expansion of its diplomatic ties with Europe enabled Ethiopia to acquire foreign experts and scholars who came to staff the imperial bureaucracy and institutions of learning. In 1906, for example, the number of foreign employees in the service of the imperial order stood at 205 and steadily rose to 14,320 by 1935.<sup>36</sup> Over time, these expatriates developed durable social bonding with the empire and the dominant culture they came to know. They were mesmerized by the charms of the Ethiopian elite and by their readings in the Ethiopian archives. The end result of all this was that Ethiopia produced a galaxy of western Ethiophiles who became co-excavators of mythological ruins and co-generators of mythical images of the empire. Through their writings they claimed to have shown the world the link between the mythological Ethiopia, the origin of which rests on the sexual union between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and the historic Ethiopia which Menelik himself had created by brute force. Their expatriate identity, when coupled with the subtleties of their methods and analyses, granted a certain credibility to their works on Ethiopia. Certain of these Ethiophiles even suggested that Ethiopia's unique traits had enabled it to transform itself speedily into a 'truly' multiethnic society.<sup>37</sup> This antiquated notion of Ethiopian exceptionalism remains so pervasive in Ethiopian historiography that even David Lewis could write that Ethiopia 'has spent a thousand years contracting, disintegrating and reassembling to reach its standing under Menelik as the premier power on the continent'<sup>38</sup>

What Lewis' conclusion suggests is that the forced incorporation of Oromia and the 50-odd ethnic groups within Ethiopia by Menelik in the 19th century was simply a matter of Ethiopian reassertion of its eternal titles to those territories and peoples. Christopher Clapham goes even further to assert that the Ethiopian state has universally been accessible to any one on the basis of effort and without reference to kinship or ethnicity. "... the resilience of the centralizing nationalism of the core has convincingly demonstrated that Ethiopia is neither a Habsburg state dependent on its dynasty to hold together the congeries of disparate peoples nor an ethnic empire depending on the domination of one of its peoples over the others"<sup>39</sup>

Such subjective juggling in the name of scholarship have the effect of reinforcing the ex post facto "invention" of Ethiopia as a historical continuity and a contiguous territorial representation of many loci that are integrally tied to a single gravitational grid. As Asafa Jalata and Jan Hultin separately argued, knowledge cannot be understood apart from the social context of its production. The essentialist narrative in Ethiopian historiography, which Western scholars helped to craft, does glorify Ethiopia's historical continuity, language, culture, and its Christian civilization, but only by excluding or even denigrating the Oromo. In this essentialist paradigm, the Oromo are seen as living in the state of nature without a civilizational grid of their own, whose only endowment is natural sexual fecundity as a result of which they have had the capacity to descend on Ethiopia like hordes, constantly endangering the purity of its Semitic culture and Christian civilization. Thus, Oromo military successes against the Tigrayan-Amhara hegemony are treated as posing threats to Ethiopia's survival as an outpost of human civilization. Conversely, Menelik's southward thrust into Oromia is seen as in keeping with the pioneering spirit of the Amhara to carry forward the civilizing torch of culture and religion, redeeming the Oromo from their condemnation to the state of nature.<sup>40</sup> Creating a pejorative imagery of the Oromo, by denigrating their history and devaluing their culture, has obviously been part of the justifying idioms of Ethiopian colonial domination over Oromia. How else could the ruling Amhara-Tigrayan oligarchy justify the rapacious extraction of Oromo resources and the

ruthless appropriation of Oromo labor? Indeed, the Amhara-Tigrayan idiom of colonial justification has uncanny parallel with the French stagecraft. French colonialists had tried to convince their colonial subjects that their placement under French yoke was for their own good. The subjects were told that they had neither history nor civilization; but by discarding their cultural particularity and ethnic distinctiveness and, instead, by adopting French language, culture, religion and French history, they would “evolve” into becoming “civilized” members of French society.

This brief description of the role played by western Ethiophiles in the evolution of Ethiopian politics and diplomacy is given simply to establish two cardinal points. First, to the extent that academia is the only corridor which connects international diplomacy with public opinion, Western intellectual production of mythological artifacts regarding the African Horn has strongly influenced Western policy makers. Second, the determinants and effects of Ethiopian territorial expansion and the complex relationships the conquering Amhara developed with the peoples they subjugated have been obscured. The failure of academics to recognize that the Ethiopian conquest of its southern neighbors is both contemporaneous and analogous to the process by which European powers partitioned the rest of Africa has led to the ignorance by policy makers, particularly within the United States, of the complex ethnic relationships which are the hallmark of the region.

This should by no means be interpreted as suggesting that there were no important differences between European colonialism and Ethiopian expansion. An apparent difference, though not qualitatively relevant, is that the regional power in the case of Ethiopia was both African and black and could, therefore, easily manufacture — as it did — bogus historical claims to the territories it conquered. A more crucial difference between European and Ethiopian colonialisms, however, was that the European penetration of the region was essentially a product of the fundamental contradictions inherent in mature capitalism such as domestic overproduction and underconsumption. The empirical resolution of such domestic crises was entirely predicated upon the



acquisition of external markets. By contrast, the Ethiopian conquest of Oromia and other polities arose as a function of the tributary relationship that developed between the Tigrayan Yohannes and the Shoan Menelik. It should be noted that this relationship had imposed onerous obligations upon Menelik, forcing him both to generate sufficient resources to pay tribute to his overlord and to raise the means to finance his ambitious armament program in order to alter the prevailing power structure. Consequently, the social relations and patterns of production which the Amhara had established in their colonies were radically different from those which the Europeans had implanted in their colonies.

For example, two-thirds of the land in the Ethiopian colonies were confiscated and then distributed among the imperial State, the nobility, the church, and their hangers-on. What emerged within these colonies was analogous to European feudalism, as the colonial administrators and garrison commanders began to receive the fruits of their serfs' labor — and often even the labor itself.<sup>41</sup> For example, a private Amhara soldier received between two and three Oromo as serfs, whereas garrison commanders were entitled to between 30 and 80 Oromo serfs each to plow their ill-gotten land, to haul their wood, and carry their water. Military Generals, provincial governors, and notables on the upper end of the hierarchy were entitled to and received several hundred Oromo serfs each.<sup>42</sup>

Even though Ethiopian colonialism rested on the alienation of land and crude appropriation of labor in keeping with the feudal mode of production, ontologically it was not different from the pattern in which European colonialism was implemented in many parts of Africa. In east and southern Africa, for example, the colonialists alienated land in mass and then distributed it to white settlers. The indigenous owners of the land were immediately transformed into a class of landless people, who found themselves compelled to work on the new colonial plantations under conditions of extortionate exploitation. Perhaps the only crucial difference between Ethiopian settler colonialism and modern European territorial accumulation was the fact that European settlers rapidly transformed their holdings into agro-commercial

plantations in keeping with modern market fundamentals, thereby initiating the process of primitive capital accumulation in the colonies. These modern commercial plantations required the promotion and development of transportation, communication and marketing networks, connecting localities and regions into integrated whole along capitalist lines. To facilitate the smooth operation of the mechanics of colonial capitalism, European colonialists also established schools and vocational training programs, creating a large class of indigenous intermediaries. The resulting ramifications of the various colonial undertakings included the facilitation of social communications and interactions among the colonized peoples, which in the long run became crucial to the beginnings of anticolonial nationalism. By contrast, Abyssinian settler colonialism rested on purely crude expropriation of land and labor, without modifying or altering them along capitalist lines.<sup>43</sup> If anything, Abyssinian colonialism arrested the social progress in Oromia by destroying the egalitarian mode of production and the democratic mode of social existence of the Oromo people.

Moreover, the archaic mode of production the Abyssinians introduced into Oromia was supplemented by the capture and export of slaves. Although slavery was not a new phenomenon in the region, the situation in post-Adowa Ethiopia expanded the scope for its commercialization. Mention must be made here that Ethiopia exported 2.5 million slaves in the nineteenth century alone.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, over 360,000 slaves were exported from the conquered regions between 1900 and 1928.<sup>45</sup> Slavery of this magnitude held drastic — and immediate — implications for the demography of these areas. By 1919, for example, the population of Kafa was reduced by two-thirds. Likewise, the population of Gimira in the southwest was reduced from its peak of 100,000 in 1900 to only 20,000 by 1912.<sup>46</sup>

Implicit in this analysis is that, unlike the European colonial powers, Ethiopia lacked the necessary means for capitalist transformation. This inevitably created a profound gap between Ethiopia's twin imperatives: the necessity of maintaining its exploitative relationship with Oromia and the necessity to develop military strength in order to sustain the exploitative relationship. Put differently, without transforming itself in

a way that would have also transformed its dependencies, Ethiopia lacked the internal means by which it could maintain its imperial overstretch. The inevitable conclusion was that Ethiopia was forced to continue its reliance on a diplomacy of external dependency to ensure the incessant flow of arms. It is worth-recalling that, right after Adowa, the imperial Ethiopian state had 112,000 guns at its disposal, needed to complete the colonization of Oromia and other ethnic polities. Seven years later, Ethiopia had 600,000 guns, which it ruthlessly employed to maintain its colonial grips on Oromia and other colonies.<sup>47</sup> This was the cardinal condition that prompted Ethiopia to continually look for an external patron — which it successively found among European powers, Russia, and the United States. In this context, when Oromo nationalists speak of Western powers having become instrumental in their subjugation by Ethiopia, they are a lot closer to the historical truth than Abyssinian Ethiopians and their Western supporters.

### **The Oromo Question: The Unfinished Struggle**

Although early European ethnographers overlooked and Ethiopian chroniclers denigrated for centuries the history and social morphology of Oromia, the Oromo people are one of the oldest ethnoracial formations in the African Horn. Throughout the second millennium of the Christian era, the Oromo expanded until they firmly secured vast territory for themselves. The unavoidable result of their territorial reach was the regional segmentation of the Oromo into politically independent polities. Interestingly, the Oromo polities developed and practiced traditional forms of republican democracy and social egalitarianism termed the Gada system. At the foundational level, the Gada system celebrates the organic interconnection of social, economic, political and spiritual relationships, not only intra-communally but also across communities. Institutionally, the Gada system universalizes the functional division of social responsibilities through meticulously arranged periodic circulation of responsibilities, using a combination of generational gradations and social competence as the sole criterion.<sup>48</sup> By social design, Oromo children are not automatically entitled to inheritance of their parents' social credit, social standing and influence;

children must earn them on their own by the cultivation of self-reliance and personal autonomy, on the one hand, and by early demonstration of independence, courage, and valor, on the other<sup>49</sup>

The civic virtues enshrined in the Gada system have unambiguously given modern Oromo nationalism its moral foundation and romantic inspiration, and its historical and cultural anchor.<sup>50</sup> In retrospect, though, the geographic segmentation of the Oromo, accompanied by their highly decentralized political structures rooted in the Gada system, was in part responsible for the success of the Ethiopian assaults on Oromia in the 19th century. This is largely due to the fact that the extreme political decentralization and geographic dispersion of the Oromo made pan-Oromo national mobilization against the European-supported and heavily armed invading Ethiopian army exceedingly difficult.<sup>51</sup> Although vanquished, however, the Oromo people carried on a relentless resistance to Ethiopian occupation which included frequent peasant uprisings, something which Ethiopian historiographers conveniently gloss over. The contemporary Oromo struggle is part of the traditional resistance to Ethiopian occupation of their country.

Ethiopia's war with Italy in 1935-36 and its subsequent occupation by the latter until 1941 had created important objective conditions for the Oromo struggle to gather some momentum. First, in order to ensure enforcement of internal pacification in Ethiopia, the Italians built a central grid of highways that branched out from Addis Ababa to the different regions of the empire, thereby creating the rudimentary infrastructure for social communications and commercial transactions between the diverse peoples of Ethiopia. The Oromo were the primary beneficiaries of this situation as they began to reconnect culturally and linguistically. Second, Italian policy, favoring the development of agro-commercial capitalism in Ethiopia, rendered the slave mode of production obsolete and sufficiently weakened the semi-feudal character of the Ethiopian land tenure system. Third, in order to advance their cause against the Amhara-Tigrayan cultural and linguistic hegemony and resistance, the Italians sought to win the Oromo to their side. A deliberate policy was enacted to restore the ethnic markers of Oromo identity, allowing the Oromo for the first time to write and read in their

own language, to develop their own literature, and to preach or teach and even broadcast in Afan Oromo. These three objective conditions together supplied the rudimentary mechanics for the beginnings of prototype Oromo nationalism.

Emperor Haile Selassie's policy to avert the potential rise of Oromo nationalism was equally crucial to the social movement of the Oromo. Beginning in 1942, the Emperor ordered the Oromo language banned from use in churches, schools, administrations, and from broadcasting. All books in the Oromo language were collected and then burned.<sup>52</sup> The vitriolic campaign against the ethnic markers of Oromo identity, including their language, culture, and religion, continued unabated well into the 1970s. Even the Protestant churches in the heartland of Oromia, where this writer received his formative education in a Swedish missionary school in the 1960s, were not allowed to preach or teach in the Oromo language. Every service had to be delivered in Amharic and then translated into Afan Oromo, even though over 99 percent of the congregations were made up of Oromo. On occasions (and there were many of them) when translators were not available, the church services would be simply delivered in Amharic, even though the overwhelming majority of the audience hardly spoke Amharic. Moreover, since it was illegal to print or publish books in Afan Oromo, the Swedish missionaries had to smuggle in copies of the Bible in Afan Oromo from Nairobi. The profound sense of cultural deprivation and intellectual humiliation felt on the part of the Oromo was painfully obvious even to those of us who did not share the same ethnic markers with them. Paul Baxter's authoritative documentation of similar experiences in other parts of Oromia bears testimony to the fact that the level of alienation and dehumanization that the Oromo experienced was such that it was not uncommon for many of them to discard their own ethnic markers in favor of Amhara names, language and religion in order to pass for "cultured" Amhara.<sup>53</sup>

The Ethiopian suppression of the Oromo people and the ethnic markers of their identity, however, simply served to accentuate the rise of Oromo nationalism. After all, as Herbert Lewis keenly observed, Oromo nationalism is a contingent response by the Oromo to their

degraded cultural status, political marginalization, and economic and employment discrimination.<sup>54</sup> Like all social movements, Oromo nationalism began in the 1950s and 1960s as a civic movement, seeking cultural recognition and respect, social justice and equal citizenship. Instrumental in the Oromo cultural movement was Matcha Tulama, formed in 1964 as a self-help association, committed to improving the cultural, social, and economic well being of the downtrodden Oromo in the periphery of the Ethiopian empire by promoting literacy campaign, building roads, schools, clinics, churches and mosques. The association attracted a large number of Oromo intellectuals, military and police officers, civil servants, and students, all aware of the cultural devaluation and second class status of the Oromo, and wanting to usher in a dawn of Oromo cultural renaissance and civic liberation by peaceful agitation and education.<sup>55</sup>

The political demise of the Matcha Tulama, more than its rapid success in capturing the imagination of many Oromo, became a historic landmark in the evolution of Oromo Nationalism. Apprehensive about the potential consequences of Oromo awakening for Amhara hegemony, the imperial regime ordered the immediate dissolution of the association in 1967 on grounds of bogus allegation of political subversion. Over 100 Matcha Tulama leaders and members were arrested and banished.<sup>56</sup> The circumstances surrounding the demise of Matcha Tulama finally convinced literate Oromo persons that the achievement of civic equality within the then existing imperial order was a remote possibility. Consequently, they elevated their struggle from the cultural sphere to a political one. Symbolic beginnings toward this end included the rejection of the Amharic alphabets, for linguistic, pedagogical and practical reasons, in favor of the Latin characters as the basis for the development of Oromo literature. By the beginning of the 1970s, Oromo intellectuals and students began releasing literary pamphlets and political tracts in Afan Oromo using the Latin-based Qube system

Meanwhile, in the 1950s and 1960s numerous peasant uprisings throughout Oromia punctuated the Oromo determination to recapture their land and to rediscover their cultural and political heritage. It was in response to the widespread peasant uprisings and the urban social

movement that the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was created in 1974 to supply unified and secular leadership to the national resistance movement. Between 1974 and 1991, the OLF made significant political and military contributions to the ouster of the military dictator, Mengistu Haile-Mariam. However, owing to its relative military weakness vis-à-vis the Tigrayan-dominated Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a reincarnation of Amhara-Tigrayan alliance, and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the OLF received very little in the final settlement.

In the U.S.-brokered peace, held in London in May 1991, the OLF was pushed aside when the EPRDF and the EPLF were formally treated as the De Jure successors to the military regime. The resulting fact was that the U.S., EPRDF, and the EPLF determined the character and shape of the post-Mengistu order in Ethiopia and Eritrea. The act at once signified the repudiation of the OLF as the sole voice of the Oromo people and the recognition of the Oromo question as an internal Ethiopian matter that was not appropriate for international negotiation. In effect, the Oromo quest for decolonization was left unanswered. Having conceded Eritrean independence by prior agreement, the EPRDF and the EPLF colluded on the essentiality of preserving Ethiopia's territorial unity and the United States readily endorsed it. The only concession granted to OLF was that the EPRDF agreed to invite the OLF, together with other minor political organizations, to a national conference scheduled for July 1st 1991. The OLF now found itself juggling between harsh realities and abstract promises. The United States, the EPLF, the Sudanese government, and even nongovernmental organizations, engaged in cross border humanitarian operations, as if in unison told the OLF that they all had vital interests in Ethiopia's territorial unity and stability and, therefore, their continued cooperation with the Oromo movement was going to be contingent on whether the OLF collaborated with the Tigrayan-led regime. On the promise side, both the US and the EPLF gave false assurances that their support for the central Ethiopian government was going to be a function of a democratic reconfiguration of the empire, ending Amhara-Tigrayan economic, political and cultural hegemony.<sup>57</sup> Caught between harsh

objective external conditions and a flickering hope of securing a better future for the Oromo people within the framework of internal self-determination,<sup>58</sup> the OLF was placed in a quandary to accept its externally defined junior status and postpone the armed struggle, something that gave the Wayane regime time to accumulate internal legitimacy and consolidate its grips over the inherited empire.

Thus, internationally isolated and militarily weak, the OLF grudgingly agreed to participation in the all-party conference and joined over 20 organizations to produce the Addis Ababa Charter, replete with abstract promises. The Charter committed the participating organizations to promoting human rights governance, enshrining due process and equality under the law, constructing democratic institutions and enforcing the right of nations to self-determination. In principle, the charter recognized the OLF as a legitimate voice, but not the only legitimate voice of the Oromo people. The EPRDF had already sponsored the creation of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) to operate in Oromia with a view to undercutting the popular legitimacy of the OLF. To this end, OPDO members were placed in key positions in Oromia by the EPRDF-dominated transitional government.

Despite the political odds stacked against it, the OLF agreed to join the transitional government as the second largest political organization after the EPRDF. Before long, however, the OLF began to complain about EPRDF drifting toward antidemocratic practices as the OPDO continued to receive preferential treatment from the central government in Oromia at the expense of the OLF. Intent on dramatizing its protestation over EPRDF heavy-handedness, the OLF boycotted the June 1992 regional elections on grounds of electoral irregularities, frauds and intimidation of OLF candidates and supporters. The OLF complaint was corroborated by independent observers as well as by the lopsided electoral outcomes. The mere fact that the EPRDF collected 90 percent or 484 out of 547 seats made the electoral exercise an obvious function of political chicanery. OPDO by itself garnished 173 of the 178 seats for EPRDF in Oromia.<sup>59</sup> The stolen elections were, however, mere reflection of the anomalies inherent in the structure of the



transitional government. First, in addition to owning the executive powers of the state, EPRDF reserved for itself the most strategic posts, including the ministries of foreign affairs, defense and internal affairs. Second, the EPRDF army was designated the national army of the country during the life of the transitional government. Oddly, two-thirds of both the army and key members in the transitional government consisted of Tigrayans. Thus the conditions for EPRDF abusing power were omnipresent. The OLF was certainly aware of this probability; the front had actually made a strong representation against using the EPRDF forces as national army and it had made a constructive proposal to use local militia until a genuine national armed forces were created without favoring any of the various ethno-national groups.<sup>60</sup>

At any rate, by boycotting the regional elections the OLF inauspiciously gave the Tigrayan-controlled government the long awaited pretext to expel the front from the transitional government, an action which soon culminated in the official ban on the OLF as a legitimate political organization. Faced with the pre-1991 situation, the OLF then resumed its fledgling armed struggle, now severely undercut by the regime's swift arrest of 18,000 OLF militia who were herded into concentration camps.<sup>61</sup> EPRDF's long range response to the resumption of the armed conflict has been twofold: the first involved the further strengthening of OPDO grips over Oromia; the second has to do with the political reorganization of Ethiopia along federal lines in which Oromia has become one of nine regional states. The OLF has, however, challenged the legality and implementation of these strategies.

In OLF's view, the OPDO is a paper organization inserted into Oromia by the Amhara-Tigrayan groups whose sole objective it is to thwart the Oromo people's quest for liberation. The front further maintains that the OPDO could not represent the genuine interests and aspirations of the people to the extent that it comprises political opportunists and sell-outs. Recent events surrounding the rampancy of corruption and nepotism in Oromia on OPDO watch clearly substantiate OLF arguments. Indeed, political patronage became a growth industry in Oromia so much so that OPDO was made to undergo a fictitious self-evaluation in October 1996 under EPRDF

direction. The supposed rectification campaign yielded the expulsion of 20 central committee members and the firing of over 300 administrators throughout Oromia.<sup>62</sup> These persons were removed from positions of power probably more for their residual sympathy for OLF than for their implication in corruption since the entire political system is permeated through and through by corruption, nepotism and embezzlement and even outright official robbery starting with the Wayane leaders themselves. The rectification campaign was a pretext to purge the OPD of Oromo intellectuals, whose loyalty to the Tigrayan clique was called into question. The recent wave of defections of OPDO officials strongly support the above deduction. For example, the defection in 1999 of Hassan Ali, Vice President of Oromia regional state, publicly embarrassed the Wayane regime. The biggest “fish” among recent defectors is Yonathan Dibissa, a prominent member of OPDO leadership and a close friend of the President of Oromia state. Yonathan’s defection sent political tremors through Addis Abeba so much so that the regime decreed that no member from the administration of Oromia regional state could leave the country without an express permission from the Office of the Prime Minister. Moreover, the regime unleashed a fresh campaign of terror on defectors’ family members. After Yonathan’s defection in March 2001, for example, the regime’s militia killed four members of Yonathan’s extended family in western Wellega and other relatives were picked up by security forces.<sup>63</sup>

OLF position on the federal constitution is equally negative. It views the constitution as highly contrived, purely designed to preserve the old territorial grid of the Ethiopian empire. The front sees an inherent contradiction between the enunciation of constitutional principles and the stifling of the same principles in practice. For example, Article Eight of the federal constitution states that: “Sovereign power resides in the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia.” Such explicit recognition of sovereignty as being owned by the nations and/or peoples themselves notwithstanding, the EPRDF regime repudiates in practice the implementation of the constitution as it pertains to the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination. At any rate, neither the creation of the OPDO as the government’s front in Oromia

nor the new constitutional framework has resolved the Oromo question. The conditions for Ethiopia once again drifting toward ethnic tensions and tumults are now propitious. The constitutional contortions of federalism only signify the fact that history has once again repeated itself not as a farce, but as a horrific blend of tragedy and farce.

Objectively speaking, there are few incentives for the Amhara-Tigrayan groups to carry the democratization process in the country toward its logical conclusion since the process might lead to the economic fragmentation of the country should Oromia avail itself of the democratic opportunity to become an independent state by secession. In such eventuality, the Amhara-Tigrayan groups are apt to lose an important economic cash-cow in Oromia. The formation of an independent Oromo state could bring the economic viability of the rest of Ethiopia into serious question. In the 1996-97 season, for example, the state of Oromia by itself accounted for 5.6 million tons of Ethiopia's total grain harvest of 11.7 million tons to which Tigris contributed a mere 700,000 tons.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, almost the entire Ethiopian coffee, accounting for two-thirds of the empire's foreign exchange earnings year after year, grows in Oromia.

Thus the north/south colonial cleavages in Ethiopia are and will continue to be determined by powerful economic considerations. This reality is clearly reflected in the economic policies of the central government favoring the north where the states of Amhara and Tigris have become the focus of fresh investment programs.<sup>65</sup> The new institutional channels for resource transfer to these states are the Amhara National Regional Rehabilitation Development Organization and the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigris (the commercial arms of the ruling party), which the Economist accurately described as having become the vital force 'determining the locus of economic power' in Ethiopia.<sup>66</sup> Between 1992 and 1997, for example, Tigris with only 6% of Ethiopia's population received about 45% of the empire's total private investment. Moreover, Tigris is now house to 250 relatively huge development projects compared with 200 smaller projects in Oromia and Amhara, which together represent over 75% of the empire's people.<sup>67</sup>

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

The recent increasingly dangerous intrusions by the central government into civil liberties and human rights in Oromia and elsewhere in Ethiopia are certainly taken in the interest of preserving the country's economic unity. Even the U.S. State Department's own report on human rights on Ethiopia grudgingly acknowledged that local EPRDF officials had been heavily involved in gross violations of fundamental freedoms in Oromia. The authors of the report noted that extra-judicial killings and detentions without trial of OLF supporters and sympathizers have lately become widespread.<sup>68</sup> George Packer, writing in *Dissent* after returning from a visit to Ethiopia, corroborated the State Department's report. He noted that loss of fundamental freedoms and human rights in Oromia, stemming from the growing hostility between the OLF and the EPRDF, has become of grave concern to the inhabitants.<sup>69</sup>

Thousands of Oromo activists have been languishing in Ethiopian prisons since 1992. According to a human rights advocacy group, there have been 2,424 extra-judicial killings and 676 unexplained disappearances of Oromo nationalists between 1992 and 1998.<sup>70</sup> The arrests and detentions of the Oromo have increased in scale and frequency. In November 1997, seven members of the Human Rights League, an Oromo entity monitoring human rights violations in Oromia, were arrested and thrown in jail in a manner which Amnesty International characterized as "undemocratic". The following December, another six OLF sympathizers were thrown in jail in Jimma in the hinterland of Oromia. In spite of the fact that the law requires that detainees must be either charged or released within 24-hours of their arrest, none has seen these six individuals as of this writing. Additionally, in the same month, the central government publicly charged 31 Oromo with what it termed "acts of terrorism."<sup>71</sup> In sum, by 1998, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, there were almost 11,000 political prisoners in Ethiopia, a majority of them Oromo.<sup>72</sup> Branded as "narrow nationalists", today Oromo intellectuals, students and merchants have become targets of the Tigrayan security forces. A simple civic protest is enough to label an Oromo as "the enemy" of Ethiopia. In August 2000, for example, the terrorist regime herded into

dungeons a number of Oromo patriots for displaying their displeasure at the Tigrayan regime's decision to de-Oromize Addis Abeba by transferring the state capital of Oromia to Nazret. Among the casualties was Dr. Moga Ferissa, a well known Oromo physician and member of the Executive Committee of Matcha Tulema self-help association. He was picked up by security forces on August 16<sup>th</sup> and nothing was heard of him since.

Paradoxically, in a manner reminiscent of the 19th century European sponsorship of Ethiopian colonization of Oromia through the provision of arms, military know-how and diplomatic support, today the West has become supportive of the present central government and of Ethiopia's territorial grid. In particular in the United States, the Meles regime has been touted as the force in full charge of the democratizing process. The charitable American view was exemplified in April 1997 when the U.S. Corporate Council on Africa, an umbrella entity of large firms doing business in Africa, presented Meles with a special award for 'good' governance. The handsome magnitude of Western aid to Ethiopia is another indicator of the cozy relationship that has continued between the new Ethiopian regime and the West. In December 1994, the Paris club of Western donors pledged Ethiopia \$1 billion. Two years later, the same group agreed to furnish Ethiopia with \$2.5 billion in fresh loans, which exceeded Ethiopia's own request for \$1.9 billion.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the World Bank's president, James Wolfenson, signed a \$500 million long-term loan with Ethiopia during his visit to Addis Ababa in January 1998, where he declared Ethiopia as one of the bank's "star partners."<sup>74</sup>

The multinational corporate penetration of Ethiopia is equally impressive. Several Western firms are financing the gigantic Fincha sugarcane plantation and refinery in the heartland of Oromia at the cost of \$226 million with annual capacity of 100,000 tons of fine sugar, raising Ethiopia's current annual fine sugar production by almost a third.<sup>75</sup>

At the bilateral level, the rush to penetrate Ethiopia economically has also taken on added dimensions in recent intra-Western competition over Ethiopia's domestic market. Enticed by a \$32 million trade surplus

against Ethiopia in 1996, France has been actively supporting its firms to capture a lion's share of the market there. Michel Roussin, head of the French Employers Federation and former minister of development, led a 25-man strong trade delegation in May 1997 to Addis Abeba where he officially opened a trade fare in which 118 French companies were represented. Subsequently, a French soft loan agency agreed to extend \$1.7 billion to Ethiopia for the construction of a hydroelectric power station on the Blue Nile.<sup>76</sup>

Likewise, the British embassy in Addis Abeba sponsored two trade fares in 1996 alone as part of the effort to carve out a market niche for British firms in Ethiopia. Determined not to be out competed by its European rivals, the United States has also aggressively pursued a highly orchestrated trade and investment policy toward Ethiopia. The number of U.S. firms doing business in Ethiopia steadily increased from 50 in 1995 to over 150 companies by April 1997 during which period the U.S. government organized three highly publicized trade exhibitions in Addis Ababa displaying a wide array of consumer goods. As a result, Ethiopia is emerging as an important market for American merchandise exports.<sup>77</sup> The extent of American growing commercial interests in Ethiopia was highlighted in December 1997 when a 40-person congressional trade delegation visited Ethiopia to hold talks with government officials and private businesspersons.

Reminiscent of Cold War years, the new U.S.-Ethiopian relationship has a large security component as well. In November 1996, Washington officially designated Ethiopia a "frontline" state in the struggle against what it termed "rogue" states, like fundamentalist Sudan. The designation was confirmed by the consignment of over \$12 million worth of U.S. surplus arms to Ethiopia.<sup>78</sup> In addition, Washington has come to view Ethiopia as the core of its 'Greater Horn of Africa Initiative', a program bent on forging a regional bloc of pro-American states straddling all the way from the Red Sea basin to the great lake region of sub-Saharan Africa.

In sum, the creation and maintenance of a unitary capitalist market within the context of a territorially united Ethiopia is very much in keeping with the economic and security interests of the United States

and its European partners. Under these circumstances, the continued relegation of the Oromo question to the backwaters of international politics is almost inevitable. Oromo nationalists may legitimately complain about the international neglect of their case; unfortunately though, legitimacy of a case in international relations is like any other political commodity whose value is determined by a given power configuration. So, if the international focus on Ethiopia is to change in their favor, Oromo nationalists may have to change things on the ground first by strengthening their organizational cohesion, rousing the masses for political action, and then by establishing a viable fighting force. Current OLF efforts appear to be geared toward achieving these objectives.

## **Conclusion**

Before the final word is written, one must hasten to affirmatively restate that the historical evidence with respect to the colonial status of Oromia is incontrovertible. Like its former sister colonies in the region, Oromia was a victim of the convergence of European and Abyssinian colonial vandalization, a situation which still obtains today. Oromia is today defined by the economic plunder of its fabulous resources by nonindigenous forces, the devaluation of its culture, and the political marginalization and persecution of its people. It thus stands to reason that if Eritrea and Somalia, which were placed under a European colonial yoke precisely at the same time as Oromia was put under Abyssinian colonial dominion, have become independent in keeping with the principle of self-determination, there is no reasonable case that can militate against Oromia benefiting from the exercise of the same right. The only obstacle to finding a just and lasting solution to the colonial degradation of the Oromo people is the fact that Abyssinian elites have continued to obscure, with international complicity, the historical entitlement of the Oromo people to the right of national self-determination as the sole subjects of international law. "Ethnic federalism" or "constitutionalism" is the latest idiom of Abyssinian obscurantism. However, the veritable fact is that the constitutional

question is exterior to the Oromo quest for self-determination. The Oromo struggle is not about “constitutionalism” nor is it about predetermined forms of a political marriage; the Oromo question is rather about national self-determination, statehood and national sovereignty pure and simple. Having the Wayane clique predetermine the terms of settlement with Oromia is like placing the fox in charge of the chicken coop. Justice demands that the decolonization of Oromia in keeping with the internationally sanctioned principle of national self-determination must be the indisputable antecedent to any constitutional marriage between Oromia and the rest of the empire in whatever name it comes.

After all, even though the centralist Wayane regime has sought refuge in the cosmetic popularity of “constitutionalism” by plagiaristically appropriating Western concepts and principles of law as a means of containing Oromo nationalism, the constitutional imitation is not working and will not work within the present Ethiopian context. In order for a constitution to transform itself from being a mere enumeration of articles into a living force, three prerequisites must be present.

First, there must be popular faith in the integrity and purpose of the constitution. Unless and until both the elites and the broad masses, representing the major ethnic formations, view the constitution as the general expression of their collective wills and interests, the effort is doomed to failure from the start. OLF’s overt repudiation of the present Ethiopian “federal constitution” as smokes and mirrors illustrates the point.

Second, the constitution set in motion must demonstrably show that both de-ethnicization and depersonalization of politics has occurred or rule of law is fully operational and that democratic institutions are unambiguously taking firm hold. If government actions are arbitrary and emanate from a few individuals or a single party, then the constitution has failed mastery of this crucial test. Public accountability is a clear demonstration of the popular ownership of public authority - a fact that defines a living constitution.

Third, for its firm implementation, a constitution must have a dynamic and expanding economic context. Without a thriving political



economy, the prospects for a constitution to transform itself from being a mere article of faith into a living and guiding instrument of politics are seldom to be present. Motivations aside, I do not believe that the federal Ethiopian constitution meets any one of the above tests. A few remarks below should help to buttress this position.

Ethiopia is a multinational entity, amorphously put together by brute conquest, lacking a fully developed capitalist mode of organization and a unifying language and culture. So the factors that naturally lend themselves to inter-ethnic contradictions are plentiful. In economic terms, the empire is integrated into the global structure of modern capitalism, sharing the burden of specialization in the production and supply of primary commodities to the integrated global market. Its economic dependency on exogenous determinants has so far precluded the creation of the best conditions for the development of national capitalism. The economic factors that should have spontaneously sparked the disintegration of the colonial and precapitalist relations of production and the bureaucratic mode of distribution of power and wealth are still deficient in the empire. As a result, retardation in developmental capitalism has hindered Ethiopia's emergence as a country of politically unified territories, using a single national language and consuming a common national literature.

Paradoxically, however, the introduction of capitalism into Ethiopia, albeit in convoluted forms, has been sufficient to arouse the anticolonial forces to seek separation from the empire. As a result, shorthanded by lack of deployable resources needed to improve the living conditions of the populace and to co-opt Oromo nationalists, the Amhara-Tigrayan groups have come to increasingly rely on manipulative idioms of indoctrination and on instruments of coercion and control to thwart the spread and consolidation of Oromo nationalism. One unambiguous consequence of such a coercive policy is the resolute determination of Oromo nationalists to seek the formation of an independent Oromo state. To this end, Oromo intellectuals have so far committed themselves to the development, production and distribution of Oromo national literature and culture for purposes of mass mobilization for political and military action. When the politicization effort succeeds and Oromo nationalism completes its

dialectical evolution as Eritrean nationalism did, Ethiopia may find itself thrown into a political and military abyss from which it may find difficult, if not impossible, to extract itself as a united empire.

A summary of the arguments I have developed in this section would suggest two solutions. First, the centralist EPRDF regime must go beyond the rhetorical and formalistic recognition of nations and nationalities as the ultimate source of sovereignty to actually implementing the principle of self-determination through referendum so that the Oromo people would determine for themselves and to their satisfaction whether they are really the owners of their sovereignty. Short of a practical application of the principle relative to the fundamental rights of the Oromo people, the characterization of the Ethiopian federal constitution as a mere containment strategy is a valid deduction. The name change in Oromia from 'regional autonomy' under Mengistu to 'regional state' under Tigrayan hegemony does not inspire confidence in the constitution nor does it promise a future for the Oromo people.

The second alternative strategy is to speed up the capitalization process in the empire with a view to accelerating the interpenetration of ethnic formations while simultaneously granting Oromia a genuine political and cultural autonomy and permitting Oromo nationalists greater representation at the center in proportion to their number. At present, the Tigrayan-controlled EPRDF regime claims to be implementing this strategy. The government claims to have been pursuing region-based agricultural development strategy largely financed with borrowed money and with revenues generated by exporting coffee. However, there are four contingencies that are likely to thwart realization of such a strategy.

The first is the biosocial contingency, having to do with Ethiopia's runaway population growth and the alarming environmental degradation in the empire. At 3 percent annual birthrate, Ethiopia's present population of 62 million is projected to reach 213 million fifty years hence<sup>79</sup> That such level of population growth is burdensome to the domestic process of capital formation and to the environment is unambiguous. Today, the empire's agrarian sector accounts for 45 percent of GDP, 75 percent of export earnings, and for 85 percent of national

employment. Furthermore, full 90 percent of Ethiopia's rural population are concentrated in 40 percent of the empire's land area, taxing the environment beyond its caring capacity.<sup>80</sup> Such environmental indicators as frequent drought and famine in conjunction with what has become a permanent structural food deficit are suggestive of the dynamic relationship between the demographic and environmental contingencies and the inevitable disequilibria between the two. This unsavory reality is compounded by Ethiopia's domesticated animal population, estimated at 77 million, including cattle, sheep, goats, equines, and camels.<sup>81</sup> The present Tigrayan controlled regime, like the one before it, does not seem to have the capacity to come to grips with this harsh reality.

Second, the present regime's excessive dependency on international finance capital has thrown the country into greater indebtedness, devouring a larger proportion of its export earnings to service the debt. Under these circumstances, it is very unlikely for the regime to accelerate the industrialization process and close the ethnic gaps.

Unmitigated dependence on containment-militarism to deal with Oromo nationalism is the third contingency that is presently militating against a meaningful national economic development. To establish vast security networks throughout the empire and to strengthen the coercive and repressive instruments of the state, the Tigrayan clique is diverting strategic resources away from the civilian economy and toward the military sector. The political fallout of containment-militarism, in terms of gross human rights violations and trampling of civil liberties, is cutting deep into the legitimacy of the regime. By taking the same road which its predecessor regimes of Emperor Haile Selassie and Mengistu took, the Tigrayan-led regime appears to be heading toward the same disastrous destination.

The fourth contingency is political in nature, having to do with the continued Amhara-Tigrayan resistance to their democratic displacement at the center should Oromo national representation rises in correspondence with their greater ratio in the demographic distribution of the empire. In other words, the dismantling of the colonial architecture in Oromia and a genuine democratic transformation of the Ethiopian state would naturally result in Oromo political

ascendancy simply by virtue of their demographic advantage and superior economic endowment. Again, this would represent a huge loss not only of political power and privileges for the Amhara-Tigrayan groups but also the major economic arteries of the empire for their international patrons. Herein lies the dubious logic behind Ethiopia's ethnic federalism, which is, according to Theodore Vestal, a sinister "Machiavellian" device used by the Tigrayans to maintain tight vertical control over the Oromo and other ethnic groups by promoting horizontal ethnic fragmentation.<sup>82</sup> The practice of ethnic federalism on the ground speaks to the "Machiavellian" character of the device. For example, the Tigrayan-controlled centralist state today still collects 85 percent of national revenue in addition to monopolizing all external financial flows.<sup>83</sup> Unable to generate their own revenues internally, the ethnic states have thus become vertically dependent on the federal regime for subsidies and handouts. But, because the central regime is firmly controlled primarily by the Tigrayans and secondarily by the Amhara, the Tigrayan and Amhara ethnic states have become the chief beneficiaries of the lopsided allocation of resources, giving Oromo nationalists additional reason to intensify their armed struggle.

These contingencies in combination are likely to shortchange the centralist government's effort to trigger a sustainable process of internal capital accumulation together with realizing the containment and domestication of the anticolonial nationalist forces. Such a scenario will certainly work to the disadvantage of the Amhara-Tigrayan groups over the long haul and to the advantage of Oromo nationalists to the extent to which the latter may capitalize on the wretched social existence of the Oromo masses to rouse them for widespread popular insurrections. To be sure, the manner in which the Oromo question is handled will be determinative of Ethiopia's political character and geographic definition, because Oromia occupies the most dangerous fault lines in Ethiopia's ethno-political polarization. In the words of a perceptive Canadian scholar, "The Oromo Movement, although it has attracted little attention in comparison with the Eritrean situation, may be decisive for the future of Ethiopia."<sup>84</sup>

## NOTES

---

1. For an extensive presentation of the Oromo thesis, see Asafa Jalata *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynn Reinner, 1993). Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa. *The Invention of Ethiopia*. (Trenton, NJ.: Red Sea Press, 1990).
2. Asafa, *Oromia and Ethiopia*, and Holcomb and Sissai, *The Invention of Ethiopia*.
3. I am indebted for this observation to Professor Asafa Jalata.
4. Zewde Gabre-Selassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: A Political Biography*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 56-57. See also David L Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda European Colonialism and African Resistance in the Scramble for Africa*. (NY: Widefield Nicolson, 1987), p. 101.
5. David Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, p. 27.
6. David Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, p. 101. See also Zewde, *Yohannes of Ethiopia*, pp. 60-73.
7. Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II of Ethiopia: 1844 to 1913* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 57.
8. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilik II*, pp. 61-63; 73-74.
9. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilik II*, p. 64.
10. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilik II*, p. 73.
11. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilik II*, p. 66.
12. David Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, p. 107.
13. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilik II*, pp. 106-9.
14. David Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, p. 107.
15. David Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, pp. 110 and 112.
16. I M Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1988), p. 50.
17. Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*. (NY: Africana Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 389-94.
18. David Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, p. 114.
19. Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, pp. 114 and 116.

- 20 Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, p. 8.
21. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilik II*, , pp 114-5 and 124-7.
22. Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, p. 398.
23. Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, p. 398.
- 24 Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilik II*, p 162
25. Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, p. 403; Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilik II*, pp. 168-73; David Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, pp. 116-20.
- 26 David Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, pp. 124-125
27. David Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, p. 125
28. David Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, p. 126.
29. David Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, p. 129; I. M Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia*, p. 58.
- 30 Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa*. (Cambridge, Ma : Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 156.
31. I.M Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia*, p 55.
32. Timothy D Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifita: Modes of Production in Southern Ethiopia from the Late 19th Century to 1941*. (University of Illinois: unpublished dissertation, 1986), pp. 186-7.0
33. Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifita*, pp. 186-187
34. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilik II*, p 185
35. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilik II*, p. 191
36. Holcombe and Sisai, *Invention of Ethiopia*, p. 139.
37. See Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia. The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974)
- 38 David Lewis. *The Race to Fashoda*, p. 137.
39. Christopher S Clapham. *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 26
40. Asafa Jalata, "The Emergence of Oromo Nationalism and Ethiopian Reaction," in Asafa. Ed. *Oromo Nationalism*, pp. 1-36; Asafa Jalata,

- “The Struggle for Knowledge: the Case of Emergent Oromo Studies,” *African Studies Review*, (September 96), vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 95-122. Jan Hultin, “Perceiving Oromo/Galla in the Great Narrative of Ethiopia,” in P.T.W. Baxter Et Al Editors *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), pp. 78-91.
41. Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta*, p. 78.
  42. Holcomb and Sisai, *Invention of Ethiopia*, p. 118.
  43. Hassen, “The Macha Tulama Association,” pp. 183-220.
  44. Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia: 1800-1935*. (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Haile Selassie University I Press, 1968), p. 84
  45. Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta*, p. 239.
  46. Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta*, p. 238.
  47. Holcomb and Sisai, *Invention of Ethiopia*, p. 112
  48. Asafa Jalata, “The Cultural Roots of Oromo Nationalism,” in Asafa Jalata Ed *Oromo Nationalism*, pp. 33-49; Asmeram Legesse. *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society* (NY: Free Press, 1973.)
  49. Robert Hazel, “Aggregating and Timing Generations: Social Organization in Cushitic East Africa and Beyond,” *Zeitschrift Fur Ethnologie*, 125 (2000), pp. 1-37.
  50. Jalata, “The Cultural Roots of Oromo Nationalism,” pp. 33-49; P.T.W. Baxter, “Moral Components of an Oromo National Identity,” In M.A. Mohammed Salih and John Markakis Editors. *Ethnicity and the State in Northeast Africa*. (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1998), p. 57
  51. Paulos Chanie, “The Rise of Politicized Ethnicity Among the Oromo in Ethiopia,” in M. A. Mohammed Salih and John Markakis Editors. *Ethnicity and the State in Northeastern Africa*. (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1998), pp. 95-96
  52. Mohammed Hassen, “The Development of Oromo Nationalism,” in P. T. W. Baxter Et Al Editors. *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), p. 71.

53. Paul Baxter, "The Problem of the Oromo or the Problem for the Oromo," in I.M. Lewis Ed. *Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa*. (London: Itica Press, 1983), pp. 129-141
54. Herbert S. Lewis, "The Development of Oromo Political Consciousness from 1958 to 1994," In Baxter et al, Eds Pp. 42-43.
55. On the evolution of Oromo Nationalism, see Jalata, "The Emergence of Oromo Nationalism," pp. 1-36; Mohammed Hassen, "The Macha Tulama Association, 1963-1967, and the Development of Oromo Nationalism," in Asafa Jalata, Ed. *Oromo Nationalism and the European Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy*, (Trenton, NY: Red Sea Press, 1998) pp. 183-220; Chanie, "The Rise of Politicized Ethnicity Among the Oromo in Ethiopia," pp. 97-100, and Mekuria Balcha, "The Survival and Reconstruction of Oromo National Identity," in Baxter et al., Eds. Pp. 58-61.
56. Mohammed, "The Development of Oromo Nationalism," p. 77.
57. Leenco Lata, "The Making and Unmaking of Ethiopia's Transitional Charter," in Jalata, Ed. *Oromo Nationalism*, pp. 51-78.
58. Alex Dewal. "Ethiopia: Transition to What?" *World Policy Journal*, vol. 42 (Fall 1992) pp. 719-737; Lata, "The Making and Unmaking," pp. 51-78.
59. Makau Wa Mutua. "Ethiopia: the Anointed Leadership" *Africa Report*, vol. 39 No. 6 November/December, 1994) pp. 30-34.
60. Lemmu Bayissa, "Contending Nationalisms in the Ethiopian Empire State and the Oromo Struggle for Self-Determination," in Asafa Jalata, Ed. *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy*. (Trenton, NY: Red Sea Press, 1998) pp. 79-107.
61. Marina Ottaway. *Africa's New Leaders: Democracy or State Reconstruction?* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), p. 69
62. The Economist Intelligence Unit. *Country Report: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti*. [Henceforth EIU] 2nd quarter 1997, p. 8.
63. "Latest Defection Costly for Regime," *Indian Newsletter*, March 17, 2001
64. EIU 1st quarter 1997, pp. 17-18.



65. Theodore M. Vestal *Ethiopia: a Post Cold War African State*. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999), p. 47.
66. EIU. 2nd quarter 1997, p. 13.
67. Asafa Jalata, "U.S-Sponsored Ethiopian "Democracy" and State Terrorism," in *Terror and Crisis in the Horn Africa Autopsy of Democracy, Human Rights and Freedom* (London: Ashghet Publishing, 2000)
68. EIU. p. 14.
69. George Packer. "Ethiopia's Prisoners of Blood." *Dissent* (Summer 1996) pp. 117-127
70. Vestal. *Ethiopia*, p. 131
71. EIU. 1st quarter 1998, p. 10
72. Vestal *Ethiopia*, p. 131
73. EIU. 1st quarter 1997, pp. 15-16
74. EIU. 1st quarter 1998, p. 13.
75. EIU. 2nd quarter 1997, p. 15.
76. EIU. 4th quarter 1997, p. 12
77. EIU. 2nd quarter 1997, p. a7.
78. EIU. 4th quarter 1996, p. 13
79. Lester R. Brown. *State of the World*. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), p. 117.
80. Richard Hogg, "Introduction," in Richard Hogg editor. *Pastoralists, Ethnicity and the State in Ethiopia* (London: Haan Publishing, 1997), p. 4.
81. Hogg, "Introduction," p. 8.
82. Vestal. *Ethiopia*, p. 46.
83. Ottaway. *Africa's New Leaders*, p. 72.
84. John Sorenson. *Imagining Ethiopia: Struggle for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa*. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p. 60



## FORMS OF SUBJECT AND OBJECT IN AFAAN OROMO

---

### *Tilahun Gamta (Xilaahun Gamtaa)*

The purpose of this descriptive study is to present the rules for marking a subject and an object in Afaan Oromo.

### **Subject**

The subject in a sentence is the person or animal that does the action represented by the verb; a thing, too, can be a subject in a sentence. For instance, in the sentences *Gammachuun humaa hinsodaatu* (Gammachuu is not afraid of anything), *Fardi koo garbuu jaal'ata* (My horse likes barley) and *Oromiyaan ni bilisoomti* (Oromiyaa shall be free), the nouns *Gammachuun*, *Fardi* and *Oromiyaan* are subjects. [See End Note for pronunciation key.]

### **Rules for Marking a Subject**

*Rule 1.00:* If a noun ends in a single-a, the -a is replaced by -i, -ni, or-ti. Examples: *saba* (people) becomes *sabi/sabni* as in *Sabi/Sabni Oromo bilisa barbaada*. (The Oromo people want freedom), *lafa* (land) becomes *lafi/lafni/lafti* as in *Lafi/Lafni/Lafti keenya xaawoo dha* (Our land is fertile), *arba* (elephant) becomes *arbi*, as in *Arbi baala nyaata*. (An elephant eats leaves) A native speaker of Afaan Oromo knows automatically that *i/ni* can be interchangeably suffixed to “saba”, but not to “arba” which allows only the suffix -i. But a non-native learner of the language has to be given the rules, where possible, which would help him/her mark a subject either with -i/-ni/-ti or just -i. The following rather detailed rules are given with a non-native learner of the language in mind.

*Rule 1 1:* If a vowel precedes a noun ending in **ba, ca, da, ga, ja, ma, pha, qa, sa, and xa**, the final -a is usually replaced by -i or -ni. For example, *quba* (finger) becomes *qubi* or *qubni*. Each of the above endings is amply illustrated as follows:

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

### Nouns ending in -a (Object form)      Subject Form

#### ba

adaba (discipline)	adabi/adabni
arraba (tongue)	arrabi/arrabni
dhaaba (organization)	dhaabi/dhaabni
duba (tail)	dubi/dubni
huuba (garbage)	huubi/huubni
irriba (sleep)	irribi/irribni
jalqaba (beginning)	jalqabi/jalqabni
kitaaba (book)	kitaabi/kitaabni
lallaba (announcement)	lallabi/lallabni
quba (finger)	qubi/qubni
rooba (rain)	roobi/roobni
saba (society)	sabi/sabni
sababa (cause)	sababi/sababni

Example: Roobi/Roobni yoo baaya'te mindhaan balleessa (Too much rain spoils crops.)

#### ca

gaaca (gristly meat)	gaaci/gaacni
guca (clump)	guci/gucni
mucuca (slipperiness)	mucuci/mucucni
saqaca (retail)	saqaci/saqacni
tuca (clump)	tuci/tucni
waca (din)	waci/wacni

Example: Waci/Wacni ijoollee kanaa na maraachuuf. (These children's noise is going to make me crazy)

#### da

alaada (half a dollar)	alaadi/alaadni
araada (habit)	araadi/araadni
areeda (beard)	areedi/areadni
gudeeda (thigh)	gudeedi/gudeadni
hededa (slope)	hededi/hedadni
ooda (sulking)	oodi/oodni
qadaada (lid)	qadaadi/qadaadni

qooda (share)	qoodi/qoodni
raada (female calf)	raadi/raadni

Example: Areedi/Areedni isaa haarrii duwwaa dha. (His beard is full of gray hair.)

**ga**

aaga (peace)	aagi/aagni
dhiiga (blood)	dhiigi/dhiigni
dalaga (work)	dalagi/dalagni
laga (river)	lagi/lagni
roga (edge)	rogi/rogni

Example: Dhiigi/Dhiigni kun dhiiga namaatii? (Is this human blood?)

**ja**

ajaja (command)	ajaji/ajajni
jaja (praise)	jaji/jajni

**ma**

ayyama (leave)	ayyammi/ayyamni
beellama (appointment)	beellammi/beellamni
cooma (fat)	coomi/coomni
daa'ima (baby)	daa'immi/daa'imni
gama (mane)	gami/gamni
kuma (thousand)	kumi/kumni
luugama (pit)	luugami/luugamni
nama (person)	nammi/namni
qaama (body)	qaami/qaamni
qoma (chest)	qomi/qomni

N.B. "m" is sometimes doubled before -i is suffixed. Example: Nammi/Namni baay'e isa jaal'ata. (People like him a lot)

**ph**

copha (drip)	cophi/cophni
tapha (game)	taphi/taphni
nyapha (not kin)	nyaphi/nyaphni
teepha (leather strap)	teephi/teephni

Example: Teephi/Teephni kun jabaa dha; hin citu (This leather strap is strong; it doesn't break.)

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

### qa

buquqa (chaff)	buquqi/buquqni
haqa (truth)	haqi/haqni
maqa (branch road)	maqi/maqni
mooqa (gruel)	mooqi/mooqni
qooqa (language)	qooqi/qooqni
raqa (carcass)	raqi/raqni
saqa (slope)	saqi/saqni
seeqa (smile)	seeqi/seeqni
suuqa (corner)	suuqi/suuqni
waaqa (God)	waaq/waaqi/waaqni/ waaqayyo

Example: Waaq/Waaqi/Waaqni/Waaqayyo tiksee kooti. (God is my shepherd.)

### sa

bilisa (freedom)	bilisi/bilisni
finniisa (pimple)	finniisi/finniisni
furrisa (sling)	furrisi/furrisni
godaannisa (scar)	godaannisi/godaannisni
gosa (kind)	gosi/gosni
kanniisa (bee)	kanniisi/kanniisni

Example: Wal'aansoo malee bilisi hin argamu. (No freedom without struggle.)

### xa

mimmixa (pepper)	mimmixi/mimmixni
qaraxa (tax)	qaraxi/qaraxni

*Rule 1.2:* If a vowel precedes a noun that ends in **-fa** or **-ka**, the final **-a** can be interchangeably replaced by **-i**, **-ni**, or **-ti**. Here are some examples.

### fa

ancufa (saliva)	ancufi/ancufni/ancufti
andaraafa (breast meat)	andaraafi/andaraafni/ andaraafti
angafa (elder)	angafi/angafni/angafti

bifa (looks)	bifi/bifni/bifti
bofa (snake)	bofi/bofni/bofti
borofa (roe buck)	borofi/borofni/borofti
gaafa (horn)	gaafi/gaafni/gaafti
hurufa (gully)	hurufi/hurufni/hurufti
lafa (land)	lafi/lafni/lafti
nafa (body)	nafi/nafni/nafti
tafa (hip)	tafi/tafni/tafti

Example: Angafi/Angafni/Angafti isaa lubbuu dhaan jira? (Is his elder brother alive?)

### ka

booka (mead)	booki/bookni/bookti
dhuka (marrow)	dhuki/dhukni/dhukti
luka (leg)	luki/lukni/lukti
muka (wood; tree)	muki/mukni/mukti

Example: Muki/Mukni/Mukti kun dheeraa dha. (This tree is tall)

*Rule 1.3:* If a vowel precedes a noun that ends in **-la**, **-na**, and **-ra**, the final-**a** is usually replaced by **-li**, **-ni**, and **-ri**, respectively. In other words, **l**, **n**, and **r**, respectively, are doubled (geminated) before suffixing **-i**. Here are some examples:

### la

adala (wild cat)	adalli
alala (cud)	alalli
amala (habit)	amalli
baala (leaf)	baalli
balbala (door)	balballi
daggala (forest)	daggalli
duula (war)	duulli
fuula (face)	fuulli
gaala (camel)	gaalli
gola (kitchen)	golli
intala (girl)	intalli
jabala (boat)	jaballi
jaalala (love)	jaalalli

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

kasala (charcoal)	kasalli
owwaala (funeral)	owwaalli
qola (peel)	qolli
tola (free)	tolli
wasiila (paternal uncle)	wasiilli
yaala (plan)	yaalli

Example: Intalli Horaa yoom eerumti? (When is Horaa's daughter getting married?)

### na

bona (summer)	bonni
bosona (forest)	bosonni
buddeena (bread)	buddeenni
buna (coffee)	bunni
dhiyaana (lunch)	dhiyaanni
eeffana (young bull)	eeffanni
fulbaana (September)	fulbaanni
konkona (nose)	konkonni
mana (house)	manni
ona (abandoned house)	onni
waraana (spear)	waraanni

Example: Manni isaa ni dhimmisa. (The roof of his house leaks.)

### ra

adeera (uncle)	adeerri
afuura (breath)	afuurri
areera (skim milk)	areerri
bara (year)	barri
beera (old woman)	beerri
dhiira (male)	dhiirri
gaara (hill)	gaarri
gajara (cutlass)	gajarri
gorora (saliva)	gororri
nyaara (eye brow)	nyaarri
seera (law)	seerri

Example: Adeerri koo sooressa ture. (My uncle used to be rich.)



*Rule 1.4:* If a vowel precedes a noun that ends in **-ta**, the **-ta** is often changed to **-ti**, **-tni**, or **-nni**. There is no change in meaning

**ta**

buufata (station)	buufati/buufatni/buufanni
dhaabata (stick)	dhaabati/dhaabatni/ dhaabanni
dilbata (Sunday)	dilbati/dilbatni/dilbanni
filmaata (election)	filmaati/filmaatni/filmaanni
gatata (aborted fetus)	gatati/gatatni/gatanni
goota (hero)	gooti/gootni/goonni
guntuta (young woman's breast)	guntuti/guntutni/guntuuni
hantuuta (rat)	hantuuti/hantuutni/ hantuunni
irbaata (dinner)	irbaati/irbaatni/irbaanni
jimaata (Friday)	jimaati/jimaatni/jimaanni
naqata (engagement)	naqati/naqatni/naqanni
sabbata (girdle)	sabbati/sabbatni/sabbanni
saddeeta (appointment)	saddeeti/saddeetni/ addeenni
ummata (people)	ummati/uummatni/ uummanni
wixata (Monday)	wixati/wixatni/wixanni

Example: Wixati/Wixatni/Wixanni ayyaana. (Monday is a holiday)

*Rule 1.5:* If a consonant precedes the endings listed under *Rule 1.1*, *Rule 1.2* and *rule 1.3* above, only the suffix **-i** is possible. Examples follow.

arba	arbi	elephant
biyya	biyyi/biiti	country
boolla	boolli	hole
dhaamochcha	dhaamochchi	cold weather (See end note for <b>-ch</b> )
faachcha	faachchi	buffalo tail
farda	fardi	horse
farra	farri	sinister

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

fedha	fedhi	wish ( <b>dha</b> ending often becomes <b>-dhi</b> )
fuudha	fuudhi/fuuti	marriage
galma	galmi	hall
gochcha	gochchi	doing
golxa	golxi	gristly meat
harka	harki	hand
hirpha	hirphi	contribution
holqa	holqi	den
ilma	ilmi	son
jaarsa	jaarsi	elderly man
jechcha	jechchi	meaning
jiidha	jiidhi	wetness
karra	karri	gate
kolfa	kolfi	laughter
marga	margi	grass
qirca	qirci	share, applies to meat only
ulfa	ulfi	pregnancy

Example: Ilmi Feyisaa nama gaarii dha. (Feyisaa's son is a good person.)

*Rule 1.6:* Definitiveness is marked by the forms **-ichi** or **-icha**. These forms are equivalent of the English definite article “the” in function, and they are suffixed to nouns that refer to males or to things considered as male. The article **-ichi** is suffixed to nouns that function as subjects whereas **-icha** is suffixed to nouns that are used as objects. Both **-ichi** and **-icha** are suffixed only after removing the final vowel or vowels of the noun involved. Thus, **nama** (person) **sangaa** (ox) become **namichi/namicha** and **sangichi/sangicha**. This form roughly means “the person/animal/thing that is known to both of us, i.e. to you (the listener/listeners) and to me (the speaker).” Study the following examples.

<b>Noun(Object form)</b>	<b>Object</b>	<b>Subject</b>
farda (horse)	fardicha (the horse)	fardichi (the horse)
gurbaa (boy)	gurbicha (the boy)	gurbichi (the boy)

Fardichi bishaan dhuguu dide. (The horse that you and I know about refused to drink water. (subject)

Fardicha fidi. (Bring the horse that you and I know about) (object)

Gurbichi maal jedhe? What did the boy say? (subject)

Gurbicha waami Call the boy. (object)

N.B. Not all **-icha/-ichi** endings are markers of definitiveness.

Examples: *billaacha/billaachi* (butterfly), *dinnicha/dinnichi* (potato), *qoricha/qorichi* (medicine), *waamicha/waamichi* (reception)

Of course, **icha/ichi** can be suffixed to these words, e.g. *qorichicha/qorichichi*

*Rule 2.00:* If a noun ends in vowels other than the single vowel **-a**, one common way of forming a subject is by suffixing an **-n**.

Examples:

<b>Noun (Object form)</b>	<b>Subject Form</b>	<b>Examples</b>
dallaa (fence)	dallaan	Dallaan isaa ni jige. (His fence collapsed)
harree (donkey)	harreen	Harreen sun ni okkola (That donkey limps.)
qurxummii (fish)	qurxummiin	Qurxummiin bishaan jaal'atti (Fish like water).
farsoo (beer)	farsoon	Farsoon nama macheessa (Beer intoxicates.)
tiruu (liver)	tiruun	Tiruun kun fayyaa miti. (This liver is not healthy)

*Rule 2.1:* If the first component in a compound noun is **abbaa**, the **-n** is suffixed to **abbaa** to form a subject. Examples:

<b>Compound Noun (Object form)</b>	<b>Subject Form</b>
abbaa gadaa (president)	abbaan gadaa
abbaa gandaa (village chief)	abbaan gandaa
abbaa gorbaa (cattle disease)	abbaan gorbaa
abbaa keellaa (border guard)	abbaan keellaa

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

*Rule 2.2:* If the first component in a compound noun is **haadha**, **haadha** is changed to **haatii** to form a subject. Here are some examples

<b>Compound Noun</b>	<b>Subject Form</b>
haadha ormaa (step mother)	haati ormaa
haadha qeyee (house wife)	haati qeyee
haadha waaqoo (pelican)	haati waaqoo
haadha warraa (wife)	haati warraa

*Rule 2.3:* If the 1<sup>st</sup> name and the 2<sup>nd</sup> name (i.e. name of son/daughter and father) are mentioned simultaneously in that order, the **-n** is suffixed to the 1<sup>st</sup> name if it ends in a long vowel

Examples:

Gamtaa Boonaa – Gamtaan Boonaa dhagayeeraa? (Has Gamtaa Boonaa heard?)

Gammachuu Tolaa – Gammachuun Tolaa ni dhufa (Gammachuu Tolaa will come.)

*Rule 2.4:* If a noun ends in an **-n**, it is used both as a subject and as an object. Examples:

aannan (milk)	Aannan jaal'ata. He likes milk. (object) Aannan kun cicciteera. This milk has curdled. (subject)
bishaan (water)	Bishaan dhugi. Drink water (object) Bishaan sun booruu dha. That water is muddy. (subject)
foon (meat)	Foon waadiif Fry meat for him. (object) Foon kun arka araka jedha This meat is spoiled (subject)
ilkaan (tooth)	Ilkaan hinqabu. He has no teeth. (object) Ilkaan koo jabaa dha. My teeth are strong. (subject)
mindhaan (food)	Mindhaan kee nyaadhu Eat your food (object) Mindhaan bilchaateera. The crop is ripe

*Rule 2.5:* A subject is also formed by suffixing **-tii + -n** to a noun. Thus, **mana + tti + -n** becomes **manattiin**. Such subjects allow only verbs that are used with a feminine gender. For instance, \*manattiin isaa jigee jira/jigeera (His house has collapsed) is ungrammatical in Afaan Oromo. The correct verb form is jigdee jirtii/jigdeetti. Also, the vowel that precedes **-tiin** is always short. Thus, one of the two final **-aa**'s in **sangaa** must be dropped before suffixing **-tiin**. Examples: sangaa — sangattiin (the ox that ...), jara — jarattiin (they), harree — harr(e)ittiin (the donkey that ...), cabbii — cabbittiin (the hail that ...), uroo — urottiin (the jar that ...), daakuu — daaku(i)ttiin (the flour that ...)

Such forms indicate that: a) the listener has prior knowledge of what is being talked about; b) the subject is feminine or considered feminine. For instance, **intala** (girl) becomes **intala + tti + n** Intalattiin maal siin jette? (What did the girl, you and I know about, say to you? **gurbaa** (boy) becomes **gurba + tti + n**. Gurbattiin si arrabsitee? (Did the contemptible boy call you names? c) Finally, the form **Noun + tti - n** indicates that the speaker usually thinks that the person/thing represented by such subjects is insignificant or even contemptible. Examples: Mana — Manattiin isaa jigdeetti. (His diminutive/contemptible house that you and I know has collapsed) Namicha — Namichattiin/Namittittiin oolaa hattee badde. (The diminutive/contemptible man that you and I know stole a sheep and disappeared) niitii — Niittittiin addagee dha. (The diminutive/contemptible woman that you and I know is rude) Intala — Intalattiin eerumteetti The notorious girl that you and I know got married. Harree — Harr(e)ittiin isaa kaleessa duute. (His diminutive/despicable donkey that you and I know died yesterday.)

Though rare, the subject form **Noun + tti + tiin** e.g. **mana + tti + tiin = manattittiin** is also used. Compare Manattiin baay'e dhimmifti/dhimisti with Manattittiin baay'e dhimmifti/dhimisti. (The diminutive/despicable house leaks too much.) The meaning is essentially the same. However, it appears that there is an added emphasis here. Jaarsattittiin harree hatte ishii kana (This is the despicable old man that stole a donkey). Gurbattittiin sun gorsa hindhageessu. (That diminutive/despicable boy doesn't listen to advice) Harr(e)ittittiin mindhaan ko

mancaafte/mancaaste. (The despicable donkey destroyed my crop.) Intaltittiin ni butamte (The diminutive girl is abducted). As already stated, verb forms used with a masculine gender can never occur here; only verb forms that are used with a feminine gender are possible. For instance, \*"Harr(e)itittiin mindhaan koo mancaase" is ungrammatical. *Rule 3* -**tu** is another common suffix with which a subject is formed. The noun to which it is suffixed must always remain intact, i.e. the -**tu** is suffixed without removing the final vowel/vowels. The meaning is "it is/was + Noun/Pronoun + that/which/who". Such subjects permit only verbs that are used with a masculine gender, e.g. Bor isheetu deema NOT Bor isheetu deemti (She is the one who will go tomorrow.) Also, such subjects do not usually allow or permit questions that are asked with question words, e.g. Fayisaatu sangaa meeqa qaba? (How many oxen does Fayisaa have?) is ungrammatical in Afaan Oromo.

As already stated, the noun/pronoun to which **tu** is suffixed must always remain intact.

Examples:

muka - mukatu —Mukatu isee irratti jige. It is a tree that fell on her.

leenca - leencatu — Leencatu bookkisa. It is a lion that is roaring.

isa - isatu— Bar dheengadda isatu dhufe. It was he who came last year.

Caalaa - Caalaatu— Caalaatu naa bite. It is Caalaa who bought it for me.

booyee - booyeetu— Booyeetu asitti du'e. (It is a pig that died here.)

daadhii - daadhiitu— Daadhiitu na macheesse (It is mead that intoxicated me)

funyoo - funyootu— Fuunyootu hoolaa hudhe.(It was a rope that choked the sheep)

Gamtaa Boonaa — Gamtaa Boonaatu dhufe (It was Gamtaa Boonaa who came.)

hattuu - hattuuu — Hattuuu sangaa koo dabarse (It was a thief that stole my ox)

intala - intalatu— Intalatu itti hime. (It was the girl that told him.)

*Rule 3.1:* In sentences in which there are modifiers (e.g. adjectives, numbers, possessive pronouns), the **-tu** is suffixed to the modifier. If there are two or more modifiers, the **-tu** is suffixed to the last modifier. Examples follow.

- With no modifier:            Leencatu asiin darbe. (It was a lion that passed this way)
- With one modifier:         Leenca guddaatu asiin darbe (It was a big lion that passed this way)
- With two modifiers:        Leenca guddaa, sodaachisaatu asiin darbe (A frightening big lion passed this way)
- With three modifiers:      Leenca guddaa, sodaachisaa lamatu asiin darbe (Two frightening big lions passed this way.)

*Rule 3.2:* If the noun is compound, the **-tu** is suffixed to the last component. (As regards modifiers, *Rule 3.1* above applies here, too.) Here are examples.

- haadha ormaa: Haadha ormaatu isa guddise (A stepmother brought him up.)
- Haadha ormaa gadheetu isa guddise (A mean stepmother brought him up.)
- Haadha ormaa sassattuu gadhee tokkotu isa guddise (A mean, wicked stepmother brought him up.)

### **Rules for Joining Two or More Subjects**

*Rule 3.3:* If two or more subjects are joined by the conjunction **fi** (and), the final vowel of the subject that precedes **fi** is long. Examples follow.

- funyaan — Funyaanii fi iji isee ni bareedu. (Her nose and eyes look nice.)
- miilla — Harka, miillaa fi cinaa isaatu cabe. (He broke his hand, leg, and rib.)

Alternately,

harkaa fi, millaa fi, cinaa isaatu cabe.

*Rule 3.4:* If two or more subjects are coordinated by **fi** (and), **-nii** is usually suffixed to the subject that precedes the coordinating conjunction **fi**. In some dialects, **-nii** is not used. Instead, what is commonly done is to lengthen the final vowel of the subject that precedes **fi**. Study the following examples.

Daljeessi **nii** fi qamaleen diina boqqollooti. (Baboons and monkeys are the enemies of corn crop)

Leenci **nii** fi arbii wal hin tuqanu. (Lions and elephants do not attack each other.)

Angafi **nii**/Angafni **nii**/Angafti **nii** fi quxisuun wal jaal'atu (The first-born and a younger child love each other.)

Harree **nii** fi gaangeen firummaa wal irraa qabu (Donkeys and mules are related.)

Alternately,

Daljeessii fi qamaleen diina boqqollooti.

Daljeessaa fi qamaleen diina boqqollooti.

Leencii fi arbii wal hintuqan. Leencaa fi arbi wal hin tuqanu

Angafii/Angafnii/Angaftii fi quxisuun wal jaal'atu.

Angafaa fi quxisuun wal jaal'atu.

Harree fi gaangeen firummaa wal irraa qabu.

*Rule 3.5:* If three or more subjects are joined by **fi** (and), **fi** occurs only before the subject that comes last. An example follows.

Daljeessi, qamaleen, booyeenii fi xaddeen diina boqqollooti.

(Baboons, monkeys, boar, and porcupines are enemies of corn.)

The above sentence can be stated in at least two different ways

a) By uttering the word “jedhii/jedhaa” which roughly means to name or identify each subject in a series by name. When the addressee is “you”, singular, “jedhi” is used. When it is plural or honorific, “jedha” is employed.

Example: Daljeessa jedhii/jedhaa, qamalee jedhii/jedhaa, booyee



jedhii/jedhaa, xaddee jedhi/jedhaa akkuma jiranuun diina boqqollooti (Wild animals of all types: baboons, monkeys, boar, and porcupines are enemies of corn crop.) Alternately, “ta’anii” (as an entity) is used. Daljeessa ta’anii, qamalee ta’anii, booyyee ta’anii, xaddee ta’anii, akkuma jiranuun diina boqqollooti

b) By suffixing **-is/-s** (and also) to every subject in the series.

Example:

Daljeessis, qamaleenis, booyyeenis, xaddeenis diina boqqollooti. (And baboons also, and monkeys also, and boar also, and porcupines also are the enemies of corn crop.)

*Rule 3 6:* If two or more subjects that are formed by suffixing **-tu** are joined by **fi** (and), **-tu** is suffixed only to the subject that comes last. Also, if there are modifiers in the sentence, **tu** is suffixed to the last modifier that comes after **fi**.

Examples:

Gamtaa fi Gaaddisaatu Afaan Oromoo na barsiise

(Gamtaa and Gaaddisaa taught me Afaan Oromoo)

Daljeessa, qamalee, booyyee, fi xaddeetu boqqolloo koo fixe (Baboons, monkeys, wild pigs, and porcupines finished my corn crop.)

Hoolaa lamaa fi jabbiiitu asiin darbe. (Two sheep and a calf passed this way.)

Hoolaa lamaa fi jabbii diimtuutu asiin darbe (Two sheep and a red calf passed this way.)

Hoolaa lamaa fi jabbii diimtuu, bareedduu tokkotu asiin darbe. (Two sheep and one beautiful, red calf passed this way.)

## **Object or Accusative Form**

The object of a sentence can be defined as a noun/pronoun that receives the action represented by the verb. The basic pattern of a sentence with an object/objects is usually S O V, i.e. Subject –Object – Verb, e.g. Insermuun farda bite. (Insermuu a horse bought, i.e. Insermuu bought a horse). With a postposition and verbs such as darbachuu (to throw), ergisuu (to lend things), kennuu (to give), and liqeessuu (to lend money), two objects are possible. Study the two patterns below.

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

- a) S – O – P – O – V Subject – Object – Postposition – Object – Verb

Insermuun - daljeesa-tti - eeboo darbate (Insermuu a baboon at a spear threw, i.e. Insermuu threw a spear at a baboon)

Alternately,

- b) S – O – O – P – V Subject – Object – Object – Postposition – Verb

Insermuun – eeboo – daljeessa – tti – darbate (Insermuu a spear a baboon at threw, i.e. Insermuu threw a spear at a baboon)

Insermuun dhagaraa Caalaa dhaaf ergise. (Insermuu an axe Caalaa for lent, i.e. Insermuu lent an axe to Caalaa.)

As can be seen from the above examples, the objects farda, daljeessa, and eeboo are not marked. So, as a general rule, unless the subject in a sentence is 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun, singular, an object is/objects are unmarked. In other words, the only time when an object is sometimes marked is when the subject of the sentence is the pronoun “I.” This major exception is discussed below.

*Rule 3 7:* Nouns and personal pronouns, namely, 1<sup>st</sup> person, plural; 2<sup>nd</sup> person, singular/plural/honorific; and 3<sup>rd</sup> person, singular, or plural/honorific that function as objects are not marked, i.e. no special suffixes are added to them. Examples are:

**Noun:** Hoolaa lama qaba. (He has two sheep)

Gamtaa Boonaa barbaadu. (They are looking for Gamtaa Boona)

**1<sup>st</sup> Person, plural:** Nuyi indaaqqoo gurgurra

(We chickens sell, i.e. we sell chickens.)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Person, singular:** Ati hoolaa gurgurta (You sheep sell, i.e. You sell sheep.)

**plural/honorific:** (Isin) mucaa arkaa haaduu fuudhaa

(You child hand from the knife take, i.e. Take the knife from the child's hand.)

**3<sup>rd</sup> Person, singular, feminine:** Iseen haaduu bitatte

(She a knife bought for self, i.e. She bought a knife for self)

**singular, masculine:** Inni eeboo bitate.

(He a spear bought for self, i.e. He bought a spear for self.)

**plural/honorific:** Isaan gaangee shan qabu.

(They mules five have, i.e. They have five mules)

**plural only:** Jerri gaangee shan qabu

(They mules five have i.e. They have five mules.)

However, if the subject is 1<sup>st</sup> person, singular, i.e. the pronoun “I”, the object can be marked or unmarked depending on (a) the tense of the verb and (b) depending on whether the sentence is affirmative, negative or question. The following tentative rules could make the meaning of this general statement more specific:

*Rule 3.8:* If the subject in a sentence is “I”, the object in that sentence is marked if the sentence is affirmative and if the present, past, or future form of a verb is used. Study the following examples.

#### **Affirmative Sentence**

An bunan dhuga/dhüge I drink/will drink /drank coffee. An sangaan bita/bite. I will buy/bought an ox. An manan ijaaruu deema. (I am going to build a house “house” is emphasized) An mana ijaaruu deema. (I am going to build a house. “build” is emphasized.) An fardan qaba. (I have a horse, not a mule, for example.) (cf., An farda qaba. (I have a horse.)

The verb *qabaachuu* (to own/possess) is unique because: (a) “-e,” which indicates the simple past tense, cannot be suffixed to it. It is ungrammatical to say \**“An farda qabe”* when the intended meaning is “I had a horse.” *“An farda qabe”* roughly means “I hold/catch a horse.” not “I had a horse.” (b) Also, **qaba** cannot be used to show the future tense. It is ungrammatical to say \**“An borin farda qaba”* (I will have a horse tomorrow” in Afaan Oromo. The sentence “Borin farda qaba” means I will hold/catch a horse tomorrow. (c) The object that precedes **qaba** can be marked or unmarked depending on the meaning intended. Study the following examples carefully.

An farda qaba. I have a horse. (The object is unmarked because the sentence is positive)

An farda qaban ture. I used to have a horse. (In this kind of tense, a verb (**qaba**) is marked)

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

An *fardan* qaba malee, gaangee hin qabu I have a horse, but I do not have a mule. (N.B. an object that occurs in a “malee-clause” is marked, (e.g. *fardan*) whereas an object (e.g. *gaangee*) in an independent clause is unmarked)

An *-n* is usually suffixed to a verb in a dependent time clause, not to the object.

Examples: An *kaleessa* araqee dhugeen machaaye. (Having drunk liquor yesterday, I became intoxicated) Bor gabaa arbii deemeen, fardaa fi gaangee bitadha (After going to Arbii market tomorrow, I will buy a horse and a mule for self) Ha’ra waaree mindhaan nyaadhee, xinno boqodheen manaa baye (After eating and resting a while at noon today, I left home.)

Instead of to an object, *-n* is suffixed to words such as *osoo/ utuu/yoo* (if) when they are used to introduce a dependent clause. Examples: *Osoon/Utuun* buna dhugee, bowwuun koo na dhiisa. (If I drank coffee, my headache would go away) *Alkan yoon* buna dhuge, irribi/irribni nan qabu/nan fudhatu. (If I drink coffee at night, sleep won’t catch/take me, i. e. I can’t sleep.)

Also, instead of the object, it is the question words, i.e. *akkam* (how), *ammam* (how much), *eenyuu* (who), *essa* (where), *maal* (what), *maaliif* (why), *meeqa* (how many) that are usually marked by the suffixes *-an/-in/-n/-ttan* and *-ttin*.

Examples:

*Akkaman/Akkamin* Irkisaa irraanfadhha? (How can I forget Irkisaa?)  
*Akkamittan/Akkamittin* isee arguu danda’a? (How can I meet her?)  
*Sogidda ammaman/ammamin* ittootti naqa? (How much salt shall I add to the stew?)  
*Enyuunan/Enyuunin* waama? (Whom shall I invite?)  
*Ulee kana enyuttan/enyuttin* kenna? (To whom shall I give this stick?)  
*Kophe koo eessan kaaya/kaaye?* (Where shall I put/did I put my shoes?)  
*Caalaatti maalan/maalin* hima? (What shall I tell Caalaa?)  
*Maaliifan/Maaliifin* sangaa koo gurgura? (Why should I sell my ox?)  
*Nama meeqan waama?* (How many persons am I to invite?)  
*Qarshii meeqattan/meeqattin* gurgura? (For how many dollars shall I sell it?)  
*Yooman/Yoomin* qarshii si irraa liqeffadhe (When did I borrow money from you?)

*Rule 3.9:* If the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> names are mentioned at once and if “T” is the subject, the 2<sup>nd</sup> name is marked by -n. Examples: An Gamtaa Boonan gaafadha. (I will ask Gamtaa Boonaa) Safuu Tollaattan/ Tolaattin kenne. (I gave it to Safuu Tolaa)

*Rule 3.10:* If the sentence is negative, present perfect tense (short form), or a question that can be answered by “yes” or “no”, the object is not marked. See the examples for each of these points below.

### **Negative Sentence**

An object in a negative sentence is not marked.

Examples: An buna hin dhugu/ hin dhugne (I do not/will not/did not drink coffee.) An farda hin bitadhu/hin bitanne (I do not/will not/did not buy a horse for myself.)

#### **Present Perfect Tense (Short Form)**

An buna dhugeera. (I have drunk coffee.) An farda bitadheera. (I have bought a horse.)

### **Questions that can be answered by “Yes” or “No”**

An object that occurs with questions that can be answered either by “yes” or “no,” is usually unmarked.

Examples:

An buna dhuguu? (Shall I drink coffee?)

An buna dhugeeraa? (Have I drunk coffee?)

An farda bitadhuu? (Shall I buy a horse for self?)

But if the question is for confirmation, the object is marked.

Examples:

An bunan dhugaa? (Am I to drink coffee?)

An buna kanan dhugaa? (Am I to drink this coffee?)

*Rule 3.11:* If the present perfect (long form) and the progressive tenses are used, either the object or the verb can be marked. The meaning is essentially the same except that the marked object or verb is emphasized

### **Present Perfect Tense (Long Form)**

Examples:

An buna dhugeen jira. I have drunk coffee. (Emphasis is on the verb)

An bunan dhugee jira. I have drunk coffee. (Emphasis is on the object)

An farda bitadheen jira. I have bought a horse for self. (Emphasis is on the verb)

An fardan bitadhee jira. I have bought a horse. (Emphasis is on the object)

### **Progressive Tense**

The progressive tense can be formed in two ways:

a) By replacing the infinitive markers **-uu** by **-aa**

Examples:

deemuu (to go) — deemaa — Deemaa jira/jiru (He is/They are going)

barbaaduu (to look for) — barbaadaa — Kaleessa sangaa barbaadaa oole/oolan. (Yesterday he was/they were looking for an ox all day)

buwachuu (to pick) — buwachaa — Buna buwachaa ooltee, galgala deemte (After picking coffee beans for self all day, she left in the evening)

b) By first removing one of the two infinitive markers **-uu** and then suffixing **-tti**.

Examples: bituu (to buy) — bitutti — Hoolaa bitutti jirti/jira/jiru (She/He is/They are buying sheep)

bitachuu (to buy for self) — bitachutti — Hoolaa bitachutti jirti/jira/jiru. (She/He is/They are buying sheep for self.)

When the subject is the first person pronoun, singular, i.e. "I", **-n/-ttan/-tтин** is often suffixed to the object or to the verb in the progressive form.

Examples:

An simbrroo ilaalaan/ilaaluttan/ilaauttin jira. (I am looking at a bird)

An simbrroon ilaalaa jira (I am looking at a bird.)  
Irbaata nyaachaan/nyaachuttan/nychuttin jira (I am eating dinner.)  
Irbaatan nyaachaa/nyaachutti jira (I am eating dinner)  
Buddeena tolchaan/tolchuttan/tolchuttin jira (I am baking bread.)  
Buddeenan tolchaa/tolchutti jira.(I am baking bread.)

*Rule 3.12:* If there are modifiers such as adverb of time, adjectives, numbers, possessive pronouns, and postpositions (prepositions) in a sentence, (See *Rule 3.1*), -n is suffixed to the modifier, not to the object.  
Examples:

Irbaata amman qopheessutti, taa'aa. (Sit, until I prepare dinner.)  
An sangaa diimaan bita/bite (I will buy/I bought a red ox.)  
An sangaa furdaa, diimaa, laman bite. (I bought two, fat, red oxen.)  
Ilma koon erga malee, an dhaquu hin danda'u. (I will send my son; I cannot go myself)  
Kittaa koo siree irran kaaye. (I put my shirt on the bed.)

*Rule 3.13:* -an/-in is suffixed to nouns/pronouns/modifiers that already end in -n.

Examples:

Annan - Annanan/Annanin dhuga/dhuge. (I will drink/I drank milk.)  
Foon - An foonan/foonin nyaachaa/nyaachutti jira (I am eating meat.)  
Alternately, "An foon nyaachuttan/nyaachuttin jira" (I am eating meat).  
Isaan - An isaanan/isaanin gaafadha. (I will ask them.)  
Iftaan - Kittaa haaraa iftaanan/iftaanin siif bita (I will buy you a new shirt the day after tomorrow.)

### **Rules for joining two or more Objects**

*Rule 3.14:* If two or more objects are coordinated by fi (and), the object that precedes fi ends in a long vowel

Examples:

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

farda: Fardaa fi gaangee bitate. (He bought a horse and an ox for self.)

sogidda: Har'a yoo gabaa daqxee, shunkurtaa, qullubbii, soogiddaa fi buna bituu hin irraanfatin. (If you go to the market today, don't forget to buy onions, garlic, salt and coffee.)

*Rule 3 15:* If there is a number after an object, **fi** can appear before each number.

Examples:

Gammachuun sangaa sagalii fi, dhaltii kudha lamaa fi, reettii shanii fi, hoolaa torba qaba. (Gammachuu has nine oxen, twelve cows, five goats, and seven sheep.)

Alternately,

Gammachuun sangaa sagal, dhaltii kudha lama, reetti shanii fi hoolaa torba qaba.)

### Conclusions

These rules are based on the dialect, or even better, on the idiolect of the writer. They are not sacrosanct; they are open to suggestions. The intention of the writer is to elicit a response, a reaction, or any constructive criticism especially from Oromos who emigrated from various regions of Oromiyaa. I remember how one student's comment made me change one rule in *Seera Afaan Oromo* (1995). The rule states, "Verbs that end in **-yu**, are preceded only by a consonant, not by a vowel. Examples: **iyyuu**(to yell), **fayyuu** (to be well again). In a workshop on verbs, which I was chairing, a Finfinnee University student from Bale raised his hand and said, "What about **booyuu** (to weep)?" I tried to defend my rule by saying, "From where I come, they say **boowuu**, not **booyuu**." But after all the other students from Eastern and Southern Oromiyaa agreed with him, I thanked him and promised to change the rule. It has now become clear that verbs that end in **-yu** can be preceded by a vowel. Here are some more examples: **bayuu/bawuu** (to get out), **dayuu/dawuu** (to give birth), **gayuu/gawuu** (to be enough), and **fooyu/foowu** (to spin)



After reading this paper, I hope Oromos from different parts of Oromiyaa would say to each other, “From where I come, people speak differently; they speak this way. Hence, this rule does not apply in our case.” Of course, this must be done amicably without making any value judgment. In this paper, we have seen that, for instance, “lafa” has three subject forms, namely, “lafii”, “lafni”, and “lafiti”. It does not matter at all if different speech communities use either one, or two, or all the three forms in spoken Afaan Oromo. In writing, however, I think we should decide to select one of the variants and use it consistently. Once we decide to use “lafii”, for instance, henceforth the other forms will not appear in our writing. Of course, we have to use a criterion of sorts for our selection. In this case, for instance, we may decide to select **lafii** because it is shorter than the other two or because it involves changing only the final **a** in “lafa” to “**i**”. Those that are not selected can still be used in speech. They are not left out because they are considered inferior to the one selected for the purpose of uniform spelling. Each is merely a sign or a symbol. Once we accept this linguistic principle, I believe, we have gone a long way to standardizing our spelling.

## NOTES

### Pronunciation Key

There are 23 consonants and 10 vowels in Afaan Oromo.

#### 1. Consonants:

15 consonant symbols and the sounds they represent are similar to those of English. They are **b, d, f, g** (as in *get*), **h, j, k, l, m, n, r, s, t, w,** and **y**.

3 consonants are not English sounds. They are **c, q,** and **x**.

**c** is glottalized palatal, e.g. *cooma* (fat)

**q** is glottalized velar, e.g. *warqee* (gold)

**x** is glottalized alveolar, upper ridge, e.g. *lixuu* (to enter)

5 consonants are digraphs. They are **ch, dh, ny, ph,** and **sh**

**ch** is the same as the English **ch**, as in **rich**, e.g. **guchii** (ostrich)

It has three characteristics:

- a) it is rarely found word initially.
- b) though it is not written as “chch”, this digraph should be considered as double or geminate when a vowel precedes it. Double consonants show that the puff of breath is very strong. So, for instance, the **ch** in **dachee** (earth) or **guchii** should be said with a very strong puff of breath because a vowel precedes it. A change in meaning could result when a consonant and a vowel are doubled, respectively. Examples are: **qoruu** — **qorruu** (to investigate — to feel cold) and **samuu** — **saamuu** (to spoil — to rob).
- c) When a consonant, which in my observation is always **l**, precedes **ch** it is not pronounced with a strong puff of breath. Examples: **galchuu** (to let in) and **bulchuu** (to let spend the night)

**dh** is glottalized alveolar. There are no rules that can explain when **dh** is pronounced with a strong puff of breath or when it is pronounced with a soft puff. Therefore, when it is pronounced with a strong puff of breath, it must be underlined or highlighted to indicate that it is geminated. Otherwise, how can anybody who had never heard, say, “**hodhaa**” before, figure out its correct pronunciation? I strongly believe that it is necessary to do this for the sake of those learners for whom Afaan Oromo is a second language.

**ny** is nasal, palatal. It is pronounced as **gn** in the word **cognac**. Since it is always geminated, there is no need to double it anywhere. Examples: **addunyaa** (world), **sanyii** (seed), **moonnyee** (mortar)

**sh** is pronounced as **sh** in the English word **bush**. In the majority of instances, it is pronounced with a weak puff of breath

Examples: **ashaboo** (salt), **bishaan** (water).

**ph** is glottalized labial. It is not common word initially. Like **dh**, this sound, too, can be pronounced either with a strong puff of breath or with a soft puff, and there is no rule that explains this fact. So, it must be underlined or highlighted to show gemination. Example: **Buphaa isaa nyaatee lafa taphaatti fiige**. (He ate his eggs and ran to the play-ground.)

2. **Vowels:** There are five short and five long vowels.

**Short Vowels: a, e, i, o, u**

**a** is pronounced as the **u** in the English words **much** and **such**.

Examples: **alana** (this time); **lama** (two). When it appears at the end of a word, however, it is pronounced as **a** in **about** or **ago**. Examples: **alana**; **lama**

**e** is pronounced as the **e** in the English word **desk**, e.g. **gemmoo** (stove)

**i** is pronounced as the **i** in the English word **sit**, e.g. **bituu** (to buy)

**o** is pronounced as the **o** in **lost** (BBC English), e.g. **boruu** (tomorrow)

**u** is pronounced as the **u** in **put**, e.g. **butii** (kidnapping)

**Long Vowels: aa, ee, ii, oo, uu.**

**aa** is pronounced approximately as in **farm**, e.g. **mataa** (head)

**ee** is pronounced approximately as in **care**, e.g. **beela** (hunger)

**ii** is pronounced as in **teach**, e.g. **ciisuu** (to lie down)

**oo** is pronounced approximately as in **more**, e.g. **booruu** (turbid)

**uu** is pronounced as in **moon**, e.g. **buutii** (big snake)

## SOME FEATURES OF TRADITIONAL OROMO EDUCATION

---

*Melaku Mekonnen\**

### **Abstract**

Traditionally, Oromo families educated their children at home in a pedagogical design and approach that has fundamental similarities to the home schooling practices employed in contemporary Western societies. This paper attempts to outline some of the characteristic features of Traditional Oromo Education from the points of view of school organization, curriculum constructs and instructional approaches. The article is based on the professional experiences and observations of the writer working as an educator for over a decade in the western region of Ethiopia predominantly inhabited by the Oromos.

### **Introduction**

There exists a limited body of literature on the topic of traditional educational systems in Ethiopia especially that relates to the preservations and continuity of the two forefront religious institutions in the Country, namely, Christianity and Islam. Traditionally, the church and the mosque were two institutions that provided formal education in Ethiopia (Wagaw, 1979; Ministry of Education, 1984).

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church developed and spread a system of learning in ancient Geez language and later on in Amharic as early as the fourth Century. This first served the narrower purposes of the church itself in preparing the priesthood and its officials. From the end of the first millennium, however, the system also reflected very strongly the close relations between the monarchy and church. Its involvement in developing the Ethiopian Empire provided the spiritual justification.

The Koranic schools, attached to and promoted by the centers of the Islamic faith, had a parallel function in spreading the reading and writing of Arabic, the study of Islam, philosophy and law, and the teaching of the Koran. As in all Muslim areas, the study of Arabic has

a special significance as the language in which the Koran was written. There is also a parallel, at various times in history, in the relationships between religion and political power in areas where Islam provided the spiritual justification (Ministry of Education, 1984).

In addition to the two forms of traditional religious educational systems, the practice of ensuring the continuity of accumulated wisdom and cultural heritage was orally passed from generation to generation by some societies using systematic pedagogical constructs and without the involvement of the church and the mosque. Among the pastoral Borana Oromo, for example, this process was institutionalized in an age-grade system known as Gada that ensured the continuity of experience and organization (Legesse, 1973).

Few scholars such as Asmerom Legesse have documented, in one way or another, about the passage of rites in Oromo society. The most outstanding work in this respect is the literature on the Gada system that discusses in-depth the socio-political organization of traditional Oromo Society. At times, the literature reflected some characteristics that prevailed in the training of the youth to assume societal responsibilities in specific areas. To the knowledge of this writer, however, no serious scholarly work is available as to how the Oromo have traditionally organized and operated their educational system.

This article, therefore, attempts to shed light on some of the fundamental features that relate to the practice of teaching and learning in traditional Oromo families. It is also the hope of the writer that the article would generate further interest among scholars of Oromo society to conduct in-depth studies on the topic so that the very existence of some form of structured educational system in traditional Oromo communities, however crude that may be, would be documented for future use.

For the sake of understanding the content better, the paper is structured in the context and terminology of contemporary education. The information contained in this paper is, for the most part, the result of the writer's personal observations based on his professional experiences of working as an educator in Western Oromia, Illubabor Region, in Buno and Gore districts from mid sixties to early seventies.

From the outset, the writer would like to state that the paper is in its preliminary stage. Due to certain constraints, time in particular, he has not been able to solicit the opinions and criticisms of educators and experts on the Oromo society. The writer would appreciate comments on the topic from interested individuals who would like to contribute in documenting educational endeavors and initiatives, as it existed in traditional Oromia.

It is to be expected that the discussion on the topic could raise some pertinent questions relating to education in traditional Oromo communities. Some individuals may welcome the idea and could be interested in expounding further the concepts outlined briefly in this article. At the same time, it should not come as a surprise if certain groups or individuals reject the fact that the Oromo had a well-established but not fully documented system of education that was in existence for centuries.

Whatever the views are, the Oromo traditionally had education that perpetuated the continuity of their culture, norms, mores, values, skills, and knowledge from generation to generation. How did this education take place? What are the instructional approaches? How was the curriculum organized? Who were the instructors and how well did the students learn? In the following pages attempts have been made to seek answers to some of these questions.

The Oromo make up a significant portion of the population occupying the Horn of Africa constituting about thirty million of the fifty-five million inhabitants of Ethiopia. In fact, the Oromo is one of the numerous nations in Africa enjoying a homogenous culture and sharing a common language, history, and descent (Oromia on line, 2001). Baxter, Hultin, and Triulzi (1996) write that the Oromo practiced sedentary agriculture as well as pastoralism. They crafted tools and produced a variety of artifacts. They have a well-developed sense and appreciation for the arts: music, dance etc. They lived in harmony with nature: In other words, they were able to strike a balance between the ecosystem and their needs for subsistence. Above all, they had well-established form of civic governance.

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

The continuity of these and other facets of life in traditional Oromo society were ensured through the provision of some schooling that prevailed through time.

### **The School**

Traditionally, Oromo children received education at home. Home schooling was the main venue of education in traditional Oromo families. Each home served as a classroom for all the children in a family. It is more or less similar to contemporary home-schooling practices found in modern day societies. The main difference is in the scope, coverage, and level of sophistication in structure, form, and content of instruction. In the traditional sense, home schooling is not a choice, but a necessity.

Normally, classes were conducted late in the evenings. After a hard workday on the farm or in the field, the family gets together for the evening meal. This is also a time for roll call where every member of the family is accounted for. In short, dinner is served and attendance is taken for classes to begin.

Classes, in most cases, were held by the fireside. Once every one takes his/her seat by the fireside, the order of class begins by reviewing events of the day. This is also the time designated to provide children some sort of feedback on their accomplishments for the day. Usually, this is expressed in the form of praise and appreciation as reinforcement for the children's contribution to the daily chores such as: assisting on the farm, tending animals, collecting firewood, helping in the daily household routines etc. In short, it is time for reflection on the day's achievements.

Then the elderly member of the family, usually the father or grandfather, takes the lead in thanking Waka (God) for providing the family with the basic necessities and offers the blessings. After the blessing, the mother who is also the head teacher examines that each child has attended to his/her personal health and hygiene care.

Accordingly, the first few minutes of the classes are designated for such chores as roll call, opening prayer, information sharing, and health and hygiene issues. Once these are accomplished, the students –



the children – are both psychologically and physically ready to learn.

In most instances the mother is the lead teacher with occasional support from the father and/or grandparents as well as from older children in the family who may serve as mentors, and teachers-aides. As the lead teacher, the mother is in charge of preparing the daily lessons, scheduling for the week, enforcing rules and maintaining discipline, checking on assignment, and ensuring that each child received proper attention.

### **Curriculum**

Traditional Oromo education curriculum consisted of several areas of study designed to enhance the mental, social, psychological, and physical development of the learner. In a typical home-schooling education, it is not unusual to find the topics taught covering a wide range of learning areas. The following areas of concentration reflect some of the prominent subjects covered in a traditional Oromo education curriculum.

### **Language Arts**

The Oromo nation has a single common mother tongue. The Oromo language, Affan Oromo, or Oromiffa, belongs to the eastern Cushitic language group. Oromiffa is considered one of the five most widely spoken languages from among the approximately 1000 languages of African (Gragg, 1982).

The Oromo language has a well-developed oral literature that has been transmitted from mouth to mouth and preserved in the memories of the people. The oral literature is rich in folk tales, stories and songs, vocabularies, proverbs, and poems (Deme, 1996). In almost all of the schools, the development of language skills is considered as an essential ingredient of traditional Oromo education. Emphasis in language arts instruction consisted of communications skill developments such as: public speaking, effective listening, thought expression, and oral literature. Since Oromo society primarily practiced oral tradition, the enrichment of the spoken language, in the absence of writing, became an important component of the curriculum.

Various methodologies and approaches were used in the teaching of the language arts. One method which was frequently practiced was story telling. As part of the teaching of language arts, the teacher (mother) narrated stories about people and places to the children. Often, the depth of the stories took into consideration the chronological and mental age of the children in attendance. The teaching of language arts also consisted of folk tales that most children were familiar with. Normally, children were expected to carefully listen to the fascinating stories. The children, having reached advanced stages of educational progression, take turns to narrate in class the stories that they either learned in class or that they picked up from their peers in the neighborhood. Subsequently, such pedagogical approaches assist the learner to develop public speaking skills, enhance retention capacity, improve comprehension, and help build vocabulary.

The learning of proverbs and sayings also accompanied another aspect of the acquisition of language skills in traditional Oromo education. Oromo proverbs commonly known as *Mamakissa* are taught to children in association with events and situations taking place in the community, family, or the development of oneself.

Poetry recital and production of original works is practically a national past time in the Oromo nation. Leaders and elders are expected to quote lines of poetry in their speeches, or to make up a poem spontaneously to suit an important occasion (Deme, 1996). In this regard one of the hallmarks of traditional Oromo education is to instill in children and youth the enthusiasm of creatively producing their own original poems. Such works are often encouraged by the community to be recited at public gatherings such as Dabo( community cooperatives) and weddings.

### **Civic Education**

One of the prominent features of traditional Oromo education is its the integration of civic lessons in the curriculum. The main objective of civic education is to inculcate in the minds of children certain societal values of the Oromo people such as respect and dignity for humankind,

accountability and responsibility to the community, patriotism and love for the fatherland, and family identity and history.

Civic classes are conducted utilizing a variety of pedagogically sound approaches. Some of the most widely practiced instructional methods included Oromo war songs – locally known as *Gerrarsa and Farssa* - tracing the family lineage several generations back, and story telling. In certain cases, lessons in civic also included historical events in society such as major battles fought; natural disasters (drought, epidemics, and crop failure); emigration and immigration patterns; the advent, introduction and proliferation of certain technology in the community.

Civic lessons also considered the cultivation of proper Oromo etiquette as an integral part of education. In this respect, children often are provided orientation in Oromo ethics and societal values. Some of the topics covered in this area revolve around the concepts of family values, teamwork, resource sharing, community interactions, fair justice, and adherence to the rule of law. At a more advanced level of the educational configuration, it is common to see civic classes discussing topics such as the Oromo calendar, the planetary system, and the foundations of major public holidays. The Oromo have a unique time-reckoning system designating seven or eight of the myriad bodies of the sky, using static nature of the celestial spheres and the movement of the earth with the moon to define the length of the year and the months (Beyene, 1995).

### **Critical Thinking**

Probably, an important contribution of traditional Oromo education was in the area of mental (cognitive) development of children. Depending on the age of the learner, the child was presented with thought provoking situations. Such situations often took place in the form of puzzles and riddles. The most widely used pedagogical technique in the development of critical thinking was by way of *Hibboo* or riddles. Starting from an early stage, children were challenged to find answers to riddles. It was a deliberate attempt on the part of the teacher to help

develop the mental capacity of the child. In addition, *Hibbo* or Riddles was designed to persuade the learner critically examine the state of things, situations, and phenomenon from diverse perspectives. Again, such exercises were presented in the form of games and were exciting and entertaining to the young learner. In other words, instruction was never dry and boring. Rather, it encouraged discovery, aroused interest, and sought the active participation of the learner.

### **Music and Dance**

An area of study that was given importance in traditional Oromo education was the teaching and learning of music and dance. Starting at an early stage of their development, children were taught to appreciate music and dance. At the introductory level, the teacher (mother) provided the basic lessons in the form of demonstration. Often, the mother (teacher) sung in class – fireside – while the students listened to her attentively. Once the interest is created, the children were encouraged to sing on their own either individually or in-groups. The family and the community at large supported children’s music recitals and dance performances. Such support from the community reinforced the teacher’s effort and attracted the students – children- to develop appreciation and creativity in music and dance.

### **Nature Study**

Nature Study in traditional Oromo education is equivalent to what modern day educators refer to the teaching and learning of science. Nature study was taught to children in several ways. The most common approach was learning by doing. For instance, in the study of plants, children were given small plots of land where they cultivated different crops and plants. This was meant to help them observe the growth processes of plants. In the same manner, they were also assigned to care for a particular domestic animal so that they could learn the basics of animal breeding. In so doing, the children gained direct first-hand experiences about plants and animals growth and development.

In addition to learning by doing, there were also theoretical approaches to the teaching and learning of nature study. Often children were taught about the species of plants and animal kingdom, as it existed in the Oromo classification system. As part of class presentations and discussion, children were taught to identify crops, wild and domesticated plants and animals that were locally available and unique to the region.

A topic of discussion often included in nature study is the orientation given to the young about human, animal, and crop diseases. Here, the focus was on prevention of communicable diseases. As part of nature study, children were taught the elements of soil and water conservation, rangeland management, and selective breeding in their rudimentary form

### **Co-curricular Activities**

Traditional Oromo education also consists of co-curricular components that are designed to enrich classroom instruction as well as provide meaningful past times promoting the cultivation of proper physical culture, healthy social interactions, and nurturing positive psychological growth. For instance traditional Oromo male youth belonging to the same peer group (*Hiriyaa*) were involved in impressive sports training while tending their animals. Racing competition known as *dogge*, long jump and high jump, running over hurdles were some of the popular sports the youth practiced. Also javelin throwing, and the throwing of spears through moving circular object known as *genko* (similar to darts), was intended to teach muscular dexterity of the upper limbs and precision respectively. In addition, dueling (*Facce*) and wrestling (*Wolansoo*), were popular physical exercises. Further, Hockey (*Kellee*) and horse racing (*Gugsi*) were exciting sports. Some of these exercises were intended to be rudimentary military training. The legacy of such training was the cultivation of long-distance runners, some of whom have been competing successfully at international sports fora. On the other hand, there were a variety of co-curricular programs designed for girls focusing mostly in the display of musical talents, handicrafts, and other productive though not as diverse of an activity as for their male counterparts

### **Apprenticeship**

Oromo traditional education is further enriched by the collaboration of local artisans and tradesmen. It is a common phenomenon to observe youth spending time with local artisans and craftsmen in their shops and learning the tricks of the trade. Some of the vocational skills gained in this respect included wood and metal works, weaving, pottery, jewelry, and tannery. Also, youth gain valuable agricultural skills from parents and the elders in the community by taking part in daily farming chores and seasonal activities.

### **Conclusion**

Attempts have been made in this article to briefly outline some of the characteristic features of Traditional Oromo Education. The level of schooling discussed in the article usually refers to the type of education offered to children between the ages of four and ten year olds. It is more or less equivalent to what is presently known as primary grades. In general, the education provided to this segment of the population attempts to provide comprehensive development in the cognitive and affective domains as well psycho-motor skills.

It is important once again to mention the extraordinary contribution of Oromo women as traditional educators of children. They deserve special recognition. Also, the contribution of older siblings as mentors and peer educators was significant in the transmission of knowledge, skills, and in molding what was considered appropriate behavior.

Although the features discussed above may be typical in most communities, it should be taken as general trends and practices. It is not unusual to find variations from school to school i.e. from family to family or from community to community.

## References

---

- Baxter, P. Hultin, J and Triulzi, A. (ed). 1996. *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*. Lawrence: The Red Sea Press, Inc.
- Beyene, A. 1995. *Oromo Calendar: The Significance of Beta Qara*. The Journal of Oromo Studies, Volume II, No 1&2.
- Deme, F. 1996. *Historical Challenges in the Development of Oromo Language and Some Agenda for the Future*. The Journal of Oromo Studies, Volume, III No.1&2
- Gragg, G. B. and T.Kumsa. 1982. *Oromo Dictionary*. East Lansing: African Studies Center, Michigan State University.
- Ministry of Education. 1988. *Education in Socialist Ethiopia: Origins, Reorientation, Strategy for Development*. Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press.
- Legesse, A. 1973. *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*. New York: Free Press.
- Wagaw, T. 1979. *Education in Ethiopia: Prospect and Retrospect*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press

\* Melaku Mekonnen, Ph.D is the Director of Housing at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Please direct all enquiries about the article to the author. He can be reached at the following address. 1000 McIntyre Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48105 E-mail: [Mekonnen@umich.edu](mailto:Mekonnen@umich.edu)





## FAMINE AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR NATION-BUILDING AND STATE CONSOLIDATION

Ethiopia's Resettlement and Villagization Programs of 1978-1991  
in Retrospect

---

*Mekuria Bulcha*

Having abandoned democracy for repression, our leaders are de-linked from our people. Operating in a vacuum, they proclaim their incarnation of the popular will, hear echoes of their voices, and reassured, pursue with zeal, policies which cannot, therefore, mobilize them. As their alienation from our people increases, they rely more and more on force and become even more alienated (Claude Ake, 1987:7)

Approaching the city from the south, I looked over the plain south of the capital [Addis Ababa] and saw the countless tidy corrugated iron roofs of Mengistu's new villages. The scars of ruins of their demolished farms were near them. From horizon to horizon . . . One of the questions, of course, concerned this problem: would the farmers now return to their farms and rebuild them? The answer: corrugated iron certainly can, if necessary, be nailed onto a roof twice. By the third time, it just won't hold. There are too many holes in it, and it begins to rust. Apart from that, the energy of the people has been spent. Pulling down and rebuilding the whole economy twice within a single generation, without a cent in support from the government, and with massive dues to pay to the state—that's just too much (Gunnar Hasseblatt, 1992:3).

### Introduction

People were relocated from their traditional homes according to the policy design. This article discusses the policies behind these controversial programs and their social and economic consequences for the target populations. Emphasis is placed on the political objectives that the resettlement program was designed to achieve. The ecological consequences of these operations are also discussed rather briefly. Since

little information is available on the impact of resettlement on environment, the comments are preliminary. Before embarking on the discussion of the Ethiopian case, some general observations will be made on the socio-political considerations that have led to large scale relocation of people in different parts of the world at different times.

### **Relocation in general**

Large-scale relocation of communities, ethnic groups, or other social categories conducted by governments is a widespread phenomenon and is called by various names at different times and regions of the world. However, it has almost always been carried out without the voluntary will of the relocated population and often by authoritarian regimes. These regimes have had different ideological persuasions and have relocated people for purposes that are variously stated. In South Africa, for example, the racist ideology of *apartheid*, or separate development was the policy behind the *Bantustan*, or “black homeland”—a program put in place during the second part of the twentieth century.

Relocation has also been carried out for strategic purposes by governments in several countries or territories. The “protected villages” strategy was often used by colonial regimes to suppress anti-colonial social movements of indigenous peoples. In the 1950s, such policy was used by the British to counter the Mau Mau uprising against the colonial rule in Kenya. The Americans used it to fight communist guerrilla insurgency in Vietnam. During the 1960s and early 1970s, the Portuguese employed the same method to weaken the liberation struggle waged by African nationalists in their former colonies.

Pacification and assimilation of cultural and ethnic minorities was another reason for implementing population relocation by states in developing countries. This was the aim at least in the Philippines when its government in the 1960s moved and resettled thousands of Christians on the Mindanao Island, which is inhabited by a predominantly Muslim indigenous population and a separatist armed political movement (Paderanga, 1988).

States have carried out massive relocation programs in the name of development. Stalin's collectivization program in the USSR in the 1930s, and Tanzania's *ujamaa* (Yeager, 1982) were some of the well-known examples. In spite of the differences in expressed aims and the great divergence of the ideologies subscribed to by the different regimes that carried them out, the above mentioned types of population relocation had some important characteristics which were common to all of them. There were also similarities in the interests underlying the policies of most of the states and regimes that conducted such operations.

First, these programs affected almost always the poorest, voiceless, and hence defenseless groups or classes, ethnic minorities. Second, they were often planned and executed with little or no participation of the affected people in the decision-making process. Third, the affected groups resisted them. Fourth, in most of the cases, the mode of their implementation included use of coercion by the state or its agents. Fifth, regardless of the intentions and the regimes that carried them out, population relocation policies often constituted infringements on human rights. They generally result in the violations of social-cultural and economic rights of the relocated groups and of indigenous populations on whose land resettlements were made. Lastly, they prioritized the interests of those in power over those of the people affected. The latter were considered objects of development; they were to be "developed" in a manner and at a pace set for them by those who wielded power. They were expected to suffer patiently the discomforts of the process for some future and often false benefits.

That the types of population relocation discussed here are seldom possible in democracies but in states run by despotic rulers and totalitarian political systems is quite clear. For whatever reason they were designed and implemented, forced resettlement programs have almost always been unsuccessful enterprises. It was even more so with regard to development, which their proponents often purport to achieve. As Claude Ake has aptly remarked,

Proxy cannot achieve development. A people develops itself, or not at all. And it can develop itself only through commitment

and its energy. That is where democracy comes in. Self-reliance is not possible unless the society is thoroughly democratic, unless the people are the end and not just the means of development (Ake, 1987:8)

Thus, paternalistic state run resettlement programs had, in many countries, resulted in human suffering than social and economic development; and in some cases in mass death. One can, for example, cite Stalin's collectivization effort in the USSR and the *safara* and villagization programs of the former military rulers of Ethiopia as examples. Although under-researched and less discussed, ethnic conflicts, ethnic cleansing, and social disintegration were also outcomes of such projects.

### **Relocation in Ethiopia: resettlement and villagization**

Since the modalities of its implementation follows the same general rules, the mass relocation of peasants in Ethiopia of the 1970s and 1980s should be seen and analyzed in the general context presented above. When it embarked on its mass relocation programs known as resettlement and villagization, the military regime, also known as the *Dergue* (committee in Amharic), aimed to achieve a variety of social, political, ideological and economic objectives. In the various statements made by senior officials of the *Dergue*, and particularly its leader Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam, relocation was presented as a panacea for Ethiopia's deep-rooted socio-economic and political malaise. These objective were also outlined in official documents dealing with the subject. Before elaborating on these points, it is necessary to distinguish between these two programs that were also interrelated as strategies used by the military rulers to realize an array of social and political objectives.

**Resettlement** refers to the movement of people from the northern part of Ethiopia, particularly from the Abyssinian highlands, to regions in the south and southwest, mainly Oromoland—now known as the Oromia regional state. It is a long distance movement and the journey covered, in almost all cases, hundreds of kilometers. From 1978

up to 1986 over 800,000 mainly Amharic speaking people and Tigreans from north and central Ethiopia were relocated in the south and southwest. The overall plan of the military regime was, according to Mengistu Hailemariam, head of the *Dergue*, to relocate up to seven million people—i.e., about a third of the population inhabiting the northern Amhara and Tigray regions—in the south within a decade.<sup>1</sup> At the place of destination, two types of resettlement strategies were followed. First, there was the conventional settlement scheme, called *medebenya safara* in Amharic, in which all the relocated people are settled together in one place in big settlements. About 65 percent of the settlers relocated during the 1984-85 operations were placed in the major conventional settlement schemes in the lowlands of Wallaga, Illubabor, Kafa, and southwestern Gojjam (Map). The rest were put in another settlement model called *sigsega* (shuffling) in Amharic, and were relocated among the indigenous population in Wallaga, Kafa and Illu Abba Bor. Local farmers' associations were assigned a number of families to take care of, to give shelter food, and provide them with a means to start a new life in their midst.

**Villagization** is a process of moving peasants, who traditionally lived in scattered homesteads to “villages”. It started in the Oromo province of Bale in 1978 (Wood, 1983; Cohen and Isaksson, 1987). Between 1984 and 1987, it was carried out on a grand scale in the entire the Oromo region, but was also extended to most of the other southern regions as well some *awrajas* (sub-regions) in the north. By 1988, it was estimated that about 12 million people, a vast majority of them Oromo peasants, were “villagized”. The military regime planned to “villagize” about 30 million people by the end of 1990. The enormity of the operation, and particularly the speed with which it was carried out, were indeed unparalleled in the history of Africa and, perhaps, of the developing countries. As the resettlement and villagization programs were parts in an overall state-building package, they were interconnected in several ways and were implemented simultaneously. When the *Dergue*

---

1 See his speech to the Six Plenum of the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) Central Committee March, 1987

embarked on these programs on a grand scale amid the 1984-'85 famine crisis, it was envisaged that relief aid from private humanitarian agencies and bilateral and multilateral development assistance would cover at least the initial costs of their implementation.

### **Resettlement objectives and motives**

As mentioned above, resettlement operations have been carried out by the *Dergue* from 1978 onwards, but were discontinued in 1981 due to persistent resistance from the relocated people and the local populations, who fled from the resettlement projects in large numbers and became refugees in the neighboring countries, particularly in the Sudan (Bulcha, 1983). Other reasons were the lack of resources for running existing resettlement schemes and for expansion, and to some extent, the negative public opinion in the West. The operation was resumed in 1985 and carried out on an unprecedented scale. In 1985 and 1986 alone, more than 600,000 peasants from the north were transferred to southwest (Wolde-Giorgis, 1989:304).

The horrendous famine of 1984-1985 that affected about eight million people in Ethiopia created conditions that were exploited by the *Dergue* to resume relocation on a grand scale. These conditions primarily concerned the fact that the famine drastically weakened the resistance of the targeted population. They became easy victims for manipulation because of their dependence on grain doled out by government agents and non-governmental humanitarian organizations (NGOs). The famine victims came to shelters, having exhausted all their means of survival and themselves physically exhausted by starvation and the long journeys to relief centers; and they were easily persuaded or coerced by the political cadres of the so-called Workers Party of Ethiopia<sup>2</sup> (WPE) to climb into overcrowded trucks, buses, and aircraft heading for the southwest. Ten huge Antonov aircrafts provided by the Soviet Union transported 80,768 settlers. Busses and lorries moved the

---

2 The WPE was a workers' party only in name. The majority of its officials and members were men from the military forces. Civil servants, peasants and workers were represented, but they were in the minority.

rest of the settlers for days and in some cases even weeks (Bekele, 1988: 141). The relocation was even justified in the eyes of the international public, who were shocked by the crisis and human tragedy caused by the famine. Many of the international organizations and a host of NGOs supported resettlement, although most of them began to doubt its humanitarianism when it became clear to them how it was carried out. Most importantly, the famine made available substantial international aid, which the regime could use to implement massive relocation. According to Dawit Wolde Giorgis, head of the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) at the time of the catastrophe in 1985, “Mengistu wanted a political advantage of this situation and launched a massive resettlement program involving 1.5 million people”, or 300,000 families (Wolde Giorgis, 1989:302). Wolde Giorgis wrote that relief was diversified to the implementation of the resettlement program. In other words, resources donated for relief were used for moving famine victims from their home areas instead of first feeding them and saving their lives on the spot.

While it is undeniable that lives were saved by the massive international assistance, available information on the operation makes it also abundantly clear that aid money was invested in the deportation causing more death and further suffering among famine victims (Malhuret, 1985; Clay & Holcomb, 1985). Of course, the blame goes to the regime and not the humanitarian organizations that provided the assistance.

### **The Official objectives of resettlement:**

In 1985, the military regime declared that the objectives of the resettlement program were to fight famine, to develop the country and to enable drought and famine victims from the north to become economically self-sufficient by moving them to the south and the southwest. The main reasons given regarding choice of the places/regions of resettlement could be summarized as follows: (a) vast unused land was available in the south; (b) rainfall was abundant and reliable; (c) the northern provinces were not only infertile and drought affected,

but also over-populated; and (d) the solution to avoid further famine catastrophes was relocation in the south.

The program was commended or condemned by scholars and human rights activists. Summarizing the official objectives of the *Dergue's* resettlement program, Christopher Clapham stated,

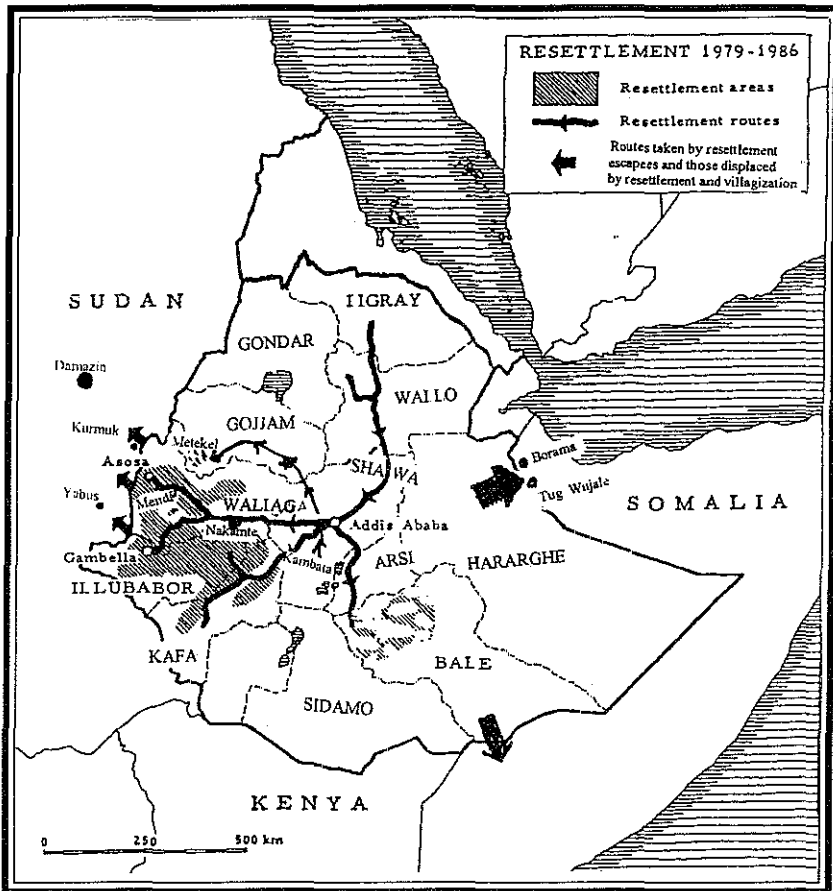
Resettlement offered an appealing model of purposive, large-scale government action, which would give a prominent role to the party, help to further the government's plans for transforming the structure of agricultural production by putting the settlers into producers' cooperatives, and at the same time promise a drastic and permanent solution to the problem of famine (1988:193).

Clapham did not question the viability or rationale of the operation; he cited consultant reports commissioned by the FAO and ILO to argue that the strategy of moving people from the north to the southwest was based on research results. Implicit in his approach was also the argument that "the government knows what is best" and that it had the right to deal with its domestic problem as it deemed fit. Other writers were rather unreserved in their appreciation of the *Dergue's* resettlement strategy (Lemma, 1988:21) and dismissals of criticisms directed against the program as mere imperialist propaganda or the enemies of the Ethiopian revolution (Galperin, 1988:182-183).

However, many researchers and humanitarian organizations did not accept the official explanations at their face value but pointed out the political and ideological motives they could discern behind the operation. Some questioned even the need for moving famine victims with such haste and on such a scale, and the reasons for selecting the southwestern regions for resettlement (Malhuret, 1985; Clay & Holcomb, 1985; Niggli, 1985; Valley, 1986). For our present purpose, it is necessary to look at the argument put forward to justify resettlement in relation to the views of its critics and relating them to the real land resources, climatic and demographic conditions in the areas of settler-destinations—the southwest regions.



*Areas affected by resettlement up to 1986*



Was land vacant in the southwest? The answer to this question is definitely in the negative. Land is not vacant or plentiful in the south and southwest as depicted by the Ethiopian authorities. Generally speaking, land in the southwest is not fertile either. In fact, the topsoil is thin in most places, and very poor red soil predominates in most parts of the districts, both in the highlands and lowland zones. Therefore, the indigenous populations practice(d) shifting cultivation. Consequently, they need(ed) more land than peasants in most parts of the northern

highland regions to produce their subsistence. If the south is taken as a whole, there are large pockets of fertile land and also vast semi-desert areas of unproductive bushy tracts. The fertile tracts in the highlands of Hararghe, Wallaga, and Sidamo are densely populated. What is more, peasants who live in the more fertile spots but do not have enough land there to cultivate use the less fertile areas. The land that looked fertile and empty to government party officials who selected resettlement sites from helicopters (Pankhurst, 1990:124; Dejene, 1990:182), were in some cases, fallow lands that the farmers let to rest. It could also be an area where they pastured their animals considering the fact that livestock constitute an important component of the subsistence economy of the Oromo and the other peoples in the south. In most cases, what the officials saw as “empty” lands contained coffee plantations, bee hives, hunting and fishing grounds and other resources on which the indigenous people depend for subsistence. Since no serious land-use study was made before declaring these areas “empty” lands, the officials of the military regime took no cognizance of the delicate land- and resource-use systems employed by some of the indigenous peoples, particularly in the lowlands. The southwest had more rainfall and vegetation and, therefore, was greener than the north. The vegetation, in this case, was not sign of soil fertility or agricultural productivity.

Notwithstanding its socialist rhetoric and the Land Reform it proclaimed in 1975, the *Dergue* viewed south as “empty and fertile land” at its disposal as the previous imperial regimes did. Through a massive propaganda campaign it painted “a glorified vision of fertile and plentiful lands awaiting migrants,” while suggesting that famine might continue in the north and aid would not be given to the able-bodied (Pankhurst, 1990:127). The land Reform proclamation mentioned above paved the way for the state to make such promises or move people from one region to another on large scale. The regime was often insensitive to the rights, needs, and interests of the southern peoples as it went on implementing its resettlement program. In the days of the emperors, the land of the “fertile south” which was confiscated from the indigenous peoples at the time of conquest, was given not only as reward to those who participated in the conquest or who governed and policed

the conquered territories on their behalf, but was also used as a bait to lure northern peasants to leave their home areas and move south in order to establish strong and loyal settler communities that could curtail any uprising by the subject peoples. The land reform did not make the indigenous people, the tillers, and owners but made the state the sole landlord, replacing northern landlords who exploited the peasants of the south in the past. Consequently, the *Dergue* could push aside the peasants to give way to state-run projects—state farms and resettlement schemes. Notwithstanding the Land Reform, land remained under the control of the local population in the north, as it was before the revolution.

Even the “abundant rainfall” argument did not warrant resettlement on such a scale as witnessed in 1985-86. It is true that in the south, drought is not always as severe as in the north and it may not be as frequent. However, several regions in the south are often affected by drought as well. Food shortage and famines were (are) not uncommon in the south, if not on the same scale as in the northern regions. According to an RRC Report, the very regions in which 600,000 people from the north were resettled in 1985/86 were also hit by drought and were suffering severe food shortages at that time. In several districts (Naqamte, Arjo, Bunno Beddellee, Limmu, and Jimma) people were dying of hunger (RRC, 1985, Malhuret, 1985). But this was not reported by the mass-media. Few foreign journalists were taken to these districts; and those who visited the area did not report on the situation of the local population, or how they were being affected by the resettlement itself. Claude Malhuret of *Médecins Sans Frontières* commented,

The controversy about resettlement that has gone for nearly a year is concerned only about the fate of Ethiopia's northern population being shifted to the south. *But the consequences of such an operation on the people who have lived for a long time in the resettlement zones are never broached. These zones are far from being empty as the Ethiopian government makes it out.* (1985:37, emphasis in the original)

Similar views were expressed by Ethiopian researchers at the Addis Ababa University, who saw the negative consequences of the

resettlement schemes for the very survival of some of the indigenous peoples (Rahmato, 1986; Woldemeskel, 1989). They became, as will be discussed later, minorities in their own districts and the ecology supporting their subsistence was undermined drastically.

A closer study of the Ethiopian demographic data shows that population density cannot be a very convincing argument for shifting hundreds of thousands of settlers to the southwest. Differences in demographic pressure between northern and southern Ethiopia is exaggerated to justify resettlement in the south. There is no convincing evidence, whatsoever, to prove that taken together, the Abyssinian (northern) regions were more densely populated than Oromo or the other southern regions, except some *awrajas* in the semi-desert lowlands of the southeast and the wastelands of the great Afar depression. A census report issued by the Ethiopian Central Statistics Office (CSO) in 1985 showed that Wallaga region, which received most of the settlers, was among the most densely populated parts of the country. Kafa, which is more densely populated than Gondar received settlers from Wallo, and Tigray. Gondar is not only the neighboring province to Tigray, but also one of the four regions then enjoying surplus food production (Stahl, 1988) received no settlers.<sup>3</sup> The people of both Tigray and Gondar are Abyssinians having a rather similar culture, religion, and language. Tigrinya is spoken in parts of Gondar. Moreover, Gondar has always been the destination of migrant labor from Tigray.

The case of Wallaga makes the validity of the Dergue's "demographic-pressure" argument for resettlement even more questionable. If we can trust figures produced by the Central Statistical Office (CSO, 1976, 1985), differences in demographic pressure between Wallaga (33.3 pers/sq.km) and Tigray (36.6 pers/sq.km.) were rather insignificant. Nevertheless, nearly 250,000 people from Wallo and Tigray were resettled in Wallaga in 1985/86. This represents a population

---

3 See Stahl, M. "State Controlled Rural Development Strategies in Ethiopia: What Role for NGOs?", Paper presented at the conference on Conflict and Development in the Horn of Africa', 7-9 April 1988, Ottawa, Canada, arranged by Canadian Council for International Co-operation

growth of 10.5 percent for the region in a matter a of few month. Even if Wallaga received more rainfall than Wallo or Tigray and, therefore, was greener, this sudden growth of population was creating, as I shall later discuss, a disastrous strain on natural resources and the environment.

Thus the claim that land was empty or abundant in the south did not tally with reality. That lends much credibility to counter arguments voiced by the opposition and independent observers who pointed out that there were other important political and strategic motives behind the resettlement program. The critics suggested that the covert objectives included: (a) weakening of the resource base of the opposition in the north; (b) strengthening state control over the local population in the south; (c) undermining aspirations of self-determination by the Oromo; (d) speeding up the cultural and political integration of Ethiopia; and (e) consolidating regime control over the whole country. The Dergue had its apologists as well as those who dismissed the above arguments as groundless (Galprin, 1988; Clapham, 1988:193). I will discuss the points raised by the critics and the counter-arguments in the following section

---

### **The undeclared motives of resettlement**

It is quite clear that population redistribution was one of the objectives of resettlement program of the military regime. But mere population redistribution was not a goal in itself, it was aimed at achieving certain other ends that were bundled with it.

*Shuffling:* It was quite clear that one of the major aims of resettlement was shuffling people with different ethnic backgrounds in order to weaken ethnic identity and enhance assimilation into an Ethiopian cultural and political identity. That there was such an aim was indicated by the relocation of Kambatta and Hadiya peasants from the south in Gojjam (Map) in the northwest. Desalegn Rahmato wrote that during

The second of April [1984], the first settlers arrived in Pawie [Gojjam] To the surprise of officials involved in the program,

however, they turned out to be from Kambatta and Hadiya awraja in southern Shoa [Shawa] province rather than from Wollo and Tigray. The new arrivals were provided temporary accommodations in Pawie until they were assigned to their own villages (Rahmato, 1988:119)

He added that by the “end of August 1985, more than 60 percent of the settler population was from southern Shoa” (ibid , 1988:119-120). Another equally surprised scholar also stated,

Of the people who were moved from Shawa, only 7.7 percent were resettled in the same region. The rest were distributed over the other regions with the highest proportion going to Gojjam. At this stage of my research, I am not able to explain the rationale behind this kind of population redistribution. That there is some kind of logic behind the arrangement cannot, however, be doubted (Bekele, 1988:139)

Obviously, the logic was “nation-building” by shuffling different ethnic groups. These people were not even hit by famine at the time they were moved to Gojjam, although scarcity of land was a chronic problem in their districts. Even if the chronic-land hunger was the motive for moving them, it would have been sociologically and logistically sensible to resettle them in Kafa and Wallaga rather than in Gojjam. The Kambatta and Hadiya, like the other ethnic minorities in the south, have linguistic and cultural affinity with the Oromo and other peoples in the nearby Kafa and Wallaga regions. But since other motives than humanitarianism and logistics seem to have had paramount importance in the operation, this was given little consideration. Research findings indicate that settlements tend to be more successful where settlers are fairly homogenous and are settled among people with whom they share cultural or linguistic traditions (Findley, 1988).

The *sigsaga* or the integrated-settlement was even clearer evidence of *shuffling* implemented by the *Dergue's* population relocation policy. More than 40 percent of the households were settled intermingled among the indigenous populations where the local farmers associations were ordered to accept them and build them homes (Pankhurst, 1990). The shuffling and control functions of resettlement were quite obvious

already in the late 1970s where the first settlements were established. Regarding the relocations in Bale, it has been noted that: “the Oromo are often dispossessed to make room for the incoming settlers and shifted to new sites to the east and extreme south in a kind of ethnic musical chairs intended to forcibly integrate the diverse peoples in the context of a general “Amharization” of the empire.”(Anon.1983:39). The different peoples were shuffled to undermine the nationalist aspirations of the Oromo and other peoples and counter their demands for self-determination.

### **Population relocation in historical perspective**

Regarding the resettlement of northerners in the south in the late 1970s, Alessandro Triulzi has pointed out that the fact that the first resettlement schemes were located in Berta-inhabited Asosa area in Wallaga and among the Annuak of the Gambella region as well as the Oromo regions of Arsi, Bale, and Harar “suggest a political and strategic logic which can hardly be ignored” (Triulzi, 1983:123). Indicating the role of Abyssinian “settlers” in the history of the region, Triulzi added that method is not new but was used repeatedly by Abyssinian rulers in the past. Since the conquest and colonization of the Oromo and other southern peoples by the Ethiopian state is discussed extensively elsewhere (Marcus, 1969; Holcomb & Ibssa; 1990, Jalata, 1993), I will mention only some facts about the formation of the present-day Ethiopia in order to highlight the affinity of the resettlement program to the former Abyssinian conquest and settlement in the south. Abyssinian Emperors created the state of Ethiopia, known as the Empire of Ethiopia until 1974, between the late 1870s and 1900 through the conquest and colonization of several independent kingdoms and principalities

To rule the population of the vast territories they conquered and occupied, the Abyssinian rulers used settlers mainly from the north. These settlers were known as *naftanya* (gun-carrying settlers) and were mainly soldiers who had participated in the war of conquest, but also settlers who came after the conquest. Many of them were refugees from the great famine of 1889-92, which hit the whole region. Literally,

all of these settlers were given land that was confiscated mainly from the Oromo people. These settlers were the land owning class in most of the conquered regions of the south and southwest until 1974, the date of the Ethiopian revolution. The majority of the Oromo peasants became *gabbars* (serfs) of the *naftanya* landlords, many of who were notorious for their bad treatment of their *gabbars*. I have dealt with the *naftanya-gabbar* system elsewhere (Bulcha, 1988; 2001) and shall not go into detailed descriptions. However, in order to show the connection of resettlement to the history of the genesis of the Ethiopian empire, I will make a few points that are relevant to our present discussion.

In the past, the central state relied on the settlers—*naftanya*—for administration, tax collection and security, while the settlers were dependent upon the state for their favorable positions and privileges. Thus, the state and the settlers had common interest in keeping strict control over the indigenous peoples. This status quo changed dramatically with the outbreak of the revolution in 1974. With the fall of the feudal order, the northern landlords lost their power over the Oromo population. From the very beginning the Oromo people reclaimed ownership over their lands. An implementation of the land reform of 1975 abolished the economic base of the settlers in the south, a transformation that was not entirely peaceful. The Oromo took the land reform as an end of an era of national (ethnic) and cultural subjugation while the settlers tried to maintain some of their privileges. The result was armed conflict between the two groups in some of the Oromo regions. In 1976-1977, the new regime had to intervene in several places in the southeast and evacuate hundreds of families of *naftanya* backgrounds. In some places in Bale, this was done by air.<sup>4</sup>

What happened was rather a surprising shock to both the *naftanya* and the members of the new regime, the majority of who originated from the same group. But there was little that could be done to save the

---

4 Documents concerning the evacuation were, in 1977, in the archives of the Relief and Rehabilitation (RRC) in Addis Ababa and were filed under "Settlement". I was employed by the RRC from August 1974 to August 1977 and had access to these documents



situation. The *naftanya* found opportunity to come back when the Somali army invaded the Ogaden and parts of Bale and Hararge regions in 1977 (Halliday and Molyneux, 1981:134) inhabited by the Oromo. As I have discussed elsewhere, during the Ogaden war (1977-78) the government controlled mass media reminisced nostalgically the exploits of Abyssinian warriors in the past and the previous landlords who were disarmed and driven to the major urban centers were rearmed and sent back, particularly to the Oromo areas of Hararghe and Bale. In the mass media and official propaganda they were called *hager waddad abbat naftanyoch* (pioneers and patriots), and their role in the defense of Ethiopian territorial integrity became the theme of jingoistic Amharic song and other programs on the national radio and televisions networks. Implicit in this was that the Oromo population of these areas were unpatriotic and hence suspected even though they constituted the bulk of the militia force used as cannon fodder in every war front (Bulcha, 1988:238, fn.7).

With massive support in arms and fighters from the Soviet Union and Cuba, the *Dergue* drove back the invading Somali army in 1978. After the end of the Ogaden war, it carried out an offensive against the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in Bale and the highlands of Hararge. However, the situation could neither be maintained by direct military intervention nor by the restoration of the former *naftanya* system. Therefore, the first batch of settlers was brought from the north to the Bale, Arsi, and Wallaga regions following the offensive (ibid.). At the same time, Oromo peasants in Bale were “regrouped” into villages. The regrouping of the Oromo freed large tracks of land, which the government was able to allocate to the resettlement schemes and large state farms (Wood, 1983). Those who were relocated in this manner were often involuntary migrants. Even if the settlers were not always willing to be used as a police force to watch over the local Oromo population, there is still substantial evidence indicating some functional similarities between the *Dergue's* resettlement schemes and the *naftanya* garrisons of former periods (Wood, 1983; Niggli, 1985; Steingraber, 1987). It should be emphasized, however, that the settlers had no choice but obey the regime. In general, both the local population and the settlers

were victims of the resettlement program; and in the initial phases of the operation, it was the settlers who suffered most.

It was reported that many of the settlers who came to Oromoland in 1979 were given rudimentary military training and provided with arms, not only to protect themselves, but also to man militia forces that controlled the resettlement areas. There were also indications that the settlers were also enlisted in the militia of some of administrative districts (Steingraber, 1987:50-58) and involved in military operations against the OLF.<sup>5</sup> The strategic and control functions of the resettlement program will become clearer when their locations are carefully studied. In the 1980s, Bale in the east and Wallaga and Ilubabor in the west were regions where the Oromo Liberation Front was militarily active and posed security problems to the regime.

### Consequences of resettlement

The scale of the resettlement program necessitates a large amount of external assistance for its success. The international community's response to alleviate the human tragedy caused by the famine of 1984-85 was indeed generous. Donations came from private individuals, musicians from around the world who organized themselves into humanitarian associations such as "Band AID" and "USA for Africa", businessmen, non-governmental organizations and governments. The amount of funds raised from the international community is not known, but according to one source, more than US\$2 billion in foreign assistance was needed to bring the famine under control (Keller, 1988:224). Notwithstanding the generosity in alleviating the famine crisis, exogenous reactions to the *Dergue's* relocation program was divided. Only some of the international organizations concerned with development and humanitarian aid were willing to be directly involved in the projects and the majority were financing the project only indirectly (Clay & Holcomb, 1985; Steingraber, 1987). As will be discussed in

---

5 Occasional news bulletins issued by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) between 1983 and 1990 indicated this.

the following sections, several independent observers and researchers regarded the settlement program as: (a) gross violation of human rights, (b) an ethnic conflict exacerbating factor, and (c) a threat to the ecological system not only of the settlement areas, but also of the region as a whole.

### **Relocation and human rights**

Human rights and development have been prominent items on the agenda of the United Nations since 1948. In fact, Ethiopia was one of the first signatories of the UN convention of human rights. Nevertheless, instead of criticizing the Ethiopian government for violating the convention, the UN, through its special crisis office set up in Addis Ababa, became a defender of the deportation carried out by the military regime (Malhuret, 1985:59-60). Yet, it was clear that the resettlement program violated human rights in various ways, was severely criticized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engaged in relief assistance, and was resented by those who were relocated. In fact, out of the forty humanitarian organizations participating in relief work, only three were willing to participate in the program described as “an almost unbelievable cruelty to the Ethiopian people” (Eide, 1996:296).

*Deportation:* Since the violation of human rights committed by the deportation are discussed in detail elsewhere (Malhuret, 1985; Clay and Holcomb, 1985; Niggli, 1985), I will present only a brief review in this section. Two categories of people were relocated: famine refugees who came to relief shelters looking for food and medicine, and those who were taken by force and coercion from their homes. It was not only those who were taken from their homes but many of the famine victims were also deported to the southwest by force. In a follow up field-study conducted among randomly selected farmers covering nine of the *awrajas* of Wallo, Dejene (1989) has specifically examined the peasants’ views towards resettlement and has found that “nearly all of the peasants were emphatic in their response that they did not wish to be settled.” He further notes “in parts of the country peasant attitudes towards resettlement are decidedly” hostile and that “there have been attacks on peasant association leaders and extension agents who were involved

in recruitment” (ibid. p. 4). According to another survey, 73.8 percent of the 117,022 settler-household heads interviewed preferred to return to the places of origin, only 16.4 percent said they preferred staying in the settlement area, while 9.8 percent were not decided (CSO, 1991:190-191). Although it is clear that the social and psychological stress incurred in the process and the conditions experienced in the settlement had made settlers’ resentment intensive, there are also indications that the vast majority did not join the program voluntarily in the first place.

Interviews with refugees who fled from the resettlement schemes indicate that few of the settlers were informed about the operation before they were put on trucks or buses to be moved to the southwest. They said that they were rounded up at market places, while on the way to visit relatives living in towns or at funerals, and taken to the new areas before even taking leave from their families. Some of them were also recruited by the peasant associations (Clay & Holcomb, 1985; Niggli, 1985; Pankhurst, 1990; Dejene, 1989). Similar methods were even used when the first settlers were brought to the south and southwest in 1979-1980. Although the criterion used for such recruitment was meant to be poverty, it seems that relocation was used by some of the officials of the associations as a means to get rid of “trouble makers” or, according to one respondent who was relocated in Asosa in 1979 and whom I interviewed in 1982 in Kumruk, Sudan, “to get at his land which happens to be the most fertile piece in the whole village” (Bulcha, 1983, 1988:121). Even those who were interviewed at the resettlement sites said that they were neither affected by drought nor famine when they were removed from Wallo and brought to Asosa (Oste, 1984). Many of those who fled from Asosa to the Sudan maintained that they left behind cattle, grain stores, and harvests when they were taken from their homes in the north and forced on to trucks and taken to the southwest (Niggli, 1985:5).

*Causes for Mass Death:* Recruitment was not the only phase when the human rights of the settlers were abused. The harsh conditions of transition and loss of family members and friends en route were even more abusive. Resettlement refugees maintained that they were transported in crammed trucks and buses over long distances that often

cover more than a thousand kilometers and took between three-fives days to travel by bus or truck. Little attention was given to the physical comfort and well-being of the settlers during the long journey or afterwards. Consequently, mortality rates were very high. The former Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner, Wolde Giorgis reported that as many as 20,000 died during the movement and at the settlement site. He noted that *almost 500 people were executed while trying to escape and about 1,000 were lost attempting to walk back* (Wolde Giorgis, 1989:304, emphasis mine). Other sources indicated even higher mortality rates. For example, a survey by a voluntary medical group—*Medicines sans frontiers*—estimated that the number who died during the movement from north to the southwest was in the range of 50,000-60,000 (Malhuret, 1985:64). Refugees who fled from the resettlement schemes to Sudan reported very high death (Bulcha, 1988; Clay & Holcomb, 1985; Niggli, 1985; Steingraber, 1987). Although he does not mention any figures Rahmato (1991:108) also writes that “large-scale death occurred caused not just by the famine *per se*, but also the massive relocation program which the government embarked upon at the critical moment during the *famine*” (emphasis in the original). A study conducted by Jason Clay and Bonnie Holcomb among refugees who escaped from the settlement makes it quite clear that death rates were also staggering, in absolute terms, on every settlement site in the southwest. They wrote that “the death rates reported by refugees ranged from 33 deaths per 10,000 per day to 270 deaths per 10,000 per day. . . . Such figures were consistently reported from a number of refugees from different areas” (Clay & Holcomb, 1985:99). The mortality rates and human rights abuses reported by resettlement refugees, NGOs and other observers were treated not only skeptically (Clapham, 1988:194), but dismissed as ‘baseless allegations’ (Wolde Mariam, 1990:241-242).

Notwithstanding skepticism and dismay by these authors, the information about excessive abuse of human rights and the concomitant high death rates was supported by research conducted at the resettlement sites. For example, Helmut Kloos (1989) has indicated that the movement to the Metekel lowlands brought settlers into new disease regions, and that the mortality rates exceeded birth rates up to ten-fold

at the beginning. Another report on the Metekel settlements indicated that the annual mortality rate of children between 0 and 5 years of age was about 52.2 percent during the first week after arrival at the sites (Woldmeskel, 1989:365). Of the 600,000 persons resettled in 1985-86, a survey conducted in 1988 by Central Statistical Authority counted on site 425,164 settlers. The rest had died or deserted. A committee appointed by regime's Council of Ministers revealed that 49,000 heads of households had escaped from the resettlement schemes and that 11,000 died by 1988 (Dejene, 1989). However, the report did not indicate the whereabouts of over 80,000 missing settlers. Indeed, the explanation for the discrepancy lies in the high death at and desertion from the settlements. Thus, the resettlement sites were more like death camps than rehabilitation and development schemes. Malaria was among the major killers. In spite of the hard work necessitated by the pioneer nature of settlement life and the prevalence of deadly malaria and other contagious diseases, food rations were inadequate and medical facilities rudimentary (Clay & Holcomb, 1985:95).

*Family disintegration:* One of the relatively well-documented sociological effects of the resettlement program was family disintegration. During the 1979-1982 operations only men were relocated from Wallo and Tigray to the south. Most of these men, being in the age range of 18-40 years, were married and family heads. Although attempts of family re-unification were made later on by the relief and rehabilitation Commission (RRC), many of the people who were relocated did not hear from their families during the years they stayed in the settlement camps in Asosa or after (Bulcha, 1983; 1988). Other studies and observations made inside the country (Sandstrom, 1986:99) and among refugees in the neighboring countries (Niggli, 1985) provide supporting evidence regarding social disintegration as one of the main consequences of the 1985-1986 operations. Allan Sandstrom noted that family disintegration was not only widespread, but in several cases so profound that children have been separated from their parents in the chaotic situations of the transition camps and sent to different resettlement sites (Sandstrom, *ibid.*) Wolde Giorgis (1989:30) estimated, of the families relocated in 1985-1986, about half were separated from

one or more family member(s) Furthermore, he mentioned that the RRC initiated family re-unification was, in many cases, a failure because

With the husband dragged off to a settlement site, whatever was left [behind] of the family wandered into cities or villages where they thought they would be safer and were never heard from again. It is hard to imagine what these people went through. The anguish of being torn away from your community ... the indescribable torment of escaping death from famine only to lose your husband, wife, and children forever by such a senseless act of brutality. I saw it in the faces of the settlers (Wolde Giorgis, 1989:304-305)

An anthropological study of the policy and practice of the resettlement program confirmed that the relocation was a great strain on family life in the areas of origin and that it led to many tragedies. In the resettlement process, marriages were broken, people were separated from close kin, the sick and the elderly were abandoned by their families and community, and many lost their families in the confusion of the shelters and holding camps (Pankhurst, 1990:128)

A Norwegian nurse who was stationed at Mendi in Wallaga recalled her observations,

The resettlement camps were horrendous. Many of the people were sick. Many were old. Mothers cried in despair because they had been separated from their families or children had died during the transportation. They had been forced to leave. They were in a state of deep physical and mental distress (Eide, 1996:297).

Indeed, the effects of resettlement have been the opposite of what the military rulers claimed to be their intentions. Instead of mending the social fabric that was torn asunder by famine, it has exacerbated the disintegration of peasant society. Famine victims were separated from their communities by force, families were broken up and the suffering that was inflicted by famine was aggravated by the horrible conditions in the transition to the south. Thus, instead of alleviating their agonies and trauma, relocation brought even more suffering upon the survivors of the famine crisis.

Life on resettlement schemes became a continuation of the ordeal caused by famine and the movement. The social and psychological trauma caused by the famine was further exacerbated by conditions at the resettlement sites, mainly because of the lack of facilities upon the arrival of the relocatees. Consequently, the initial reaction of relocatees to these conditions was one of shock. The hopes, particularly of those settlers whose migration was relatively voluntary, for a better standard of living were dashed. The government told them that it had made adequate preparation to cater for their needs and that houses were built for them and that essential facilities would be provided (Wolde Giorgis, 1989:195; Pankhurst, 1990:127). But settlers were often dropped in the “middle of nowhere” and were told to gather wood and grass and build their huts, stores and office buildings and to clear bushes and prepare farm lands (Niggli, 1985). The camps so created were nothing like the villages from which they originated. The social networks that characterized rural life in their previous former villages were gone. In the conventional settlement schemes (*medebenya*) which produced cash crops and constituted huge estates on which 6000 to 16,000 heads of household worked, the settlers were transformed overnight from peasants to “wage” laborers on mechanized modern farms with little understanding of what was going on (Dejene, 1989).

The problems the settlers faced also were exaggerated by the geographical contrasts between settlement sites which were often located in a flat and hot lowland areas in the southwest, and the cool northern highlands, and differences in agricultural systems and food crops. Therefore, one Wallo peasant settled in Gambella said, “I do not even believe I am in Ethiopia” (Dejene, 1989:6). The linguistic distance between indigenous peoples and the settlers also caused socio-cultural stress and conflict.

As the catalogue of criticism directed against the resettlement program by the settlers and independent observers was long, space does not allow us to subject all of them to critical analysis. In short, its major negative aspects and consequences were: the coercion used in relocation, the physiological, social and psychological stress caused by the sudden movement and the lack of material and infra-structural support at the resettlement sites. The result was bitterness and



resentment, since the relocatees feel abused, persecuted, and diminished by both nature and man. The resentment was evidenced by mass desertions from the resettlement schemes.

### **Consequences of resettlement for the indigenous peoples**

The Oromo, Anuak of the Gambella region, the Berta of Asosa, and the Gumuz of Metekel are negatively affected and hence show great resentment towards the resettlement program. Their opposition to the program has both a historical and material basis. From the historical perspective, they relate resettlement to their experiences of conquest at the turn of the century. As Triulzi (1983:111-127) has correctly stated, the resettlement projects raised in their minds the specter of a second conquest and parallels are drawn between them and the *katamas* mentioned above. The differences between the objective conditions that led to the conquest and colonization of the south during the last century and those that have motivated the relocation program do not matter very much here. This is because in both instances the indigenous peoples rightly considered themselves to be the disadvantaged party even if the settlers were also victims of the program. Together with the state farms, the settlement schemes became the symbols of continuing alien control of land in the south and southwest.

The negative consequences of resettlement for indigenous communities were both sociological and socio-cultural. Here, we should draw attention to the case of Asosa and Gambella, two *awrajas* (sub-regions) in the southwest that have received the bulk of the settlers in the last few years. Already, in both *awrajas*, the indigenous peoples, the Bert and Anuak, became minorities in every sense. Furthermore, the status of these two *awrajas* was raised to regions in September 1987. According to the military regime, the *awrajas* were raised to region status in order to grant autonomy to their inhabitants. However, the massive resettlement makes any talk about autonomy for the population of these areas meaningless. By 1987, the peoples of these two regions were entirely outnumbered by settlers whose languages and culture are completely different from their own. Their cultural identity and the survival was threatened. Thus, possibilities for some sort of linguistic

and cultural or even administrative autonomy were severely curtailed. Therefore, many of them took refuge in the Sudan (Bulcha, 1988:123; Clay & Holcomb, 1985: 153ff; Steingraber, 1987:71-75). Instead, resettlement strengthened the presence of the state in the regions while it increased the resentment of the indigenous peoples against it

Writing about the economic consequences of resettlement on the Gumuz communities of Metekel *awraja*, Gojjam region, Getachew Woldemeskel has pointed out:

The establishment of settlements in areas already inhabited by Gumuz people has brought about loss of their traditional land and heightened the existing problem of land scarcity in the region, disrupted their agricultural and non-agricultural modes of appropriation [subsistence], and has introduced ecological problems. The Gumuz people are amongst the poorest of the poor in Ethiopia. Despite years of neglect and marginalization by successive governments, they managed to survive in this harsh yet delicate environment. Instead of answering their plight and alleviating their suffering the government has, by introducing the resettlement scheme in the region, further exacerbated their vulnerability and deprived them of access to their precarious security system (Woldemeskel, 1989: 373).

What is said above about the Gumuz is also true for the Berta and the Anuak. For the Oromo, who were also affected by drought and famine, the resettlement operations of 1985-86 constituted an onerous burden. They were asked to feed the people who were relocated on their way to the resettlement schemes and in some places even for weeks afterwards. In several of the resettlement sites they were ordered to stop work on their farms in the middle of the planting or harvesting season and build houses for the settlers and provide them cooking and household utensils (Wolde Giorgis, 1989:297; Pankhurst, 1990:126). For example, peasants in Ilubabor constructed 27,000 *tukuls* in a matter of a few weeks to receive incoming *sisaga* or 'integrated' settlers. This was done under duress and some households have been forced to sell their farm oxen in order to make contributions to the settlement program (Sandstrom, 1986:140&142). Clay and Holcomb noted that

*Famine as an Instrument for Nation-Building and State Consolidation*

To ensure implementation of the resettlement program the government's political concerns take priority; policies are implemented regardless of their economic and social costs to local populations. Aside from the ecological effects of building 800 to 1200 permanent houses for the unwanted settlers in these areas at one time using local wood materials, the labor that had to be diverted from agriculture had an immediate, negative impact on production (1985:130-131).

The Oromo, and in some cases the other southern peoples have, in the past received and sheltered famine refugees from the northern region. But now, resettlement has been forced upon them. In some of the places, resettlement created a burden that the indigenous population were unable to bear. Consequently, their response was resentment and in some cases even hostility. In Asosa, which received settlers since 1979, one of the reactions of the local population to resettlement was mass flight, and more than 15,000 Berta and Oromo peasants have crossed into the Sudan (Bulcha, 1983, 1988:123; Clay & Holcomb, 1985). In Gambella (Pankhurst, 1990:124) and Metekel (Rahmato, 1989) *awrajas*, resettlement not only displaced ethnic minorities, but also destroyed the natural resources on which they depended for their livelihood and the maintenance of their ways of life.

According to a sociologist, in a multiethnic environment, development programs will stimulate ethnic conflicts, unless they are designed to redress regional and social disparities. He notes that the ideal approach to managing ethnic diversity is "achieving a progressive integration of ethnic groups into the national community, respecting their cultural values, autonomy, dignity and citizenship and avoiding their alienation and exploitation" (Barsh, 1988:339). While its official aim was to fight poverty and ecological degradation in the north, resettlement was not designed to redress the regional disparities that resulted from the conquest of the southern and southwestern peoples. The rights of the indigenous populations in these resettlements areas were not respected. The consequences, as could be expected became conflict between the settlers and indigenous peoples, on the one hand, and the deepening of cleavages between the latter and the state, on the other

### **Environmental effects of resettlement**

The negative consequences of the resettlement program are not limited to political and economic spheres. It also has a serious impact on the ecology of the resettlement areas. This concerns mainly deforestation and soil erosion.

Dense forests covered much of Oromoland and the other southern regions in the beginning of the twentieth century. One of the consequences of the Abyssinian conquest and colonialism was a gradual deforestation (Kuru, 1986), which greatly reduced by the middle of the 1960s. In fact, by 1982 only about 4 per cent of Ethiopia's land area was forested (Kuru, 1986:39). The resettlement schemes were concentrated in areas where most of the remaining natural forests were located; deforestation of the remaining forest and bush lands became very rapid in the 1980s. Because settlement sites were selected without prior studies regarding their suitability for agriculture and human habitation, they resulted in senseless wastage of natural resources. Thousands of hectares of virgin forests were cleared in some of the resettlement districts. But since such land was found unsuitable for cultivation, the cleared sites were abandoned after great damages were caused to the environment and an enormous amount of manpower and resources were wasted (Wolde Giorgis, 1989:295).

Both the *medebanya* (conventional) and *sigsaga* (integrated) forms of settlement were responsible for environmental destruction. In the case of the former, the use of heavy machinery to clear forests proved to be particularly damaging. Several inches of the top and fertile soil, which is torn off in the process, is easily carried away by water in the rainy season and wind during the dry months. Alemeneh Dejene wrote that contour plowing was not widely practiced by the settlers, and that there were hardly any terraces or soil bunds on many of the hilly areas being cultivated by settlers as well as by the natives. Consequently "many rivers and streams from these hills are carrying a massive amount of top soil to the neighboring Sudan" (Dejene, 1989:7). In fact, in the mid 1980s, it was not only the sociological consequences of resettlement which were clearly observable beyond the borders of Ethiopia as manifested in the exodus of refugees, but also its environmental effects

in the form of silt carried down stream by the Nile and its tributaries. For example, hydro-biologists and engineers working at the Roseries Dam on the Blue Nile in Sudan reported rising silt and increased logs carried down the stream from Ethiopia. The same was even observed in the Yabus River, which brought down into the Sudan an unusual amount of silt and logs after the shorts rains of May 1987 (Steingraber, 1987:63). Data on silt deposition at the Roseries Dam revealed the extent of soil erosion in the Blue Nile watershed area in Ethiopia. During the first ten years (1966-76) of its existence, the hydrological observation station at Roseries registered 55 million cubic meters of silt per year. By 1985 the annual rate of siltation had increased five times to 250 million cubic meters (ibid). It was obvious that resettlement was one of the major contributing factors to the dramatic increase in the siltation of the Blue Nile.

Wherever resettlement was implemented, a great deal of the flora and fauna have been destroyed (Gada Melba, 1988:102; Clay & Holcomb, 1985:183). Besides clearing for farmlands, the settlers' habit of cutting trees not only for fuel, house construction and farm equipment but also just to get rid of forests is accelerating deforestation. In addition, it is reported that

Wood and wood products are becoming a source of cash to some settlers. This has intensified the destruction of the natural forest. In fact, the sights of "integrated settlements" easily stand out throughout Illubabor because they occupy a bare land, one that is devoid of their natural vegetation, and is in the midst of thick forest (Dejene, 1989:7-8).

That the resettlement program was a great menace to the environment was also in the report of Committee sponsored by Council of Ministers mentioned above. The report indicated that at the ongoing rate of environmental destruction, the resettlement zones of the southwest will degenerate, in less than a decade, to conditions similar to the northern highlands.

Environmental scientists maintained that the importance of the natural forest in these regions was not limited to local environmental stability (Kuru, 1986:39). The forests have a macro effect on the economy

of the whole country. Geneticists also stressed that the resettlement program was a threat to some precious natural resources. It was argued that the forests of south and southwestern areas are the home of coffee, which is one of the world's economically most important plants. This is the only region in the world where this plant is found in its natural habitat with a very high degree of genetic variety. Without a doubt, the destruction of this habitat was a damage to this genetic resource. Thus the *Dergue* was creating in the south the very problems it ostensibly set out to solve in the north.

### **Villagization**

Although villagization was extended to some regions in the North, the Oromo peasants were its main targets from the very beginning. As mentioned above, regrouping them into protected villages began in 1978, following the end of the Ogaden war and a major military offensive against the OLF guerrilla bases in the region. According to one source, villagization was implemented at that time to (1) restrict insurgency and reduce secessionist tendencies among the Somali and Oromo inhabitants, (2) and to protect Christian groups (i.e., mainly *naftanya* families) from "violence resulting from Muslim fundamentalism among some OLF functions" (Cohen and Isaksson, 1987:110). Large scale comprehensive villagization began in Hararge in early 1985 and was extended to Arsi. Within a few months hundreds of thousands of Oromo households in the two regions, were moved to new sites that were selected by the military authorities. This was carried out while the attention of the whole world was preoccupied by the tragedy of famine in the northern regions and the refugee camps in eastern Sudan to which thousands of Ethiopian famine victims fled.

### **The Official objectives of villagization**

As mentioned above villagization began in Bale in 1978 with the sole objective of isolating the Oromo Liberation Front's (OLF) guerrillas from the peasants. Six years later, in 1984, the program was extended to the region of Hararghe. As it was started as a response to increasing

OLF activities in the region, the program was implemented without any plan or preparation. However, about one million Oromo peasant households were, according to the National Villagization Coordinating Committee, moved into new villages within six months (Lirenso, 1990:136). The government used brute force to relocate the peasants since they were not willing to settle in the new villages (Vallely, 1986). In 1985, the operation was declared as a long-term national development program and was extended to the rest of the country.

In the official policy declaration, villagization was presented as an integral part of a long-term development strategy for the rural areas with the following objectives: (a) to enhance extension services aimed at increasing agricultural productivity; (b) to promote more rational land use patterns and conserve natural resources; (c) to facilitate access of rural population to services; (d) strengthen security and self-defense; (e) to advance the socialist revolution and promote collectivization of agriculture, and (f) give the government the political control needed to ensure that rural society is reconstructed and agrarian socialism achieved (Cohen and Isaksson, 1987).

Villagization signified complete disruption of the peasants' way of living and production. It represented control and development from above. As indicated above, the Dergue gave several reasons to justify the program. It argued that villagization was a precondition for socialist relations of production and improvement of rural life. However, a closer scrutiny of the methods and manners with which the program was implemented clearly indicated that the decisions to adopt this type of development strategy were not the result of serious study and analysis of previous villagization and collectivization program in other countries. The failure of a similar adventure in Tanzania in the form of *ujamaa* was disregarded (Cohen and Issaksson, 1987:112-114). It seems that short- and long-term political objectives were more important in the design and implementation of the program rather than economic and social development.

Villagization was conducted from the beginning (1985) with great speed and was not preceded by any economic or sociological study. The peasants were given only a very short time to dismantle their

dwelling and build new ones on sites selected according to guidelines produced by the government authorities. As with resettlement, the Dergue's dominant consideration was clearly political control "Security" and "self-defense" were, as indicated above, among the key concepts in the reasons for relocation. The Dergue did not make it clear how and why peasants were in danger in their former homesteads. Even in the regions where anti-government forces were active, they seldom targeted villagers. Oromo peasants and peasants in Ethiopia in general have lived for centuries in scattered homesteads, directly on or nearby their farms, and there was no danger whatsoever that necessitated driving them into "secure" villages. In fact, villagization made them more vulnerable to a variety of health, social, economic and political problems and has exacerbated general insecurity in rural communities.

### **Mode of implementation**

As we have indicated above, before their villagization the Oromo and other peasant communities in the south lived in scattered homesteads. The size of the new villages they were forced to build by the *Dergue* varied from place to place. In Arsi they contained about 150 to 400 houses. Some of these villages were bigger than nearby towns and accommodated thousands of inhabitants (Cohen and Isaksson, 1987:xv). In Wallaga such a village could contain up to 1000 houses (Steingraber, 1987:2; Bulcha, 1988:124).

"Coercive" persuasion was employed in the implementation of villagization. The degree of violence used to move the people to the village sites varied from place to place. One report listed physical abuses that were visited upon peasants in Hararge in order to move them to sites selected by regime cadres. It indicated that those peasants who resisted were imprisoned, their homes were set on fire and even that leaders of such resistance were shot. The peasants were ordered to move on short notice and little or no preparation was made (Bulcha, 1986; Valley, 1986). Furthermore, villagization disrupted agricultural activities as it was conducted even in the middle of the harvesting or planting seasons. Thus the state owned daily, *The Ethiopian Herald* (October 28, 1986), reported that about 554,000 households with about



two million members were moved into new villages between October 1985 and February 1986. The period coincides with the harvesting season in Ethiopia. That means that the peasants were tearing down their homes while weather and wild animals were destroying their harvests.

Sandra Steingraber's (1987) study, which was based on information given by villagization refugees from the Wallaga and Ilubabor regions, describes several incidents in which naked violence was used by government authorities. Cohen and Isaksson (1987:xv) suggested that psychological coercion rather than physical violence was used to implement the Arsi program, and that even there, villagization involved hardship.

### **Impacts of villagization on rural life**

As Cohen and Isaksson have argued, no government programs affect rural lives as much as villagization (1987:111). In this section I will make comments on the experience of Oromo and other communities that were targeted by the villagization program.

The Dergue was not in a position to deliver basic services it promised in its program. As Cohen and Isaksson pointed in their study of villagization in Arsi, the services most urgently needed, such as community pit latrines and a water supply, were lacking in the villages. The villagers fetched water from the previous sources and in most cases walking distances between the villages and the sources also increased significantly. The government had no funds and it was beyond the means of the villagers to pay for the installation of the services. Furthermore, government guide-lines precluded private enterprise from setting up even small catering services. The program did not lead to any improvement of rural life. What happened was rather drastic deterioration of living standards in the villagized communities.

*Poorer Living Conditions and Increased Health Hazards:* The housing conditions of the peasantry deteriorated as they moved to the new villages. The *tukuls*, which the farmers could build in these new villages, were smaller in size than their previous homes. Most of the houses were incompletely built due to loss of material during dismantling and

transportation. The living conditions in the new villages must have led to increased illness. The hastily reconstructed *tukuls* provide little protection from the cold plateau winds and driving tropical rains.

The deterioration of living conditions was even more marked in the coffee-producing regions of the southwest. Here, the peasants built houses, which were relatively better than in the rest of the country. They lived, generally, in rectangular houses built from eucalyptus poles, daub and tin roofs, and some had cement floors. Even the traditional *tukuls* were much larger than in other regions. When the houses were dismantled in the process of villagization, the owners were able to construct only "very shoddy dwellings" (Steingraber, 1987). Since dismantling and moving materials was relatively difficult and time-consuming, villagers often built their shelters from sticks and grass collected around the new sites. Lirenso noted that

Thus in Welmera and Dalocha *woredas* [districts], stalks of sorghum, wheat and barley were used for thatching roofs, materials which were not strong enough and often made repairs necessary within a year. In Hasalisso peasant association in Dire Dawa *woreda*, peasants had to cover the roofs with soil and mud, since thatching grass (*eleusine jaegeri*) was not available locally. These roofs proved not tight against the rain, and some of the dwellers faced the prospect of their houses collapsing (1990:138)

The fact that so many houses were built at the same time and that in each village most of the able-bodied men were conscripted and sent to the war front prior to relocation contributed to the bad quality of the newly built dwellings. In many parts of Africa, the scattered pattern of settlement served a means of quarantine against those who contract diseases such as typhus, cholera and small-pox. This was also a preventive method practiced in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Oromoland. Villagization disturbed this balance seriously, while the services to tackle the problems that arose because of the changed circumstances were not provided in the new villages (Bulcha, 1986, 1988:126). Infections, which used to affect only a few individuals developed into epidemics in some of the villages in Wallaga. In Gidole, where peasants were had to

move from higher areas to lower places “a large number of them died of malaria within a year” (Eide, 1996:299).

*Negative consequences for peasant household economy:* According to the official policy the scattered settlement pattern of large part of Ethiopia brought considerable disadvantages and that it was necessary to put the peasants together in villages that they can benefit from science and technology. However, the scattered pattern of human settlement was an adaptation mechanism to subsistence production. In other words, demographic density was patterned more or less according to the availability of resources such as water, pasture, fuel and the suitability of the soil for crop cultivation. Peasants lived near their fields, within easy reach of pastures and water sources. Villagization had deleterious effects on economic production for two main reasons. First, the long walking distances to the fields impinge on productive work time and give wild animals more opportunity to destroy crops. Second, peasant households, particularly in the Oromo and Sidama areas, who were (are) dependent on a variety of perennial crops such as coffee and *enset* (*enset edulis*), lost important sources of income as they moved to the new villages. These crops grown around hamlets dotting the countryside and thrive only in soils that have been fertilized for decades by refuse from the household and by cow dung. Relocation meant the destruction of these crops because once the households are moved, constant tending may become impossible (Bulcha, 1986, 1988:126). Life also became very difficult for livestock owners as the crowded conditions in the new villages entailed new problems in animal husbandry. They lacked fences, bins and pens. Animals trespassing on other compounds also became constant problem, leading to increased conflicts between neighbors.

Couched in terms that promise progress and welfare, villagization appeared to be a radical policy that could solve the problems of the peasantry in Ethiopia. In reality it exacerbated their burdens. Conceived and implemented from above, the primary concern of the program was the interests of the state and the peasants were used to achieve goals in line with those interest. As government control increased in the villagized areas, the delivery of surplus grain to the para-statal AMC was also ensured. More room for state farms and resettlement was

created although not used as planned. It was argued that like the resettlement program villagization was also a tool for the militarization of the countryside and control of its inhabitants. Villagization facilitated the conscription of young men and women to the militia and the army. According to a political sociologist, “the question of controlling the Oromo farmers and their resources has been the most critical issue in the Ethiopian colonial politics” (Jalata, 1993:140). One political scientist who studied the policies of the *Dergue* argued that “Oromo resistance must ultimately depend on the balance between alienation and control in the countryside of southern Ethiopia” and that “the villagization policy, which seeks to increase control at the expense of an inevitably increased alienation, may well prove to be the touchstone of central government success or failure” (Clapham, 1988:219). Like resettlement villagization also became an epitome of the abusive use power by the *Dergue* and the repression of the peasantry. The result, of course, was a fiasco—politically, economically and socially. The center’s attempt to control the peripheries resulted in its own disintegration.

The peasants reacted to the program in various ways. In some areas where armed liberation fronts were active, peasant reaction was not passive. Many took up arms against the military regime and joined the fronts. Several peasant communities fled to the Sudan and Somalia under very difficult circumstances. A total number of people who fled from villagization was not known. However, in 1985-86, about 140,000 Oromo peasants fled villagization from the Hararghe region in the east. In 1985 alone, more than two thousand of these refugees lost their lives due to a cholera epidemic and malnutrition that hit the overcrowded shelters located in the border towns of Tug Wajale and Borama in northwest Somalia (Bulcha, 1997:42; Vallely, 1986).

### **Concluding remarks**

Resettlement and villagization were first started in the late 1970s as package programs to combat OLF insurgents in the southern province of Bale. The programs were expanded and implemented during the famine of 1984-85. Starting in 1985, the *Dergue* planned to settle about seven million peasants within a ten years period, the first 1.5 million

within two years. But only about 600,000 peasants from the north were resettled in southwest when the program was discontinued in 1986.

Previous rulers have also encouraged loyal subjects from the north to emigrate and colonize the Oromo country. Economic exploitation, political and military control of the indigenous people were among the driving motives of resettlement in the south. However, the resettlement program carried out by the *Dergue* was somewhat different from those conducted in the past. It was enormous in scale and coercion was used in its implementation. A radical transformation of the demographic structure of the southern and southwestern provinces was envisaged.

Resented by settlers who fled from it by the thousands, resettlement failed to attain the objectives it was planned to achieve. Although it was envisaged as a means of reducing demographic pressure in the famine affected regions, resettlement could have not guaranteed control over population growth or famine recurrence in northern Ethiopia. One cannot remedy demographic pressures merely by transferring people from one place to another. It requires an array of interrelated programs involving family planning, education, rehabilitation of soil and environmental conditions, improvement of agricultural practices, building water-catchment dams, etc. to mitigate the degraded conditions of the ecosystems and the abject poverty existing in Ethiopia in general and northern Ethiopia in particular. Much of the resources wasted deporting northern peasants to the southwest could have been used for such activities.

Villagization was conceived and implemented by the state without the participation of the peasants. The policies that are said to be guiding its implementation were couched in terms that promised development and prosperity to rural communities. However, the program was designed not only without adequate knowledge about the living conditions and wishes of the rural communities, political control and state security considerations also were driving motives for its implementation. This was also the case with the resettlement schemes. Villagization made it easier for the state to collect taxes and conscript young men into the militia force. The collection of surplus grain by the state owned Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) was facilitated, and more land was also made accessible for state farms and resettlement.

In addition to the tremendous physical hardships that they have experienced in the process, villagization exposed peasant households to far-reaching social and economic deprivations. In the initial stages, agricultural production was disrupted due to the time spent on moving to new sites. Since the peasants were relocated far away from their fields and much time was wasted on walking to and from them, the negative effect of villagization on food production remained unsolved. In the absence of health service and sanitary facilities villagization also created serious health hazards.

Resettlement and villagization were designed as parts of a package program and implemented simultaneously to increase state control over peripheries then in rebellion as well as on the traditionally intractable peasant subjects the regime regarded politically unreliable. The military government attempted not only to kill two birds with a stone, but also to turn a crisis created by famine into an opportunity. Using international relief assistance the it planned to remove northern peasant communities from areas controlled or infiltrated by Tigre People's Liberation Front (TPLF) guerrillas and relocate them in the areas where the Oromo liberation was becoming a menace to its rule. The Dergue could relocate only 90,000 famine victims from Tigray to the southwest, in itself a large number. The famine affected Tigrean peasants moved into the areas controlled by the TPLF in order to avoid deportation.

As the regime refused to permit relief to be distributed outside its control, the TPLF moved hundreds of thousands of famine victims to relief centers in the Sudan. However, within a year or so they were repatriated from the Sudan and settled in TPLF controlled areas. To assist them and those who stayed in their villages, the international humanitarian agencies poured into Tigray and Eritrea assistance worth not less than US\$700 million (Duffield & Prenergast cited in Lata, 1999:120). The agencies operated from stations in the Sudan through a program called "Cross-Border Operation" and in co-operation with the humanitarian wings of the TPLF and EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front). The *Dergue's* plan to use famine relief for state consolidation back-fired. The two liberation fronts in the north—the TPLF and EPLF—were able to use the relief aid in building up trust

and support among their respective peoples and became effective movements of resistance. As thousands of men and women joined the fronts their fighting forces strengthened and overwhelmed the uninitiated forces of the *Dergue* most of whom were forcibly conscripted through structures set up by villagization in the south. Ironically, relief aid used by the opposition in the north became an important factor in the demise of the *Dergue*.

Unknown number of the peasants from Tigray, Wallo and Shawa who were resettled in the south and southwest between 1978 and 1987 has gone back to their villages in the north. It is not known how many of those who were “villagized” moved back to their former home sites following the fall of the *Dergue* regime. None of the long-term objectives the programs were designed to achieve seem to have been fulfilled. What remains is the memory of the human suffering caused by these centrally planned and callously implemented operations. The social disintegration caused by resettlement is yet to be mended, if at all, in the areas from which settlers were recruited. It seems that many of those who deserted the resettlement schemes between 1986 and 1990 did not make it back to their home villages. It is possible that many of them are trapped in the miseries of urban centers as day laborers, prostitutes, beggars, and so on. Probably most of those who returned to their home villages after the fall of the military regime have found their former plots of land occupied by other cultivators. Since the disruption of family life, social networks and community caused by famine has been prolonged by resettlement, the majority of those who were relocated are not able yet to go back to the “normal” life they were used to before the fateful year 1985. A full account of the consequences of the gigantic projects of social engineering carried out the *Dergue* is yet to be documented. A great deal of research is needed in different fields.

Resettlement and villagization had affected rural societies profoundly—mainly negatively. The damages done to the environment by both the two programs will perhaps take decades to repair. Using and abusing the coercive power of the state, the *Dergue* tried to achieve, in short time, what its predecessors failed to achieve in a century. By

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

changing demographic structure, particularly through the *sigsaga* form of settlement, it tried to weaken historically embedded ethnic identities and limit or even eliminate grounds for collective action and claim making by underprivileged population groups such as the Oromo. However, the programs proved to be wrong methods of creating economic development and absolutely disastrous for achieving national integration. The very measure the military government wanted to use for consolidating its power contributed to the erosion of its legitimacy thereby hastening its fall. The military regimes effort to control ethno-national sentiments and impose Ethiopian national identity on the different non Amhara peoples, not only created strong resentment but also rekindled the memories of the oppressive past and strengthened ethno-national consciousness. Consequently in 1991, the date of the Dergue's demise, Ethiopia was even more disunited than it was in 1974—the date of its accession to power..

### References

---

- Anon "Ethiopia: Conquest and Territory", *Horn of Africa*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1983
- Ake, C. "The African Context of Human Rights", *Africa Today*, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarters, 1987, pp 5-12
- Batsh, R. "The Ethnic Factor in Security and Development: Perceptions of the United Nations Human Rights Bodies", *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 1988:333-341
- Baxter, P. "Ethiopia's unacknowledged Problem: The Oromo", *African Affairs*, vol. 77, no. 208, 1978, pp. 283-296.
- Bulcha, Mekuria. *Flight and Integration: Mass Exodus from Ethiopia and Problems of Integration in the Sudan*, Scandinavian Inst. of African Studies, Uppsala, 1988.
- "Some Notes On the Conditions of Oromo, Berta and other Refugees in The Kurmuk District of Blue Nile Province." Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1983, Unpublished Report.



- “Om folkomflyttning och kollektivisering i etiopien” (Mass relocation and collectivization in Ethiopia), *Dagens Nyheter*, Stockholm, August 11, 1996.
- “Conquest and Forced Migration: An Assessment of the Oromo Experience.” In Hameso, S., Trueman T. And Temesgen Erena, *Ethiopia: Conquest and the Quest for Freedom and Democracy*, London: TSC Publications, 1997.
- *The Making of the Oromo Diaspora*, Minneapolis: Kirkhouse Publishers, 2001 (forthcoming)
- Bekele, Shiferaw, “An Empirical Account of Resettlement in Ethiopia (1975-1985)”, *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies*, Moscow: Nauka Publishers, Vol 2, 1988:127-142
- Clay, J. and Bonnie Holcomb, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine 1984 - 1985*, Cultural Survival Incorporation Occasional Papers 20, Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Clapham, C. *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Cohen, J. and Nils-Ivar Isaksson, *Villagization in the Arsi Region of Ethiopia*, Rural studies No. 19, Swedish University of Agricultural sciences, Uppsala, 1987.
- CSO (Central Statistical Office), *Ethiopia: Statistical Abstract 1976*, Addis Ababa: CSO, 1977
- *1984 Census Supplement 1*, Addis Ababa: CSO, 1985.
- *Report on Census of population and housing and on Survey of Demographic Changes in the Resettlement Areas*, Addis Ababa: CSO, 1991.
- Dejene, Almeneh. “Peasants and the Environmental Dilemma in Resettlement”, Energy and Environmental Policy Center, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Typescript, 1989
- Eide, O. M. *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia: A Study of Church and Politics with Special Reference to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus 1974-1985*, Stavanger: Misjonshogskolens forlag, 1996

- Findley, S. "Colonists Constraints, Strategies, and Mobility: Recent Trends in Latin American Frontier Zones." In *Land settlements, policies and population redistribution in developing countries*, New York: Praeger, 1988.
- Galperin, G. "Some Notes on Population Migrations in Ethiopia Before and in the Course of the Revolution", *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies*, Moscow: Nauka Publishers, Vol. 1 1988.
- Halliday, F. and Mollyneux, M. *The Ethiopian Revolution*, London: Verso, 1981
- Hasselblatt, G. "A corrugated iron roof cannot be used thrice: After 14 years return to Addis Abeba and free Oromia. A travel diary", Berlin, 1992 (translated from German by David look, with assistance from Victor Dewsbery).
- Holcomb, B. and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia*: Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1990.
- Jalata, Asafa. *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993
- Keller, E. *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- Kloos, H. "Health and Resettlement in Ethiopia with Emphasis on the 1984/85 Resettlement Program: A Review", *Ethiopian Journal of Development Research*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1989:61-89.
- Kuru, Assefa. *Soil Erosion and Strategic State Policy: The Case of Ethiopia*, Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1986.
- Lata, Leenco. *The Ethiopian State at Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization, Or Disintegration?* Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1999.
- Lemma, Legesse, "Economic and Social Development of Revolutionary Ethiopia: Achievements, Problems and Prospects" *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies*, Moscow: Nauka Publishers, Vol. 1, 1988.
- Lirenso, Alemayehu "Villagization: Policies and Prospects." In *Ethiopia: Options for Rural Development*, S. Pausewang, and et. al (eds.) London: Z-books, 1990.

- Malhuret, C. "Mass Deportations in Ethiopia", *Medecins Sans Frontiers*, December 1985.
- Marcus, H. "Imperialism and Expansion in Ethiopia from 1965 to 1900." In *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960*, Gann L.H. and P. Duignan (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 1, 1969.
- Niggli, R. Ethiopia: "Deportation and Enforced Labour Camp. Doubtful Struggle against Famine." Berlin: Berliner Missionwerk, 1985.
- Oste, S. "Svälten löser problemet med de upproriska" (The famine solves the problem of dissidents), *Dagens Nyheter*, Stockholm, November 25, 1984
- Paderanga, C. "Land Settlements in the Philippines" In *Land Settlement Policies and Population Redistribution in Developing Countries*, Obrai, A. S. (ed), New York: Praeger, 1988.
- Pankhurst, A. "Resettlement: Policy and Practice." In *Ethiopia: Options for Rural Development*, S. Pausewang, et. al (eds.) London: Z-books, 1990.
- R.R.C (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission). "1986 Food Supply Projection", RRC: Addis Ababa, 1985.
- Rahmato, Dessalegn, "Some Notes on Settlement and Resettlement in Metekel Awaraja, Gojjam Province", *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies*, Moscow: Nauka Publishers, Vol 1 1988.
- *Famine and Survival Strategies: A Case Study from Northeast Ethiopia*, Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1991.
- Sandstroem, A. *Mesqelblommansland. En bok om svältens och böpets Etiopien*, Uppsala: EFS forlaget, 1986
- Schwab, *Ethiopia: Politics, Economics and Society*, London, 1985
- Stahl, M. "Capturing the Peasants Through Cooperatives: the Case of Ethiopia," Stockholm, Sarec, 1988, typescripts.
- "State Controlled Rural Development Strategies in Ethiopia: What Role for NGOs?", Paper presented at the conference on Conflict and Development in the Horn of Africa', 7-9 April 1988, Ottawa, Canada, arranged by Canadian Council for International Co-operation
- Steingraber, S. "Resettlement and Villagization in Southwest Ethiopia, University of Michigan, Ann Harbor, unpublished manuscript, 1987.

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

- Triulzi, A. "Competing Views of National Identity in Ethiopia", in I M Lewis (ed.) *Nationalism and Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa*, London: Ithaca Press, 1983:111-127.
- Vallely, P. "Land Blight by Ideology", *The Times*, London, October 30, 1986.
- Wolde Giorgis, Dawit. *Red Tears*, Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1989
- Wolde Mariam, Mesfin "Draught and Famine in Ethiopia: Social Impact and Socio-Economic Development." In *Understanding Africa's Food Problems: Social Policy Perspectives*, ACARTSOD, London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1990.
- Woldemeskel, Getachew, "The Consequences of Resettlement in Ethiopia", *African Affairs*, No. 352, 1989, pp. 359-374.
- Wood, A. "Rural Development and National Integration in Ethiopia", *African Affairs*, vol 82, no. 329, 1982, pp 509-539
- Yeager, R. *Tanzania: An African Experiment*, Boulder: West view Press, 1982

## AN OVERVIEW OF SOME FACTORS LIMITING THE MIGRATION OF THE OROMO TO ADDIS ABABA

---

*Benti Getahun*

### Introduction

The Oromo are the largest ethnic group in the Ethiopian empire. They were conquered and colonized in the last quarter of the nineteenth century by Emperor Menilek II of Ethiopia. Their homeland, Oromia, makes up more than a half of Ethiopia's landmass. It is also the richest part of the empire in natural resources.

Despite their numerical majority in the country and the location of the empire's capital, Addis Ababa, in their heartland, the population of the Oromo in the city has been very low. The largest population of the city is composed of the Amhara who are only the second largest ethnic group in the country. According to demographic sources published by the Ethiopian Central Statistical Office in 1985, the Oromo constituted 74.9 percent of the population outside of Addis Ababa's city limit (roughly within 50-kilometer radius from the city). They were followed by 20.5 per cent Amhara, 3.6 percent Gurage, and 1.0 per cent others. Within the city limit, however, the ethnic distribution was dramatically changed. The Oromo constituted only 17.1 per cent, while the Amhara, whose home provinces are far away from the capital, constituted 47.9 per cent of the city's population.

In this article, I will examine some factors behind this demographic anomaly. I will analyze how one ethnic group (the Amhara) who controlled the political and economic power at the center manipulated the migration of the Oromo, first by eviction and later through systematic exclusion by enforcing socio-cultural conditions that discouraged the presence of the Oromo in the city.

Studies on Addis Ababa provide only fragmented information on migration to the city. Most information came data from the Central Statistical Office (CSO), which provide demographic information

relating to mortality, fertility, age and sex structures, religion, literacy, provincial origins and “mother tongues” which were often confused with “languages spoken at home.” Other worth-mentioning works are by Susanne Comhaire-Sylvain<sup>1</sup>, J. A. Hellen and Mohammed Said<sup>2</sup>, John J. Palen<sup>3</sup>, Bekure Wolde Semait<sup>4</sup>, Laketch Dirasse<sup>5</sup> and Arkabe Asgadam<sup>6</sup>.

Although each author contributed to our understanding of the movement of people to Addis Ababa, none of them provided a theoretical and conceptual framework to the dynamics of ethnic migration to the city. It is only Gunilla Bjéren<sup>7</sup>, who in her Shashamane-focused study of migration provided a broader context to the process of ethnic migration in Ethiopia, especially to towns created as garrisons including Addis Ababa. These towns became centers of Amhara settlers, where they formed “opportunity structures” thus attracting their fellow country people. In examining the limiting factors for the migration of the Oromo, I, therefore, borrowed Bjéren’s concept of “opportunity structures” for it is flexible enough to explain why one ethnic group has more members in Addis Ababa while others do not. Only comparative approach would help spell out the limiting factors. Consequently, I will focus on the Oromo situation in comparison with Amhara migrants whom the “opportunity structures” created by the state facilitated their migration to Addis Ababa while simultaneously limiting the Oromo.

### **The Foundation of Addis Ababa and the Eviction of the Oromo**

The foundation of Addis Ababa<sup>8</sup> was a direct outcome of the conquest of the Oromo by the Ethiopian emperor, Menilek II, in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>. Before the conquest the Oromo inhabited the area where Addis Ababa was founded. After fierce resistance, Ras Gobana, an Oromo warrior in the service of Menilek, defeated the last Oromo chief of the area, Tufaa Munaa.<sup>10</sup>

Menilek first camped at Intoto<sup>11</sup>, a hill overlooking the location of the future capital. From there, he encroached on the land of the

surrounding Oromo and finally descended to the Finfinnee plain in 1887 where his wife Tayitu set up a camp while he was on a campaign of conquest of the Oromo in Hararghe. She gave the Amharic name Addis Ababa (meaning “New Flower”) to the new settlement at Finfinnee. On his return from the campaign, Menilek set up his imperial camp at the present day site of the Grand Palace

Although the choice of the site was attributed to the hot springs located at Finfinnee, there are fundamental reasons that influenced the decision. It was located in a fertile agricultural land for the emperor’s followers to live on. By the time of the city’s foundation, the wars of conquest were not yet over, and the emperor had a large number of northern followers, estimated at tens of thousands. Finfinnee was located closer to productive Oromo lands from where the emperor collected onerous tributes and fed his retainers. It was likewise located at the center of the newly created empire, close to major trade routes connecting the north to the south and the west to the east. Positioning himself at this very strategic point enabled Menelik to control effectively the lucrative commerce of the empire he created. Geo-politically too, the new capital was located at the heart of the empire, relatively close to both his power base and security and to the newly conquered regions for an effective political and military control.

The implementation of these objectives necessitated a permanent settlement of Menilek’s followers in the new capital. This required granting them land by taking from the Oromo through forcible eviction. The eviction of Oromo from Gulallee and Boolee to Chilalo, Arsi<sup>12</sup>, was, thus, part of this grandiose plan. Menilek evicted them because of two interrelated reasons. First, by crippling the indigenous Oromo administrative structure politically, he, therefore, did not want to allow the existence of the Oromo as a community close to his new power base due to concerns about retaliation<sup>13</sup>. Second, because he dispossessed them economically, Menilek must have correctly thought that they would not give him an easy time if they were allowed to stay closer to their homeland now taken over by his men. Even those Oromo who served Menilek as soldiers were not granted land in Addis Ababa compared to

their northern counterparts. From the very beginning, therefore, the population of Addis Ababa was composed largely of the Amharas. Very few Oromos who remained in the city were assimilated in order to survive and dispersed in the areas settled by the Amharas. Consequently, they could not form a cohesive Oromo community to pull other Oromos to join them. Those who survived eviction were permanently pushed away to the periphery of the city and remained victims of its perennial physical expansion. They were systematically marginalized and some were turned into laborers and providers of firewood, while those who settled in the vicinities provided agricultural products and other vital necessities to the city<sup>14</sup>

### The Phase of Systematic Exclusion

While the phase of eviction victimized only those Oromos who lived in and around Addis Ababa, the phase of systematic exclusion targeted all Oromos in the empire, as it did all other conquered people. Ethiopian rulers adopted undeclared policies of systematically excluding people of other ethnic groups from establishing themselves as cohesive ethnic communities in Addis Ababa to creating social and economic “opportunity structures” to accommodate new fellow migrants. They imposed a policy of “nationalizing” the language, culture, religion and values of the Amhara ethnic group. The Amhara conquerors created new towns (**katamas** – of which Addis Ababa was the largest) in the occupied territories where agents of the state, overwhelmingly of Amhara ethnic group called **nafxanya**, settled.<sup>15</sup> Old southern towns were also converted into serving the interests of the state and the settlers and became centers from where the policy of “nationalization” was implemented. This policy of “nationalizing” Amhara values was to promote the assimilability, governability and exploitability of the colonized Oromo. This process involved the suppression of Oromo political systems as well as their religions and cultures. In so doing, the state created a favorable environment in Addis Ababa (as in many other urban areas) to facilitate continuous Amhara migration to Addis Ababa while discouraging others. This situation is comparable with migration



in Yugoslavia where similar ethnic policies facilitated the migration of Serbs to Belgrade.<sup>16</sup>

In Addis Ababa, the urban environment was economically, socially, culturally and psychologically designed to accommodate the Amharas in more ways than one. First, as indicated above, the state distributed land among the conquerors - the commanders, the soldiers, the church and the civilian administrators. This paved the way for the continuous migration of ordinary Amharas to the city. Second, in order to accommodate the military, civil officials and the “ordinary” settlers in the conquered regions, the state made the living environment more attractive to them. Besides making their language an official one, churches were built with the result that the settlers could feel at home and comfortable. Schools were established to educate their children. It took a long time for children of the Oromo to come to Addis Ababa and reap the fruits of modern schools, which were mostly located in the capital. Even then, it was not easy for them to live in a city dominated by a single group because the Amhara considered themselves “indigenes or hosts . . . [and] regard[ed] all others as outsiders,”<sup>17</sup> thus discouraging the Oromo from migrating to the city. In the following section, I will discuss how the Amharas used their language to exclude the Oromo as outsiders and discouraged them from migrating to Addis Ababa and living in the city.

### **The Role of Language Factor and Associated Factors**

A very important mechanism by which the Oromo were excluded from establishing themselves in Addis Ababa and benefiting from the opportunities created in the empire’s capital was the imposition of Amharic as the “national” language. The subtle policy of imposing Amharic was accompanied by a systematic suppression of Afaan Oromoo. The Amharas propagated Amharic “as the language of the king (*yenigus k’wank’wa*)”<sup>18</sup> to legitimize its imposition on others. This is quite typical of conquerors as manifested in the cases of the Romans, the Greeks, and the Arabs had demonstrated. Robert L. Cooper drew a parallel conclusion that in the Ethiopian case “Amharic has [also] spread

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

as a consequence of Amhara military conquests and political supremacy."<sup>19</sup>

Although the existence of an official language in a multi-lingual society such as Ethiopia is necessary, Amharic was made to play that role by suppressing Afaan Oromoo, the language that has the largest number of speakers in the empire, and one of the largest in Africa. Indeed, from the perspective of the government, it was part of the effort towards national integration. But from the perspective of non-Amharas, the policy was seen as helping the Amharic speakers to reap the benefits of joining government services.

The imposition of Amharic on non-Amharas and the Amharanization strategy became almost an open government policy in 1955/6.<sup>20</sup> It was enshrined into the statute issued to establish the Ministry of National Community Development and Social Affairs. Article 7 of the statute explicitly stated that the civil servants, the police and security forces should be recruited from the Amhara ethnic group. If the number of Amhara candidates was not enough, those from other ethnic groups ought to be Amharic speakers and orthodox Christians. Article 15 recommended the withering away of all other languages in the country in favor of Amharic.<sup>21</sup> This was, indeed, part of the age-old project of destroying other languages in favor of Amharic. As Mekuria Bulcha correctly noted:

The promotion of Amharic as a national language has been a consistent policy of various Ethiopian regimes at least during the last fifty years. Amharic, which is the language of the politically dominant ethnic group, the Amhara, and mother tongue of less than 20 per cent of Ethiopia's population was imposed on the other ethnic and linguistic groups without taking into account their sentiments and opinions. Furthermore, in order to avoid competition with Amharic, and subsequently achieve linguistic homogenization in Ethiopia, the use of other ethnic languages for publishing, teaching, preaching and administrative purpose was forbidden.<sup>22</sup>

Because the Oromo could not speak Amharic, they were not employed in government services, which were located in the towns

especially in Addis Ababa. Even those who learned the language (however fluent they could be) were not treated on the same level with the Amharas.<sup>23</sup> These factors prevented the Oromo people from living and working in the towns. The Oromo learnt Amharic only after the expansion of education, which indeed facilitated their migration to Addis Ababa and other towns dominated by the Amhara.

Since Amharic was the official language, the Oromo could not easily find jobs in the expanding state bureaucracy. Their access to the service industry was also limited because of the same reason. Only the Amharas, and a few other non-Amharas that learned the language thus benefited in the rapidly growing city and the “opportunity structures” created in it. For ordinary Amharas, the simple knowledge of the language secured them a variety of jobs. They were hired as guardsmen, watchmen, babysitters, housemaids or servants, clerks in government offices, janitors, and other similar jobs that did not require writing and reading.<sup>24</sup> To secure such low-level jobs, the Oromo and other non-Amhara migrants had to wait until they master the Amharic language<sup>25</sup> through longer residence in the city or through a formal education before migrating to the city.<sup>26</sup> As Robert L. Cooper correctly observed:

With respect to the material advantages associated with knowledge of Amharic, they are undeniably great. Knowledge of Amharic is a prerequisite for educational and political advancement. However, the benefits of knowledge of Amharic are still confined principally to the urban population and to that part of the rural population with relatively easy access to towns.<sup>27</sup>

Knowledge of the Amharic language became the only channel to enter into government service. One Amhara scholar proudly noted that a non-Amhara “... wishing to obtain a position in government offices is required to have a good command of Amharic.”<sup>28</sup> The Amharas met the requirement by upbringing, as it was their mother tongue. For the Oromos, it was a matter of survival in Addis Ababa and they had to learn the language at schools or after migration to the city.

There are two equally important and related factors that gave additional advantage to the Amharas to migrate to Addis Ababa by

keeping the Oromo away. The first has more to do with the consolidation of Ethiopian administration in Addis Ababa and the continuous appointment of Amhara civil servants and army commanders to run the administration. Their families and relatives followed the appointees. Gunilla Bjèren, who made an extensive research on migration to Shashamanne, a town that experienced similar developments with Addis Ababa, noted that “Each ‘career move’ ... [led] to a number of replacement moves, the length of the migratory chain depending on the rank of the person promoted. At the end of the chain, a new recruit ... [was] admitted to the niche.”<sup>29</sup> While military service set the stage for the first wave of Amhara migration to Addis Ababa (and to the south in general), the beginning of modern administration and the gradual expansion of a modern bureaucracy set another equally important stage. The latter required educated personnel; and the ethnic group that took advantage of the expansion of modern education was the first to reap the opportunity. As speaking the Amharic language earned jobs in the bureaucracy, Amharas became the greatest beneficiaries of the new developments.<sup>30</sup> The other ethnic group that benefited from the situation was the Tigre who is culturally, politically and socially related to the Amhara.

The second related factor is the effect of radio broadcast only in the Amharic language, which all Amharas but only very few Oromos understood. In other words, the effect of radio broadcast was the same for all Amharas (literate or otherwise) while it affected only the few educated segments of the Oromo. Songs praising the beauty and modernity of Addis Ababa had appealing messages to the Amhara and created in their minds a state of hope for a better future thus encouraging them to migrate to the city.<sup>31</sup> “In my life, I had been praying to God to help me see two places; Addis Ababa and the Heaven,” said a priest-migrant from Gojjam, who claimed to have been strongly influenced by the news he heard on the radio about Addis Ababa.<sup>32</sup> The following couplets are collected from Amharic songs that praised the city.

*An Overview of Some Factors Limiting the Migration of the Oromo*

Alem Addis Ababa Shawaa yabibal gana	Oh Addis Ababa, paradise Shoa will prosper more
Amarech Addis Amarech Amarech Addis Amarech Ye Afriqa ahigur ma'ikal honech	Addis became beautiful Addis became beautiful and became the center of African continent
Addis Ababa new betu Addis Ababa new betu	Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa where handsome brown boys reside
Wub qonjo xayim shabala	with their heart warming looks
libb yemimarik wubatu <sup>33</sup>	

The language factor had thus played a considerable role in Amhara migration to Addis Ababa and their numerical superiority in the city. Out of the city's total population of 1,099,851 in 1976, 533,392 were from the city itself while 331,630 were migrants from the province of Shoa where Addis Ababa is located. The remaining 143,596 were from the northern provinces of Eritrea, Tigray, Wallo, Gondar and Gojjam of which 98,186 were from the last three Amhara provinces. Out of the total population of 24,068,800, the nine southern provinces had 10,396,000 in 1974<sup>34</sup> and produced only 91,703 migrants to the city in the 1976 survey.<sup>35</sup>

**Table 1**  
**Population by Birth Place, 1976**

Birth Place	Male	Female	TOTAL	% <sup>36</sup>
Addis Ababa	260,560	272,832	533,392	48.49
Arsi	3,643	4,760	8,403	0.76
Bale	948	1,894	2,842	0.26
Eritrea	10,267	11,346	21,613	1.96
Hararghe	7,011	10,762	17,773	1.62
Gamo Gofa	11,017	7,633	18,650	1.69
<b>Gojjam</b>	<b>9,842</b>	<b>11,252</b>	<b>21,094</b>	<b>1.96</b>
<b>Gondar</b>	<b>3,762</b>	<b>10,562</b>	<b>14,326</b>	<b>1.30</b>
Ilu Abba Bora	1,661	2,117	3,778	0.34
Kafa	1,661	4,294	6,895	0.62
<b>Shoa</b>	<b>160,813</b>	<b>170,817</b>	<b>331,630</b>	<b>30.15</b>
Sidamo	8,622	10,968	19,590	1.78
Tigray	9,184	14,613	23,797	2.16
Wallaga	5,984	3,860	9,844	0.89
<b>Wallo</b>	<b>26,400</b>	<b>36,366</b>	<b>62,766</b>	<b>5.70</b>
Outside Ethiopia	1,441	-	1,441	0.13
Not Stated	937	1,080	2,017	0.18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>524,695</b>	<b>575,156</b>	<b>1,099,851</b>	<b>99.99</b>

Source: Central Statistical Office, *Statistical Bulletin No. 15* (Addis Ababa: August 1977), p. 6. (Summarized from Table 4. Amhara provinces are highlighted).

Two important points need to be made clear here. First, migrants from the provinces (as those from southern regions) were not **necessarily** indigenous people of the regions. They were largely re-migrating Amharas, or generations of early Amhara migrants. They spoke Amharic<sup>37</sup> and also reaped the fruits of modern education for they had the necessary resources owing to their location in the political and social geography of the system. Their parents were administrators, civil service and military officials or landlords and could thus afford

sending them to Addis Ababa for schooling and for any other purposes. Such re-migrating Amharas settled on the lands previously granted to some Oromo chiefs, whose home provinces were governed by parents or relatives of these re-migrants. A typical example was **Dajazmatch** Kumsaa Morodaa whose land was settled by re-migrating Amharas from Wallagga.<sup>38</sup> Second, most migrants from Shoa were from the Amhara-inhabited northern part of the province, the very power base of Menilek and his successors. The Amhara from northern Shoa were pioneers of the great conquest under Menilek, and thus, formed the core of Amhara administration in modern Ethiopia. They had every opportunity to migrate to Addis Ababa, and they were the architects of Oromo eviction and their systematic exclusion from Addis Ababa.

Moreover, most key government offices at all levels were occupied (or dominated) by the Amhara elite who exhibited a tendency of favoring their kith and kins. According to Fantahun H. Michael, by 1974 "...more than 60 per cent of the government, 75 percent of the officer corps, and 70 percent of the district (woreda) governors in the southern non-Amhara regions (who at the time were the largest landowners there) were Amhara."<sup>39</sup> When competing for the same jobs, an illiterate Amhara was preferred to a literate non-Amhara if the job does not require writing and reading. In so doing they created the necessary chain for continuous Amhara migration because "people prefer to move to a city where their own group is well represented rather than to one where they would be a very small minority, and for some only the presence of co-ethnics permits a move."<sup>40</sup> In other words, the existence of a large number of co-ethnics at destination is "a strong positive attraction for potential migrant[s]."<sup>41</sup> In the case of the Amhara, the protection they secured from the government was an additional incentive to migrate even to towns where their co-ethnics were minority. For all practical reasons, Addis Ababa became a major destination. The Oromo did not only lack such opportunities, but were literally discouraged from migrating to the city.

## Conclusion

Some scholars and Amhara elites argue that the Amhara-led Ethiopian government was accommodative and indiscriminate<sup>42</sup> (Bulcha 1994: 96). However, a close examination of the situation indicates otherwise. The empire was rather dominated by members of a minority group tied together by common historical, social, political and ethnic interests. Such a state always, and quite correctly, feels insecure. The adoption of different mechanisms and systems to keep others away is a response to this state of insecurity.

The Amharas shaped the growth of Addis Ababa in the way it fitted their interests and, consequently, created an environment of self-accommodation to the exclusion of the Oromo. This system of self-accommodation was so interconnected that it was very difficult for the Oromo to penetrate. To be accepted into the system, the Oromo had to adopt not only the Amharic language, but also its other major components such as Amhara cultural, social, and religious values. On the other hand, assimilation required abandoning their culture and language. Although Amhara rulers hoped that they would assimilate the Oromo, their efforts largely proved counter-productive. Even Oromo leaders who embraced Orthodox Christianity eventually realized that they were not treated on equal basis. They gradually reverted to their Oromoness and challenged Amhara socio-cultural and political encroachment. Their challenges ranged from sending their children to schools run by Protestant missionaries to leading a drive for Oromo independence in 1936,<sup>43</sup> and the creation of a pan-Oromo movement, the Maccaa Tuulamaa Self-Help Association, in 1964.<sup>44</sup> In the end, however, the Amhara succeeded in creating factors that limited the migration of the Oromo to Addis Ababa.



## Notes

---

1. Susanne Comhaire-Sylvain, "Considerations on Migration in Addis Ababa" (Prepared for the University Collage of Addis Ababa, 5 April 1962); and "Migration," in "Social Survey of Addis Ababa" (Carried out by the Study Group of the University College of Addis Ababa Under the Auspices of the Municipality of Addis Ababa and the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa, 1960), pp. 12-56.
2. J. A. Hellen and Mohammed Said, "Patterns of Rural-Urban Migration in Ethiopia," in *Aspects of Population Change and Development in Some African and Asian Countries* (CDC Research Monograph Series No. 9, Cairo Demographic Centre, Cairo, Egypt, 1984), pp. 297-318.
3. John J. Palen, "Urbanization and Migration to an Indigenous City: The Case of Addis Ababa," in Anthony H. Richard and Daniel Kubat (eds.), *Internal Migration: The New World and the Third World* (London and Beverly Hills: Sage Publications Ltd., 1976), pp. 205-224.
4. Bekure Woldesemait, "The Industrial Labor Force in Addis Ababa Region Before 1975: Origins, Expectations and Realities," in *Proceedings of the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Lund, 26-29 April 1982* (1984, pp. 603-616; "Industrial Development in Addis Ababa (A Miniature Capitalist Penetration)," in *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. XVII (1984), pp. 37-61; "Pre-1974 Industrialization in Ethiopia and the Socio-Economic Consequences: The Example of the Addis Ababa region," in *Proceedings of the Seminar on Industrial Transformation in Ethiopia Held in Nazareth, January 18-20, 1980* (Addis Ababa University, Institute of Development Research, July 1983), pp. 133-192.
5. Laketch Dirasse, "The Survival Strategy of Female Migrants in Ethiopian Urban Centers" (A Paper Submitted to the International Congress of Africanists, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, December 9-19, 1973, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia).
6. Arkebe Asgedom, "Analysis of Some Aspects of Responses for Migration of the Addis Ababa Migrants" (Addis Ababa, AAMPPO, NUPI, Demographic Section, September 1985).

7. Gunilla Bjèren, *Migration to Shashemene: Ethnicity, Gender and Occupation in Urban Ethiopia* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1985).
8. Richard Pankhurst, "The Foundation and Growth of Addis Ababa to 1935," in *Ethiopia Observer*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (1962), pp 33-61; Richard Pankhurst, "Menelik and the Foundation of Addis Ababa," in *Journal of African History*, Vol 2, No. 1 (1961), pp. 103-117; Peter Garretson, "A History of Addis Ababa From Its Foundation in 1886 to 1910" (Ph.D Dissertation, University of London, 1974).
9. For the details of Menelik's conquest, see Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); and R.H. Kofi Darkwah, *Shewa, Menilek and the Ethiopian Empire* (London: Butler & Tanner Ltd , 1978).
10. Informants: Alamu Qitessa (Addis Ababa, 1 14.97); Fayisa Walda Amanu'el (06.17.97).
11. See Tekalign Wolde Mariam, "Notes on Intoto: The Precursor of Addis Ababa (1881-1892)," in *Proceedings of the Fourth Seminar of the Department of History, Awasa, 8-12 July 1987* (Addis Ababa University, Department of History, 1989), pp. 133-152.
12. Garretson, pp 188-190. In the course of a field research for my M.A thesis, I was able to interview second and third generation Oromos whose forefathers were evicted to Chilalo from Addis Ababa. Informants: Gebre Hanna Shafo (Shashamanne, 09/02/87); Nagesso Gabi (Shashamanne, 08.20.87). See also Benti Getahun, "A History of Shashamanne From Its Foundation to 1974" (M A. Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Department of History, June 1988).
13. See Asafa Jalata, *Oromia & Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992* (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), p. 63.
14. Informants: Geremew Gurmu (Addis Ababa, 02.06.97); Tsegaye Badhadha (Addis Ababa, 05.23.97); Kuma Arado ((Addis Ababa, 02.06.97).
15. For instance, see Marcus (1975), p 89.

16. See for example, Oli Hawryshyn, "Ethnicity as a Barrier to Migration in Yugoslavia: The Evidence from Interregional Flows and Immigration to Belgrade," in Alan A. Brown and Egon Neuberger (eds.), *Internal Migration: A Comparative Perspective* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 379-399.
17. Anthony O'Connor, *The African City* (London: Hutchinson & Co (Publishers) Ltd., 1983), p. 108
18. Robert L. Cooper, "The Spread of Amharic," in M.L. Bender, et.al. (eds.), *Language in Ethiopia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 289.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 291-292
20. Whether given a legal cover or not, it would not make any difference for non-Amharas since it had long been "implicitly" imposed. An attempt to resist this imposition has cost some people their lives and others their positions and dignity. Thousands had languished in jails under successive Ethiopian governments. Among others, see Olana Zoga, *Gizitina Gizot: Macca Tulama Self-Help Association* (Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Press, 1985 E.C., in Amharic).
21. A copy of the original document of this statute was printed in *Malada* magazine, No 3 (Magabit 1985 E.C.), pp. 5-7. Eighty-one languages were listed to have existed in Ethiopia, and 80 of them were supposed to wither away.
22. Mekuria Bulcha, "The Politics of Linguistic Homogenization in Ethiopia and the Conflict Over the Status of Afaan Oromoo," in *African Affairs*, Vol 96, No. 384 (London: July 1997), p. 1. The state's policy of Amharanization of non-Amharas involved the use of force and, a complex administrative pressures and inducements. See Mordechai Abir, "Education and National Integration in Ethiopia," in *African Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 274 (January 1970), pp. 46-47.
23. In fact, this is one of the most important complaints of Emmanuel Abraham, an Oromo who served the government of Haile Sillasse throughout his life. The Emperor trusted Emmanuel, but his Amhara colleagues and bosses persecuted him. Emmanuel Abraham, *Reminiscences of My Life* (Oslo, Norway: Lunde Forlag, 1995), Part I.

24. Informants: Itagagn Izazew (Addis Ababa, 06.15.97); Malke Asfaw (Addis Ababa, 06.03.97); Tihune Taddesse (Addis Ababa, 06.04.97); Tirunesh Degifew (Addis Ababa, 06.14.97).
25. Informants: Balaynesh Kenne (Addis Ababa, 14.05.97); Darartu Gada (Addis Ababa, 08.05.97); Mazgabe Beyene (Addis Ababa, 04.06.97); Mulu Rorrisa (Addis Ababa, 14.05.97).
26. Informants: Emmanuel Abraham (Addis Ababa, 12.30.96); Bulcha Damkasa (Addis Ababa, 04.22.97); Yohannis Huluqa (Addis Ababa, 04.07.97).
27. Cooper, p. 293. Even, Amhara prostitutes had better advantages over their non-Amhara counterparts. For the same reason, some non-Amhara prostitutes, especially the Gurage, pretended to be Amharas. See Laketch Dirasse, *The Commoditization of Female Sexuality: Prostitution and Socio-Economic Relations in Addis Ababa* (New York: AMS Press, 1991), p. 56.
28. Girma Amare, "Government Education in Ethiopia," in *Ethiopia Observer*, Vol. 6 (1963), p. 340.
29. Bjéren, p. 246.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
31. Informant: Yilma Worqneh (Addis Ababa, 01.21.97)
32. Informant: Mulugeta Yihun (Addis Ababa, 06.07.97).
33. This is my own recollection. There are also many other songs of admiration in Amharic for the southern provinces with a similar effect on migration. Here is one example praising the province of Sidamo; "Awasa Langano lashirishir hije yayehush, yesidamo qonjo indet nashi". Literally translated as, "That lady whom I saw in Awasa and Langano, Oh, greetings to [you] that Sidamo beauty". Awasa is the capital of Sidamo province and Langano is a Lake close to Awasa with beautiful resorts. Not only Addis Ababa but also southern provinces are generally praised for their natural beauties, and resources – gold, coffee, wild animals, etc. This created in the minds of the northerners the feeling that money could be made easily and that life is cheap and luxurious compared to the north.

34. Imperial Ethiopian Government, Central Statistical Office, *The Demography of Ethiopia*, Results of the National Sample Survey, Second Round, Volume I, *Statistical Bulletin No. 10* (Addis Ababa, January 1974), p.2. Indeed, of the 24,068,800-estimated population of Ethiopia, 13,672,800 lived in the northern provinces including Shoa. But three-quarters of Shoa is located within the South both geographically, socially, ethnically and historically. Shoa's population then was 4,922,600, which brings down the total population of the other five northern provinces (Eritrea, Tigray, Gonder, Gojam and Wallo) to 8,750,200. If three-quarters of Shoa's population were added to the south, the total population of the region would be 14,087,950. (There is a two-year gap between the censuses of Addis Ababa and that of the empire. That of Addis Ababa was taken in 1976 and that of the country was taken in 1974. That, however, does not significantly affect the conclusions drawn out of the comparison.)
35. Computed from CSO, "Addis Ababa Manpower and Housing Sample Survey - Dec. 1976," *Statistical Bulletin No. 15* (Addis Ababa: August 1977), p. 6.
36. Percentage computations are mine.
37. Interestingly enough, descendants of Amhara migrants currently living in the southern provinces are taking advantage of their knowledge of the local languages when the current government allowed all ethnic groups to use their languages. But more interesting is that Oromos who know Amharic are not allowed to take similar advantages in the Amhara regional state, which means that the Oromos are still being discriminated against in an entirely different circumstance.
38. Informant: Bayana Abdi (Addis Ababa, 06.17.97); Alamu Qitessa ((Addis Ababa, 01.14.97); Tsegaye Badhadha ((Addis Ababa, 05.23.97).
39. Fanathun H. Michael, *The Roots of Nationality Problems and the Challenge to Nation-Building in Ethiopia* (Bergen, Norway: Derap Publications, 1989), p. 71.
40. O'Connor, p. 117.

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

41. Hawryshyn, p. 397.
42. See Mekuria Bulcha, "The Language Policies of Ethiopian Regimes and the History of Written Afaan Oromoo: 1844-1994," in *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter 1994), p. 96.
43. For an excellent discussion on this issue, see *ibid.*, p. 97.
44. For the history of association, see Olana Zoga, *Gizitina Gizot: Ye Maccaa Tuulamaa Maradaajaa Maahibar*, in Amharic (Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Press, 1985 EC). (This excellent piece on Oromo history of Oromo people's struggle for freedom needs to be translated into the English language.)

## BOOK REVIEWS

---

*The ETHIOPIAN STATE at the CROSSROADS: Decolonization and Democratization or Disintegration?* Leencho Lata, (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1999), 270pp., \$21.95.

This book is an important contribution to the continued discussion of what ensued after the defeat of the military regime of Ethiopia in 1991. Ethiopia, an empire-state, built in its present shape by the Abyssinians during the European “scramble for Africa” is still a colonial power in Africa. Of the colonized peoples, the Oromo constitute more than fifty percent of Ethiopia’s population, occupy an area larger than the rest of Ethiopia, and contribute more than eighty percent to Ethiopia’s foreign exchange earnings.

The author, Leenco Lata, a member of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), played a decisive role in the formation of the transitional government of Ethiopia (TGE). In the book under review, he attempts to provide readers with “a stock-taking of the achievements and failures” of the TGE based on his experiences as one of the principal actors of the government from its creation to the OLF’s departure from the coalition government in 1992.

The book contains valuable information for those unfamiliar with developments during the post-Dergue (military junta) regime of Ethiopia and documents the ascendancy to power of the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), the new colonial force in Ethiopia. In the first two chapters, Leencho furnishes first-hand accounts about the details of political and technical arrangements for governance during the transition period. The next two chapters appear to be conspicuously alien to the task of “stock-taking” or bear no relationship to the main themes of the book. These two chapters are examples of inappropriate “lessons” about the Leninist orthodoxy and Maoist peasant revolution. Three chapters compare the system of governance of TGE with its two predecessors and Leencho’s analysis is manifestly absurd in view of the fact that the imperial and the military regimes were much more

organized and too systematized to be compared with the predominantly peasant militia administration of the TGE. The one thing they have in common is a brutal colonial administration with the latter's variation in targeting the Oromo people for genocide. In fact, for the empire in general, the closing of the twentieth century and the starting of the twenty-first century became an era of militia administration.

In spite of the author's insider information, the book is far from being a comprehensive account of the transitional period. In those critical moments of the formative period, the active roles and arm-twisting by the western ambassadors in Ethiopia and particularly the role played by the newly independent Eritrea, while significant in many respects, were almost left untouched. Moreover, the author's failure to appreciate the active participation of the Oromo in the struggle for national liberation reflects grave oversight, or perhaps, a political commitment gap. For instance, the Oromo masses of western Oromia rejected orders of Abachala Lata, then commander of OLF's western forces and the author's younger brother, to let the TPLF army pass through the liberated areas of Oromia and gallantly fought off re-occupation. After a brief period of self-rule, once again western Oromia fell to a brutal colonial power following a bitter fighting in which thousands of Oromos died. Leencho did not mention the Oromo peoples' heroic defense of their taste for independence. In short, the book addresses selected aspects of the whole story to fit a personal agenda of the author's shopping for particular supporters, at the cost of the Oromo people and their homeland, Oromia. No one should be surprised if in the near future the book turns out to be the official political manifesto of the political group in-the-making. Let us go into the details of this manifesto and the political group in the making.

The empire has never been in short supply of straightjacket solutions to the demands of the colonized people, borrowed either from Western democracies or Marxist-Leninist quarters. The latest, supposedly workable, but in reality just another warmed-over solution in these series came from Leenco Lata, the former Deputy Secretary General of the Oromo Liberation Front. Like many other people who know him well, I admire Leenco's extra-ordinary intellect and salute



him for his immense contributions to the Oromo cause. Yet, I have serious disagreements with some of the views he articulated in his book.

First, let us examine the title of his book, "The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads." In the first place, from whose perspective is that state at the Crossroads? Surely, not from that of the Oromos who are carrying the oppressive clutches of the colonial regime. Secondly, why is a state that has supposedly existed as an independent country for the last three thousand years, suddenly be at the Crossroads? If Leenco is referring to the possible reduction in the size of the empire after decolonization, why should Ethiopia's fate be different from all other colonizers around the world that have shrunk back to their original sizes? On the other hand, if Leenco is talking about the well-being of Ethiopia's citizens, why should the provision for their livelihood be the permanent burden of the colonial subjects such as the Oromos?

Let us consider the subtitle of his book, "Decolonization & Democratization or Disintegration." The underlying message of Leenco is not immediately clear from the three different issues of concern lumped together in the subtitle. If the author's objective was meant to capture the essence of the book in the subtitle, that would have certainly passed for a fine literary technique. But, as we will see below, it is nothing more than an exercise in a self-deception on the part of the author.

It is utterly bewildering to learn that Leenco devoted his life to something he had never believed in, when one reads "the creation of one's independent state is not an end in itself, for me. This much has now been recognized even by the present rulers. There are those who, by overlooking this fact, still consider talking about 'independent Oromia' as a testimony to one's ultra-nationalism"<sup>1</sup>. The petty trick of silencing freedom fighters aside, the message of this statement is not clear. Is it democracy, development, peace for Oromia, or all of them? Or is the independence of Oromia which does not also include all the colonized nations and nationalities in the Horn of Africa or probably Africa at large not acceptable to him? A more relevant question to ask is on whose side is Leenco? Is Leenco on the side of Oromo freedom fighters, or the Abyssinian colonists? We do not have to go to a great length to find an answer since he had answered this question himself.

Leenco breaks the heart of genuine freedom fighters who once believed him and demonstrates on whose side he is, when he states “if it is demonstrated that the internal EPRDF space is accommodative enough, other more capable and committed individuals will increasingly be drawn to join TPLF’s surrogate parties. An EPRDF that practices democracy internally will become much more confident to engage in democratic competition as a possible alternative to the present reality of clinging to power by sheer force.”<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, Leenco in his book, exposes his hidden agenda and clarifies where he stands when he says “I have personally come to the conclusion that the survival of the Oromo people has come to depend on democratizing and stabilizing not only the Ethiopian state, but also the entire Horn region.”<sup>23</sup> The core issue here is not whether Ethiopia is democratic or not. Democracy in Britain or France did not make one bit of a difference for their colonial subjects. And to be sure, democratization cannot be substituted for decolonization unless the intention of those who are calling for it is deliberately to confuse others. Contrary to Leenco’s conviction, it is in the best interest of the Oromos that Ethiopia remains destabilized until the decolonization of Oromia has taken place.

As to Leenco’s doubt about the survival of the Oromos, let us look below at one typical passage in his book. “If the world powers are really interested in the survival of the Ethiopian state, as they continue to indicate, then they should do everything possible to put back on track the derailed democratization and decolonization process.”<sup>24</sup> When was it in Ethiopia that democratization and decolonization were on track and at what point did the derailment take place? I hope Leenco is not referring to the July 1991 drafting of the “Transitional Charter of Ethiopia”, since the Charter only succeeded in putting the TPLF on track to power. As he repeatedly claims in his book, one cannot undermine Leenco’s input in the task of drafting the Charter. Now, which one of his two self-contradictory statements is very dear to the heart of Leenco, the survival of Oromos or the survival of the Ethiopian state.

We do not have to scratch our heads to figure out which one it is because he has already answered the question in his book in the following manner: “..... the birth of a New Ethiopia will be realized. This is my hope and wish.”<sup>5</sup> Essentially, Leenco is advocating nipping in the bud the creation of an independent Oromia. At last, Leenco has mustered enough courage to abandon his former clandestine operations and come out to openly fight against Oromo freedom fighters. Since we also know that he has never been alone in his previous clandestine works, we hope his other Ethiopianist colleagues would also show similar courage and make their stand clear. In the mean time, we all have to congratulate Leenco for his courage for finally speaking out and making his choice clear to us.

If we look back, we may find that Leenco’s commitment to the creation of a New Ethiopia has been a long-standing one rather than a sudden change of mind.\* To clarify this, let me refer to issues that are in the public record and apparently part of the whole story:

1. At the exclusive meeting of the heads of delegations of EPLF, TPLF and OLF held in London in May 1991, chaired by Ambassador Herman Cohen of USA, Leenco accepted and agreed to the EPLF-TPLF forces’ entry alone to the capital city, Finfinee. It is a matter of record that the other members of OLF delegation to the London conference officially and publicly protested against that agreement.
2. At the summit meeting held between himself and Meles Zenawi in Senafe, Eritrea, in July 1991, Leenco accepted and signed off the proposition that allowed the TPLF leadership to assume and exercise the powers of state as Provisional Government of Ethiopia. Consequently, he made sure that his name goes down in the annals of history as the first Oromo leader who capitulated to the dictates of a colonial power and thus consented to the continued subjugation of his own people to colonial domination.

- 3 Even though in the Council of Representatives of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia the OLF had a minority vote that might not have made a difference in the policy formulation, it was a breach of trust of the Oromo people for Leenco to use his position of influence and force other Oromo delegates to vote with him in favor of the article that empowered the TPLF army to be the sole defense force of Ethiopia thus rendering all other fighting forces illegal to carry even a weapon for self-defense.

In all the fore-stated three instances, the TPLF had the endorsements of Leenco. Yet, these are only a few picks from the official and public records. Is it not difficult to see why Leenco is admired in certain quarters for his wisdom and willingness to negotiate and reach agreements on matters concerning the Horn of Africa?

The challenges ahead for the Oromo's struggle for independence has been moving one step forward and two steps backward owing to the stabs-in-the-back by a few fifth columnists. It hurts to witness when fellow Oromos willingly convert themselves into convenient tools of the enemy, with which uncountable number of our brothers and sisters are targeted for torture and massacre. The number of those working with hidden agendas is not easy to determine. It is increasingly becoming more difficult to figure out on which side one is, whether or not one is forging ahead or dragging one's feet when it comes to the Oromo struggle. Appeals for Oromo unity are invoked frequently to disorient and confuse while contradictory information is disseminated to create chaos and instability at every point. Everyone typically hurls symbolic attacks on the TPLF for credibility purposes. Meanwhile, the Wayne's objective to paralyze and dismantle genuine Oromo organizations are being faithfully executed. Since the Ethiopianist elements who once had their hands stained with blood continue to fight for their hidden, it is no wonder that genuine fighters confront serious challenges within their own organization. Surely, for the ordinary freedom fighter, the choice is clear: free Oromia or death; and never be disarmed by the army of the TPLF and be escorted to resettlement.

Lencho's proposal of democratization of the Ethiopian state has never been the stated goal of OLF. To be sure, the Oromo issue is not a domestic issue of Ethiopia. It is strictly a colonial question which is an international issue by its own right. Decolonization is the right point of departure for the journey toward a genuine and workable solution. Seeking a short cut through democratization of an empire is a cruel policy meant to defeat the real issue of liberation. Besides it is an elusive and an unrealistic goal.

In the end, there is no question that the sons and daughters of Oromia will restore the human dignity Oromos have been robbed of for the last eleven decades. The independence of Oromia and the emergence in North-East Africa of the Oromo as a viable polity in proportion to its resources and numerical weight is inevitable. It is a high time for Oromos to demand recognition and representation at the UN and other international organizations and bring to an end the relative obscurity of the struggles for decolonization of Oromia.

*Makonnen Galan\*\**

\*Today, it is an important task to demystify Leecho Lata as a contribution to the liberation struggle of the Oromo people

\*\* Originally presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> Conference of Oromo Studies Association (OSA), York University, Toronto/Ontario, Canada, August 29-30, 2000

1. Lata, Leenco *The ETHIOPLAN STATE at the CROSSROADS : Decolonization & Democritation?* (Asmara, ERITREA: The Red Sea Press, Inc , 999) P. 242
2. IBID. P. 232
3. Ibid. P. 244
4. Ibid. P. 251
5. Ibid P.252

BOOK REVIEWS

---

*The Gabra: Camel Nomads of Northern Kenya* by Paul Tablino. Translated and illustrated by Cynthia Salvadori. Paulines Publications Africa, PO Box 49026, Nairobi, Kenya. 1999. Pp. 434, ISBN 9966-21-438-0. US\$8.

*Being Oromo in Kenya* by Mario Aguilar. Africa World Press, Inc., PO Box 1892, Trenton, NJ 08607, USA & PO Box 48, Asmara, Eritrea. 1998. Pp 273. ISBN 0-86543-569-3. US\$ 19.95

*Pastoralists, Ethnicity and the State in Ethiopia* edited by Richard Hogg. Haan Publishing, London. 1997. Pp 182. ISBN 1 874209421. £12.95.

Research into the contemporary cultures and social organizations of the peoples who speak the Boorana branch of afaan Oromo continues to produce a crop of excellent publications. The ethnography in the monographs of both Tablino and Aguilar is so rich and “thick” that I cannot summarize either briefly: I only attempt to indicate the range and the richness. Both books demonstrate the crucial importance of poetic ritual language for the maintenance of continuing identities.

Paul Tablino has spent the best part of thirty-five years as a humble missionary, friend and scholar with the thirty five thousand or so Gabra of Kenya. His unassuming and concisely written book is packed with meticulously collected cultural and social data, especially on traditional ritual and belief. The author revises his 1980 Italian monograph and complements it with a great deal of new material, of which that on Gabra history is especially valuable. The powers of the description and of the analysis, which could only have been achieved through close residence and language fluency, lie in the subtle complexities of the ritual and symbolic interconnections, which he explicates. Part 1, “A Description”, consists of seven chapters; an overview of Gabra daily life and social organization; celestial calendars and their ceremonies; the luuba system; the life cycle; fables myths and legends; songs, hymns and prayers and chronology. Part II, “An Analytical Interpretation”,

consists of a “tentative” outline history, an analysis of the six basic concepts of aada, luba, jila, nagaya, rooba and waaqa and a “Conclusion”. Part III consists of a sixty-four page “Glossary of Cultural Terms” and a shorter “Botanical Glossary”, both of which will entrance all Oromo speakers. But, though rooted in knowledge of tradition, this is not an antiquarian book and deals with present cultural and political realities and dilemmas, such as the consequences of enforced sedentarisation and “the volatile politics of the Horn”. Cynthia Salvadori provides a vivacious translation and also contributes dozens of small, explanatory line drawings; they enhance the text and their production engaged many Gabra, who were anxious to check their accuracy. If you have trouble getting a copy look up *St Paul Multimedia* or *Daughters of St Paul* or *Librairie Saint-Paul* in the telephone directory and badger the nearest local branch to stock it.

Tablino argues, I think conclusively, that the five Gabra phratries **gosa** are made up of descendants of camel herding peoples (including some Boran) who, though they became part of the Borana hegemony and adopted **afaan Boorana**, have maintained a distinctive cultural identity since at least the early nineteenth century. Indeed, it has probably been the dominating presence of the Boran, which has caused the Gabra to stress the differences, which they perceive as marking their own distinctive identity. A crucial feature of that identity has been the maintenance of cycles of rituals in which, though they are not Muslims, the retention of remnants of Islamic vocabulary and symbolic resonance has been central, as they have also been in domestic rituals. Sadly, contemporary competition for grazing and water, aggravated by political factionalism, is causing the relatively small differences to be stressed. Recently there have been armed affrays between Boran and Gabra young men, something that would have been hardly imaginable fifty years ago.

Those Boran who live around the Waso Nyiro River in the Garba Tula and Merti divisions of Isiolo District in Kenya are also on the periphery of the Oromo world. Mario Aguilar concentrates on understanding and explaining why, after some years of rejection, there has been a public “revival” of traditional religious responses to the events and tribulations of daily life. His sensitive analysis demonstrates

how deep a hold Oromo values have retained on the consciousness of Waso Boran. This study is a major contribution to our understanding of both the diversity of Oromo and to comparative religious studies.

In the 1930's the colonial government, in an endeavor to limit affrays with Somali over water, forcibly moved those Boran who used the deep wells of Wajir to the Waso River area. They prospered there and lived well from their herds and flocks without resort to wage labor, cultivation or relief. But they were cut off from their fellow Boran of Marsabit, Moyale and Ethiopia. The prosperous generation, which reached maturity on the Waso, some of whom were already Muslims, abandoned **gaada**, lost touch with the Kaallu, adopted many Somali customs and embraced Islam with enthusiasm. The Somali appeared to be favored by the colonial government and increasingly prosperous and ascendant. In the early fifties many elders told me that they had become only part or half Boran **nuus Booran** which meant, by implication, that they were becoming part Somali. Islam had become "the foundation of their identity."

At Kenya Independence in 1963 the Boran of the Waso were trapped between Somali guerillas, who were fighting for the incorporation of Muslim northern Kenya into Somalia, and the Kenyan army. From 1963 to 1969 they endured an awful period of guerilla warfare, enforced sedentarisation and internment in camps under guard. Their herds and flocks were almost totally destroyed either by starvation or by slaughter by the army. Many, many families were reduced to absolute poverty from which they have not recovered. For some years the social and moral order appeared to have collapsed. This period of suffering was named **Gaaf Daaba-**"the time of stop" and recalled as being as awful a time as the great rinderpest epidemic and famine of the 1880's known as **tiite cinac guraaca**.

Aguilar distinguishes three generations;- the older, who were brought up as practising Muslims; the middle, who matured during **Gaaf Daaba** and its consequences, and have become apathetic to an Islam which appeared to have failed them; the younger who have attended school and have grown up with little instruction in Islam. The middle and younger generations have vigorously rejected any idea of union



with Somali and seek to reestablish *ada Boorana* and community with fellow Boran to the north. They are creating a syncretic system of communal and domestic rituals, through which to seek God's blessings, which accommodates both Islam and *ada*. All, whatever their generation or education, sensibly hold that restocking and the maintenance of **Nagaa BQorana** are both crucial to their economic survival and to the maintenance of cultural continuity. In Part I the author analyses the communal rituals of **Waqlal** the naming ceremony and those of weddings, burials and funerals. In Part II he analyses prayers, blessings, the **Buna Qalla** and the **Ayyaana** cult.

The collection edited by Richard Hogg, who has earlier written extensively on the Boran of the Waso, contains the following essays which must fascinate all those interested in Oromo studies. The editor's Introduction is the best account I know of the present parlous position of pastoralists in Ethiopia and what needs to be done to alleviate their sufferings and even, hopefully, permit some development. Three essays centre on Boran; - Marco Bassi on "Returnees in Moyale District, Southern Ethiopia: New Means for an Old Inter-Ethnic Game"; Johan Helland on "Development Interventions and Pastoral Dynamics in Southern Ethiopia" and Claudia Futterknecht's "Diary of a Drought: The Borana of Southern Ethiopia, 1990-1993".

*PTW Baxter*  
*University of Manchester, UK*

**OBITUARY - FATHER DR. LAMBERT BARTELS. 1915 -2000.**

Abba Lambert, as he was known to his many Oromo friends, died at peace on the second of October 2000 in The Netherlands. He left Finfine in November 1999 because his physical health was failing, but his heart and his thoughts remained among the Oromo. **Oromo Religion**, his major work, is dedicated “to the Oromo people” to whom he dedicated so much of his life. For many years under the Derg his book was not available in Ethiopia and he was under surveillance by the security police; indeed, for a time, he gave up his home leave for fear that if he left the country he might not be allowed to return.

Lambert Bartels was ordained a Lazarist priest in 1941. His ambition, from the time he first went to Seminary, had been to become a missionary but the Second World War, and then the tuberculosis, which he contracted during it, stopped this. Instead, he served as a teacher at the Seminary and as a controversial theologian. In 1959 he was judged fit enough for mission work and went to work among the indigenous people of Brazil. He soon decided that to be an effective priest he needed to understand the culture of his parishioners: therefore, when he returned to The Netherlands on leave, he became a part time student of cultural anthropology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. When he returned to Brazil he discovered that his Indian parishioners had suffered savage exploitation and nearly total destruction. He was distressed and outraged but found that his protests were unheard and that there was nothing he could do to help or to ease the suffering of the survivors. He was moved to Wollega in 1967 where, among the Macha Oromo, he found the pastoral love and intellectual challenge, which lasted for the rest of his life.

By 1969, when we first met, Lambert was well into his research and had already drafted and circulated his first two papers. During our conversations it soon became apparent that his consuming interest was to “attempt to understand” *Oromo Religion*, as the subtitle of the book later put it. He empathised with the spiritual experiences and theological subtleties, which his informants recounted to him. It would be

presumptuous and patronising, he felt, to present his own “interpretations” of Oromo traditional mystical experiences as theirs so, instead, he sought to make those experiences accessible to readers in the words and in the contexts in which he had heard and recorded them; to let his informants speak for themselves. This was not a conventional way to proceed in comparative theology nor in anthropology (and also extremely difficult in practice) The bulk of the book is a “compendium of short chapters” each devoted to a topic eg; Waqa, Ayana, Maram, Purification, Peacemaking, Buna Qala and Saffu Together the chapters present a “cultural ethnography... and social history of the western Oromo” which, by “the amassing of commentary, texts, metaphors and aphorisms does provide tangible evidence for a religious discourse of enduring importance among them ...and a valuable document of an authentic and self-identifying past.” (Wendy James in *Journal of Religion in Africa* 17: 180-183).

Abba Lambert continued his “attempt to understand” and to collect data and to write until the end. Less than a month before he died he wrote to me about his research notes and his current reflections on Oromo religious experience. But the more he learned the more he felt there was to learn. One can only wish that he had been less humble and had published more of his store of knowledge. Aneesa Kassam and Gemetchu Megersa are editing a volume of essays in memory of Abba Lambert.

Abba Lambert donated his collection of tape recordings of Oromo texts and his discussions with Oromo on religious topics to the John Rylands University of Manchester, M13 9PP and deposited a second set with the Instituto Universitario Orientale, Seminario di Studi Africani, Piazza S Giovanni Maggiore 30, 80134, Napoli

## References

- Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia**  
**An Attempt to Understand** Collectanea Instituti Anthropos. Vol 8. Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Berlin. 1983 (second edition 1990). ISBN 3-496-00671-4 “Birth customs and birth songs of the Macha Galla”.  
*Ethnology*, 1969, Vol 8, No 1: 406-422. “Studies of the Galla in

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

Wallaga”, **Journal of Ethiopian Studies**, 1970. Vol 8, 1: 135-160.  
“Dabo, a form of cooperation between farmers among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia: Social Aspects, Songs and Ritual”, **Anthropos**, 1975. Vol 70:883-925. “On pilgrimage to a Holy Tree”, in David Brokensha (ed), **A River of Blessings**: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University 1994,1- 13.

*PTW Baxter*

*University of Manchester, UK*

## BOOK REVIEW

---

*Reminiscences of My Life* by Emmanuel Abraham (Oslo, Norway: Lunde Forlag, 1994), pp. 343.

*Reminiscences of My Life* by Emmanuel Abraham is divided into two parts: the first part, covered in 14 chapters, deals with Emmanuel Abraham's educational background, teaching experience, and 35 years of service in the government of Emperor Haile Selassie in ten different positions and his nine months detention in 1974/75. Part Two deals with the growth and development of the Mekane Yesus Church under his able leadership. In fact, the author began writing his reminiscences in 1985 after he completed his service in the Mekane Yesus Church. The Amharic draft of the work was completed in 1990 and its English translation completed in March 1993, shortly before his 80th birthday (p. 9). Emmanuel Abraham has been blessed with good health, long life, deep Christian faith, discipline of hard work, and remarkable skill in improving organizational effectiveness and the ability to express his thoughts clearly both orally and in writing in Amharic as well as in English. He is a self-made man, who started from a very humble background and made it to a position of power and wealth within the Ethiopian bureaucracy, whose daughter was allowed to marry the grandson of Emperor Haile Selassie, thus becoming a member of the royal family.

Emmanuel Abraham was born on March 17, 1913, in the Babbo area, Boji sub-district (Wallaga) to an Oromo peasant family. His father Abraham Tato was baptized and became a member of a Swedish Evangelical Church congregation. He was among the first generation of Oromo who was instructed to read and write in the Oromo language before the beginning of the twentieth century. In those days, the Swedish Evangelical Mission played a very crucial role in the spread of literacy in the Oromo language. The hero, who translated the Bible into the Oromo language and started modern education in the Oromo language in Wallaga was Onesimus Nasib (pp. 294-295).

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

Emmanuel Abraham was admitted to the Swedish Evangelical Mission School at the age of 5 in Boji (p. 13), where he received instruction mainly in the Oromo language. Although he was exposed to literacy in the Oromo language early in his life, Emmanuel neither shows his mastery of his mother tongue, nor pride in it, nor interest in using it. Only in 1974, while in detention at the 4th army camp in Addis Ababa did he mention giving lessons in the Oromo language (for a few weeks) to about a dozen of his fellow prisoners for one hour every morning (p. 234). Ironically, Amharized Oromo Nationals in positions of power, including Emmanuel Abraham discovered the importance of using the Oromo language only after they lost power and influence within the Ethiopian bureaucracy.

Emmanuel Abraham came to Addis Ababa at the age of 12 and joined Tafari Makonnen Boarding School. Upon completion of his six years of studies (1925-1931), his teachers recommended to the then Minister of Education that he should be sent abroad to continue his studies. He was denied that opportunity and the period of his formal education ended in 1931. Since then he was mainly a self-taught man, who made a remarkable spiritual and intellectual journey that elevated his social status and brought him into the service of Haile Selassie's government.

Emmanuel Abraham was the headmaster of Asbe Tafari (Chiro in Chercher) school from 1931-1935. In his own words: "There was nothing in my long years (42) of service that gave me more pleasure than my work at Asbe Tafari school" (p. 27). However, he failed to mention that all his students were children of Neftanna (armed settlers) whose fathers lorded over the downtrodden Oromo gabbars (serfs). In fact, Emmanuel Abraham never mentioned a single word about the plight and sufferings of the Oromo peasants while he lived in Asbe Tafari. Most probably he passed as an Amhara.

When Doctor Worqneh, the governor of the Chercher district, was appointed ambassador to England in 1935, he took Emmanuel Abraham with him to England. That was the beginning of his slow rise to a position of power within the Ethiopian political establishment. Emmanuel Abraham came in contact with Emperor Haile Selassie, while

the latter was in exile in England (1936-1940). He impressed the Emperor with his 1937 speech (p. 43) in which he condemned the Muslims and pagans for inflicting hardship on Christian Ethiopia. He did not mention by name, the pagans who attacked Christian Ethiopia, but he revealed his hatred for Islam and the Muslims, when stating that "... the Muslims had tried to destroy us for a thousand years" (p. 134). This implies that since the introduction of Islam into Ethiopia, probably a thousand years ago, the Muslims were trying to destroy Christian Ethiopia, more accurately Abyssinia. This is historically inaccurate to say the least. It was only during the time of Imam Ahmad (known as Ahmad Gran, 1529-1543), that the Muslims tried to destroy Christianity in Abyssinia. During the reign of Emperors Amda-Siyon (1314-1344), Zara Yaeqob (1434-1468), Tewodros (1855-1868), and Yohannes (1872-1889), Abyssinian leaders made systematic efforts at destroying Muslims and in uprooting Islam from Abyssinia.

Emmanuel Abraham served as Secretary for the Government Affairs in London from 1939-1943. He returned to Ethiopia in 1943. To keep him busy, the Emperor ordered Emmanuel "... to translate from English into Amharic a book on etiquette (i.e. on rules for polite behavior in a good society, p. 56). Emmanuel was nominated for a position of vice Minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, because of his Oromo background, his evangelical faith and lack of supporters in Court circles, priority was given to a Shawan Amhara who was appointed Vice Minister (p. 59). That individual was Aklilou, who hated the Oromo and worked against Emmanuel Abraham for the next three decades until both of them were detained together by the military in 1974. Emmanuel Abraham was appointed Director General in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Ato Aklilou showed me a room in which there was neither a table nor a chair. I told him to request the Emperor to order a table and a chair to be provided. He did that and a table with a chair with one arm broken was supplied on loan" (p. 59). From the above, two things are crystal clear. First, it was the Emperor who decided on all governmental matters from big to small. It was this which made the Ethiopian bureaucracy ineffective and unresponsive to the needs of the people. Second, Aklilou did not want Emmanuel

Abraham to work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Consequently, he was transferred and served as Director General in the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts (1944-1947). It was while serving in that capacity that Emmanuel Abraham made an interesting observation about the Amhara ruling class' attitude towards modern education in general and the education of the Oromo, in particular.

... slanders and rumors were put about within a year of my transfer to the Ministry of Education on the pretence that they were concerned for the welfare of the several persons who presented complaints to the Emperor orally and in writing. Since he was following my activities closely, the Emperor gave appropriate replies to all their complaints. Nonplussed, they resorted to a stratagem. They spread a report in 1947 which said 'Emmanuel educates only Gallas.' They got together and went to the Emperor to accuse me of this. In reality they were indirectly accusing His Majesty since he was the Minister of Education. While their aim was to halt the spread of education, it was an intrigue to get me discredited and dismissed on the ostensible grounds that large numbers of Gallas were going to school to make the so-called Amharas feel neglected and offended.

The Emperor realized this and was vexed. He, therefore, went one day without my knowledge, to a school which had the largest number of students and directed the headmaster to make a list of the pupils in ethnic groups and present it to him. He did that and out of a total of 991 pupils, 701 said they were Amharas. The rest came from the various ethnic groups. The Emperor showed this, and after telling me why he had asked for it, commanded me to get him in ethnic groups a list of all the pupils in Addis Ababa schools. I presented a complete list in a few days. In April 1947, 4,795 students attended the Addis Ababa schools, of those 3055 said they were Amharas and the remaining 1,740 were from the other ethnic groups. Of these, 583 said they were Gallas. On the basis of this, it was obvious that the great majority of the students of that period were not Gallas, but Amharas (pp. 63-64).

On June 6, 1947, Emmanuel Abraham received the following message from Emperor Haile Selassie: "We are exceedingly pleased with your work, wait until we give you another important work." Almost



two years had to elapse while I awaited the work” (p. 65). During the two years, when he was paid salary without work, Emmanuel Abraham was ordered by the Emperor to translate into the Amharic language, Sir Harold Nicolson’s *Diplomacy*, which was published after a long delay in 1964. From 1949 to 1952, Emmanuel Abraham served as Minister Plenipotentiary in New Delhi, India. Although he was a disciplined, hardworking man, he showed his lack of diplomatic skills by making statements that angered many people. Let me mention just two examples. First he writes that “... although Ethiopians are Africans they cannot be placed on the same level as the pagans who live in the south and east Africa” (p. 71). This implies that Ethiopians are superior to Africans in the south and east Africa. What Emmanuel Abraham does not realize is that the people he insults as pagans in the south and east Africa are actually either Muslims or Christians and they enjoy a better standard of living than the peoples of Ethiopia, who are the poorest of the poor in the world. Secondly, Emmanuel Abraham argues that the “mentally immature people [of Ethiopia] should be protected from harm and the state from instability” (p. 74). It is not the peoples of Ethiopia who are mentally immature, but their self-appointed leaders, who harm them. The people need protection not from external enemies, but from the Ethiopian state itself.

After his return from India, Emperor Haile Selassie ordered Emmanuel Abraham to translate into Amharic, Wilfred Harrison’s *The Government of Britain*, which he did successfully. He served as Ambassador Plenipotentiary in Rome (1952-1955), during which time he played a very important role in the negotiations for reparation for the Italian fascist aggression of 1935-1941 (pp. 96-122). He served as Ethiopia’s Ambassador in London from 1955-1959. He acquired a well earned and deserving reputation for efficiency, upright moral character, and commitment to his work. It was this man, the Amhara officials targeted for destruction. It was Haile Selassie himself who saved Emmanuel Abraham from his enemies.

Though unable to repress the intrigues that were constantly devised against me, he had been my supporter and protector because he knew I had no friends around him. He had helped and encouraged me in all

I had done. He had never left me at the mercy of those who hated and slandered me. And above all, even though he was aware I am neither highborn and endowed with wealth, he had shown the regard and good will he had for my family before the whole Ethiopian people by consenting to the marriage of his grandson to my daughter (p. 127).

Even though Sara's marriage to Commodore Iskender Desta, ended in divorce, as rapidly as it was arranged it brought a great deal of pride and satisfaction for Emmanuel Abraham and other members of his family.

Emmanuel Abraham served as Chief of Political Affairs in Haile Selassie's private Cabinet from 1959-1961. He made an interesting observation about the Ethiopian government of the day:

Whether by design or accident, many of the persons chosen as first to head the sections of the Cabinet were born outside Shoa in other parts of Ethiopia. The officials of the Ministry of Pen were men born in Shoa..... The man who was Minister of Pen in those days and his brothers as well as his predecessors in that office and their likes were obsessed with the notion that the state belonged to Shoa and that they were most loyal to the throne . they had determined and striven to reserve all the key positions, if not all power of the state for natives of Shoa as a monopoly. A glance at the lists of appointments of ministers, governors general and district governors from 1941 onward is sufficient evidence for this (p. 178).

From 1961-1974, Emmanuel Abraham served as the Minister of posts, telegraphs and telephones, the Minister of Communications and the Minister of mines, respectively. Emmanuel Abraham brings to light endless intrigues and machinations of Amhara officials which eventually destroyed them and Emperor Haile Selassie himself in 1974. Prime Minister Tsefai Tizaz Aklilou, was the master of intrigue and machinations. It was he who destroyed the Macha and Tulama Association and its leaders such as General Tadesse Biru, Haile Mariam Gemedo and Mamo Mazamir. Ironically, Prime Minister Aklilou himself was destroyed by a machination of a member of his cabinet, who "..... spread rumors that Aklilou would be killed unless he relinquished power

forthwith” (p 227). The Prime Minister panicked and tendered his resignation to the Emperor on February 27, 1974 at 6:00 p.m.

On hearing his entreaty, the Emperor asked, ‘What is that caused you to ask for a release?’ They are after us, not you : seeking to flatter the monarch as was his habit, Aklilou said, ‘Your majesty, you are the life of Ethiopia who will hurt you?’ The Emperor enjoined ‘Very well then, go and prepare a communique.... There upon a few men got together and prepared the announcement. It was read out and his majesty ordered that it be announced over the radio. This was done at 8:00 p.m. (p. 228).

To complete the tragedy of the Amhara officials’ machinations, the Oxford-educated New Prime Minister Lij Endalkachew Makonnen had the former Prime Minister and his Cabinet members detained (p. 230).

I heard later that Aklilou protested to the Emperor with deep emotions and said, ‘How could you condemn us to death after we have served you for so long’ and that the monarch did not utter a word’ (p. 230).

Shortly after, the New Prime Minister and members of his Cabinet were detained. On September 11, 1974, Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed and he too was detained. That marked the end of the ancient order in Ethiopia and the beginning of a new era. It also marked the end of Part One of Emmanuel Abraham’s book.

Part two deals entirely with his role in the Mekane Yesus Church. He became a member of this church’s congregation on his return from Britain in 1943 and as the President of the congregation, he had laid the foundation of the new church building before his departure for India in 1949 (p. 128). He retained his membership while on his diplomatic tours abroad, played a very important role in the development of relations with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and attended all African Lutheran Conference as the delegate of Mekane Yesus Church (p. 242). He was elected and served as a member of the Federation’s Executive Committee until 1963. He was again elected as a member of LWF Assembly in Dare-Salaam, Tanzania in 1977 and served

## JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

on it until 1984. In short, Emmanuel Abraham served for 27 successive years (1957-1984) in the LWF on behalf of the Mekane Yesus Church (p. 243). Under his able leadership the Mekane Yesus Church was able to establish the famous Radio Voice of the Gospel and other institutions.

Emmanuel Abraham recognizes the important role Qes Gudina Tumsa played in the growth and development of the Mekane Yesus Church. However, the following statement leaves a lot to be desired “Qes Gudina was suddenly abducted on July 25 by unknown persons. Strenuous, but unsuccessful efforts were made to find his whereabouts, and we were compelled to consider him as no longer in this world (p. 252). Qes Gudina Tumsa was a great Oromo Nationalist and the best leader of Mekane Yesus Church. He was abducted, tortured, and executed by the Ethiopian military government’s security agents.

Emmanuel Abraham also mentions the unique role Onesimus Naslb played in the translation of the Bible into the Oromo language, (p. 294) his establishment of formal schooling and instruction in gospel, and the punishment he suffered at the hands of the Ethiopian orthodox church authorities.

Onesimus was under strict control not to preach at any gathering of people and not to teach anyone even in his house, except his children. He lived, therefore, under acute stress in Naqamte for almost 18 years. A church was built in Naqamte. It became the inception of the Naqamte Mekane Yesus Church and taught the gospel every week until his death on June 19, 1931 (p. 295).

Finally, Emmanuel Abraham’s *Reminiscences* contains interesting information about Haile Selassie’s government and its inner workings. It also contains a great deal of information about the growth and development of the Mekane Yesus Church. In short, it is an interesting, informative, and a useful autobiography.

*Mohammed Hassen*  
*Georgia State University*

## BOOK REVIEW

---

*Historical Dictionary of Djibouti* by Daoud A. Alwan and Yohanis Mibrathu (Lenham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2000), pp. 163, price / cloth \$60 00

*Historical Dictionary of Djibouti* is part of an African Historical Dictionaries Series, Number 82. It is the latest Scarecrow's African Series, which is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the Republic of Djibouti. It contains useful political, economic, social, cultural, historical and geographical information about Djibouti. This dictionary was written by Daude A. Alwan and Yohanis Mibrathu, who were born, grew up in Djibouti, and received a French university education. As educated citizens of Djibouti, the authors have a good knowledge of their country and its position in the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa. Djibouti is both the name of the capital city as well as that of the republic that came into existence in 1977. Djibouti, located at the crossroads of Africa and the Middle East, is the smallest, and the poorest in terms of resources and the least densely populated country in the Horn of Africa. Ironically, this tiny country, which lacks a resource base, has been an island of relative stability in the politically unstable Horn of Africa.

Most of the 630,000 people of Djibouti, live in the capital city, where most of the modern educational facilities are located. It is also here where Modern amenities, a thriving business community, port facilities are found and where the working class and foreign communities live. Apart from political refugees from the neighboring countries, Arab and Greek merchants and French Nationals, the population of Djibouti are divided into two ethnic groups: The Afar and Issa, who are part of the Cushitic language speaking family of peoples and who have lived in the Horn of Africa for thousands of years. Both the Afar and the Somalis are distantly related to the Oromo, who are the single largest Cushitic language speaking people. The Afar are estimated to be around two million and they live "... in a triangle-shaped area between Djibouti,

Ethiopia, and Eritrea” (p. 8). “The Issa, who belong to the Deer group, are the northern most of the six Somali clans” They live in the territory “straddling Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti” (p. 67)

Both the Afar and the Issa follow a nomadic way of life, as their hot, semi-arid territory, with its poor quality soil and a very scanty rainfall of four to ten inches (p. 48) annually makes agricultural activity almost non-existent. The economy of Djibouti is based mainly on commerce, port facilities and the railroad that links Djibouti with Addis Ababa (Finfinnee). The Republic of Djibouti is the only country in Africa that does not have the potential to produce enough food for its people. In fact, I do not know of any other country where agriculture accounts only for two percent of the gross domestic product as it does in Djibouti. Even this insignificant agricultural sector is based on small-scale farming projects developed by under paid Ethiopian refugees (p.8) consisting mainly of Oromo peasants, who have fled from the crude and cruel Ethiopian colonial tyranny. It is interesting to note in passing that the city of Djibouti depends heavily on fruits, vegetables and chat produced by Oromo peasants in Hararghe. Unfortunately, however, Oromo refugees are the most badly treated refugees in Djibouti. What political authorities in Djibouti have been doing to the Oromo refugees is like biting the hands that feed their people.

It was in 1862 that French diplomats signed a treaty of friendship with local chiefs in the small town of Obock at the entrance of the gulf of Tajourah in Northern Djibouti. When L. Lagarde was appointed the governor of Obock and its dependencies, he moved the capitol to Djibouti. That decision was motivated by the need for fresh water, safe deep water harbor, and “... the need for an easier and safer access to the Ethiopian hinterland” (p. 84). It was that decision which led to the foundation of the city of Djibouti in 1877 and the inauguration of the port of Djibouti in 1888. The protectorate of Djibouti got its economic boost with the signing of the treaty for the construction of Djibouti-Addis Ababa railroad in 1897. The railroad reached the village of Dire Dawa in 1903, transforming it to a dynamic commercial center in Hararghe, which eclipsed and replaced the city of Harar as the commercial capitol of the region. The railroad linking Djibouti to Addis

Ababa was completed only in 1917, an event that was followed by the transformation of Djibouti from a protectorate into a French colony. Since 1917, the single tract railroad from Djibouti to Addis Ababa has been the life-blood of Djibouti's economy, and the main artery for Ethiopia's import and export businesses. The railroad also gave birth to several towns between Addis Ababa and Djibouti, including Dire Dawa, Awash, Adama (Nazareth), Mojjo, Bishoftu, and several smaller ones. Ironically, the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railroad, which revolutionized economic development both in Djibouti as well as in Ethiopia ".... is today the least developed although much used, means of transport" (p. 41).

It goes without saying that France has played a very crucial role in Djibouti's historical development, from 1877 to 1977, when that land gained independence and since then. Hassan Gouled Aptidon, who was born in northern Somalia played a very important role in shaping the modern history of Djibouti. During the 1960s and in the Referendum of 1967, he favored Djibouti remaining a French colony. The reason for that was his fear of the ambition of Ethiopia and Somalia, both of whom were aspiring to annex Djibouti. It was in June 1977, when Djibouti gained independence and adopted the name of the Republic of Djibouti. Hassan Gouled served as the first president of Djibouti from 1977 to April 1999. During the twenty-two years when he held the reins of power in Djibouti, Hassan Gouled was ".... considered to be France's closest ally in Africa" (p. 62). France provided Djibouti not only with economic assistance but also maintained a military force in that territory which deterred both Ethiopia and Somalia. Guelleh Ismael Omar, who was born in the city of Dire Dawa in 1947, served as the principal private secretary of Hassan Gouled and controlled the territory's security services. It was he who was elected as the second president of Djibouti in 1999. Guelleh Ismael Omar allied his country closer with Ethiopia than Hassan Gouled did.

There are several historical errors in the *Historical Dictionary of Djibouti*. Let me just mention a few of them. First, the authors of this dictionary claim that the port of Zeila served as the capitol of the kingdom of Adal (pp. 19, 119). This was incorrect historically. Zeila

was the famous port for all the Muslim states of southern Ethiopia including Adal, and the gate to Arabia, the birthplace of Islam. The kingdom of Adal had three different capitols in three different areas, and Zeila was not one of them. Second, the authors claim that “the ancient capitol of Adails Zeila, was first transferred to the highlands of Harar in Ethiopia following the Adails’ defeat by the Ethiopian army and then to Awsa in 1597” (p. 5). This was historically inaccurate. The capitol of Adals( which the authors incorrectly spell as Adails), was at Wahal in the lowlands of the Awash River Valley, that was transferred in 1435 to Dakar, about 70 kilometers east of the city of Harar. It was in 1520 that the capitol was once again transferred from Dakar to the city of Harar. In 1577, the ruling Harla dynasty abandoned the city of Harar and transferred its capitol to Awsa in the Afar desert. Third, the authors claim that “Adal, a 12th century Muslim kingdom that included the territory of the Republic of Djibouti, northern Somalia, and southeastern Ethiopia. Its subjects were principally Somali and Afar nomads” (p. 5). Again, this is incorrect historically. The kingdom of Adal came into existence in the fourteenth century after the ruling Walasma dynasty moved its capitol from Ifat in eastern Shaw to the Afar lowlands. The kingdom of Adal was one of the seven Muslim states in southeastern Ethiopia. The peoples of Adal included the Afar, Somali, the Adare (Hararis) the Harla, Argobo and Warjih. Of these groups the Adare and Harla were settled sedentary farmers, while the rest were nomads. Fourth, the authors of *Historical Dictionary of Djibouti* claim that the institution of *Heer* developed among the Issa “... toward the end of the 16th century, following the defeat of the Adal kingdom by the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia and the former’s subsequent breakup” (p. 63). This is historically incorrect. The institution of *Heer*, which is a political constitution as well as an oral contract, that regulated all aspects of Issa life, developed much earlier than the end of the 16th century. Its development had nothing to do with the collapse of the kingdom of Adal in 1559. Fifth the authors claim that the Walasma dynasty ruled from the 13th century to the 17th century (pp. 116-117). The Walasma dynasty lasted from 1285 to 1559, when the last Walasma sultan was executed outside the city of Harar and with that the Walasma



dynasty came to an end. Sixth, the authors claim that Ahmad Gran was defeated in 1547. He was defeated and killed in 1543 in Begameder.

Finally, despite these historical errors and minor others which are not mentioned in this review, this *Historical Dictionary of Djibouti* is a very useful reference book that provides much needed information about Djibouti.

*Mohammed Hassen*  
*Georgia State University*

JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES