

# THE JOURNAL OF OROMO STUDIES

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

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Department of Sociology  
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University of Tennessee  
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**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 from all areas of Oromo studies and related fields. Since manuscripts are evaluated by anonymous peer reviewers in the appropriate field, publishing decisions are made on the recommendation of these reviewers. It is our commitment to work with authors, and we respond 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.

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## NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

**WILLIAM I. ROBINSON** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at The University of Tennessee. He has published in such scholarly journals as *Theory and Society*, *The Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, *Race and Class*, *Third World Quarterly*, *Critical Sociology*, *Global Society*, and *Latin American Perspectives*. He has also published three books. The most recent is *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, U.S. Intervention, and Hegemony*, (Cambridge University Press).

**BONNIE K. HOLCOMB** is a Senior Research Associate at the Center for Communitarian Policy Studies of The George Washington University at Washington, D.C. She is the author of several articles on Northeast African affairs and two books, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine, 1984-1985* with Jason W. Clay and *The Invention of Ethiopia* with Sisai Ibssa.

**ASAFU JALATA** is an Associate Professor of Sociology and African and African American Studies at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He is the author of *Oromia & Ethiopia*, and the editor of *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Colonial Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy*, (Red Sea Press, forthcoming). His articles have been published in *The African Studies Review*, *Horn of Africa*, *Dialectical Anthropology*, *The Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, and *Social Justice*.

**KUWEE KUMSA** is a Researcher and Activist who currently lives in exile in Canada.

**FEYISA DEMIE** is a Principal Research Officer and Consultant. His area of interests include Social Survey, Statistical Data Management and Technological Change, and Sustainable Development in Developing Countries. He has published several articles on the Horn of Africa.

**ASSEFA KURU** is a Senior Researcher at the Finnish Forest Research Institute. He has published several articles on Africa.

**MOHAMMED HASEN** is an Associate Professor of History at Georgia State University, Atlanta. He is the author of *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860*, (Cambridge University Press), and he also published more than a dozen articles, numerous book chapters and book reviews. He was the president of the Oromo Studies Association.

## EDITORIAL OVERVIEW

This volume of the *Journal of Oromo Studies* deals with the complex issues of the Oromo problem. Contributors to the volume focus on the impacts of globalization and U.S. foreign policy on the Oromo national movement; the failure of U.S.-sponsored Ethiopian "democracy" and the emergence of Tigrayan colonial dictatorship in a multinational empire; the status of Oromo nationalism in the era of the new global order and the necessity of designing new tactics and strategies to achieve the Oromo national project; the issue of the *siqqee* institution of Oromo women and the possibility of reinventing this institution for achieving national liberation and gender equality; the problems of population and sustainable development in Oromia; the impacts of colonial development projects on environment and the colonized peoples in the Awash Valley; and the history of the Macha-Tulama Self-help Association and the importance of this association for the development of Oromo nationalism. Contributors do a superb job of addressing the complex problems of the Oromo nation and forcing us to critically understand these problems and to find pragmatic solutions.

In "Global Capitalism and the Oromo Liberation Struggle: Theoretical Notes on U.S. Policy Towards the Ethiopian Empire," Sociologist William I. Robinson explores the complex problem of the Oromo national movement in relation to the process of globalization and U.S. foreign policy, and why the United States and other Western countries have chosen to support the emergence of Tigrayan colonial dictatorship under the guise of "democracy." He critically exposes the wrong assumptions by some scholars and activists on U. S. foreign policy towards peripheral countries in general and towards Oromia and Ethiopia in particular, and explains why the capitalist world order under the leadership of the U.S. does not promote agendas of authentic democratization, human rights, social justice and national liberation in Oromia and Ethiopia.

He argues that the U.S. developed the new policy of "democracy promotion" for ideological legitimation of intervening and controlling political crises and transitions in peripheral countries to determine their outcomes for the interest of the capitalist world order and its

collaborators at the cost of the struggling and suffering populations. Robinson demonstrates that the strategy of managing crises during transitions and the policy of "democracy promotion" are needed to maintain an unjust international system through suppressing the processes of popular struggle and authentic democratization. He asserts that the main reason why the U. S. manages and finances the current crises in the Ethiopian empire by backing the emerging authoritarian Tigrayan minority regime is to suppress the popular Oromo national struggle and to intensify the exploitation and oppression of the Oromo majority. Therefore, Robinson says, there is no surprise that the U.S. assists Ethiopian colonialism and Tigrayan dictatorship at the cost of the Oromo majority and others since its intention is not to promote authentic democracy, social justice and freedom.

He suggests that although the U.S. currently uses Tigrayan authoritarianism to suppress the popular Oromo national struggle and democracy, at the same time it continues to search for establishing polyarchy or "elite democracy" in case the Oromo struggle goes out of its control. Robinson argues that as the global capitalist world order led by the U. S. makes the national liberation struggle of the Oromo complex and difficult, the Oromo popular struggle has the potential to undermine the stability of this order in Oromia and Ethiopia. He predicts that the Oromo national movement can achieve its national project in one of two possible ways: The first one is the creation of an independent Oromia. The second one is capturing central state power and transforming Ethiopia into a multinational state through establishing the Oromo majority rule. Robinson recognizes the dilemma that political liberation does not necessarily bring social equality and popular democracy for the Oromo popular forces since the capitalist world order can easily impose its logic on the emerging Oromo Revolution.

In "The Tale of Two Democracies: The Encounter Between US-Sponsored Ethiopian 'Democracy' and Indigenous Oromo Democratic Forms," Anthropologist Bonnie K. Holcomb identifies and examines the consequences of the encounter between U. S.-sponsored Ethiopian "democracy" and Oromo democracy, and demonstrates with concrete analysis and evidence how the former lacked democratic elements in form and content and was implemented to suppress Oromo nationalism

and its democratic manifestation in violation of Oromo human rights. Her arguments further demonstrates Robinson's theoretical arguments on U.S. foreign policy towards Oromia and Ethiopia. Holcomb documents how the U. S. -sponsored Ethiopian "democracy" violently suppressed the popular Oromo national struggle and its democratic manifestation in Oromia. She explains the main features of Oromo democracy known as **Gada** and shows how the Oromo people compared the standards of their democratic heritage with that of the U. S.-sponsored Ethiopian "democracy" and discovered that the U. S. government and the Tigrayan regime collaborated to renew the dependent colonial relationship between Oromia and Ethiopia.

Holcomb exposes the cultural arrogance of the Tigrayan elite and the U.S. political operatives and theorists, who convinced themselves that the Oromo people do not understand the authentic meaning of democracy. These wrong assumptions, according to Holcomb, made the Tigrayan elite and these political operatives and theorists think that they could impose the Tigrayan colonial dictatorship on the Oromo in the guise of democracy, and establish consensual domination. Holcomb argues that the U. S. policy has intensified the historical and contemporary contradictions between the Ethiopian colonizers and the colonized Oromo rather than solving them; consequently, it has forced the independent Oromo nation liberation fronts to take arms against the Tigrayan regime and to continue the armed struggle. Further, she says, the repression of the Oromo by the U. S. allied Tigray/EPRDF has sharpened the development of Oromo nationalism and resulted in conflict and instability. Both Holcomb and Robinson assert that the U.S. effort to "democratize" Ethiopia and to establish stability failed and led to the renewal of colonial relationships and the intensification of the Oromo national struggle.

Asafa Jalata's essay, "Oromo Nationalism in the New Global Context," illustrates how structural and conjunctural factors are causing ideological and organizational crises in the Oromo national movement, at a time when this movement is emerging as a formidable political force in the dying Ethiopian empire. Jalata explains that the allying of the United States and other Western countries with the Tigrayan minority regime to suppress the nationalism of the Oromo majority has forced the

Oromo to intensify their struggle in armed, political, cultural and intellectual fronts to determine the self-determination of Oromia. He notes that the maturation of Oromo nationalism has enabled the Oromo to achieve a major ideological victory over Habasha cultural, intellectual and ideological hegemony. Jalata also indicates that this new development is challenging all sectors of Oromo society to overcome their ideological crises and organizational weaknesses and to achieve the Oromo national project.

Jalata explores how capitalism produced both globalism and nationalism, and why the principles of popular sovereignty and national self-determination emerged with the French Revolution and spread to the whole world. He demonstrates that class exploitation and national oppression within the so-called nation-states and in colonial empires facilitated the emergence of the principles of popular sovereignty and national self-determination in the modern world system. Jalata explains why it is necessary for all ethnations to have full access to the states that have impacts on their lives or to establish their own states.

Jalata asserts that after some Oromo leaders' and organizations' repeated attempts to transform Ethiopia from a colonial empire into a multinational state, in which the Oromo and others would be equal citizens and equal partners, were destroyed or suppressed, most Oromos are convinced that it is absolutely necessary for the Oromo nation to achieve popular sovereignty and national self-determination through creating an independent Oromia or through establishing a multinational democratic state. He underscores that these objectives can be realized only by totally uprooting Ethiopian settler colonialism from the soil of Oromia. Otherwise, Jalata predicts, the Oromo may face ethnocide or total cultural destruction like many indigenous peoples around the world by the alliance of the U.S.-led transitional elite and the Tigrayan regime because of their economic resources and resistance. Based on his analysis of the global experience, Jalata makes concrete suggestions for the future direction of the Oromo national movement.

"The **Siqqee** Institution of Oromo Women," by Activist Kuwee Kumsa, introduces us to the Oromo women's institution known as **siqqee**, a parallel institution to the **gada** system. Kumsa explains the cultural meaning of **siqqee**, and how it is used to defend Oromo

women's rights in the society. She points that **siiqqee** is also used to maintain **saffu** (ethical code) of **Waaqa** (God) and the society. Kumsa explores how this institution has signified Oromo women's control over resources and private spaces, collective work, social status and respect, sisterhood and solidarity, and individual and collective rights in the society. This institution, Kumsa asserts, has enabled Oromo women to have control over their sexuality and fertility, and to maintain their social rights and religious and moral authority to deter men from infringing upon their rights.

Describing how colonialism and the imposition of Christianity and Islam undermined the roles of the **gada** system and the **siiqqee** institution, Kumsa documents the crimes committed against the Oromo people in general and the Oromo women in particular. She explains that the suppression of the **siiqqee** institution has put Oromo women at the bottom of society; consequently, they have faced multiple forms of oppression. Kumsa argues that despite their triple oppression - ethnonational, class, and gender oppression - Oromo women have maintained some values of this institution to protect human dignity and to struggle for national liberation, gender equality, and social justice. Further, she demonstrates how some Oromo women still use some tactics of **siiqqee** rebellion and punishment to resist male domination, and how they use original Oromo religion to Oromize Christianity and Islam. She argues that the resilience of the **siiqqee institution** is obvious in the current struggle of Oromo women for national liberation and gender equality. She also exposes sexist attitudes and practices in the Oromo national liberation fronts and calls upon Oromo women to reclaim **siiqqee** and fight against all forms of oppression.

In "Population Growth and Sustainable Development: The Case of Oromia in the Horn of Africa," Economist Feyisa Demie examines the relationship between population growth and sustainable development in Oromia. Explaining the lack of population and economic data, Demie disaggregates the statistical data produced on the Ethiopian empire and provides clear estimates on land resources, the current and future population size, and land use patterns. Demie emphasizes the need to have empirical information on Oromia to promote the policy of self-

sufficiency in food production, to avoid environmental collapse, and to facilitate sustainable economic development.

Environmental Scientist Assefa Kuru in his essay, "Fate of Conquered Peoples and Marginal Lands Under Imperial Rule: The Case of the Awash River Basin," illustrates the nature and consequences of Ethiopian government policy on peoples inhabiting the Awash River Basin of the Rift Valley. He examines how the Oromo, Afar, and Somali peoples who lived there before their colonization by Ethiopia have been affected by irrigation schemes, development projects and settlement programs, and the ecological and environmental consequences of these policies. He also discusses how Ethiopian colonial policy, with the help of international imperialism and the United Nations, excluded these peoples from the decision-making process and made them poor and powerless by disregarding their cultural and economic systems and by expropriating their economic resources. Using this case, Kuru exposes the crimes committed by the Ethiopian colonial system against the colonized population.

In his review essay on **Gezetenä Gezot, Matcha and Tulama Self-Help Association**, Historian Mohammed Hassen summarizes the main arguments of the book and demonstrates how this association was a landmark in the emergence and development of Oromo nationalism. Using this opportunity, Hassen attempts to provide a brief social history of the association. He identifies some prominent Oromo heroes who played crucial roles in founding this association and struggled to change the colonial status of the Oromo in Ethiopia. He exposes the crimes that the Ethiopian leaders have committed to destroy Oromo leadership, to keep the Oromo as second-class citizens, and to continue exploiting their resources.

Asafa Jalata  
Editor  
June 1997

## GLOBAL CAPITALISM AND THE OROMO LIBERATION STRUGGLE: THEORETICAL NOTES ON U.S. POLICY TOWARDS THE ETHIOPIAN EMPIRE

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*William I. Robinson*

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s led some scholars and partisans of progressive social change in the Third World to believe that new opportunities had emerged to advance agendas of social justice, national liberation, and democratization locally and in the global system. This optimism was based on the view that with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the Third World would no longer be a staging ground for East-West rivalries. Specifically, the United States, as the dominant world power, had supported dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, and the exploitative socioeconomic orders these regimes defended, as part of its competition with the Soviet Union. Some scholars and revolutionary groups assumed that the core capitalist powers would no longer have any reason to block aspirations for authentic democratization, for structural change in Third World countries in favor of popular majorities, and for the liberation of oppressed groups and nationalities. Particularly, since East-West rivalry would no longer dictate U.S. action, it was expected that the United States could become an ally of human rights and social justice in Africa and around the world. "The end of the Cold War," stated Randall Robinson (1992:39), the head of the pro-Africa U.S. lobby "Transafrica" in expressing this view, "has stripped America of the fundamental cornerstone that motivated U.S. policy toward Africa since the end of World War II."

This view, however, was rooted in a set of erroneous assumptions about the global system and the dominant social forces operant within it. Given these erroneous assumptions, disappointment was very great among Oromos when the United States, following the May 1991 collapse of the Mengistu regime, facilitated the seizure of power by, and threw its support behind, a new and equally repressive Tigrayan regime that has continued to deny the Oromo majority their fundamental human

rights and freedoms. A more precise and historically-grounded understanding of what drives U.S. policy and of the nature of the current world order would have led to no such illusions about U.S. intentions, and would have provided a more realistic interpretation of the real constraints and opportunities for Oromo liberation. This article challenges the assumptions behind which it was expected that the United States would contribute to authentic democratization and social justice in Ethiopia, in Africa, and elsewhere. It examines the three-way relation between U.S. policy, the current global capitalist order, and Oromia, and focuses in particular on the self-proclaimed U.S. policy of "democracy promotion." Before proceeding, I should emphasize as a caveat that this article does **not** attempt to analyze the labyrinthine situation internal to the Ethiopian empire, or the complex social forces and political dynamics therein. Rather, it is a discursive exposition of the global backdrop to that situation, with a special focus on U.S. foreign policy and how it has intersected with internal Ethiopian dynamics.<sup>1</sup>

### **Democracy and U.S. Foreign Policy**

The U.S. role in Ethiopia since 1991 should not have come as any surprise. That it did surprise some reflects the following assumptions: 1) the United States is a force that supports democracy; 2) U.S. foreign policy was driven in the post-World War II period by Cold War rivalry, which explains its support in this period for repressive political systems and exploitative socioeconomic arrangements. "The [current Ethiopian government]...has abandoned any attempt at negotiation, peace or democracy. It is following the traditional path of Ethiopian dictators of one party, one tribe, dictatorship," noted a 1994 report by the London-based Oromo Support Group. "The mystery is not this is happening but the American government and press supporting it" (Oromo Support Group, Sept. 1994:6).

There is no mystery here, but simply the disjuncture between legitimizing discourse and the actual content of U.S. foreign policy. Support for "justice, freedom, equality, and democracy" around the

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world has been central to the public discourse of U.S. state managers since the founding of the U.S. Republic, and the emphasis on "democracy" in U.S. foreign policy has taken on heightened ideological importance in the wake of the demise of the former Soviet bloc. But analysis of state policies and class practices must be based on the actual content of these policies and practices, and not on what their agents claim them to be. The practices of all ruling classes require ideological legitimation, and the specific legitimizing discourse will depend on particular historic circumstances. It should be recalled that the legitimizing discourse of the Mengistu regime was popular revolution and socialism, although in reality the regime was antithetical to both. As the historic record shows, the United States promoted and supported a global political network of civilian-military regimes, repressive authoritarian states, and outright dictatorships in Latin America, Africa, and Asia throughout the post-WWII period, including in Ethiopia. Now, was this promotion of authoritarianism and dictatorship a consequence of rivalry with the Soviet Union, as some have assumed?

Speaking in 1948, one of the most important architects of post-World War II United States foreign policy, George Kennan asserted, "We have 50 percent of the world's wealth, but only 6.3 percent of its population.... In this situation we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period, is to devise a pattern of relationships which will allow us to maintain this position of disparity." The then-Director of Policy Planning of the Department of State stated, "We should cease to talk about the raising of the living standards, human rights, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better" (Department of State, 1948:23). Kennan's candid statement, contained in a top-secret document which discussed U.S. strategy in the aftermath of WWII, underscores that the strategic objective of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War was less battling a "communist menace" than defending gross inequalities in the international order (inequalities which were seen as under challenge by the spread of socialism) and the tremendous privilege

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and power this global disparity of wealth brought for the United States as the dominant world power.

Perceived competition from the former Soviet Union, while significant, was never the driving force behind foreign policy. Behind the "communist threat" was always another, more fundamental threat: any challenge by subordinate classes and groups in the Third World to reorient local social and economic structures in favor of popular majorities, and/or to withdraw from the capitalist world economy. National Security Council (NSC) Memorandum 68, perhaps the key U.S. foreign policy document of the post-WWII era, stated in 1947 that post-WWII policy embraced "two subsidiary policies." One was to foster "a world environment in which the American system can survive and flourish," and the other was "containment of the Soviet Union, which "seeks to foster the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system." The Memorandum went on: "Even if there was no Soviet Union we would face the great problem" of achieving global "order and security" (NSC-68: 252, 263, 272). Revealingly, a major focus of NSC-68 was not on containing the Soviet Union at all, but on securing U.S. and Western access to the raw materials, markets and labor power of the Third World, and on assuring a political environment propitious to the operation of an increasingly international capital. Behind East-West relations, therefore, North-South relations were always intrinsic and central to the whole Cold War era. Authoritarian political and social arrangements were judged to be the most expedient form of assuring stability and social control in the Third World required for the free operation of international capital.

As the United States replaced waning European colonial powers in Africa as the dominant core capitalist state, its objective was to assure a smooth transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism, such that the socioeconomic structures that integrated Africa into the capitalist world would not become severed or altered through this transition. The natural resources, labor force, and markets of Africa were to remain open to international capitalism at all costs. It was in this context that the United States backed the Haile Selassie dictatorship. And the United States

opposed the Mengistu regime not out of any principled opposition to its authoritarian character, but because the **Dergue** chose to ally itself with the Soviet Union as an alternative international linkage that served the interests of the then-dominant fraction of the Ethiopian elite, and in doing so, it threatened the interests of world capitalism in the Horn of Africa.<sup>2</sup>

The East-West prism in which U.S. public discourse cast the North-South divide in foreign policy dictates evaporated with the end of the Cold War. Yet the fundamental objective of maintaining international asymmetries in an unjust global system did not change with the collapse of the Soviet system. What has changed are the methods and strategies for securing this objective. What U.S. policymakers term "democracy promotion," and the ideological dimensions it entails, has been developed as an effective instrument in contrast to - or more often, alongside - force in protecting the collective interests of dominant groups in the new global order. A U.S. "democracy promotion" apparatus was created from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, including new governmental and quasi-governmental agencies and bureaus, policy studies and conferences by government and private policy planning institutes to draft and implement "democracy promotion" programs (see, e.g., Robinson, 1992, 1996a; Smith, 1994; Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 1990; GAO, 1994). Where earlier it supported dictatorships in Chile, Nicaragua, Haiti, the Philippines, Panama, Southern Africa, and elsewhere, the United States turned to "promoting democracy." The State Department now defines "democracy promotion" as one of the three basic planks of U.S. foreign policy, along with the promotion of "free markets" and the maintenance of a U.S. military capacity around the world.

Under the rubric of "promoting democracy," the United States intervened in the crises, transitions and power vacuums resulting from the breakup of the old order to try to reshape political and economic structures as a "new world order" emerged. The impulse to "promote democracy" is the rearrangement of national political systems so as to maintain elite-based status quos in an unjust international system and to suppress mass aspirations for more thorough-going democratization of

social life in the new world order. This change in U.S. policy has dramatic implications for the struggles of popular classes around the world for progressive social change, yet it has been largely misunderstood. The general misunderstanding of "democracy promotion" reflects the failure to appreciate the profound changes at every level that are accompanying the rise of global capitalism, which is a new stage in world capitalism. This includes changes in international political relations and transnational class formation. I will return to globalization below; let us first discuss **democracy**.

What U.S. policymakers mean when they use the term democracy is actually what political scientist Robert Dahl (1971) has termed **polyarchy**, a system in which a small group actually rules and mass participation in decision-making is confined to leadership choice in elections that are carefully managed by competing elites. The polyarchic definition of democracy, building on early 20th century elitism theorists such as Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto, developed in U.S. academic circles closely tied to the policymaking community in the United States in the post-World War II years. According to Samuel Huntington, this "redefinition" of the classical definition of democracy as rule, or power (cratos) of the people (demos) to make it more "realistic" and "compatible" with "modern society," culminated in Dahl's 1971 study, titled **polyarchy** (Huntington, 1989:12-13).<sup>3</sup> By the time the United States rose to world power after World War II, the polyarchic definition of democracy had become established in Western academia. When U.S. officials speak of "promoting democracy," what they really mean, therefore, is the promotion of polyarchy, or what I have alternatively called "low-intensity democracy" (Robinson, 1992; 1996a).

As an "essentially contested concept" (Gallie, 1956), the polyarchic conception of democracy competes with the concept of **popular democracy**. The various views on popular democracy are traceable to the original Greek definition of democracy and rooted in Rousseauian-Marxist traditions. Popular democracy posits a disbursement throughout society of political power through the participation of broad majorities in decision-making or forms of participatory, or direct,

democracy, linked to representative forms of government and formal elections. Popular democracy is seen as an emancipatory project at whose heart is the construction of a democratic socioeconomic order. Democratic participation, in order to be truly effective, requires that democracy be a tool for changing unjust social and economic structures. In sharp distinction to polyarchy, popular democracy is concerned with both process and outcome. Elitism theories claim that democracy rests exclusively on process, so that there is no contradiction between a "democratic" process and an anti-democratic social order punctured by sharp social inequalities and minority monopolization of society's material and cultural resources. Thus, under the polyarchic definition, a system can acquire a democratic form without a democratic content or outcome. Popular democracy, in contrast, posits democracy as both a process and as a means to an end - a tool for change, for the resolution of such material problems as housing, health, education, land ownership, social inequalities, racism, ethnic domination, gender subordination, and so forth. It thus involves **mass empowerment to change unjust social and economic structures, in opposition to minority elites who benefit from such structures.**

The polyarchic definition of democracy has achieved hegemonic status, in the discourse and analysis of scholars, journalists, and the international community, including among many popular and revolutionary movements around the world. The implications of substituting the literal (or classic) definition of democracy with the institutional definition embodied in polyarchy are vast. It means that such issues as who controls the material and cultural resources of society, in whose interests is society organized, and so forth, become irrelevant to the discussion of democracy. What is relevant is simply political contestation among elite factions through procedurally free elections. It means that asymmetries and inequalities both among groups within a single country and among nation-states within the international order bear no relation to democracy. The notion that there may be a veritable contradiction in terms between elite or class rule, in which wealth and power is monopolized by tiny minorities, on the one hand,

and democracy, on the other hand, a contradiction which would flow from the original Greek definition of power of the people, does not enter - by theoretical-definitional fiat - into the polyarchic definition.

Struggles for popular democracy around the world are profound threats to the privileges of dominant groups in global society. Yet the methods and policies pursued during the Cold War years to confront these challenges have proved increasingly ineffective and untenable. This process has led U.S. policymakers to initiate a shift from promoting authoritarian arrangements to promoting "democratic" political and social arrangements in Third World countries. Both polyarchy and authoritarianism/dictatorship, as distinct forms of elite rule and social control, stand opposed to popular democracy. The shift from backing authoritarianism to promoting polyarchy may be conceived theoretically, in the Gramscian sense, as signalling new forms of transnational control accompanying the rise of global capitalism. Specifically, behind this shift is an effort to replace coercive means of social control in the South with consensual ones within a highly stratified international system. This shift corresponds to the emergence of the global economy since the 1970s. It constitutes a political exigency of macroeconomic restructuring on a world scale, in the context of the transnationalization of the economy, political processes and civil societies. These propositions require that we deepen the theoretical discussion and link the issue of globalization to that of "democracy promotion" in U.S. policy.

### **Global Capitalism and the Transnational Elite**

Recent events in the Ethiopian empire have unfolded within the world-historic dynamic of our epoch: globalization. Capitalism has spread around the world as a social system for 500 years and progressively conquered and incorporated peoples and regions, creating in the process complex webs of domination and subordination both within and between nation-states and regions. But globalization is a qualitatively new stage in this "modern world system," involving the transition over the past several decades from linkage of nation-states via

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commodity exchange and capital flows in an integrated international market, in which different modes of production were "articulated" within broader social formations, to the globalization of the process of production itself. Globalization denotes a transition from the linkage of nation-state societies predicated on a **world economy** to an emergent transnational or global society predicated on a **global capitalism**.<sup>4</sup> The essence of globalization is global capitalism, which has superseded the nation-state stage of capitalism. Economic globalization brings with it the material basis for the emergence of a singular global society, including the transnationalization of civil society and of political processes. Nation-states are no longer linked "externally" to a broader system but "internally" to a singular global social formation. The old units of analysis - nation states - are inappropriate for understanding the dynamics of our epoch, not only in terms of economic processes, but also social relations and political systems. To understand what goes on in any part of the world, or in any single nation-state, we must understand what is occurring at the level of the global system. No single nation-state can remain insulated from the global economy or prevent the penetration of the social, political and cultural superstructure of global capitalism. The breakup of national economic, political and social structures around the world is reciprocal to the gradual breakup, starting thirty years ago, of a pre-globalization nation-state based world order.

What is the import of globalization to the Ethiopian empire? Each of the stages in the development of capitalism as a world system has had direct and discernible effects on different regions and peoples around the world. The first stage in the world system, the "mercantile" era, which spanned approximately from the 1500s to the 1800s, saw the process of Ethiopia's subordinate incorporation into world capitalism. This incorporation in the late 1800s, Holcomb and Ibssa argue, made possible Ethiopia's own imperial expansion: Ethiopian incorporation became superimposed on its colonization and domination of the Oromo (along with other ethnonational groups), and the latter's own incipient process of internal class differentiation and state formation became arrested, in a process referred to by Holcomb and Ibssa (1990:22-26) and

by Jalata (1993, esp. chapter 3) as "dependent colonialism." The next stage in world capitalism, from the late 1800s until the eve of globalization in the 1960s, established a more unified global system which linked nation-states and regions via the trade and financial flows into an integrated world market. For reasons analyzed elsewhere in considerable detail (see, e.g., Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990:1-11; Jalata, 1993, esp. chapters 3 and 4), Ethiopia was not directly colonized by European powers despite the 1935-1940 interlude of Italian annexation. However, the world capitalist system made possible the creation of the Ethiopian state, and also made possible Abyssinian conquest of Oromia and other groups (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990; Jalata, 1993). The socioeconomic and class structure in Abyssinia was reoriented towards integration into world capitalism. In this stage Oromia was captured by world capitalism as a subordinate segment of the Ethiopian social formation. Oromia provided the labor and resources for the rapid transformation of Ethiopia's socioeconomic and productive structure to feed the needs of an intermediary Ethiopian ruling class and dominant groups in the core of world capitalism. The creation of Ethiopia and conquest of Oromia are creatures of European colonialism. What concerns us in this article is the third and current stage, globalization, which dates back to the 1960s and whose consolidation inside the Ethiopian empire began with the collapse of the Mengistu regime in 1991.

The core of globalization, theoretically conceived, is the near culmination of the spread of capitalist production relations around the world and its displacement of (rather than articulation with) pre-capitalist relations. This involves a whole set of corresponding "superstructural" changes in politics (and politics), in the composition of social forces, and in class and group relations. Globalization involves technological advances that have allowed capital to achieve total mobility around the globe in search of the cheapest labor and the most congenial conditions for different circuits in the process of production and distribution, without regard for national borders. In this reorganized world economy, a new international division of labor has emerged, in which the rich

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countries of the North are increasingly based on control of technology, information and services in a "global factory," whereas the labor-intensive phase of international production is shifted to the South through the "comparative advantage" of abundant, cheap labor, along with changes in zones of mineral extraction and agricultural production through new forms of integration into transnationalized circuits. Above all, transnational capital requires that conditions are established in each nation-state propitious to its unfettered operation, not just **within** nation-states, but **between** nation-states. Thus the globalization of production, which involves a hitherto unseen integration of national economies, brings with it a tendency towards uniformity, not just in the conditions of production, but in the civil and political superstructure in which social relations of production unfold.<sup>5</sup>

The agent of the global economy is transnational capital, organized institutionally in global corporations and in supranational economic planning agencies and political forums, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Trilateral Commission, and the G7 forum. At its apex, the global economy is managed by a class-conscious transnational elite based in the centers of world capitalism, and led by the United States.<sup>6</sup> The accelerated concentration of capital and economic power around this transnational elite in center countries has profound effects on arrangements between existing social groups, class constellations, and political systems in every country of the world system, including a redistribution of quotas of accumulated political and economic power towards new groups linked to transnational capital and the global economy. In every region of the world, states, economies and political processes are becoming transnationalized and integrated under the guidance of this new elite.

This transnational elite has its exact counterpart in each nation, of the South, in a new breed of "technocratic" elite and bureaucrats in Latin America, Africa and Asia who are the local counterparts to the global elite. The source of social privilege that accrues through participation in relations of domination and exploitation is now incorporation into the hegemonic project of transnational capital. The

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new elites of global capitalism may be local transnationalized fractions of the bourgeoisie, state managers and bureaucratic administrators, or diverse professional and intellectual strata, who are willing to act as local transmission belts for transnational elite interests. Later I will discuss this point further as it pertains to Ethiopia and Oromia.

The agenda of this transnational elite is to promote diverse economic and political conditions in all corners of the world that will allow transnational capital to operate unfettered. The economic component of this agenda is "neo-liberalism," a model which seeks to achieve conditions which permit the total mobility of capital. This model includes elimination of state intervention in the economy and the regulation of individual nation states over the activities of capital in their territories. The neo-liberal Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) currently sweeping the South seek macroeconomic stability (price and exchange rate stability, etc.), and the lifting of all state regulations over the free operation of capital, as essential requisites for the activity of transnational capital, which must harmonize a wide range of fiscal, monetary and industrial policies among multiple countries if it is to be able to function simultaneously among numerous national borders.

If this economic component is to make the world available and "inviting" to capital, the political component is to "make the world safe for capital." This requires developing social control systems and political institutions necessary for the establishment of a stable world environment. The turn to promoting polyarchy in U.S. foreign policy is precisely an effort to develop political systems in each country incorporated into global structures that operate through consensual, rather than through direct, coercive domination, as I have analyzed and documented at length elsewhere (Robinson, 1996a, 1996b). The imperative for "democracy" as far as transnational elite interests are concerned lies in the view that polyarchy is a more effective means of assuring stability. Polyarchy is seen as the preferred means of confronting, or at least controlling, popular sectors and their demands. Supported upon the foundations of what Gramsci referred to as ideological hegemony, consensual arrangements are at play for the

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resolution of conflicts within the parameters of a given social order. **Formal** democratic structures are therefore seen as more disposed to diffusing the sharpest social tensions and to incorporating sufficient social bases with which to sustain more stable environments under the conflict-ridden and fluid conditions of emergent global society. While mediating inter-class relations, polyarchy is also a more propitious institutional arrangement for the resolution of conflicts among dominant groups. It encourages the exercise of effective self-control in intra-group affairs, and achieves, in its ideal-type functioning, intra-elite stability via compromise and accommodation. It is thus a more effective means of achieving the political and social stability that global capitalism requires. Through inculcating polyarchic political systems, the transnational elite hopes that the demands, grievances, and aspirations of the popular classes will become neutralized less through direct repression than through ideological mechanisms, political cooptation, and the limits imposed by the global economy and the legitimizing parameters of polyarchy. Consensual mechanisms of social control thus tend to replace the dictatorships, authoritarianism, and repressive colonial systems that characterized much of the world's formal political authority structures right up to the post-Cold War period.

The penetration and influence of globalizing pressures is a complex process that generates local social forces who come to assume the role of "in-country" agents and "junior partners" of the transnational elite. These forces include: economic elites tied to globalized circuits of production, distribution, and finances set up in their own countries; political elites such as state managers and administrative bureaucrats; and charismatic leaders of the organs of civil society. These elites clustered in both political and civil society are expected to develop an outlook and identity of interests with the transnational elite that is their "senior partner," to gain hegemony over the internal (national) social order, and to integrate their respective nation-states into the global order. As a result, these local transnationalized fractions find that their own interests rest in the reproduction of that global order in the local environment. One notes a process here in which local elites assume new

roles as intermediaries between the "local" and the "global," such that they become, in effect, "pimps," offering their nation's laboring masses and resources to transnational capital in exchange for incorporation into the junior ranks of an emergent hegemonic transnational elite.

In the 1970s and 1980s incipient transnationalized fractions of ruling classes in the core capitalist countries of the North competed with national-based fractions in an effort to capture the "commanding heights" of state policymaking (Cox, 1987; Gill, 1990). By the late 1980s, these fractions were largely in command of Northern state apparatuses and began active promotion of the transnational agenda of neo-liberalism and polyarchy. From the 1980s into the 1990s, similar transnational pools became ascendant in the South. They began to vie for, and in many countries, to capture, state apparatuses and to promote the transnational agenda in their own nation-states (Robinson, 1996a, 1996b). This transnational agenda - and its agent, the transnationalized fraction within local elite structures - is embryonic in some countries and regions (e.g., much of sub-Saharan Africa). It has incubated and is now ascendant in others regions (e.g., the Philippines, India, major portions of Asia). It has become fully consolidated elsewhere (e.g., in Chile, Mexico, and much of Latin America). Transnationalized fractions in the South have overseen at the local level, under the tutelage of the North, sweeping economic, political, social and cultural changes involved in globalization, including free-market reform, the fomenting of polyarchic systems in place of dictatorships, and the dissemination of capitalism's culture/ideology of consumerism and individualism.

### **Social Forces, Social Control, and Global Capitalism**

How can we catalogue the configuration of **social forces** engendered by and drawn into globalization? Classes are restructured by the globalization process. Pre-capitalist classes and autonomous domestic producers, such as peasantries, small-scale artisans, and capitalist fractions oriented towards domestic markets, tend to disappear. New urban and rural working classes linked to transnational production

processes appear. In highly simplified terms, there are, on the one hand, diverse class fractions, strata, and groups in each country and region which have been - or aspire to become - incorporated into the hegemonic project of global capitalism. On the other hand, there are those fractions, strata, and groups objectively opposed to, or resisting the process of capitalist globalization for diverse reasons. These oppositional elements often constitute oppressed and potentially revolutionary classes and groups, as well as fractions of dominant classes and assorted elites, who are adversely affected by the structural and institutional changes wrought by globalization. There are also sundry groups who face a fluid and indeterminate situation vis-a-vis the process.

In sum, antagonistic social forces are thrown together in highly complex milieus, and do battle to shape emergent social, economic, political, and cultural institutions as each country integrates into global society. **These struggles become superimposed on, and interwoven with, pre-existing social contradictions and struggles, modifying their context and character,** a point which we should bear in mind as regards Ethiopia and Oromia. Just as all good social science should be concerned with both the general in the particular and the particular in the general, analysis requires an understanding of how particular national and local histories interface with globalizing dynamics and become reshaped in the process. Struggles between dominant and subordinate groups - such as between the Oromo people and the Ethiopian state, or among distinct Oromo social groups and classes - need to be conceptualized in a manner that links particular national circumstances to the broader world-historic conjuncture of globalization.

If one side of "making the world safe for global capital" involves the development of local agents of the transnational elite, the flip side, equally if not more importantly, involves the **suppression** of those social forces and their political expressions that represent an actual or potential challenge to the structure of global capitalism and its local reproduction. Thus local contingents of the transnational elite are expected to utilize their states to implement neo-liberal structural adjustment, **and also** to maintain local social control and political stability. In focusing on the

suppression of popular classes, we need to emphasize the **mode of social control** in the new transnational environment. The political component of this transnational elite agenda is the consolidation of political systems which function through consensual mechanisms of social control, that is, of polyarchic political systems. It is precisely the new elites in the South who have entered into alliances to promote polyarchy, or to develop "democratic" consensual forms of social control in their countries in contrast to the earlier forms of authoritarian or dictatorial control.

As has been well documented elsewhere (Robinson, 1992; 1996a; 1996c), promoting polyarchy as a new modality of U.S. intervention is conducted through a transnationalized "democracy promotion" apparatus within the United States. This apparatus includes the AID's Center for Democracy and Governance, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and new agencies in the Departments of Justice and Defense, among others. It involves the use of "political aid" in conjunction with the panoply of established U.S. foreign policy instruments, including economic and military aid, traditional diplomacy, and so forth. The policy seeks to foment functioning polyarchic political systems in peripheral countries and targets civil societies as the locus of hegemonic order and social control, in tandem with efforts to influence states. U.S. "democracy promotion," sets about not just to secure and stabilize polyarchy but to have the United States and local elites thoroughly penetrate not just the state, but civil society as the locus of a Gramscian hegemony, and **from therein** assure control over popular mobilization and mass movements. Gramsci stressed the distinction and unity of political and civil society. **Social control** takes place on two levels: in civil society and through the state (political society), which are fused into what Gramsci called the **extended state**. "These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of hegemony which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government" (Gramsci, 1971:12). The hegemony of a ruling class or fraction is exercised in civil society, as distinct from its coercive power exercised through the state. Civil society is the arena of social

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relationships based on consent - political parties, trade unions, civil (voluntary) associations, religious institutions, the family, and so forth.

Seen through the lens of the promotion of polyarchy, the composition and balance of power in civil society in a given Third World country is now just as important to global elite interests as who controls the governments of those countries. This is a shift from social control "from above" to social control "from below" (and within), for the purpose of managing change and reform so as to preempt any elemental challenge to the social order. This explains why the new forms of U.S. political intervention, conducted by diverse U.S. "democracy promotion" agencies, such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), target groups in civil society itself - trade unions, political parties, the mass media, professional guilds, peasant associations, women's, youth, student and other mass organizations.

The president of the NED, Carl Gershman, has categorized U.S. political intervention programs into those aimed at "long-term democratic political development," and those aimed at securing a "democratic transition," that is, a change of regime (Gershman, 1989). The first category signifies programs to stabilize and consolidate polyarchic political systems in societies already considered "democratic" by bolstering elite forces in political and civil society, and by inculcating what the operatives and theoreticians of "democracy promotion" consider to be the "political culture" of polyarchy. These programs in the 1990s included most Latin American nations, as well as the former Soviet bloc countries, all of which were considered "democratic." Regarding the second category, "transitions to democracy," U.S. policymakers identified two types of transitions: from authoritarian or right-wing dictatorships, to elitist civilian regimes; and from left-wing, popular, nationalist or socialist regimes considered adversaries, to elitist regimes allied with the U.S.-led transnational elite. Chile, Haiti, Paraguay, and the Philippines, fell under the first type in the 1980s, and in the 1990s, many African and several Asian nations fell under this type. Nicaragua under the Sandinistas fell under the second, as did programs in Haiti under President Jean Bertrand Aristide and programs in Cuba.

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A number of countries, however, do not fall into either of these categories indicated by Gershman, and represent very challenging and complex "deviant cases" for U.S. officials who would rather downplay these embarrassing cases. These are authoritarian regimes, such as Burma and Indonesia, and many Asian and Africa countries, including Ethiopia. In these countries, U.S. plans for a quick transition to polyarchy met with limited success, and in some instances completely failed. Because there are no ready alternatives to authoritarian social control in these cases, the United States pursues a **two-track strategy**. The first track is to continue to work with existing regimes that are often authoritarian and even antithetical to polyarchy. These regimes nevertheless push through other aspects of the transnational agenda, such as neo-liberal reform, and maintain a minimal amount of social control. The second track is to continue to foment the conditions for a transition to polyarchy in a modified, long-term timetable. Efforts in the second track include the gradual cultivation of transnational elite pools, the creation of programs in civil society to inculcate a polyarchic political culture, the establishment of programs in political society to bring together diverse elites into consensus-building forums ("national dialogues," "reconciliation conferences," etc.) and so on.

Promoting polyarchy is a very problematic enterprise, as are all projects of domination. The endeavor often becomes bogged down in conflicting interests and fierce competition among local dominant groups. It also runs up against social contradictions that are structural in origin; consequently their resolution involves structural transformations that contravene the political and economic agenda of the transnational elite. This elite finds itself dependent on local forces to implement some aspects of their agenda (e.g., making the particular country available for transnational capital), yet these same forces block the attainment of other aspects of that agenda (e.g., stability through polyarchy). Polyarchy is a superior mode of elite domination **when it can be successfully implemented**. But intent is not ability. The transnational elite should not be seen as impotent, and diverse local groups are active and autonomous collective subjects with their own agendas that intersect in

complex, often highly contradictory and conflictive ways with the transnational agenda. Later I will discuss these paradoxes as they apply to the Ethiopian empire.

It is of analytical import, beyond a mere moral denunciation, to note that emergent global society is profoundly undemocratic. "Poverty amidst plenty" and "global social apartheid", or the dramatic growth under globalization of socioeconomic inequalities and of human misery in nearly every country and region of the world, a consequence of the unbridled operation of transnational capital, is worldwide and generalized. The dual tendency is for the concentration of wealth among a privileged strata encompassing some 20 percent of humanity, in which the gap between rich and poor is widening **within** each country, North and South alike, simultaneous to a sharp increase of the inequalities **between** the North and the South. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) annual report for 1994, **Human Development** 1994, 1.3 billion people live in **absolute** poverty - literally on the verge of life and death. A third of the South's population "lives in state of abject poverty," stated the report, "at such a margin of human existence that words simply fail to describe it." One billion are without access to health services, 1.3 billion have no access to safe water, and 1.9 billion are without access to sanitation (UNDP, 1994).

A comparison of recent reports reveals the **tendency** for the chasm between a shrinking minority of haves and a vast majority of have-nots to widen ever-further. The 1992 report indicated that the wealthiest 20% of humanity received 82.7% of the world's wealth. Its 1994 report places that figure at 84.7%. The comparison also reveals that the abyss between the rich and poor nations continues to widen. In 1960, the wealthiest 20 of the world's nations was 30 times richer than the poorest 20 percent. Thirty years later, in 1990, it was 60 times richer. Just one year later, in 1991, the latest year for which figures were available, it was 61:1, according to the 1994 report. However, the report noted: "these figures conceal the true scale of injustice since they are based on comparisons of the average per capita incomes of rich and poor **countries**. In reality, of course, there are wide disparities within

each country between rich and poor **people**" (UNDP, 1992:34 [emphasis in original]). Adding the maldistribution within countries, the richest 20% of the world's **people** got at least 150 times more than the poorest 20%. In other words, the ratio of inequality between the global rich and the global poor in a highly stratified world system was 1:150.

The North-South divide is growing and should not be understated. However, humanity is increasingly stratified along transnational class lines, given the accelerated creation under globalization of lakes of wealth in Third World countries and seas of poverty in First World countries, and it makes more sense to see the world as increasingly divided along class lines than along nation-state lines. This is crucial if we are to accurately discern the **social basis** of global capitalism.<sup>7</sup> Dominant minorities in the South find new and expanded opportunities for all sorts of social privilege and are becoming wealthy and powerful as they integrate their states into global society. In doing so, they strengthen their relation and identity of interests with the elite of the global system, and in this way we see movement from class alliances across nation-states to the emergence of an organic transnational elite that incorporates contingents from each country and region of global society.

Thus the SAPs and related free-market economic reform policies of the transnational elite result in mass impoverishment, but these policies find an objective social base in those countries to which they are applied, among fractions of dominant groups tied to global capital and related strata (e.g., state bureaucracies). We cannot talk about inequality in global society without also talking about **power**. Wealth and power are not dichotomous but are inextricably interconnected. Reproduction of social privilege and of the inequality upon which it is based requires the application of power by dominant groups over subordinate groups. In this regard, Antonio Gramsci noted, domination is both coercive and consensual. All political authority is derived in the last instance from the use or the threat of the use of force. But social formations based on domination combine both consensual and coercive mechanisms of social control, and one or the other usually constitutes the most salient feature of social control in a given social order. Social forces in the Ethiopian

empire and Oromia that could constitute the internal linkage with global capitalism need to be identified. But analysis also requires how the changing character of the global system changes the composition of internal social forces in Ethiopia and Oromia.

### **U.S. Policy and Oromo Liberation**

Salient events in recent years in the Horn of Africa have included the disintegration of the state in Somalia, the ascent of fundamentalist Islamic forces in the Sudan, and above all, the collapse of the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia and a reconfiguration of the political landscape in the Ethiopian empire. These dramatic events have led the United States to assume a highly visible profile in the region. A pliable regime in Ethiopia became a valuable asset in pressing the economic and political interests of the U.S.-led transnational elite throughout North and East Africa. "The advent of the TGE [Transitional Government of Ethiopia] in 1991 marked a major change in the state of relationships between the U.S. and Ethiopia," stated U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, George Moose, in 1994. The TGE "has maintained a strongly pro-Western foreign policy since its inception. As a result, good working relationships have been established that have been of great value on numerous regional concerns, including Sudan, Somalia, and Rwanda. These relationships have also given the [U.S.] Embassy excellent access within the TGE, making it an effective advocate for U.S. policy" (Moose, 1994). Advancing the transnational agenda of polyarchy and neo-liberalism in Ethiopia thus came to be seen by U.S. officials as pivotal for that agenda in the entire region. "Given Ethiopia's population of 54 million, including ethnic groups that share ties with Djibouti [sic], Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia, Ethiopia can profoundly impact its neighbors," noted John Hicks, U.S. Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Africa of the AID. "If Ethiopia can successfully make the transition to democracy and a free market economy, it could become a model of peace and stability in a troubled region" (Hicks, 1994).

The incursion of capitalism into the Ethiopian social formation in the post-WWII period, and particularly, from the 1960s and on, precisely as the global economy began to emerge, created a host of new social groups and classes, exacerbated internal social contradictions, hastened polarization, and laid the structural basis for the 1974 popular uprising against the Haile Selassie dictatorship. This uprising, however, for reasons analyzed elsewhere (see, e.g., Jalata, 1993:115-125), resulted not in a popular or revolutionary outcome but in the takeover by the Mengistu regime. Jalata (1993:126-130) has noted that the Mengistu regime received military support from the former Soviet Union and economic support from the Western capitalist powers during much of its time in power. According to Jalata, this regime's discourse was one of socialism and revolution, but its actual model was one in which state enterprises kept the empire inserted into the world capitalist economy, precisely as the global economy was emerging, and despite reliance on the Soviet bloc for political and military support. State enterprises sustained a ruling group and elite strata tied to the state rather than to private Ethiopian capital (precisely, in part, because the latter remained severely underdeveloped). Oromos provided much of the labor and resources, including the land, for this socioeconomic structure. Global capitalism thus came to be filtered through a very unusual national structure: a disjuncture between the political superstructure of a self-proclaimed revolutionary regime aligned with the Soviet bloc and an economic base which linked the empire to world capitalism. This arrangement owed to the empire's particular history. The Amharan feudal and monarchial structures never permitted a "modernizing" capitalist, professional, and bureaucratic strata - which had begun to emerge with the post-WWII incursion of capitalist production relations into the empire - to develop into a coherent political bloc that could assume the reins of an organic capitalist state.

The praetorian Mengistu state, seen in structural perspective, was the intermediary between global capitalism and a chaotic, poorly organized, and constantly shifting Ethiopian ruling class. Taking power under highly fluid circumstances, as a Bonapartist expression of the

inability of either emerging dominant or subordinate classes to gain any hegemony, the Mengistu regime represented the complete disarticulation of the economic and political spheres of the Ethiopian social order, with no stabilizing linkage between the state and a coherent bloc of social forces in civil society. This model - both in its exploitative socio-economic dimension and in its brutally repressive political dimension - accelerated social contradictions within the empire. As these contradictions heightened - particularly as ethnonational struggles among the Eritrean, Tigrayan, Oromo, and other groups escalated - the particular disjunctures between the empire's social forces, political superstructure and economic structure were bound to result in the collapse of the regime, with or without the demise of the Soviet Union.

By the late 1980s, the regime was in deep crisis and it became clear that its days were numbered. A very familiar U.S. pattern elsewhere in the Third World was put into practice in Ethiopia: the United States intervened. The objective was to gain as much influence as possible over the resolution of emerging crises and to assure an outcome that would be most favorable to specific conjunctural U.S.-transnational interests and, more importantly, to the long-term interests of global capitalism. In Ethiopia, there was a complex confluence of global and local events, notably the irreversible crisis of the Mengistu regime just when this regime's principal external sponsor, the Soviet Union, was itself crumbling, that allowed the United States to regain decisive influence over Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, and to play a pivotal role in the outcome of the crisis and demise of the Mengistu regime.<sup>8</sup> The familiar pattern of intervention involved three phases.

In the first phase, U.S. operatives negotiated the fleeing of Mengistu, providing the dictator with ample financial incentives and a safe haven in exile (Jalata, 1994). This is consistent with the recent pattern of U.S. intervention elsewhere: just as it did with Mengistu, the United States facilitated the departure into comfortable exile of dictators in Iran (the Shah, 1979), Nicaragua (Somoza, 1979), the Philippines (Marcos, 1995), Haiti (Duvalier, 1985), Paraguay (Stroessner, 1989), and so on.

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In the second phase, the United States attempted to gain maximum influence over the breakup of the Mengistu regime and impose an orderly transition to capitalist polyarchy. U.S. strategists assessed the actual direction of change, the character of the crisis, and the social groups and classes that could best be organized, supported, or coopted as part of a strategy for a transition. On the basis of this assessment, the United States chose to support the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the independence of Eritrea. The conditions imposed on the TPLF in exchange for this support, as well as new opportunities opened up to the TPLF leadership to attain their own goals of ruling a reconfigured Ethiopian empire, in exchange for following the U.S. script, preempted any popular democratic or radical outcome to the breakup of the Mengistu regime. The U.S. plan was to facilitate the rapid installation into power of the TPLF-led Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), in order to avoid a vacuum of power and assure as predictable an environment and a governing apparatus as possible during a transition period (P.R.A. consultants, 1991:18). This phase was successfully achieved, in what U.S. policymakers have sometimes referred to as "preventative diplomacy and preemptive reform" (Robinson, 1996a).

In the third phase, U.S. policymakers and on-the-ground operatives then attempted to launch and control a gradual "transition to democracy," for which Washington spent at least \$11.5 million between 1991-1994 under its "Democracy and Governance Support" program (Hicks, 1994; Ottaway, 1993:8). Through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and other agencies from the "democracy promotion" apparatus of the U.S. state, U.S. officials were deeply involved in this "transition to democracy." A number of Ethiopian civic and political associations were funded and advised by NED-affiliated organizations that set up operations in the empire, including the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the National Republican Institute for International Relations (IRI), of the U.S. Democratic and Republican parties, respectively, the International Foundation for Electoral Assistance (IFES), the America's Development Foundation, the Free Trade Union

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Institute (FTUI), the Fund for Peace, and several other agencies tied to the U.S. state. (NED Annual Reports, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1994). Most of these organizations, which handled over half a million dollars between 1991-1995, are themselves linked to the covert and intelligence apparatus of the U.S. state.

The NED is not an impartial and benevolent agency seeking to promote "democracy," but an organ that grew out of the covert operations and intelligence apparatuses of the U.S. state in the 1980s, and it functions as a foreign policy branch of the U.S. state, as I have documented and analyzed in depth elsewhere (Robinson, 1996). My own research on the NED in other countries indicates that the NED and its associated groups play an important role in identifying and grooming local leaders that are to be tapped for incorporation into U.S.-crafted hegemonic projects. Researchers of Ethiopian and Oromo studies would do well to investigate the programs conducted by the NED, the individuals involved, the agendas that NED-supported groups propose, the alliances they develop, and so forth. It is to be expected that the NED supported groups will attempt to compete with, and try to eclipse, genuine popular grassroots and mass organizations, among the Oromo and other groups in the empire, and to work towards elite consensus and popular class incorporation into elite hegemony. The NED, as a semi-clandestine organ of the U.S. intervention and intelligence apparatus, does not readily provide information to researchers. Research into its activities in Ethiopia will probably require filing Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. According to the NED Annual Reports for 1991-1995, the following organizations were funded and guided by NED-linked U.S. agencies: Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc., Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Ethiopia, Ethiopian Human Rights and Peace Center (of the Law Faculty of the University of Addis Ababa), Ethiopian Congress for Democracy, Ethiopian Human Rights Council Ad Hoc Peace and Development Committee, Inter-Africa Group (Ethiopia branch). The analytical point is that groups linked to the NED (and the AID) are fomented by the U.S. state as organs of civil and

political society with the precise intention of cohering national elites and of advancing the transnational elite agenda in the intervened country.

Through this process, U.S. officials hoped that the leadership of the Tigrayans, the Eritreans, the Amhara, the Oromo, and other ethno-national groups in the Ethiopian empire, would develop a working consensus amongst themselves around implementing the transnational agenda in Ethiopia: 1) structural adjustment and the opening of the empire to free market global capitalism; 2) the installation of a functioning polyarchic ("democratic") political system, in which elites from the different groups would peacefully compete with and accommodate one another, thus assuring stability as the empire opened up to transnational capital. This third phase failed due to profound social contradictions internal to the Ethiopian empire that U.S. officials could not hope to overcome **and at the same time** achieve their (the transnational elite's) goals, as I discuss briefly below. But this failure should not obscure the intent of U.S. policy during this period, which was never to bring democracy and social justice to Ethiopia.

The "transition to democracy" in Ethiopia was to involve the creation of a new governmental and state administrative structure, the drafting of a new constitution, and the holding of elections (Cohen, September 17, 1992). These were to take place alongside ongoing U.S. programs to penetrate Ethiopian civil society and develop associations therein, including the media and professional groups (Hicks, 1994), that could act as an anchor within the population for a stable hegemonic order. A July 1991 conference, convened under U.S. auspices to "reach agreement on a transition process which could lead to a democratic outcome" (Ottaway, 1993:2), was successful in bringing together the leadership of the different groups in Ethiopia, and was to have been followed by the June 1992 elections. But these failed when the EPRDF essentially coopted the process to install its own supporters and representatives throughout the empire. Instead of serving as a mechanism for helping to forge a working accommodation among elites, "the elections eroded the legitimacy of the transitional government rather than increasing it, and narrowed its political base" (Ottaway, 1993:3).

Despite the 1992 electoral charade, the EPRDF set up the Constitution Drafting Commission in 1993 with U.S. approval, and scheduled elections for 1994 for a new national assembly that would, among other things, review and ratify a permanent constitution. These elections were held in June 1994 with \$2.5 million in U.S. technical and financial support. Although some voiced disapproval, they were certified as "satisfactory" by the international community, including U.S. and European observers, and represented, in the words of one U.S. official, "progress in the democratic development of the country" (Moose, 1994). This certification occurred despite widespread irregularities, mass repression of the Oromo during the electoral process by the Ethiopian state and by its agent the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), and the non-participation of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and key actors and organizations from other ethnonational groups.<sup>9</sup>

Despite this deeply troubled transition to polyarchy, U.S. policymakers retained the expectation that they could work with the EPRDF government to create functioning polyarchic political structures. The conduct of the EPRDF (e.g., its monopolization of power, corruption, ongoing human rights violations, etc.) hampered the transnational elite project in Ethiopia and strained relations between some U.S. policymakers and the Ethiopian regime. But the EPRDF was still the transnational elite's "best option." It was the hope of the transnational elite that capitalist development inside Ethiopia through free-market integration of the empire into global capitalism would help bring together diverse political, economic and bureaucratic elites from all of the empire's ethno-national groups into a process of national class formation. The elite leaderships of Ethiopia's principal groups and movements, namely the Amhara, the Tigrayan, and the Oromo, were to be continuously nudged, coaxed, and prodded to achieve compromise and a working accommodation among themselves, and in this way cohere into a national elite. Seen in analytic perspective, this was the intent behind the spate of diplomatic initiatives undertaken by diverse representatives of the transnational elite, such as the Contract Group in 1992, and Paris initiative in 1993, Jimmy Carter's mediation in 1994, the

U.S. Congressional Task Force meeting in 1995, and so on. The U.S. hope was that these elites would begin to identify more with each other than with their own popular bases and to identify more with a transnational capitalist project for the Ethiopian social formation as a whole than with any popular project in the interests of their own mass bases. This is the model the United States has pursued throughout the Third World in its new policy of promoting polyarchy. That this effort has proved to date a dismal failure in Ethiopia attests to the gap between intent and ability in U.S. policy, and to the deep-rooted contradictions within the Ethiopian empire and within the transnational agenda.

The failure of the 1990-1994 attempt to effect a transition to polyarchy in Ethiopia also points to the ignorance of local realities and histories, often bordering on self-delusion, that U.S. officials generally bring with them in their foreign policy undertakings. Policy considerations among U.S. state managers, as well as theoretical reflections and academic musings among Western intellectuals in general regarding Ethiopia, have historically been colored by perceptions of Oromo inferiority (see, e.g., discussion by Jalata, 1996; Lata, forthcoming). Such perceptions were consciously propagated by the Habasha elite for centuries as part of the ideological dimensions of its own class development. They took root easily among mainstream Western perceptions, given that Western support for Habasha domination became the central condition for the subordinate incorporation of the Ethiopian social formation into world capitalism. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to see the failure of U.S. policy to bring about a polyarchy as a consequence of racist attitudes among Western state managers and organic intellectuals, rather than as a consequence of structural contradictions within the Ethiopian empire which simply do not lend themselves to resolution within the framework of the transnational elite project. U.S. policymakers and organic intellectuals have never been able to grasp the nature and extent of ethnonational domination, especially of the Oromo. This is, in turn, a consequence of the character of Ethiopia as an empire based on ethnonational domination with little

organic historical basis for a viable multiethnic national formation and for a polyarchic system of consensual domination.

It must be recalled that a functioning polyarchic system involves two dimensions. One is intra-elite accommodation and consensus. The other is consensual mechanisms of elite domination over popular majorities. One considerable constraint to a pan-Ethiopian intra-elite consensus that the United States would like to foment is disdainfulness among the Habasha elite of the Oromo, which precludes the former from embracing an Oromo elite as its equal. The principal constraint to consensual domination over the Oromo masses within an Ethiopian social formation is the latter's own steadfast refusal to accept their subordinate status, which also makes any would-be Oromo elite reluctant to reach an accommodation with Habasha elites for fear of losing credibility with its popular base. Another major constraint is the Habasha elite's fear of the numerical strength of the Oromo as an ethnonational majority within the empire (the Oromo comprise about half of the empire's 52 million inhabitants). These dual constraints to a polyarchy in Ethiopia - intra-elite constraints and elite-mass constraints - should not be particularized, just as all ethnic group identity itself should not be reified as an attribute that is primordial, but rather one of historical and social construction. The general can be distilled from the particular, and the general in the present discussion is the complex relation between ethnic/racial and class domination. Processes analogous to Ethiopia's were also at work in South Africa, for instance, until conditions particular to that country facilitated a polyarchic resolution to apartheid, which did not, as a matter of course, resolve other underlying social contradictions. Among many other cases we could cite, these processes are still at work in Guatemala, between the Creollo/Ladino ruling elite and the oppressed Mayan ethnonational majority, and whose resolution is not clear at this time. This is not to say that a polyarchy within a unified Ethiopian empire is viable or desirable. The point is that the Ethiopian case, theoretically speaking, is not one of exceptionalism.

So whither U.S.-transnational elite strategy toward the Ethiopian empire? Analysis requires that we separate what the United States will

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pursue in a long-term strategy as an ideal-type outcome (a perfectly functioning polyarchy and robust free-market economy), with what policymakers will attempt to achieve as short-term objectives. An analysis of the deep structural impediments to U.S. success must be combined with an understanding of the dialectical interplay of these impediments with the real constraints to, as well as the opportunities for, Oromo liberation under the current historic conjuncture. It would be a complete misreading of the U.S. strategy to assume that the United States is content to try to stabilize the current arrangement. Seen from the logic of the U.S. policymaking community and organic intellectuals, the fact that the Tigrayan government is weak and powerless, and completely dependent on U.S. support for its continued survival, is a fundamentally unstable and problematic arrangement in the long-term, despite the immediate benefit it brings Washington of having a very pliant government in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa). Tigrayan domination is a tenuous and fragile way of reproducing social order and social control, an obstacle to constructing a solid and self-reproducing system of domination based on consensual (hegemonic) arrangements. The U.S.-transnational elite objective is precisely to avoid reliance on regimes that enjoy little internal legitimacy and that are not solidly rooted in a constituted civil society, and must therefore resort to state repression rather than to mechanisms of hegemony, consensus-building, and cooptation.

In the Ethiopian empire as elsewhere, the failure to install polyarchic regimes does not lead the United States to abandon intervention. Rather, Washington pushes on with its effort, and in the meantime, chooses the best policy option for assuring continued elite rule and political stability in what policymakers hope will be an interim period during which time the conditions will gradually be incubated for an effective long-term transition to polyarchy. If this means supporting a resurgent authoritarianism or even a dictatorial regime during a very long interim, or "transition period," U.S. policymakers do not hesitate to do so, such as happened in Haiti during the 1991-1994 military dictatorship, and in many other places (see, e.g. Robinson, 1996a). The

overall U.S. objective, it must be recalled, is not to support **democracy**, but to stabilize elite rule. Whether the stabilization of elite rule can be achieved through consensual modes of social control (polyarchy) or must rest on coercive domination is a matter of conjunctural analysis of concrete situations. In Haiti, Burma, South Korea, and elsewhere in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the United States did not hesitate to back repressive regimes even as it pushed forward its efforts to implant systems of consensual domination. This is the two-track strategy discussed above.

Coercive domination, outright force and repression, have historically moved to center stage when ruling groups face a crisis of authority, and when they face a breakdown in the socioeconomic structure or the impossibility of establishing a viable pattern of capital accumulation. The Habasha ruling class, given the nature of the Ethiopian empire, has never been able to establish its domination through consensual means or to organize a viable economic system that could meet the minimum needs of the empire's subjects. Hence, mass repression of the super-exploited segment of the empire - the Oromo people - and others, has been an institutionalized, indeed structural, feature of the empire. Thus it should have come as no surprise that the United States has continued to support the EPRDF regime while it attempts to chart a more long-term strategy for developing polyarchy in Ethiopia, or that this policy involves **ignoring** (and even supporting) the systematic repression of the Oromo and other groups.

Repression of the Oromo has continued - and indeed escalated - under the current Ethiopian regime (see, e.g., Pollock, 1996; Africa Watch, 1992; An-Na'im, 1994). Nonetheless, and despite formal statements of "concern," the U.S. government continued to work closely with the regime. It should be recalled that the U.S. concern is not with the violation of human rights, but with how human rights violations in countries around the world may disrupt the transnational agenda, either by the political blemish and moral objection among the international community that human rights violations provoke, and/or because human rights violations are an obstacle to the development of polyarchic

political systems. To the extent that these violations are symptomatic of deeper social conflicts, they indicate a threat to social stability, which, is the condition required for making a country "safe" for transnational capital. Thus, stated Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, George Moose, in explaining why the U.S. government continued to support and work closely with the EPRDF regime despite its systematic human rights violations: "In assessing the human rights situation, we should recall that the TGE, for the first time in decades, has brought general peace and stability to Ethiopia" (Moose, 1994).

The transnational agenda involves, in respective order of priority, making the world accessible to global capital, and making it safe for global capital. The former involves capitalist free markets and neo-liberal SAP's, and the latter, stability. Although the Tigrayan government has become just as authoritarian as its predecessor, it has also moved forward with neo-liberal reform. It has worked out a broad-ranging neo-liberal reform and structural adjustment program with the World Bank and the IMF, and has created conditions for the large-scale entrance of transnational capital. The Tigrayan regime has been the recipient of nearly \$1 billion in financing from bilateral and multilateral agencies, a good portion of these funds destined to rebuilding the infrastructure which will allow for the entrance of the transnational corporations (TNCs) that are driving the global economy. Moreover, bilateral U.S. aid remained high in the early 1990s (\$150 million in 1994 alone), all of it made conditional on continued neo-liberal structural adjustment (Moose, 1994). The economic reforms required for the operation of transnational capital in Ethiopia have been applauded by the transnational elite.

Despite the regime's repressive and anti-democratic character, foreign aid has not been made conditional on any improvement in human rights or even on movement towards **polyarchization**. "Foreign assistance should probably not be saddled with political conditionality at this point," counseled one expert to the U.S. Congress. "Despite the shortcomings of the political process, economic transformation seems to be on track and deserves support in and of itself" (Ottaway, 1993:8).

One Western intelligence analysis unit predicted that U.S., European and Japanese capital would be able to take advantage of the guarantees, social stability, and infrastructural services that the EPRDF government could provide, and that "private investments will play a major role in the Ethiopian economy in the 1990s" (P.R.A. Consultants, 1991:41). The SAP has included a process of privatizing state sector holdings to transnational capital and to Ethiopians. Albeit, as elsewhere, privatization becomes a cookie jar for those elites who have access to the state, and not surprisingly the EPRDF and its supporters have privatized to themselves many state properties. In early 1994, the World Bank commended the EPRDF regime for substantial progress in neo-liberal structural adjustment, including lifting constraints on foreign investment and the liberalization of the domestic financial market, which allowed the opening of several private banks and insurance companies (Moose, 1994). And former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, noted that "the TGE has really taken to structural adjustment with gusto" (Cohen, 1994).

It should also be noted that Mengistu's policies of removing millions of Oromos from their land, the most fertile agricultural lands in the empire, to make way for state farms, ironically created the perfect structural conditions for the eventual introduction of agri-business and cash-crop production destined for the world market: the concentration of small holdings, an emerging market in land, and a dispossessed Oromo laboring population. The northern region of Ethiopia is no longer fertile due to decades of overexploitation, soil erosion, and war, while Oromo lands remain fertile and well-watered. Moreover, Oromia contained Ethiopia's famed coffee wealth, as well as significant deposits of natural gas, gold, and other resources coveted by transnational corporations. The relationship between class and ethnicity is too complex for discussion here.<sup>10</sup> Suffice it to note, as regards Ethiopia and Oromia, that there has been a close affinity, for historic reasons, between class exploitation and ethnic oppression in the Ethiopian social formation, in which the Oromo have made up the exploited classes, as serfs and slaves dating back to King Menilek's creation of the Ethiopian empire, and later

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as expropriated and coerced labor under the empire's 20th century semi-capitalist structures. The point to emphasize here is two-fold, and underscores complex contradictions.

First, as Cappelli has noted, "It may be that historic Abyssinia's only hope of escaping recurrent famine and retaining economic viability lies in maintaining control over the Oromo areas it conquered a century ago" (1992:20). In turn, such continued class-ethnic subjugation of the Oromo on the basis of capitalist penetration and development of Oromo land, resources, and labor, could well become the formula for the Ethiopian social formation's insertion into the global economy and the linkage of an Ethiopian elite to the transnational elite, such that Habasha internal domination becomes the internal Ethiopian political condition for the operation of transnational capital in the empire. In such a hypothetical scenario, Oromo emancipation would run up against the full weight of the forces of global capitalism, including the structural power of transnational capital, as well as the myriad forms of state power exercised by core states in the global order, in conjunction with Habasha local domination.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, class and ethnicity have historically been closely intermeshed in Ethiopia, particularly as regards Oromia. It should be expected that the U.S.-transnational project will try to foment an Oromo elite that privileges its own class identity, and intra-elite class alliances, over the oppressed ethnonational status of the Oromo. A viable formula for internal hegemonic order in Ethiopia that links the social formation to transnational hegemonic order - indeed, one that would objectively provide a much more solid and long-term base for stability (making Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa "safe" for global capitalism) - is the fomentation and incorporation of an Oromo elite. Such an elite would be intermediaries between the Oromo laboring mass and Oromo resources, on the one hand, and on the other hand would be integrated into a pan-Ethiopian transnationalized elite drawn from diverse ethnic groups.<sup>11</sup> Such an Oromo elite, in essence would be "invited" to join a ruling bloc in the empire, which would entitle it to the privileges of domination, including entitlement to enjoy the spoils of the

exploitation of Oromia's wealth, state sinecures, and so forth. If this scenario, hypothesized in the logic of U.S.-transnational strategy, were to materialize, it would help resolve **intra-elite** contradictions impeding the inculcation of a polyarchy, as discussed earlier, and would shift the terms of the dialectics between dominant and subordinate groups.<sup>12</sup>

What are those forces that might form the potential social base for an Oromo elite tied to the transnational elite and the global capitalist order, and what are the countervailing forces? The search to identify these social forces, to liaison with them, and so forth, will be an integral part of U.S. policy, and, consistent with similar U.S. operations in other countries, this search will take place within Oromo civil society, among Oromo intellectuals, in the Oromo diaspora, and within the Oromo liberation movement itself (one should look to AID and NED-funded groups as key transnational elite recruitment grounds). Inevitably, tensions with the Oromo liberation movement reflect multiple dynamics that interact with each other, one of which is the Oromo national question, and another of which is class formation and elite aspirations **within** Oromia. There are no facile answers, but the national/class dialectic beckons elaboration, and is addressed here in some concluding remarks placed in historic and theoretical context.

### **Conclusion: The Hour of Oromo Liberation**

It is the job of good social analysis to identify those forces (classes, strata, and groups) that form the historic social base of, and therefore have objective interests in, a given order, including those who aspire to join these dominant groups, and to distinguish those forces whose objective interests lie in fundamental change. Superimposed upon all anti-colonial national struggles are class and group contradictions latent in the social coalitions that engage in such struggles. Opportunism and betrayal in political struggles often have objective coordinates in real or potential class and group interests. The transition from the colonial to the neo-colonial order in Africa involved a definite set of international class alliances, between new dominant classes in post-independence

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Africa that were to assume the direct administration of state power in their respective countries and the ruling classes in the core of the world capitalist system. That these regimes did not protect and promote the interests of broad popular majorities should not have been surprising. Local ruling groups were intermediaries between the world capitalist system and national populations, and their objective interests were not in liberation from this system but precisely its defense and reproduction within each national formation. The multifarious conflicts and contradictions within local ruling classes, and between these and their counterparts in the core of world capitalism, attest to the extreme difficulty of stabilizing capitalist social order in Africa, but do nothing to negate the class character of post-independence African regimes. It should also be recalled that aspiring elites used discourse ranging from cultural nationalism to African socialism to Marxism, and that discourse and practice do not necessarily correspond.

It would be wrong to assume that the same class relations of earlier decolonization in the rest of Africa are not latent within the movement for the decolonization of Oromia, with the dual exceptions that the colonizing agents are also African in the Ethiopian empire, and that the struggle for Oromo emancipation takes place with the new epoch of globalization as the backdrop. In a hypothetical scenario, an Oromo elite would seek to decolonize Oromia so as to become the "legitimate" local dominant group, with full "rights" as an Oromo elite as other Third World elites enjoy in the new environment of global capitalism. This group would have as its objective the incorporation of the Oromo struggle for decolonization and liberation into the broad agenda of the transnational elite. It would not be surprising to find this group puts forth a discourse and a practical political agenda that reflects the aspirations of a potential Oromo elite to become the in-country Oromo counterparts to the transnational elite, and that these elements become enmeshed with the diverse "democracy promotion" and related U.S. political, diplomatic, and economic undertakings in the region. Because the mass of oppressed Oromo and their struggle are sources of the legitimacy of a potential Oromo elite, and its "bargaining chip" with the

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Habasha and the transnational elite in Ethiopia, the discourse and the conduct of a potential elite would be unstable and contradictory.

As in all national democratization and anti-colonial struggles, there is both a national and a class contradiction at play. Under globalization and the changes involved therein, the class contradiction tends to take on a greater quota of importance vis-a-vis the national contradiction. This is clearly not the case at the time of writing (early 1997) as regards Oromia and Ethiopia. The circumstances attendant on the struggle for Oromo liberation makes it exceedingly difficult for an Oromo intermediary elite to emerge. But the class contradiction is a condition latent in the structure of the social forces at play. What keeps the national contradiction in the forefront is the "wild card" in the Ethiopian equation: the Oromo masses. So long as the Oromo masses retain the vibrant political protagonism they have displayed in recent years, it will be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for the transnational elite to pry an Oromo elite far enough away from its mass base to incorporate it into any hegemonic elite bloc. Since the early 1990s, Oromo nationalism has blossomed under the conscious protagonism of the Oromo masses (Jalata, 1995), and "the Oromo national movement has been transformed from an elite to a mass movement" (Jalata, 1996:105). The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) emerged as the most advanced and organized expression of Oromo nationalism, and the **popular** national struggle of the Oromo masses has kept the OLF anchored in its mass popular base. The resistance of the popular classes in Oromia - their armed struggle, political mobilization, cultural awakening - is the principal monkey-wrench in the U.S.-transnational project for Ethiopia. It makes the empire inherently unstable and makes inviable the aspirations of any would-be Oromo elite. The failure to resolve the Oromo question - to end Oromo ethnonational oppression - will only intensify the crisis of the Ethiopian empire, and this crisis will aggravate the already explosive situation throughout the Horn of Africa. There is a paradox in the dialectic between the oppressor and the oppressed. If global capitalism has the power to undermine any project of popular democracy and social emancipation in

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Oromia, the popular Oromo masses also have the power to undermine the viability of global capitalism in the Horn of Africa.

What is to be done as regards the Oromo liberation struggle? This is, as a matter of course, a decision for the Oromo people. But it is a decision that must be taken within the real constraints to social change and emancipation that global capitalism places on each nation and people. In the complex relation between national liberation and social emancipation, there are two distinct processes that become interwoven under historically-determined **conjunctures**. The interests of multiple classes and social groups converge **in these conjunctures** around national liberation since national oppression holds back all members of the particular socially-constructed national community. The convergence of distinct classes and groups around national liberation conceals real contradictions between these classes and groups, and these contradictions become inextricably intermeshed with the process of integration into emergent global capitalist society, leading to highly complex scenarios. For aspiring elites, "national liberation" means removing those barriers that impede these elites from full participation in structure of domination, the preservation of which is a requisite for their status as elites. For popular classes, "national liberation" is a precondition for social emancipation. As regards Oromia, what needs to be explored is the extent of organic unity among diverse classes, elites, and social groups around a project of Oromo liberation, as well as the limits to such unity, the objective contradictions between these classes and groups, and the distinct interests of each vis-a-vis global capitalism.

We should be aware of the constraints that global capitalism places on popular democracy, and with it, Oromo freedom in Ethiopia. Revolution, liberation, and popular democracy mean that people win through struggle the power to shape their life circumstances, and to use that power to improve their life conditions and collective cultural realization. Revolution conceived as the seizure of state power by popular forces, or the creation of a new state, may not mean much in the era of globalization, in which real power is located in the global system. The structural power of capital can be superimposed with ease on the

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direct power of peripheral states. The "operational" power of the transnational elite as the agent of transnational capital is such that it does not take much to have (nation) states conform to the dictates of global capitalism and its agenda. In the process, those that come to power are thrust by powerful structural pressures, and tempting opportunities opened up to them by their new location, to synchronize local states with global capitalism.

This is less a pessimistic assessment than a realistic one. It in no way implies that Oromo freedom (and the project of human emancipation in general) is foreclosed; to the contrary, facile solutions are foreclosed in a more realistic appraisal of constraints and opportunities. I do not know whether Oromo liberation can be achieved within an Ethiopian nation-state, or if achieving such liberation requires the establishment of an independent Oromia. It seems to me that there are two possible "paths" to the abolition of Oromo ethnonational oppression: one is the establishment of an independent Oromia, and the other is the seizing of state power within the Ethiopian empire by the Oromo and the establishment of majority rule therein. What is progressive at any historic conjuncture is what advances the interests of popular majorities - their control over the conditions of their existence and their prospects for social emancipation. Under the current historic conjuncture, the liberation of the Oromo from Ethiopian colonialism, even though it does not result in popular democracy and social justice given constraints imposed by global capitalism, is an attainable goal, in and of itself. **And attaining this goal- indeed, any outcome to the current situation in Ethiopia and Oromia results in an end to the systematic ethnonational oppression of the Oromo - would be a victory of historic proportions for the Oromo, and a tremendous advance for democratic forces in Africa and worldwide.** It is incumbent upon scholars, activists, democrats, and humanitarians the world over to support the Oromo in their just struggle. To do anything less is to betray the most elemental principles of human dignity and justice.

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## NOTES

1. A biographical note of sorts is in order. As a scholar and also a partisan of popular social change around the world, my work in recent years has led me to theoretical inquiry into the nature of constraints to such change in Central America, a region in which I lived during the formative years of my academic and political development. Following an examination of the failure of revolutionary movements in Central America in the 1980s and early 1990s, I moved to broader theoretical inquiry into the nature of the current world order as the ultimate causal factor constraining such change around the world. I concluded that capitalist globalization, as the qualitatively new historic dynamic of our epoch, has fundamentally altered the terrain on which dominant and subordinate groups face each other and do battle in every corner of the world. The findings of six years of my research was published by Cambridge University Press in 1996, in a volume titled *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, U.S. Intervention, and Hegemony*, and readers interested in a more complete exposition of the theoretical propositions advanced in this article are referred to that volume (Robinson, 1996a). See also Robinson, 1992; 1996b; 1996c. While I spent several years as a student in East and West Africa in the late 1970s, I do not claim expertise per se on Africa, and consider myself a beginning student of Oromo studies. Nevertheless, what I have found in my initial investigation is that the same patterns of U.S. foreign policy, and more broadly, the same social forces and dynamics bound up with the current period of capitalist globalization that I have analyzed and documented elsewhere, are at work in Ethiopia, and are of vital importance to understanding the future of the Oromo struggle for freedom.
2. I state this herein admittedly simplified terms due to space constraints. The point is that social analysis of policy and specific conjunctures requires that we see beyond the immediate concerns and perceptions of policymakers and the conjunctural circumstances in which they are grounded (e.g., geo-political rivalries), and focus on the deeper structural processes and relations at work. For more detailed discussion readers are referred to Robinson, 1996a, esp. chapters one and two. For some discussion of the Soviet role in Ethiopia, see Jalata (1994); Petras and Morley (1987); Holcomb and Ibssa (1990, esp. chapter 9).

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3. Samuel P. Huntington. 1989. "The Modest Meaning of Democracy," in Robert A. Pastor, *Democracy in the Americas: Stopping the Pendulum* (New York: Basic Books).
4. There is a long-standing debate on modes of production and the world system relevant to discussion of globalization. In this debate, one side (e.g., the dependency perspective of economist Andre Gunder Frank and world-system framework advanced by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein) argues that the "modern world system" (circa 1500 to date) has always been "capitalist" since production was undertaken to market for a profit. The other side rejects this definition of capitalism as an exchange relation, and argues that a broader capitalist world economy "articulated" diverse modes of production under the hegemony of the capitalist mode, and that capitalism is in essence a production relation (for a summary of the debate, see Foster-Carter, 1978). This is not mere semantics. The former position leads to a view that globalization denotes only a quantitative intensification of a 500-year process, whereas the latter sees quantitative change giving way now to qualitative change, with important implications for macrosocial analysis. My own position is that globalization is displacing all hitherto pre-capitalist production relations around the world (see Robinson, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c). When I refer in this essay and elsewhere to "emergent global capitalism," therefore, I am referring to a qualitatively new worldwide situation, in which capitalism is becoming the only production relation on a global scale.
5. *Uneven Globalization* (Holm and Sorensen, 1995) implies that the essential economic process has lagged in certain regions (e.g., a good portion of Africa). But the pressures emanating from the substructural process are felt around the world, including as they are "filtered out" through policies, such as U.S. foreign policy, and these superstructural changes are at work in every region, including in the Horn of Africa. This is crucial, because most world industrial production is not shifting to Africa, but largely to Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe. But the general process of macroeconomic restructuring associated with globalization and a new international division of labor has affected virtually every country and region of the world (witness, for instance, the application of "structural adjustment programs", or SAPs, in every country of Africa). The sets of policies developed by the centers of world power in response to globalizing pressures, such as polyarchy promotion, are applied throughout the world. Also, see Sklair's discussion of a "transnational capitalist class" and of global capitalist forces in Africa (Sklair, 1995:138-142).

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6. For discussion on this transnational elite, see Cox, 1987, Sklair, 1995, Gill, 1990, and Robinson, 1996a, b, and c.
7. The emergent system of global stratification is punctuated by multiple hierarchies among labor, often along racial and ethnic lines. Super-exploited ethnic groups, such as the Oromo, should be seen in analytic perspective, as subordinate segments of local and global class structures. Discussion is beyond the scope of this essay.
8. For discussion, see Jalata (1993), esp. pp. 178-186.
9. For discussion of these events as told by an insider, see Lata (forthcoming). Lata is Deputy Secretary of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).
10. I will stress, however, that nations/ethnicities are historically variable and socially constructed. What creates an ethnic or national group and defines its membership are never innate or primordial. The material and ideational processes of historical construction of a nation/ethnicity are inseparable from class formation and class dynamics arising from the same historical process. These class dynamics, theoretically conceived, are generally antecedent, and therefore causal, to ethnic or national dynamics, even though the latter is not reducible to the former. Applied to the Ethiopian empire, we cannot conceive of an Oromo ethnonation apart from its subjugation to the Ethiopian empire, and this subjugation was an historic process grounded in the economic (material) interests and objectives of a Habasha ruling class and a Habasha class structure that temporally anteceded Habasha conquest of the Oromo.
11. There are, of course, deep historic continuities apart from the discontinuities brought about by globalization whose exploration is not possible here. Suffice it not note that the hypothetical "game plan" depicted here from the viewpoint of the transnational elite would update, under new conditions of globalization, the 19th century Oromo elite that mediated Abyssinian conquest (see, e.g., Jalata, 1993; Baissa, 1992; Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990).
12. The transition would be from a Habasha class structure, and interests therein, integrated into a transnational class structure and the global economy, to the conformation of an internal pan-Ethiopian class structure externalized, in turn, by linkage with emergent global class structures. This would shift the principal contradiction in the Ethiopian empire from the ethno-national to the class

terrain. Such issues cannot be explored here. But note the issue of "competing political vision" among Oromo nationalists as discussed by Jalata (1996), among others. I suggest here that behind competing visions are real, perceived, or potential competing interests.

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# THE TALE OF TWO DEMOCRACIES: THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN US-SPONSORED ETHIOPIAN "DEMOCRACY" AND INDIGENOUS OROMO DEMOCRATIC FORMS

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*Bonnie K. Holcomb*

## Introduction

In the six years since the end of the 17-year long regime headed by Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia, there has been considerable interest in and dispute concerning the nature of the government that replaced Mengistu's *Dergue* and took over control of the Ethiopian state. The group that moved into power in 1991 with the support of the United States vowed to introduce democracy into Ethiopia. The EPRDF, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, was the least likely of the potential candidates in the region to promote democracy if popular grassroots democracy was to emerge.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the EPRDF, which declared itself to be a multi-ethnic political force, was ensconced in power and all other political groups in the Ethiopian empire were invited to join with them in the effort to build what was called a "multi-ethnic democracy" in Ethiopia. Nearly all, including the groups representing the majority nationality in the empire, the Oromo, and several southern peoples accepted the invitation and agreed to attend an organizing conference in July 1991 to establish a transitional government for Ethiopia. Most of these groups were also drawn into the process of framing, endorsing and signing a National Charter which offered promises of rights to govern their own affairs within their regions. Thus they looked toward a year of preparation for an election that all hoped would consolidate their progress toward democracy.

By the end of the transition year, however, most of the independent parties had withdrawn from the coalition and there is no dispute that the elections ended in the consolidation of one-party rule in Ethiopia. How do we explain this breakdown in the effort to build a

multi-ethnic democracy? What happened here? Taking the Oromo as our focus, did the Oromo somehow fail to uphold the tenets of a viable form of democracy? Or did the EPRDF and Oromo objectives clash in a way that made cooperation impossible? If so, how?

## Two Democracies

The cause of this breakdown is found in deeply differing notions of democracy represented in the process of introducing a US-sponsored "democracy" into Ethiopia. The paper title promises a tale of two democracies. There were several conceptualizations of an ideal democratic polity operating among the many groups who initially participated in forming a transitional government. Here we focus on two of them, first on the particular form of "democracy" promoted worldwide by the United States. It has become an integral part of a new economic development and foreign policy initiative taken in the mid-1980s. This version of "democracy" was accepted wholesale and championed by the EPRDF for introduction into Ethiopia. We will also focus on a second form of democracy which came into contact with the EPRDF sponsored version in the Ethiopian context. This form was the one embodied in the political culture of the indigenous Oromo people who were incorporated into the Ethiopian empire in the late 1800s. Central concepts of popular democracy exist in Oromo tradition which are apparently grounded in pre-colonial political experience. These concepts remain accessible to even ordinary Oromo who have utilized them to critically judge the types of "democratic" practices introduced by the EPRDF. Let us take a look at each of these "democracies."

## Background to "New Wave" Democracy

The form of "democracy" advocated by the U.S. and adopted by the EPRDF is the product of a new U.S. foreign policy strategy developed over the last two decades. This "New Wave" democracy is epitomized in Samuel P. Huntington's book, *The Third Wave* (1991).

He describes a process of "democratization" in the late twentieth century and chronicles how this new kind of "democracy" is being introduced to replace crumbling authoritarian regimes worldwide. Huntington and other New Wave ideologues have presented central features of this new "democracy" as a model for the involvement and the integration of new elites from all major sectors of the political terrain into the management of the central government in the "democratizing" empire. The type of system that Huntington and other writers are willing to call "democratic," and apparently willing to accept as such, is one which has developed in response to global processes at work in this era.

What becomes evident in looking at Huntington's examples is that in this new type of "democracy" a multi-ethnic group of local Western-educated elites in a given empire can be supported by the United States to step in to grasp the controls of governance with a firm hold while presenting the appearance of political openness. That appearance is primarily maintained through the conduct of highly subscribed and publicized formal elections held in each empire. Huntington has written, for example, "**The principal criterion of democratization is selection of a government through an open, competitive, fully participatory, fairly administered election**" (1991: 113, emphasis added). Yet the holding of elections when this component is divorced from other components of democratic process serves to present an image of democracy while camouflaging the real dynamics of the political system in formation. Therefore, elections have come to provide the appearance of equal access to decision-making for all social and political groups while in reality the process of determining who is able to run for office is tightly controlled during the short but determinative period of transition from an authoritarian regime. A crucial part of New Wave "democracy" is the process of stage managing these elections both internally and externally. Particularly important to the new "democratization" process is that some international "neutral" body be on hand to declare the that elections were officially "open, competitive, fully participatory, fairly administered;" in other words, that they were "free and fair."

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The New Wave democracy is not a type of popular or grassroots democracy, though there is a concerted effort to present it as such. It is more accurately called "polyarchy",<sup>2</sup> or the rule of elites. I call it interchangeably polyarchy, "elite democracy," or simply "democracy," placed in quotation marks to indicate that I contest this application of the term as misleading. As mentioned above, this Third Wave "democratization" is a phenomenon of the considerable and rapid changes that have taken place in the world from the 1970s to the 1990s. The creation of a global economic order has meant the globalization of communication, of currency, and of the labor force itself. This has also forced the systematization of politics leading to the creation of a new global political order as well. Consequently, the old nation-state boundaries are shrinking in significance. Global finance has created a reality in which 20% of the population of First World countries owns and controls the vast majority of the resources of the globe (Lasch 1995:45ff). This highly privileged twenty percent has recently begun to share its status with tiny percentages of the populations in Second and Third World countries to constitute a group of transnational ruling elites who are the decision-making members of a smaller global village. The new global order is in the process of creating conditions where these ruling elites know virtually no boundaries to investment. Many of these conditions are aided by the promotion of polyarchy or elite democracy in areas that are being more tightly integrated into the global system.

What were once called the old "compradore" and "national bourgeoisies" are being gradually absorbed into this new transnational ruling class. The incorporation of these old elites into a global class is occurring simultaneously with the emergence of a new privileged and Western-educated group of functionaries or managers who have been drawn to the economic and administrative centers created by the global economy. A close look at these global processes throughout the 1990s reveals that the world has gradually become separated into three broad groups, an organized global ruling class, a fairly disorganized group of Western-educated administrative functionaries (which could be regarded as a global petit bourgeoisie), and a massive global working class.

The introduction of this model of Third Wave "democracy" aims at integrating the functionaries, or the trained, managing sectors of the Third World countries -- who are privileged, Western-educated elites in relation to their own populations -- into governing or administrative groups in those countries. Since the mid-1980s the "promotion of democracy" by the U.S. has targeted these new transnational functionaries for participation in the new political venture. The processes of consolidating a global economy have created conditions for formerly isolated groups of localized Western-educated managers, administrators and intellectuals from different ethnic groups to come together, at least tentatively, based on Western culture. Their acquired tastes for Western products (such as Nikes, blue jeans, and Western music for example) as well as their shared language, social and educational skills have already begun to isolate them from their divergent populations of origin and provided a basis for the possibility of uniting them as a Western-oriented and Western-influenced group. The new policy of "democracy promotion" sets great store on the strength of that Western influence on determining the direction and behavior of this group, but, in reality, the strength of the influence remains to be tested in the crucible of the New Wave "democratization."

William Robinson has shed a bright new light on the phenomenon of establishing elite "democracies" worldwide, and contributed greatly to our understanding of the United States' role, in a timely new book titled, *Promoting Polyarchy* (1996). In it, he has addressed the development of U.S. foreign policy from the mid 1980s. He details how the explicit design of polyarchy (what I have called "elite democracy") emerged out of the highest echelons of the U.S. national security state.<sup>3</sup>

Robinson demonstrates how the U.S. military defeat in Indochina, followed by the collapse of the Shah's regime and the rise of the Nicaraguan resistance to the US-backed dictator at the close of the 1970s, seriously damaged the U.S. ability to shape events abroad. This was particularly true in the Third World, where nationalist revolutions abounded. The need for a new political, military, and economic

approach to put resistance forces on the defensive gave rise to the new formula for conducting U.S. foreign policy. Robinson traces the birth of this new policy through the corridors of the U.S. policy-making apparatus.<sup>4</sup>

The new "democracy" or elite democracy that is cropping up worldwide should be viewed in the context of U.S. hegemony or leadership of the new transnational ruling group. What we are witnessing now is the formal abandonment of the old U.S. policy of direct military intervention and support of authoritarian regimes in favor of the introduction and development of its replacement, "promoting democracy," as the preferred form of political intervention on the global level. The type of "democracy" promoted is the one referred to above, polyarchy, a carefully curtailed system in which a tiny group of Western-oriented, Western-educated functionaries friendly to the U.S. actually governs. Mass participation in government and decision-making is strictly limited to leadership choice between competing individuals from this group in highly publicized and carefully managed elections. The political strategies associated with the new "democracy" have been put forward in an effort to develop and protect the environment for investment and the maximization of profit of the new transnational ruling elites, formed out of the 20% of the First World population together with their new Second and Third World cohorts.

The architects of the new "democracy" have based their strategy in great measure on the assumption that control, or at least significant influence, over the group of Western-educated functionaries found in each of the locations that has been targeted for "democracy" will introduce stability in that specific place by exerting control and influence over the vast working populations who represent well over 80% of global society. The nature and composition of both the Western-educated group and the working populations become quite important in assessing the potential for success of this strategy. The composition changes from continent to continent and from empire to empire depending on their particular histories and experiences with the colonizing empire. The group of functionaries is primarily composed of urban-dwelling persons

who have become isolated from the rural populations they came from, and who have been educated and equipped to serve in administrative and management roles in business and/or government. There is no doubt that they aspire to elite status and respond quickly to opportunities made available to them through a system of government based on a model of power sharing directly introduced or supported by the United States. The U.S. strategists have assumed two things about these Western-influenced individuals -- that they will respond to U.S. influence and pressure, and that they have strong directive links with the remaining working populations which enable them to provide an adequate measure of control over the working masses in their respective countries.

Although these are only a portion of the assumptions upon which the new strategy is built, they are crucial ones. Yet the assumptions are seriously flawed, particularly for Africa, as we shall discuss below. The political architects of the new "democracy" have set about to construct in transitional societies worldwide "democratic" administrative structures designed to be operated by a locally recruited Western-educated managerial and intellectual elite corps. This design requires the corps to serve and to participate in an infrastructure that anticipates providing the necessary stability for that megastate or global state. The key to this stability, however, lies in the presumed cooperation, or at least the quiescence, of the bulk of the huge working population (the remaining 80%). What is not taken adequately into account is that the nature and the strength of the connection between the new management elites and the working peoples varies greatly according to the specific circumstances and history of the society in question. The approach of "democracy promotion" tends to overlook that the extent of Western influence on the members of recently privileged functionary groups can be quite tentative and superficial. It also fails to realize the powerful hold that their cultural and social backgrounds can have on them. This group of Western-influenced functionaries is particularly tiny and volatile in Africa.

Concern about the possibility for rebellion of the majority working populations is what lurks behind the political strategy of the new

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"democratization" with its explicit concern over political "stability." It is implicit that potential conflicts among the selected elites from a wide range of backgrounds who are invited to share in the multi-ethnic "democracy" project reflect real or potential clashes among the wider populations. Conflicts that occur among these Western-trained functionaries of Third World nations for power or control of the state apparatus in any given empire are regarded as a great threat to investment and stability worldwide, precisely because they are indicative of deeper conflicts society-wide. The New Wave "democracy" is introduced as the model for governance set up to manage latent conflicts by bringing the elites of various conflict-prone populations into government, an arena where the transnational ruling class has considerable sway. This policy assumes first, that the acceptance by these local managerial elites of Western mores and modes of government is complete, and second, that the power and influence between these functionaries and their home populations flow outward to the working people rather than the reverse.

### **U.S. "Democracy Promotion" in Ethiopia**

The program of United States-led "democracy promotion" has been tested with varying degrees of short-term success in the Philippines, Nicaragua, Chile, Haiti, South Africa, and elsewhere. Consequently, the ongoing attempt in Ethiopia deserves our attention.

When events in the Northeast African corner of the globe are viewed in light of the introduction of "democracy" in other unlikely places by other equally unlikely agents, it becomes evident that Ethiopia indeed represents a case study in the new form of U.S. foreign policy. The drama played out in the Horn of Africa, between differing visions for democracy, takes on greater significance here precisely because it sheds light on the worldwide effort by the U.S. to construct a political and social institutional framework that will accommodate the needs of corporate investment globally. It is clear that U.S. agencies operating in Northeast Africa chose to support a specific group in Ethiopia who

would ally with them and assist in the fabrication of a "democratic" framework as designed and guided by U.S. policymakers. One key to cooperation between the U.S. and the TPLF, cum EPRDF, became the extent to which the Tigray formed an elite willing to offer U.S. corporations access to resources within the empire that the EPRDF also sought control over, and whether they were willing to perform the function of servicing corporate institutional needs locally and regionally. Another key was whether the Tigray/EPRDF were willing to adopt the "multi-ethnic" approach to governance that is central to U.S. policy. The Tigray/EPRDF were extremely accommodating in both regards.

In assessing developments in Ethiopia, it is significant to note that following their attempts at "democracy" in the Philippines, Chile, Nicaragua, Haiti and elsewhere, the same branches of the U.S. foreign policy apparatus appeared on the ground to carry forth their "democracy promotion" program in the Ethiopian venue through the EPRDF. Suffice it to say that many of the major institutional and individual players in these foreign policy organs appeared on the scene in person to carry forward the Ethiopian experiment. In fact, Meles Zenawi himself, newly established head of the Ethiopian state, read *The Third Wave* and invited its author, Samuel P. Huntington, ideologue for this new democracy movement, to meet with him personally. Huntington did go to Ethiopia and reported part of their discussion in a paper delivered to AID/Ethiopia on May 17, 1993 (Huntington, 1993). Huntington provided Meles with a recipe of "democratic" choices he might select in approaching the challenge. The meeting of these two men only symbolizes the coming together of a massive US-led movement to promote an elite democracy on the one hand, and on the other, a representative of the local elite group more than willing formally to put aside any previous political principles in order to be tutored in how to accomplish the seemingly insurmountable challenge of "democratizing" Ethiopia. It happens that the objectives of the Tigray elites matched quite well with those of the U.S. in that neither were interested in popular democracy per se, but rather in the stability of the Ethiopian state. Consequently, the Tigray elites were able to operate easily in consort with international policy

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planning institutes, U.S. state agencies, and academic circuits linked to the policy-making process.

It appears that in each setting where a new institutional arrangement designed and currently promoted by the U.S. is introduced through an elitist instrument, it encounters some form of popular democracy or popular aspirations for democracy; popular democracy being conceived of as a system in which people will be empowered to make decisions about their immediate conditions and run their own affairs, bring together social, political and economic dimensions of their lives, and direct government from the population upward or inward. Since the polyarchy or elite democracy interposed by the U.S. is specifically charted and equipped to enhance the investment environment of transnational and corporate concerns, its design clashes with and ultimately has the effect of undermining movements to develop popular democracy wherever it is introduced. Suffice it to say that the place of local labor and resources in the designs of the transnational ruling elite and of the indigenous popular movements (usually organized to reclaim rights from a repressive government), prove to be incompatible. In the Ethiopian case, the discrepancy in interests was revealed in a relatively short time frame compared to other places where the model has been introduced.

With the distinction in mind between elite and popular democracies, let us interpret the events of the first year of transition to "democracy" in Ethiopia. The EPRDF was an unlikely candidate to introduce democracy into Ethiopia **only** if popular democracy was the objective desired. If we interpret events in light of the new "promotion of democracy" approach to foreign policy which has been applied to Ethiopia, the type of "democracy" for which Ethiopia was targeted was clearly not the popular grassroots version aspired to by the Oromo and other peoples of the region. In fact, the Oromo national liberation fronts had chosen to champion specific components of popular democracy identified with the Oromo pre-colonial **Gada** system of government. If popular democracy had been the goal, these organizations might have been favorably regarded. However, once the new U.S.-backed

government was in place in Ethiopia, the independent Oromo organizations, regardless of the kind of democracy they advocated, were labeled as "terrorist," and the institutions of Oromo democracy associated with these groups became suspect and were specifically targeted for elimination and replacement. This process took less than a year.

In the Ethiopian case, the EPRDF qualified as a particularly appropriate agent for the job of accepting and of promoting the U.S. version of democracy largely due to the responsiveness of its leadership to U.S. directives. It constituted a set of educated managerial elites, primarily Tigrays, eager to gather around them ambitious elites from surrounding ethnic groups, aspiring to manage an empire that they had been competing to control, not to change. Given the Tigray interest in being established at the pinnacle of the Ethiopian state (they regard it as a "reinstatement" to Tigray's previous grandeur before suppression by the Amhara), and their willingness publicly to abandon former political postures to attain assistance in achieving this goal, they stood ready to do U.S. bidding. In preparation for assuming this role, they had created a set of shadow institutions poised to replace the organizational forms that existed in areas not controlled by the EPRDF. For the Oromo areas, the OPDO was constructed to compete with, rout out, and replace the already existing independent Oromo groups. It is consistent with the new U.S. "democratization" strategy that replacement institutions be introduced to parallel and supplant whatever forms threaten global corporate interests.

Substantial U.S. contact with the TPLF beginning at the time of the 1984-1985 Ethiopian famine nicely exemplified a pattern now well established by the U.S. of using humanitarian assistance and quasi-humanitarian agencies to gain access to and create avenues of intervention into crisis-ridden situations. The TPLF was subsequently assisted, advised, and groomed to step into the position of advocating the U.S. version of "democracy" and assuming the reins of power. These aspirations, together with a lack of democratic credentials, may well have made the Tigray more suitable to the task of implementing the U.S.

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program in this region, having no established, working concept of democracy that might clash with or interfere with the U.S. concept.

When the **Dergue** collapsed, the U.S. intervention was swift and decisive. From the London Conference in May 1991, the U.S. Undersecretary of State for Africa first "recommended" that the EPRDF enter Addis Ababa (see Lyons, 1992), and then formally recognized the EPRDF to be in control of that city.<sup>5</sup> With the Tigray as accomplices, the U.S. program for promoting the U.S. version of democracy was underway. Herman Cohen declared that the effort to build a democracy in Ethiopia had begun. "No democracy, no cooperation," he said. Everyone who heard that remark could and did impose his or her particular interpretation of democracy into the statement. It is now clear that he meant polyarchy, elite democracy of the "Third Wave" variety, not popular democracy. That anticipated confusion bought the U.S. and their EPRDF allies several months of organizing time before the discrepancies became evident.

The point of transition following the fall of an authoritarian regime is the primary juncture at which the new U.S. policy of "democracy promotion" is regarded as successful worldwide. The strategy appeared to work fairly well in Ethiopia. By appealing in May 1991 to the aspirations of the broad majority of people in rural Ethiopia, who were hungry for freedom from a ruthless dictatorship and also hungry for popular sovereignty, the U.S. promised to bring democracy and thereby blunted protest, disarming the population for many crucial months between May 1991 and the scheduled June 1992 elections.

Neither the ideological content nor the political implications of the U.S. brand of "democracy" were immediately recognized among those who responded to the call for "democracy." The desire among the Oromo and other "peripheral" peoples to build a popular democracy according to their own tradition and objectives (see below) prevented them from perceiving the distinction between the US/EPRDF version and their own. This desire kept the Oromo and others from resisting effectively the appeal for cooperation with the U.S. and the Tigray at a critical formative point in the political process, July 1991-January 1992.

The Oromo desire for democracy also kept them from protesting blatant inequities such as being apportioned only 12 out of 87 seats in an ostensibly representative council, although the Oromo constituted the unquestioned majority population in Ethiopia even while Eritrea was still included in the count. Another example of this kind of inequity was the arrangement accepted by the Oromo in which the EPRDF's own militia was designated to serve as the state police and as the transitional national army, a status that provided them legitimacy for a constant presence in the Oromo and others' territories, leaving the indigenous peoples vulnerable to intimidation, violence, and fraud at the hands of increasingly hostile troops during a period when Oromo were supposed to be self-administered (see Lyons, 1996: 127). The justifications for repeated interference in Oromo areas were the requirement to protect minorities, and that the roads were their domain, giving rise to many instances of the arrival of EPRDF troops in Oromo territories on charges that Oromo claimed were trumped-up and for which "investigations" dragged on for months.

The tactical move of getting Oromo intellectuals involved in the process of drafting and then defending the National Charter (which the EPRDF disregarded) also bought the EPRDF and the U.S. operatives many months of organizing time while the Oromo and others made serious attempts at cooperation between July 1991 and early June 1992. The Oromos' confidence in their own ability to build a regional popular democracy in Oromia based on the Oromo people's commitment to and familiarity with popular democratic concepts and mechanisms represented in the *Gada*, proved to be overconfidence, and blinded them to the pattern of repression that was emerging. The lack of equity in the talks in London, the precipitous move to place the TPLF/EPRDF in power, the decisions made behind closed doors, the illogical bias in the apportionment of seats in the interim Council, the way in which Oromo assigned to take Ministry portfolios as part of the coalition government were stripped of authority within their ministries, the pattern of low intensity warfare, the build-up and financial support given to the OPDO - all take on special meaning in light of the divergent objectives. The

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pattern is in accord with practices used in situations in the Philippines, Chile, Nicaragua, and Haiti into which the U.S. arrived to prepare for elections and to get the countries "ready for democracy."

With local and international attention focused on highly-lauded events in the Ethiopian capital, repression by EPRDF armed forces was increased in the empireside in an explicit attempt to prepare the ground for elections. The repression was aimed at influential local-level leaders of independent organizations who had intimate contact with the rural populations. The highly visible Western educated leaders of these movements who were tied up in official business of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia were not targeted. Between July 1991 and December 1991 a few mass rallies were held by the traditional Oromo parties in which tens of thousands came forward, euphoric in their anticipation, thinking that they were building the long-sought-after "Oromo democracy." It is fair to say that the aspiration to build an Oromo democracy had already become the cornerstone of Oromo nationalist ideology. Apart from the issue of whether the Oromo had developed democracy within the fronts themselves, there is no question that Oromo nationalism had become inextricably tied up with the aspiration for democracy.

Following these rallies where vast numbers of Oromo revealed their support for formerly underground Oromo liberation fronts, contrary to Oromo expectations, the EPRDF moved to identify, threaten, imprison, and even kill the most visible leaders and key organizers at the local level. By January of 1992, videotapes taken at these frequent mass rallies were utilized to recognize individuals singled out for harassment and imprisonment in the effort to intimidate the population and thwart the elections. These systematic actions on the part of the EPRDF local operatives constituted massive violations of the human rights of national groups whose Westernized leaders, ironically, were cooperating with the Transitional Government of Ethiopia. The ineffectual nature of the U.S./Eritrean intervention and its downright failure to protect non-EPRDF parties against the systematic repression of the EPRDF take on new significance when viewed in light of a long-term U.S. pattern of

actively curtailing popular movements. As in other situations of U.S. political intervention, "democracy" in this case was limited to include only pre-selected "qualified" leaders for participation in elections. Choices were not extended to include representatives who might come forward through any other process.

As was mentioned above, careful management of elections is the central defining component in the U.S. "promotion of democracy" approach. Again, the Ethiopian experience bears this out. While it is true that elections are significant elements of popular democracy, this is true only under conditions where candidates are selected by the populace, when campaigns make choice meaningful, and when mechanisms are in place to ensure the responsibility of the elected officials to the population. In the truncated style of democracy that the U.S. is supporting, once officials are elected and in place, they are insulated from popular pressures between election events, supposedly so "that they might effectively govern." The effect of this is that the governing elites and their U.S. advisers have a free hand in directing events apart from the real involvement of the people who voted. This interpretation of accountability is restricted solely to the holding of elections.

By contrast, most traditions of popular democracy hold leaders accountable to the people who elected them, and whose interests they represent. Oromo democracy is no exception. There are clear procedures followed under the Oromo **Gada** system for communicating with representatives and even for "uprooting" a person from office if he fails to perform satisfactorily. Mechanisms of accountability were tested during the transition period. In fact, at one point Oromo elders from throughout Oromo empire, representing each region where Oromos lived, arrived in Addis Ababa and called the leaders of all Oromo parties together: the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO), the United Oromo People's Liberation Front (UOPLF), the Oromo Abbo Liberation Front (OALF), and even the OPDO, the EPRDF-created group. Their objective was to compel the Oromo individuals who were representing the Oromo people to act together on specific issues. In the meeting, the Oromo officials

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responded positively to the elders. When the OPDO representatives notified the EPRDF of their decision to vote with the Oromo organizations on specific points, the EPRDF informed them that they were not free to vote against the EPRDF on any issue; if they did so, the representatives were told that they would be replaced.

Participation of the Oromo parties in the elections was increasingly regarded as a threat to the Tigray/U.S. system of "democracy." Consequently, Oromo groups were systematically alienated and pushed to withdraw from the elections. Conflicts flared and deepened throughout the empire leading up to the scheduled elections; yet, up to the eve of the voting, the Oromo and other leaders who had opted to cooperate with the EPRDF continued to express faith in the Charter and to turn to the United States and Eritrea for interference and protection on their behalf. For some reason unclear to these cooperating leaders, mediation by the United States and Eritrea was ineffectual. Relations between EPRDF and the Oromo groups deteriorated to the point that interference by armed forces of the EPRDF in Oromo regions became more blatant until it systematically prevented the Oromo parties from conducting or participating in the elections. For example, the EPRDF forcibly closed the offices of recognized Oromo parties, imprisoned numerous organizers without charge, and finally in early 1992 attacked gatherings of ordinary Oromo, killing in a single day hundreds of rural Oromo participating in a peaceful demonstration seeking reconciliation at Watara and again in Dire Dawa in Harar.

These staggering violations of the rights of rural peoples took place under the unseeing eye of the United States. Despite several events in which violence was perpetrated on both the rural and urban Oromo, the Oromo leadership continued to cooperate with the EPRDF, agreeing to encamp its armed forces under the supervision of the U.S. and Eritrea during the course of the election. As the election drew near, candidates of participating Oromo groups who had managed to escape prison and disappearance at the hands of the EPRDF and OPDO troops in rural areas were systematically excluded from the election process through a variety of bureaucratic means (the most detailed account of these is found

in Niggli, 1991.) Then EPRDF failed to honor its commitment to encamp its army. No action was taken by the U.S. or Eritrea to enforce the encampment arrangement. At this point most of the Oromo groups declared that without a postponement of the elections they would withdraw. In the absence of a positive response, the major independent Oromo organizations withdrew in exasperation from the elections in June 1992. They protested the absence of protection from the egregious conditions for which the EPRDF were responsible, and stated that these prevented the contest from being free and fair. They declared that there was no rule of law being applied in the land.

Surprisingly, the withdrawal of the majority ethnic group in the empire did not derail the election process. It created very little stir. In fact it left the playing field clear for the EPRDF, who was poised in the few remaining days and hours to put forward its Oromo wing, OPDO, as a replacement organization for the Oromo Liberation Front in the election. Substantial U.S. assistance in the form of logistical, advisory, and financial aid enabled the EPRDF to proceed without the Oromo and other groups who had been members of the coalition government. The nominal candidates (many of them unknown to their new constituencies) who were fielded by the recently-formed OPDO, the Oromo branch of the EPRDF, monopolized the ballots and controlled the process of voting in the Oromo regions.

Amidst fanfare and a host of international election observers, the JIOG (Joint International Observer Group), and press presence, a highly-publicized election proceeded as scheduled (NDI 1992; Harbeson, 1996.) It happened that the U.S. and EPRDF criteria for what constituted a satisfactory election clashed fundamentally with the criteria of the supporters of the independent Oromo organizations. As a result, the process assumed a stage-managed quality. Some candidates were fielded whom the local residents did not know (Lyons, 1992), but none were those who had been nominated by locally viable parties. Some registration and voting did take place under the camera's eye, but serious criticisms and objections were brought forth by many of the international election observers, several of whom rejected the results outright

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(Ottaway, 1992; Lyons, 1992). Some observers, including the leader of the delegation, were even deported (see NDI 1992). The elections were declared by the National Election Commission of Ethiopia to be essentially "free and fair." The United States supported them in this assessment. Everyone was thanked and sent home.

In Ethiopia there was a priority placed on the appearance of political inclusiveness, but in the end it was limited only to the formal right to vote, not to the ability to run for office, or to have access to the means to succeed in competing or even to gain access to the means to register to vote. In most cases where the U.S. becomes involved in the election process, a focus on **form** in the holding of elections, where "free and fair" is interpreted to mean procedurally correct or free of fraud **on the day of the voting**, is substituted for equality of conditions for participation. But the Ethiopian elections did not meet even this minimal criterion of formally or procedurally correct. The conditions for participation were widely assessed unfair by the international observers. It made no difference. As Marina Ottaway wrote in a particularly candid piece regarding her role as an election observer, "We were escorted there by an embassy official... (t)o me it was particularly disturbing because unguarded comments by our escort strongly suggested that the embassy had decided in advance that the elections results would be declared acceptable" (Ottaway, 1992: 11).

In the end, the limited "democracy" represented in polyarchy was limited in Ethiopia to stage-managed elections alone. Even these were inadequate. We can only conclude that the symbolic act of voting was set up to substitute for real equality in political life. This discrepancy has become clear to persons and groups who entered the process of the 1991 election in Ethiopia with a specific standard of participation in mind. What became evident was that the election served a legitimating function for a kind of political system bearing little resemblance to popular democracy. When all was said and done, international media and, to a greater extent, the international observer groups, realized their impotence in affecting the process. The numerous groups who were called upon to participate in drawing attention to the voting part of the

process, and this part only, became part of the legitimization process, as many international observers to the 1992 elections discovered (see Lyons 1992 and 1996; Niggli 1992; Ottaway 1992; Pausewang 1994; Vestal 1992 and 1994--among the writings of many disgruntled members of the international observer team). The US, and by extension, the EPRDF's, fixation on elections clearly was designed to serve as a substitute for participatory democracy. The dismissal by the EPRDF's National Election Commission (NEC) of the negative reports and warnings of the Joint International Observer Group (JIOG), and the acquiescence of the U.S. in that dismissal (e.g., NDI 1992; Harbeson, 1996) only reinforces this interpretation.

In the Ethiopian case the mounting frustration of the excluded parties in the months leading up to the scheduled elections had been exacerbated by the inaction of the U.S. to intervene to prevent the violations or protect the agreed-upon process. The non-EPRDF parties ran into a well-honed indifference on the part of the U.S. and the Eritreans--and faced an election in which the profound efficiency in mobilizing an army of international observers was not matched by the ability to put training, personnel, or equipment in place in time for the elections process to proceed as outlined in the original agreements. The EPRDF appears to have turned inefficiency into an art form in the peripheral areas with their U.S. backers equally artful in providing internationally acceptable excuses and justifications for them. Registration materials that had been irretrievably lost by EPRDF officials were miraculously found as soon as the OLF withdrew from the election process in one region, for example. Meanwhile these kinds of violations were explained away with statements such as, "the elections were not perfect, but it should be regarded as an acceptable first attempt;" or, "these Africans are not accustomed to the mechanisms of democracy" (with the implication that they cannot grasp the concepts or handle the logistics); "at least this is not the **Dergue**;" "it is a move in the right direction;" or by presenting the only alternative to this process, "flawed as it might be," as dictatorship rather than as popular democracy.

The independent Oromo movement, as well as the independent movements of others that are not the focus of this discussion, was sidelined as soon as the elections were over, and told by the EPRDF to withdraw from the government. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), for example, recalled its Ministers and ambassadors as its officials left in disarray. The Oromo groups were replaced in government as they had been in the elections by the Tigray-controlled OPDO, which was waiting in the wings. Soon after a series of efforts designed to compel the EPRDF to adhere to several basic tenets of popular democracy failed, other southern peoples' organizations withdrew as well. There proved to be PDOs (People's Democratic Organizations) ready and waiting to replace every ethnic group that withdrew. A last-ditch effort was mounted by the ambassadors from several Western countries to bring together the leaders of the disaffected parties in a concerted attempt to get the coalition back together. It was unsuccessful. The project of promoting "democracy" in Ethiopia went ahead despite the absence of any independent national party or front representation in the government.

### **Background to Oromo Popular Expectations for Democracy**

Prior to the fall of the Dergue, the emerging Oromo nationalist ideology expressed by all independent Oromo groups had already become linked with notions of popular democracy associated with the traditional **Gada** system. Protecting central features of an Oromo democratic heritage has become an important public commitment in a widely-subscribed Oromo national movement whose objective is a struggle for liberation. As a result, to champion and defend democracy has become a component in Oromo identity as it is currently articulated. The interpretation and possible application of specific features of the historic **Gada** has become part of the debate among Oromo intellectuals over the direction and even the organization of the national liberation movement. A full examination of the components and implications of that debate must be the subject of a different paper. For the purposes of our current discussion, however, it is important to separate the political stance (or

posture) of the Oromo political parties and fronts, and the internal operations of those groups, from the social features and mores shared by members of the Oromo population as a cultural group. These democratic features include a belief in the free expression of ideas and explicit social measures taken to protect the right of an individual to express his or her opinion or belief in private or in public, reaching group consensus in decision-making, electing representatives by a group to perform tasks assigned by the group and answerability of those representatives to that group, reconciliation of differences which impede the group's objectives, apportioning resources among members of a community according to consensual criteria, etc.

Oromo scholars and students of Oromo society, including historians, political scientists, philosophers and sociologists, and anthropologists, have unanimously noted the strong democratic traditions honored universally among Oromo, whether urban or rural dwellers. Several have explored the democratic heritage of the Oromo, tracing the ubiquitous features of Oromo modes of interaction and belief to the **Gada** system of government that operated prior to the conquest of the Oromo people in the late 1800s (among these are Asmarom, 1973; Baxter, 1954, 1978, and 1980; Baissa, 1994; Dinsa, 1975; Hinnant, 1980; Holcomb, 1992; Keller, 1995; Mekuria, 1984; Mohammed, 1990; Sisai, 1992; Waldhaansso, 1980). A considerable literature has developed concerning the historic Oromo **Gada** system of government, its mechanisms, its variations from region to region, and survivals of the system into the current day in some parts of Oromo territory.

There is unanimous agreement among students of the Oromo that the legacy of the **Gada** system is very much alive in Oromo language, religion, lore, and custom. Some of this literature examines the means by which that over-arching system of administration continues to inform the underlying assumptions, behaviors and philosophies by which Oromo conduct their private daily lives and their public affairs. This includes examining the ways in which the cultural memory of pre-colonial procedures of governance under the **Gada** might have been passed down to members of the Oromo society and applied to current situations by

those who have never participated in the historic **Gada** system. The language itself conveys many of the underlying concepts embodied in Oromo standards for governing and administration, including election. The language learned in conjunction with oral history, song, ritual, and social practice all reinforce the underlying precepts of democratic procedure. Despite the fact that the Oromo people have lived under Ethiopian rule since the turn of the century, the norms and values which prescribe appropriate behavior and determine social interaction are still understood by Oromo and explained in terms of historical Oromo democratic processes. Those historically grounded norms appear to have provided at least a moral environment by which the events of the recent elections of the EPRDF were evaluated and judged by the population.

Historians and anthropologists of the Oromo report that the pre-conquest historical process of elections under the **Gada** system required individuals to be selected for governance from among a group of candidates who had gone through several periods of education and skills training with their peers, and were to be selected from among those with whom they trained as the most competent of the lot. According to observers on site and interviews conducted with participants in the old system, the individuals elected had to demonstrate their knowledge of the law; show their ability to apply the law to specific situations on which they were challenged in open meetings; serve as exemplars of character, honesty, and acceptability, first among their fellows, and then among the society as a whole. Knutsson (1967) and Waldhaansso (1980) have described this process. Oromo individuals who are regarded as leaders by the population, either those who are elected or those who step forward to represent the Oromo, are compelled by the people to acknowledge and show respect for these features of Oromo self-definition or lose the support of the people.

To compare, for example, the criteria for the election of representatives, a prominent component of both the EPRDF's democratic formula, and a component in Oromo popular expectations of democratic governance, we find fundamentally different expectations at work in establishing standards of procedure and in evaluating the success of the

process. When Oromo criteria and EPRDF criteria are compared, we find that Oromo expectations regarding the election of representatives include demand for candidates to be put forward by people who know them, followed by a screening process of candidates during which the voters question and test the knowledge of the persons seeking their support and ability to respond to the demands of those they represent. Familiarity with the individuals to be elected to office was an important issue with the Oromo voters. Their reactions provide interesting insights into the continuing vitality of the Oromo concept of democracy.

In the case of the 1991 balloting, time and again members of the rural Oromo population judged the elections operated by the EPRDF not to be a proper election. They complained continuously to visitors, to observers (including election observers), to their family members abroad, and to the leaders of Oromo groups who were supposed to be representing them in the Transitional Government of Ethiopia about the process. They reported that the agents of the EPRDF, the OPDO, were harassing their local representatives; closing offices of participating groups; imprisoning people who engaged in the free expression of ideas, ideas which included criticism of the government; trying to bribe farmers to vote for their candidates with promises of fertilizers, marketing assistance, etc.; threatening entire communities with their armaments; and so forth.

Although most of the assessments of the withdrawal of independent Oromo participation from the 1991 elections neglects this factor, the groundswell of opposition from the heart of the population to continued participation in such elections provided a strong influence on the Western-educated Oromo elite who had chosen to participate in the attempt to build a U.S.-led "democracy" in Ethiopia. The powerful hold of their population of origin through the cultural precepts they shared proved to be stronger than the architects of the polyarchic model anticipated. The latent Oromo constituency, which was never allowed to become a formal or legitimate constituency, still had the power to force a choice between support of those Oromo who subscribed to an implicit cultural standard or continued cooperation with the EPRDF-led

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"democratic" experiment. The English-speaking, Western-educated Oromo members of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia who stood at the juncture where the two democracies encountered each other withdrew from the US-backed EPRDF experiment in "democracy" in the face of that pressure.

Analysts, and perhaps in recent history, U.S. advisers, tend to miss this point, assuming that "the masses," especially since they are peasant farmers and herders, can be manipulated if their leaders and representatives can be manipulated. This is not the case. Approaches to the Oromo that proceed on inaccurate assumptions about a vertical, top-down relationship between Oromo nationalists and their urbanized, Western-educated leaders are quite likely to run aground as this one did. The bottom-up nature of this connection was the major reason that the Oromo groups broke their connection with the TGE (Transitional Government of Ethiopia). The nature of this connection may well have provided a compelling reason why the independent Oromo groups were ultimately found unacceptable to the U.S. operatives as well. That interpretation of events seems all the more persuasive in light of the fact that the U.S. immediately opted to accept EPRDF's support for the OPDO as a preferable substitute for all independent Oromo organizations and then stood quietly by as unambiguous and very public repression of the Oromo re-emerged as EPRDF policy, especially from 1993 onward.

Some of the election observers who witnessed the failure of the 1992 and 1994 elections process commented in error that many of the obvious difficulties in implementing the elections process resulted because Ethiopia has no democratic traditions and no democratic political culture. While this assessment is relatively true of Ethiopia in general, it is incorrect in reference to Oromia. Neglecting the Oromo penchant for democratic procedure is a serious misunderstanding of the context into which this EPRDF version of "democracy" was introduced. In fact one of the major reasons for the breakdown in the process in the Oromo regions in 1991-1992 is that Transitional Government of Ethiopia introduced forms that failed to meet the expectations, or one could say the standards, of popular, participatory government already held by the

Oromo people. The Oromo reaction to the US/EPRDF elections demonstrates that deeply-embedded democratic traditions have continued to shape and inform Oromo modes of interaction at the level of civil society even through the extremely repressive era of the **Dergue**.

Some of the overwhelmingly positive response of the Oromo population to the call for democracy was stimulated by seeing the symbol of the **Gada**, the **odaa** tree under which Oromo formally deliberated and fashioned their law, flying on the flag of the largest of the independent Oromo organizations (OLF), as these once-underground organizations were invited and then welcomed into the Transitional Government of Ethiopia. Some of the popular response was also due to explicit explanations by all independent Oromo organizations that the Oromo were now going to be able to practice democracy. This implied democracy as they knew it. The terminology and the references to democratic practice with which the Oromo were conversant in their mother tongue led them to expect the open competition and campaigns for public office, responsibility in selection and support of candidates from among themselves whose qualities, strengths and weaknesses were known to them. In preparation for the upcoming elections, Oromo anticipated internal governance of their own affairs without interference from the central authorities. They also expected a strict accountability of the elected officials to the populations that they represented. These expectations were dashed.

What has emerged in the place of democracy in Ethiopia is the renewal of the dependent colonial relationship between the holders and wielders of the Ethiopian state machinery and the once-conquered peoples whom that very machinery was designed to control. The formula developed in **The Invention of Ethiopia** (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990; Jalata, 1993), still applies to this empire. The superpower patron has shifted from the Soviet Union to the United States, and the old operations have been set up "under new management," the management of the Tigray/EPRDF. The old and much-despised administrative system of the **Dergue** which organized the empire under a top-down apparatus to the grassroots level **kebele** (local-level farmers' association) in the

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rural areas has been embraced by the Tigray/EPRDF. The EPRDF has resorted to using the Dergue's peasant association structure as a repressive apparatus to suppress and control the Oromo and others. It is used to register reluctant voters under the threat of withdrawing services, to carry out surveillance, to recruit party members, to forcibly collect back taxes for the years when EPRDF was too weak to do the job, to conduct searches for dissidents followed by imprisonment and extrajudicial murders, and to introduce more coercive farming and villagization programs.

War has broken out again between the defenders of the Ethiopian state and the suppressed national movements, whose interests it does not represent or defend. The independent national movements have taken up arms against the government. Concentration camps have once again been filled with political dissidents, this time those who oppose the EPRDF. Villagization schemes have reemerged on the landscape. EPRDF has been ordained by the U.S. Secretary of State himself to receive armaments of the Rapid Defense Force officially for use in the maintenance of peace and stability in the Horn of Africa region. The U.S. seems oblivious to the fact that these weapons are turned against the internal political opponents of the EPRDF. Recent documents distributed widely inside Ethiopia and abroad as "Tamrat's Secrets" describe the EPRDF regime as more repressive against its opponents than the predecessor it so heartily condemns (Nabalabal 1996). The heavy hand of EPRDF repression has had the effect of sharpening the battle lines between the Tigrays and their allies in government and the peripheralized national movements. This is an effect opposite to the objectives of the "democratization" effort of the U.S.

Remarkably, the ponderous state machinery of the ostensibly "socialist" Dergue has been revived virtually intact to serve the purposes of the ostensibly "democratic" EPRDF government. This development raises questions concerning the nature of the social formation in which two supposedly different governments have operated. On the one hand, it reveals that the Soviet-backed Dergue did not function as a socialist system, but rather administered an outpost of a form of state capitalism

emanating from the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the speed and apparent ease with which a US-sponsored administration has stepped in to utilize the same repressive apparatus with no significant alteration belies its "democratic" nature. The EPRDF's revival of the Dergue's apparatus is more accurately understood not by trying to see how it works as a democracy but in light of its role as an outpost of a capitalist system operating globally but under a hegemonic leadership emanating from the United States. As such the outpost in Northeast Africa is charged with maintaining a secure environment for investment and maximization of profit for the shrinking percentage of the world's population who constitute the transnational ruling class. The EPRDF government has fallen back on the same kind of heavy-handedness that their predecessors used to establish "stability" in the region because no real organizational changes have been wrought in the social formation of the empire to alter basic relationships among national groups.

### Observations and Conclusions

The introduction of new wave "democracy" into Ethiopia has failed to introduce either democracy or stability in the short term. The Third Wave model of "democracy" on which U.S. policy is currently based rests upon the assumption that there exists some kind of homogeneity within the nation state targeted for "democracy." For Africa this sort of model generally will not work and particularly will not work in Ethiopia due to the specific circumstances of the development of the social formation. The state in Africa is not a historically logically formed state. It is a product of European colonization, a political crystallization of an economic holding. Ethiopia is no exception (see the argument in Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990). If a natural social and economic entity is one that is conceived and constructed on the basis of an internal logic, the mechanisms that were used to force neighboring nations to stay together under duress created unnatural social and economic entities in Africa. Such mechanisms form the basis upon

which these states functioned in formally colonial Africa and were used in Ethiopia, too.

The social formation that resulted from these policies is particularly fragile and the impact of Westernization relatively superficial compared with other colonial situations. For example, in Africa, compared to Asia and Latin America, there was relatively less capital investment, the financial and bureaucratic infrastructure was less well developed, and a much smaller percentage of the population received Western education. This legacy is coming back to haunt the United States as it tries to build a form of stable government here. The same colonial intrigues which were resorted to by European colonizers in building the state in Africa during an intense rivalry over control of the continent are still at work today in the way those administrations function. Policy is still formulated on a basis which separates "us" who possess the instrument of the state from "them," whom the instrument is directed against. Since controlling "them" was the *raison d'être* of these governments; demonizing those not in power justified the operation of the state machinery in the way it was designed.

What is called the "national government" in Africa, the group that operates the state apparatus, uses that apparatus to defend "us" from "them." In the Ethiopian case, "us" is currently the TPLF dressed in its multi-ethnic EPRDF guise. What analysts do not take into account in policy planning is the potency of the legacy of divisiveness injected by the colonial outlook into the foundations of these artificial states during the process of their formation throughout this century. The divide-and-rule approach that was deemed necessary to create a group or series of groups that would claim as their own the externally-introduced state structure and defend it introduced a psychological superiority in the stance of the ruling group ordained to govern. It also instigated a cultural rivalry among groups wherever variation occurred. Distinction continues to be the cornerstone upon which one group justifies its superiority over the others. Ethiopia is no exception to this colonial legacy. It has handled its colonies in the same way that the Europeans did.

The mindset of distinction and superiority continues to affect the Western-educated group whose members come from antagonistic nations. As part of the new wave of "democratization" these members are now being put forth as candidates for "democratic" shared management of the very state that was built upon their enmity. However much spokespersons in the U.S. may decry the situation of rivalry and antagonism among competing sectors in Africa and the Third World, the design of the new "democratic" governments introduces no fundamental change in the configuration of the inherited state structure. The old pattern has never been undone. The new wave "democracy" does not undo it, either.

Those in the West who try to argue that Africans should "put petty conflicts behind them" fail to acknowledge that when the Westernized managerial elites of two or more ethnic groups come together for the purpose of operating the state mechanisms that have divided them, they are affected by the specific circumstances of that intentionally divisive colonial history. In the case of the Ethiopian empire, the Oromo and northern Abyssinians, either Amhara or Tigray, are societies that were historically distinct and whose distinctions have been maintained and exacerbated by the political system of the state. Amharas in the past, and now Tigrays in their turn, justify their rule or their position at the top of the state structure and their use of the police and security apparatus by characterizing the Oromo and others as in need of control, as potentially threatening forces for anarchy, dissolution and "terrorism." This stance explains why the trappings of "democracy" fell away so quickly after the withdrawal of organizations representing the colonized peoples of the empire. The EPRDF immediately resorted to the use of the state structures put in place by their predecessors in power to suppress the expression of the once-conquered Oromo nation as well as others. The re-emergence of the colonial practices used by regimes supported by a range of imperial patrons only proves the continuity of the colonial legacy, as well as revealing the continuity, despite refinements, of international corporate interests in Africa.

The final integration the nations subjected to this type of colonial history will require a resolution of their imposed contradictions and a process of accommodation that must take place outside the same structure that has enshrined their differences. The "democratization" model that is now being introduced through the instrument of the existing state has predictably provided an opportunity for the revival and deepening of the nationalities conflict. It is the colonial past that continues to keep the ethnic groups apart. A resolution of this kind of conflict must take place apart from the very colonial state structure which is a major source of the conflict.

Oromia's experience on the receiving end of US-sponsored "democratization" into Ethiopia sheds light on the way the new intervention is designed. It also raises several concerns about both the short-term and long-term local impact of this kind of imported "democracy" not only in Africa but elsewhere. It is clear that the effort to "democratize" Ethiopia failed even in the short term. The rapidity of its demise was spectacular, i.e. establishment of one-party rule within a year of launching the project. This is most likely occurred because the social formation in Africa and particularly in Ethiopia is not well enough developed for a "democracy" based on the incorporation of managerial elites to succeed. In this, the case of Oromia is instructive. Furthermore, from what we can learn from examining the underlying assumptions on which the process is constructed, the U.S. model is unlikely to be successful anywhere. The assumptions that elites drawn from the potentially rebellious populations, who constitute the bulk of the working class in a system founded on inequity, will have the ability to control their home nations are ill-founded. Instead, the hold that their nations of origin have on the Westernized members of this functionary group may well ultimately turn out to be more powerful than the hold of the sponsors of the imported "democratic" state. The struggle between the transnational ruling group and the working populations who form the new international working class over the loyalty of this managerial elite will unfold as the parameters of the ostensibly "democratic" state are exposed

At first blush, the new political intervention, spear-headed by the US, appears to have registered greater success, at least in the short term, in Asia and Latin America than it has in Africa. This may well be due to the fact that their particular regional experiences with colonialism created a social and political bulkhead in those countries substantial enough to provide the basis for an initial success for polyarchic domination or elite democracy. It remains to be seen, however, whether even these apparent successes will endure.

In the final analysis, the policy of the "new democracy" is grounded in the assumption that bringing into the infrastructure of the new global state or megastate, the newest international category of Western-educated managers and intellectuals will secure stability for the system. Yet the vast majority of these new functionaries in the Third World, who are invited to join their counterparts from the First and Second Worlds to run the global state, are being drawn from the very populations who are being further subjugated even as the newly privileged are moving out and upward. This will create a dilemma for these new elites whose resolution will indicate the success or ultimate failure of the new "democratization" policy. The policy grossly underestimates the vitality and staying power of the national formations which have been suppressed but not destroyed by the repressive systems put in place by the colonial powers in Africa. Success is bound to elude any policy, whether presented as "socialist" or "democratic," which tries to build on the remnants of that divisive state structure. In the Tale of Two Democracies unfolding in the Oromo regions of Northeast Africa, the final chapter has not yet been written.

### NOTES

- 1 The group was at its core a national liberation organization, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The TPLF itself had been the subject of an internal coup during the late 1980s and had been taken over by a group calling itself the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT). The leadership of the nationalist organization had changed overnight. The internal politics after the MLLT takeover were ruthless, notoriously hard-line and often referred to as

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following a "Stalinist-style organizational model." In the months prior to 1991, the group suddenly began to present itself as a multi-ethnic organization by recruiting prisoners of war from various nationalities taken from the defeated Dergue forces during the last days of the Dergue's regime. These new recruits were put forward to bolster a claim that the TPLF had been transformed into the EPRDF through the addition of several associated nationality-based organizations.

- 2 This concept has been fully developed first by Robert A. Dahl in a classic work titled *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (1971) and then updated and applied to the current "New Wave" phenomenon by William Robinson in a penetrating analysis titled *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, U.S. Intervention and Hegemony* (1996).
- 3 It really came into existence with the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in 1983. This agency took over many of the political operations of the CIA, but in a public overt forum and utilizing a more specialized, sophisticated vision and strategic agenda. The ideological underpinning of this new effort was developed within the National Security Council (NSC) drawing a heavily on the writings of William A. Douglas (1972) and Samuel P. Huntington (1968) and other U.S. scholars tied to the policymaking apparatus. Douglas argued that what was needed to serve U.S. interests was a kind of "regimented democracy" that could effect a measure of "social control" or "stability" without arousing the ire of the masses. This approach would replace the strategy of supporting authoritarian rulers. His ideas indicate the outlines of what became the grand design for a new phase in U.S. foreign policy (see Robinson 1996, 84-85).
- 4 A new program was initiated by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Trilateral Commission in the early 1980s seeking broad bipartisan consensus. The position reached was that the U.S. should abandon support of authoritarian regimes and take the political and ideological offensive globally. A bipartisan group called the American Political Foundation was formed to implement this process, recommending in 1982 that a presidential commission examine how the U.S. could promote democracy overseas. The White House approved the recommendation for the creation of a Project Democracy. At the outset, it was attached to the National Security Council supervised by the chief CIA propaganda specialist who worked closely with Oliver North. The NSC's work with Congress resulted in the legislation creating the National Endowment for

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process, recommending the 1982 that a presidential commission examine how the U.S. could promote democracy overseas. The White House approved the recommendation for the creation of a Project Democracy. At the outset, it was attached to the National Security Council supervised by the chief CIA propaganda specialist who worked closely with Oliver North. The NSC's work with Congress resulted in the legislation creating the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in 1983. NED was to take over the funding and political guidance activities that the CIA had handled up to that time. The elaborate orchestration of government and quasi-governmental institutions required to put this new program into place was to take place through the NED (Robinson 1996, particularly Chapter 2, pp. 73-116).

5. Conveniently, a well-timed arrangement with the Israeli Defense Forces to oversee the evacuation of the country's remaining Ethiopian Jews to Israel in Operation Moses. In effect, the IDF were in control of Addis Ababa until the Jews were safely dispatched and on site should any untoward event threaten to derail the plan to transfer power to the TPLF/EPRDF.

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## OROMO NATIONALISM IN THE NEW GLOBAL CONTEXT

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*Asafa Jalata*

Since the early 1990s Oromo nationalism has developed into a mass national liberation ideology. Despite the fact that Oromo nationalism is maturing and penetrating all sectors of Oromo society, it is facing ideological and organizational crises. These crises are caused by structural and conjunctural factors. While the structural problems are imposed by the global capitalist system, conjunctural ones are facilitated by a lack of innovative political ideas, unwillingness of Oromo political leaders to involve all sectors of Oromo society in the process of decision-making, rigid political centralism and anarchism, political spontaneity, and a lack of dialectical and mutual understanding among different Oromo movement centers. These factors, among other things, have caused organizational weaknesses and ideological crises in the Oromo national movement at a time when the movement is becoming a formidable political force in the Horn of Africa.

Ethiopian colonial and racial/ethnic domination, political disfranchisement and exclusion, repression, and massive human rights violations of Oromo have stimulated Oromo nationalism. The main objective of Oromo nationalism is national self-determination to decide Oromo cultural, economic and political rights freely and to overcome underdevelopment. Currently Oromo nationalism is blossoming through armed, political, and cultural struggle, despite the alliance of the West, particularly the USA, with the Tigrayan regime and society to suppress Oromo nationalism. It is obvious that because of the maturation of Oromo nationalism, the Ethiopian Amhara lost their cultural hegemony over the Oromo majority; the Ethiopian Tigray, despite capturing the Ethiopian state since 1991, could not establish their cultural hegemony over the Oromo people. This is a major ideological victory for the Oromo national movement.

The majority of Oromo have psychologically and mentally liberated themselves from the cultural hegemony of Ethiopian colonialism; consequently, the Tigrayan colonial state has failed to

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establish consensual domination and cannot remain in power by using only its primary coercive tool, the army. The Oromo majority rejected the Oromo People's Democratic Organization created by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front from Ethiopian prisoners of war and a few collaborators to maintain Ethiopian colonialism. This puppet organization, along with the Tigrayan militia, is used to commit atrocities against the Oromo people under the guidance of the Meles regime. Instead, the majority of Oromo people have accepted the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) as their organization, despite its weaknesses, because this front operates independently and promotes Oromo cultural heritage, aspirations, and freedom. Despite its emergence as the leader of the Oromo national movement, the OLF has not yet clearly mapped out its tactical and strategic approaches.

Oromo nationalism challenges all sectors of Oromo elites and society to address openly their organizational weaknesses and ideological crises and to resolve them in order to play appropriate roles in the Oromo national struggle. This paper explores the complexity of Oromo nationalism and the structural and conjunctural problems that confront Oromo nationalists and society. Specifically, it explains the essence of this nationalism by locating it in the new global context. It also provides some tentative theoretical suggestions that can assist Oromo nationalists in formulating practical political policies to facilitate the liberation of Oromia from Ethiopian colonialism through prioritizing the objectives of Oromo liberation. Before launching into a critical discussion of Oromo nationalism, this paper briefly underlines and explains some major theories of nationalism in relation to the capitalist world system.

### **Capitalism, Nation-state, and Nationalism**

It is superficial to discuss nationalism without explaining its emergence in a global context. Capitalism produces both globalism and nationalism. Global capitalism has brought about large-scale and long-term structural change since the sixteenth century. Mercantilism successfully developed into capitalism in Western Europe (see Frank

1978, 1995) through the expropriation of the European actual producers and the resources of the indigenous Americas, and international trade (see Marx, 1967; Rodney, 1974; Wallerstein 1979, 1980, 1984); consequently, these fundamental social transformations occurred first in Western Europe. The processes of expropriation and colonialism resulted in "the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market, and with this, the international character of the capitalist regime" (Marx, 1967: 763). These processes involved acts of war, ethnocide, cultural destruction, colonialism, and intensified social stratification and slavery. The results were justified by the ideologies of racism, classism, sexism, progress, civilization, modernity, and cultural universalism (see Said, 1978; Jalata, 1995; Young, 1995; Winant, 1994).

The new political structure that initially emerged with capitalism in Europe was the absolutist state; this state was needed to balance the actions of the competing social forces, such as monarchies, the aristocracy, the nascent capitalist class, and the working class (see Anderson, 1974). Absolutism developed to overcome various "threats to unity from within and sovereignty from without" (Breuilly, 1985: 54). The absolutist state used arbitrary political power against its subjects who resisted and struggled to establish the rule of law. Gradually this absolutist state became the nation-state in England in 1689 and in France in 1789. The French nation-state emerged as a world model. It radically broke away from the old regime by taking all necessary steps to build the new state (see Bereciartu, 1994: 11).

The French people initiated the French Revolution in 1789 to change their political status from that of subjects of the monarch to that of citizens of the French nation, and to transfer sovereignty from the French monarchy to the French nation. As a result, the French people or nation theoretically became the source of all sovereignty and introduced the principles of national self-determination and popular sovereignty to the world (see Kamenka, 1973: 10). The Constituent Assembly that came to power declared that "The source of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation" (Heater, 1994: 4). Since

then, the notion of popular sovereignty has become an important political principle in the modern world system.

First the emergence of absolutism, then the processes of state- and nation-building, transformed the allegiance of the people from a lineage or a city-state to a 'nation' through developing state nationalism. "The process of state-building helped create the political context within which nationalism could develop," Breuilly (1985: 45) writes, "and the national sentiments which nationalists could subsequently exploit." Liberal European scholars theorized about questions of nationalism, citizenship, and democracy. Gradually, the capitalist class emerged and developed nationalism and liberal democracy (see Synder, 1976: 75). Then this class and the nation-state intensified the processes of class oppression and colonial expansion; they also abolished or reduced the privileges of the monarch, the aristocracy, and the clergy. Class oppression and colonialism led to the emergence of the two social processes that world systems theorists call antisystemic movements: social movements and national movements.

The social movement defined the oppression as that of employers over wage earners, the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. The ideals of the French Revolution - liberty, equality and fraternity, could be realized .... The national movement, on the other hand, defined the oppression as that of one ethno-national group over another. The ideals could be realized by giving the oppressed group equal juridical status with the oppressing group by the creation of parallel (and usually separate) structures (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein, 1989: 30)

Since a national movement involves class conflict as well as national struggle, it is wrong not to recognize the dialectical connection between the class and national contexts of national struggle. For the Oromo, both national and class struggles are inseparable since they have been

oppressed and exploited by Ethiopian colonialists and their Euro-American supporters and Oromo collaborators.

In Western Europe, territorial or state nationalism developed in previously established state territories. Of course, there have been dominant and dominated ethnonations in these state territories, and the dominated ethnonations have resisted the imposition of economic exploitation and cultural assimilation on them (see Bereciartu, 1994). But in Eastern Europe, for instance, with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, according to Pflanze (1966:140), "the nation was first defined as a cultural rather than political entity. The growth of national consciousness created a demand for the creation of the 'nation-state'." Since then, territorial or state nationalism, and ethnonationalism, have become very important organizing political principles in the capitalist world economy.

With the emergence of the nation-state, new phenomena known as nation, nationalism, and the 'citizen' have become a new political reality. Gradually the nation-state theoretically "created the idea of the 'citizen'-the individual who recognized the state as his legal home. It created the idea of a uniform system of law throughout a country .... of legal equality, where all citizens have the same status before the law .... of a state that exists to serve those citizens .... of loyalty to a larger group than clan .... of common languages and common education systems, and common legal systems within clearly defined state boundaries ...." (Tivey, 1981:13). Of course, this quotation does not explain the contradictions between the ideological claims and the material processes that are reflected in the socio-economic conditions of various social forces; in reality, the nation-state mainly serves the interests of the dominant classes and ethnonational groups whose members occupy key positions in the structures of the state machinery.

Nation-states and the interstate system emerged with the development of capitalism. "The failure of any one state to impose its will over most of the others in Europe," Shannon (1989: 44) writes, "occurred in the context of almost continual wars aimed at achieving that dominance." As a result, the nation-state has become the basic unit of

political organization in the modern world system. The model of the nation-state spread with the global expansion of capitalism. Capitalism has constantly introduced new technology, organizational techniques and economies of scale based on exchange and a global division of labor. The dominant classes and ethnonational groups in the capitalist world system hierarchically organized the peoples of the world based on the criteria of racial/ethnic identity, and class and gender identification; thereby enabling them to intensify the looting of resources through ethnocide or repression, and to extract surplus or produce.

These changes brought about large-scale transformations that were cumulative and involved cultural, economic, social, and political changes. As a result, pre-capitalist social formations based on lineages, communities, consensus democracies (see Legesse, 1973), chiefdoms or kingdoms were incorporated or destroyed (Chase-Dunn, 1995). According to Wallerstein (1988: 30), "The historical development of the capitalist world-economy is that, beginning with relatively amorphous entities, more and more 'states' operating within the interstate system have been created. Their boundaries and the definitions of their formal rights have been defined with increasing clarity (culminating in the contemporary United Nations structures of international law)."

Capitalism facilitated the centralization of political power and the development of a political vision that Smith calls "the national idea." According to Smith (1979: 1), "No other vision has set its stamp so thoroughly on the map of the world, and on our sense of identity. We are identified first and foremost with our 'nation.' Our lives are regulated, for the most part, by the national state in which we are born. War and peace, trade and travel, education and welfare, are determined for each one of us by the nation-state in which we reside." Smith fails to see the racial/ethnic, class, and gender contradictions that exist and determine our reality in the so-called nation-state. Since the ideology of the nation-state has been oriented by racism or ethnocentrism, classism, and sexism, our membership in certain racial/ethnic, gender, and class categories determines our social positions in a given society.

State nationalism attempted to destroy ethnocultural diversity through the imposition of the culture of the core ethnonation on the subjugated peoples within the nation-state, and at the same time recognized cultural diversity within the imperial interstate system (see Bereciartu, 1994). The practice of destroying ethnocultural diversity through forced assimilation to create a 'national culture' became the main goal of territorial or state nationalism; however, ethnonationalism has opposed forced cultural assimilation and economic exploitation and remained a strong political force in international politics (see Connor, 1994; Smith 1971, 1981, 1986, 1991). The subjugated peoples whose history and culture were condemned to death by state nationalism sought cultural diversity; but the demand for cultural diversity became incompatible with official nationalism. State elites and most scholars have misunderstood and mispredicted "the assertive renaissance of nationalisms" (Comaroff and Stern, 1995: 1) and declared the inevitability of the assimilation and dissolution of the indigenous peoples. Bereciartu (1994: 127) remarks that "the national question is a historical one that has not been resolved satisfactorily since the first formation of nation-states in Europe" and other parts of the world. These issues will be clearer by briefly looking at the Oromo case.

The Oromo question involves both colonialism and ethnonationalism. Ethiopian colonialism has been imposed by global capitalism on the Oromo nation. Ethiopians, both Amharas and Tigrayans, through establishing settler colonialism in Oromia, have systematically killed millions of Oromo and expropriated their lands and other resources from the last decades of the nineteenth century until today. Ethiopian colonialists already destroyed the people called Agawu by taking their lands, systematically killing them, and assimilating the survivors. They attempt to do the same thing to the Oromo by destroying the Oromo national movement, confiscating Oromo lands, and forcing the remaining Oromo into "settlement villages" (or reservations). Many times, some Oromo organizations attempted to democratize Ethiopia so that the Oromo would achieve equal citizenship rights and maintain their ethnocultural identity. Determined to maintain their

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colonial domination and to destroy the Oromo cultural personality through ethnocide or assimilation, Ethiopian colonialists destroyed or suppressed those Oromo political forces that attempted to transform Ethiopia into a multinational democratic society. Therefore, most Oromos are convinced that their rights and freedom cannot be obtained and respected without creating their own state, or a state that they can create as equal partners with other ethnonational groups interested in forming a multinational democratic society to promote ethnocultural diversity and human freedom. Hence, Oromo nationalism is an ideology of the subjugated Oromo who seek human rights, freedom, justice, and democracy.

Colonialists degraded the history and culture of the colonized to psychologically demoralize them and to make them submissive free or cheap laborers. Hence from the perspective of the subjugated peoples, nationalism can be seen as an integral part of the struggle for identity, history, human dignity, and economic, cultural and human rights. Berenciartu (1994: 128) notes that the "‘peoples without history,’ who had seemingly been condemned to oblivion, not only have ‘returned to history;’ now seem on the brink of becoming coparticipants and protagonists, along with ‘historical peoples,’ in the creation of future history." The colonized peoples in different corners of the world struggle against the nation-states that have suppressed cultural diversity in the name of common citizenship and cultural universalism. The social sciences have faltered in explaining the struggles of these indigenous peoples. Classical Marxism wrongly predicted the dissolution of ethnocultural diversity and nationalism and their replacement by the collective consciousness of class; modernization theory also wrongly assumed that socioeconomic development would make ethnocultural diversity and nationalism obsolete. A very few serious scholars have begun to recognize the weaknesses of the social sciences in these areas (see Nairn, 1975; Nimni, 1991; Berceriart, 1994; Comaroff and Stern, 1995; Tirayakian, 1995).

Most scholars over the years have viewed nationalism as progressive when it helped the formation of nation-states, and regressive

when it challenged and changed nation-states from within by ethnonational movements (see Tiryakian, 1995). Some Marxist and liberal scholars "do converge in their negative evaluation of nationalism as anti-democratic, anti-progressive, and ultimately a fundamental threat to interstate relations" (Tiryakian, 1995:215). Since most of the nation-states and their interstate relations are oppressive, there are no valid reasons why such unjust social arrangements are not opposed and challenged by the exploited and oppressed social forces. Those scholars who were influenced by the European conditions of wars, fascism, and crises of capitalism in the first half of the twentieth century never changed their negative views of nationalism, even when liberation movements challenged Euro-American colonial domination since mid-century (see Kedourie, 1960). Nationalism of the colonized people must not be confused with fascism and racism, since it fights against them and various forms of oppression and exploitation. The logic of different forms of oppression and exploitation of the colonized people will be explored below.

### **Colonialism and Nationalism**

Colonized peoples are confronted with genocide or cultural repression and class oppression in the capitalist world system. When dominant racial/ethnonational groups rationalize their privileges and dominant positions by racist and ethnocentrist discourse (see Marshall, 1993; Roediger, 1991; Huttenback, 1976), those ethnonational groups who are denied cultural and economic development and access to state power develop a collective national consciousness to challenge the dominant ethnations. Bereciartu calls this social process "national revindication" in which the subjugated peoples reclaim, recover, or restore their lost cultural, political, and economic rights to develop the collective consciousness of ethnonationalism. This national revindication involves ethnoclass consciousness since the subjugated people are culturally suppressed and economically exploited. Bereciartu (1994: 129) states "that the center's economic policy has consequences that rend the

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social fabric of the national formation of the underdeveloped area by reducing human beings to a pliable economic mass, ripping them out of their natural and cultural setting, and provoking massive emigrant movements. In this fashion, under the pretext of a shared country, there exist in reality persons genuinely without a country."

Anti-colonial nationalist movements of territorial or ethnonational groups emerged and challenged European colonial domination in Asia, Africa, and other places where colonialism was not as deep-rooted as settler colonialism. Wherever colonizers established settler colonialism - in the Americas, South Africa, Oromia and other places - the struggles of the colonized peoples have been very difficult. Still, there are anti-colonial movements that struggle against settler colonialism, sub-imperialism and global imperialism. Magdoff (1982: 12-13) explains that "the new institutions and class alignments of the periphery served to maintain and reproduce a hierarchy of nations-a hierarchy that was distinguished by great inequalities in standards of living, levels of technology, and freedom of self-development." These kinds of inequalities exist among nation-states and within nation-states today both in the industrialized and less industrialized areas of the world. The subjugated peoples resist and struggle to oppose subordination, poverty, and underdevelopment. Breuilly (1985: 131) argues that such "Nationalism can be seen as a form of politics appropriate to the extended sort of resistance needed to challenge imperial power effectively."

With the emergence of various national liberation movements since the mid-twentieth century in developing countries, and with the decline of the European colonial powers and the emergence of the two superpowers, the USA and the former USSR, the issues of nationalism and national self-determination have become important international political factors. As the French Revolution shaped the nature of the nation-state and as the emergence of various national movements spawned many nation-states, the crises of the capitalist and socialist systems, and the inability of various nation-states to transform themselves into multinational democratic states have facilitated the emergence of

more ethnonationalisms and the creation of more states in the modern world system. Anderson (1991:3) explains that "many 'old nations,' once thought fully consolidated, find themselves challenged by 'sub'-nationalisms within their borders - nationalisms which naturally, dream of shedding this sub-ness one happy day .... Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time."

National movements have gained legitimacy because they base their struggle on the grievances of a collective memory (Anderson, 1991) to regain economic, political, and cultural rights by rejecting subordination and cultural assimilation (Tiryakian, 1995: 218). The breaking down of the Soviet and Yugoslavian empires into several ethnonational states, the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, the division of Czechoslovakia into Czech and Slovia, and the liberation of Eritrea in 1991 prove the relevance of the principle of national self-determination. Kellas (1991: 27) remarks that "So while the revolutionary ideas of the French Revolution threatened monarchies and aristocracies in every state in Europe, ethnic and linguistic nationalists took this further and threatened the boundaries of states as well." Barber (1992: 226) characterizes both nationalism of indigenous people and globalism as anti-democratic and disruptive forces.

The global historical evidence shows that it was first the centralization of political power, then the emergence of nation-state and the imperial interstate system, that produced destructive and genocidal wars (see Eckhardt, 1995). State-terrorism, racial holocaust, and ethnocide have been committed by nation-states, not by ethnonational movements as Barber claims. National movements usually engage in peaceful struggle or guerrilla warfare since they do not have modern destructive weapons, and few respond to state-terrorism with terrorist activities. Unfortunately, Barber characterizes the struggles of subjugated peoples for social justice, human dignity, and political rights as Jihad to associate them with a religious war. He also blames globalism in isolation from the roles of nation-states and the imperial interstate system. "The two axial principles of our age-tribalism and globalism-clash," Barber (1992: 226) writes, "at every point except one:

they may both be threatening to democracy." He calls the indigenous peoples 'tribes' to imply their stagnation or lack of autonomous development. For Barber and others, indigenous peoples are the "peoples without history" who create problems for those ethnonations who have states; hence, they must be absorbed through cultural assimilation or destroyed through ethnocide or both.

The current state structures and globalism are not contradictory, as Barber claims, since they are integrated in the imperial interstate system. The global interstate system, nation-states, multinational corporations or other institutions are the integrated systems that support one another to maintain the modern world system; they do not have an independent existence. Since most state structures are buttressed on racial and ethnic stratification on the one hand, and class and gender hierarchies on the other, they are undemocratic. The major contradiction that exists in the modern world system is not between McWorld, or globalization, and nation-states; but between the subjugated peoples on one hand, and the McWorld of transnational elites, multinational corporations, and the imperial interstate system, on the other. Isaacs (1989: 215) argues that the new era of the "global village" emerged "before most of the world's people could glean any advantages at all from industrialization and modernization. The fundamental and decisive conflicts grow ever sharper over the hard stuff of wealth, access to sources of energy and other raw materials, over production, food, trade, and military power. These are the conflicts that will decide the fate of the world and its peoples."

Without addressing the problems of state-terrorism, racial/ ethnic hierarchy, lack of access to economic, cultural and political resources, and the failure of the nation-state to transform itself into multicultural democracy, Barber characterizes the current ethnonational movements as destructive forces. Barber (1992:228) calls state nationalism "a force of integration and unification" and characterizes the struggle for equality and cultural diversity as "a reactionary and divisive force." The main objectives of ethnonational movements are human rights and social justice. Indigenous peoples are opposed to cultural assimilation at the

cost of their cultural, economic, and political rights; they have been struggling for these rights since the emergence of the nation-state. The claim that the struggle of the subjugated people undermines democracy in the racially/ethnically stratified world is misleading. True democracy and social stratification, particularly racial/ethnic inequality, contradict each other. Since nation-states and their interstate system have failed to establish multicultural democracy, it is only the struggles of the oppressed majority and groups that attempt to bring social justice and democracy from below.

### **Nationalism, Cultural Identity, and Dignity**

Lack of democracy, denial of group and individual rights, cultural degradation, and oppressive socioeconomic conditions force the subject peoples to struggle for their rights. Since domination reduced the subject peoples to historical objects by disdaining their culture and revering every aspect of the dominant culture, the anti-colonial national struggle attempts to achieve liberty and human dignity that are denied by an oppressive social system. There are areas of the world where the total destruction or gradual liquidation of the colonized subjects occurred through replacing them by a foreign people; in other areas, partial destruction took place by settling a foreign population among the indigenous population. Without severe physical liquidation, European colonialists and their collaborators faced serious resistance from the remaining colonial subjects because they could not totally destroy their cultural personality (see Cabral, 1973: 41).

National liberation movements emerged to restore "the inalienable right of every people to have their own history" (Cabral, 1973: 43), culture, and human dignity that were damaged by colonialism. Cabral (1973: 60) expounds that "the people are only able to create and develop the liberation movement because they keep their culture alive despite continual and organized repression of their cultural life and because they continue to resist culturally even when their politico-military resistance is destroyed." The cultural resistance to colonialism

can develop into political and armed struggle. The colonization of a human group denies dignity and suppresses the material and nonmaterial elements of culture that are necessary for survival and development. Cabral (1973: 43-68) sees the national struggle of the dominated people "as the organized political expression of the culture of the people who are undertaking the struggle", and also as "necessarily a proof not only of identity but also of dignity."

Colonialism can also create a condition in which an indigenous intellectual and professional stratum emerges to serve its own economic and political interests. Some elements of this stratum gradually recognize the irreconcilability of the contradictions between the colonizing structure and the colonized subjects and begin to rediscover the cultural heritages and identities of the colonized subjects in the process that Cabral calls the "return to the source." When such elements form a movement by returning to their cultural source, the resistance of the colonial subject is transformed into a national liberation struggle. Without critically understanding how oppression creates this kind of nationalist leadership, some scholars see liberation nationalism as a phenomenon invented from above (see Gellner, 1983, 1987; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990). Some elements of the educated stratum can assist the process in the presence of factors that facilitate the emergence of nationalism.

Liberation nationalism is a significant revolutionary force in international politics. Using themes such as civilization, progress, and cultural universalism (see Goldberg, 1990; Jalata, 1996a), some scholars and state elites who want to maintain the status quo have negated the history, culture, and humanity of the subjugated peoples in the world. The negative views about the subjugated peoples have prevented such knowledge elites from understanding the needs, aspirations, and humanity of these peoples (see Gaventa, 1993). Some social scientists have promoted the interests of the dominant racial/ethnonational groups at the cost of the subjugated peoples. Heaney (1993: 41-43) correctly remarks that "[w]ith the writing of history, knowledge became power, or rather an expression of power and a tool of maintaining it. History,

and later, science, were frequently used not merely to understand, but to legitimize historically shaped political relationships and institutions."

As Vansina (1986) and Wallerstein (1983a, 1983b) argue, some intellectual discourse has been dominated by scholars whose ideology of cultural universalism and a top-down approach completely ignored or distorted the social and cultural history of the subjugated peoples. Cultural universalism is an ideology used by dominant groups in the modern world economy to view the world from their own cultural perspective, and to control economic and cultural resources of the dominated people; it also assists in creating and socializing a global intermediate class by subordinating or destroying multicultures in the name of science, technology, and progress (Wallerstein, 1983b). Such discourse perpetuates domination; exploitation, dehumanization, and underdevelopment for the majority of the world population (see Fannon, 1963).

Since the capitalist world system denies economic, cultural, and political rights, and human dignity to the majority of the world population, it cannot be peaceful; consequently, we experience massive human rights violations, recurrent conflicts and wars, terrorism, poverty and hunger, and massive military buildups. Correct and critical understanding of these problems and finding fair and democratic solutions require the examination of world problems from different cultural centers and abandoning the idea of cultural universalism. As Wa Thiong'o (1993: 9) puts it, "there could never be only one centre from which to view the world but that different people in the world had their culture and environment as the centre." Therefore, critical studies require the recognition of a pluralism of cultural and historical centers to understand the factors that facilitate the development of nationalism within a nation-state, a region, and the world. Let us briefly analyze the Oromo national movement in the context of these theoretical and historical themes.

### **Oromo Nationalism in the New Global Era**

At the close of the twentieth century, the intensification of globalization and the proliferation of nationalisms are the two main global social processes shaping world history. The nature and role of the nation-state is being challenged and changed by the globalizing structures, such as transnational elites, multinational corporations, etc. (see Robinson, 1996), and by forces of ethnonational diversity and multiculturalism (see Bereciartu, 1994; Nimni, 1991). Oromo nationalism is an integral part of these global processes. It fights against Ethiopian colonialism and the global structures that deny Oromos psychological freedom, and democratic and cultural rights; and, it also struggles against those structures that facilitate internalization of oppression, economic exploitation, and underdevelopment.

There have been two major historical waves in the capitalist world system: The first wave extended approximately from the 17th to the mid-20th centuries. It was characterized by slavery, conquest, colonization, ethnocide, and continued subjugation. The transformation of mercantilism into industrial capitalism and the expansion of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries in Western Europe increased the need for raw materials, free or cheap labor, markets, and the intensification of global colonial expansion during the first historical wave. Oromos were colonized in this global process, during the second half of the nineteenth century, by the alliance of Ethiopian colonialism and European imperialism (see Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990; Jalata, 1993a).

The second global historical wave emerged after the First World War, appearing as national liberation movements and revolutions. Wallerstein (1979: 234) mentions that this war "marked the opening skirmishes of world-wide struggle of movements of national liberation against Europe's world political hegemony, which had been based on the latter's temporary technological advantages and deep-rooted racism." The first phase of the second global historical wave was characterized by forms of territorial nationalism and ethnonationalism that opposed direct colonial relations. Despite the fact that Oromo nationalism has not yet

achieved its main objective, it is an integral part of this first phase of the second wave of global history. The second phase of this wave has been characterized mainly by ethnonationalism within established nation-states.

Oromos have been colonized and dominated by Euro-American backed, technologically-backward Habasha aggressors. Ethiopian colonial occupation crippled Oromo leadership and created a leadership vacuum in Oromo society. Successive Ethiopian regimes limited the access of Oromo to education and to positions of authority and knowledge-making in universities, business and government; consequently, these policies delayed the emergence of an Oromo educated stratum and Oromo leadership until recently (Jalata, 1996a: 96). Although Oromos resisted Ethiopian colonialism from the beginning, it took them a long time to establish an organized and centralized leadership. Since the causes, phases, objectives, and characters of Oromo nationalism have been examined elsewhere (see Jalata, 1996a, 1996b, 1995, 1993a, 1993b), thorough discussion of these issues will not be made here. Initially Oromos resisted slavery, conquest and colonization without systematically organizing themselves (see Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990; Jalata, 1993a). Although the Oromo national struggle embodies the continuation and culmination of the previous resistance, it emerged from certain historical and socioeconomic factors. Colonial capitalism that emerged in Oromia under the alliance of Ethiopian domination and U.S. hegemonism (see Jalata, 1993a) produced new class forces and social groups, such as workers, the military, intellectuals, students, etc. during and after the mid-twentieth century. Some revolutionary and nationalist elements from these social forces transformed peaceful opposition movements to rural-based, guerrilla armed struggle through the Oromo national movement.

It has taken about forty years for the Oromo national movement to complete its formative stage. The period between the 1960s and the 1990s marked this formative stage that was fermented by the sacrifice of several nationalist heroes. Although it is impossible to list the names of all of these formative leaders in this short paper, let us mention a few of them who lost their lives while giving ideological, organizational, and

military forms for the Oromo national movement. These nationalist heroes include Haile Mariam Gamada, Mamo Mazamir, Taddasa Biru, Elemo Qiltu, Baro Tumsa, Magarsaa Bari, Ahmed Buna, Demssie Techane, Mohee Abdo, and Aboma Mitiku; their remaining comrades who survived the onslaught of the Ethiopian and Somali aggressors kept the spirit of the Oromo struggle, maintained the survival of the OLF, and contributed to the demise of the Mengistu regime in the early 1990s.

Due to its lack of military capacity to defend Oromia from the new Tigrayan colonial regime, between 1991 and 1992, the OLF supported the idea of a peaceful democratic transition and participated in the process of creating and adopting a charter that would guarantee basic human rights, freedom of association and expression, the rights of ethnations to national self-determination, and the formation of a multinational federal democratic state. During this aborted transition, OLF cadres and cultural and musical troupes openly articulated the nature of Ethiopian colonialism and the necessity of Oromo freedom. After realizing that the OLF has been an independent and genuine Oromo organization that reflects the aspirations and hope of the Oromo nation, the majority of Oromos accepted it as their organization and began to fully participate in the Oromo national movement. The mobilization of the Oromo people by the OLF revived the fear of Habashas in general, and that of the Tigrayan elites in particular, that the Oromo would emerge as a decisive political force in the Ethiopian Empire. Therefore, the Tigrayans decided to suppress Oromo nationalism with the help of the U.S. and to consolidate Ethiopian colonialism under their leadership. The Tigrayan colonial regime and its international supporters used the political opportunity of transition and replaced Amhara colonialism with that of Tigrayan.

The Tigrayan colonial regime with the help of Eritrea, Sudan and the West, particularly the USA, established its colonial dictatorship through abrogating the transitional charter within less than a year. Even Lyons (1996:142) who does not address the colonial contradictions that exist between Oromos and Tigrayans says that this transition "began with a broadly inclusive national conference and ended .... with a single-party-

dominant political system." The U.S. and other Western countries openly endorsed the process through which Tigrayan ethnic dictatorship emerged in a multinational empire (see Lyons, 1996). The abortion of the transition to democracy, the emergence of the Tigrayan colonial dictatorship, the serious mistake that the OLF made by encamping its army, and the fascistic actions that the new colonial regime committed against the Oromo people never eliminated the love and support the Oromo people cultivated for the OLF. When those OLF cadres, and the army who managed to escape the trap that was set for them by the Tigrayans and their supporters, entered the forest, most Oromos bravely and openly embraced and supported them. The torture, murder, looting and violence, and violation of their rights never dissuaded Oromo from being part of the struggle; rather, it helped the Oromo national movement attract Oromos and blossom.

Although the OLF emerged between 1973 and 1974, it successfully reached the majority of Oromo people in the early 1990s by accomplishing its formative stage of the Oromo struggle. Since 1992, OLF cadres and its army have been successfully integrated into Oromo society in general, and Oromo farmers and herders in particular, and survived without any foreign assistance. Explaining similar revolutionary conditions, Petras (1981: 153-4) argues that

Critical to an understanding of the embryonic revolutionary organization is the political culture in which it is embedded—the degree to which class struggle and social mobilization have occurred. The insertion of the embryonic revolutionary party into an ascending mass movement or within a politicized population is crucial in the creation of the collective experiences within which the cadres will frame their revolutionary programs. The cadres are the distillation of class [and national] struggles and the bridges between past struggles and the future revolution. As carriers of the early formative class experiences, they play a decisive role in

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determining the ultimate direction of the revolutionary process and in weaving its specific organizational forms, leadership, and ideology. But the cadres themselves, and the struggle they lead, are reflections of broader historic conflicts that provide the parameters within which particular actions and movements occur.

Realizing the organization of regional and global forces and the nature of the Tigrayan regime, OLF cadres and the army have cemented their organic integration with the Oromo farmers and herders and engaged in revolutionary activities. This indicates the completion of the formative stage of the Oromo national struggle and the beginning of the Oromo Revolution.

The Tigrayan colonial regime is in power mainly because of the financial and military assistance it receives from the U.S. and other imperialist countries. The Eritrean mercenary army also contributes to the survival of the regime. Since this regime mainly survives on Oromo economic resources, it never hesitates to take fascist actions against the Oromo people. The fascist tendencies of this regime are manifested in its criminal plans (see Seifa Nabalbal, no. 94, Nov. 8, 1996) and terrorist activities against Oromo nationalists, open and hidden murders of thousands of Oromos, reinitiation of villagization and eviction, expansion of prisons in Oromia, forcing of about forty thousand Oromo into hidden concentration camps, and looting of economic resources of Oromia to develop Tigray, enrich Habasha elites and their collaborators (see Ujji, 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997 series; Amnesty International, 1995 and 1996; Oromia Support Group, 1996 and 1997 series).

Like the Agoni people of Nigeria who are facing ethnocide because of their lands which are rich in oil deposits, and their political resistance to the Nigerian government and Shell Oil Company (see Robinson, 1997; Knapp, 1997), Oromos may soon face an open ethnocidal war because of gold and other minerals in Oromia, other economic resources, and their resistance. Oromos need to recognize that they face an internationally-financed ruthless regime that never hesitates

to exterminate them to take their lands and other resources. The words of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Nobel Peace Prize Nominee and hanged leader of the Agoni, have relevance for the Oromo survival and struggle. He says, "We will either win this war to save our land, or we will be exterminated, because we have nowhere to turn to" (quoted in Knapp, 1997: 4).

If Oromos are not ready to consolidate their national movement and armed struggle as soon as possible, they, like many colonized people, may face systematic extermination and concentration camps so that their lands and natural and economic resources will be used entirely by Habashas and transnational corporations. The two nightmares of Habashas have been the influences of Islam and Oromos since the sixteenth century (see Hassen, 1992). That is why the Tigrayan and Eritrean regimes are becoming mercenaries for the West in the Horn of Africa: to topple the Islamic Sudanese government (see Ottaway, 1996) and to recreate the Somali government under their influence, and also to provide a final solution for the Oromo problem. What should Oromo elites and the Oromo people do to take the Oromo national movement to its final logical conclusion before it is too late?

### **Balancing Pragmatism and Political Idealism**

Achieving the Oromo national project requires critically assessing the past and mapping out a clear program of action for the future. The structural and conjunctural problems of the Oromo national movement cannot be solved by themselves, or spontaneously, or by simply reacting to events. The solution to the Oromo political problem requires social scientific studies, critical understanding, and taking bold and concrete political actions. As Petras (1981: 155) asserts, the success of any revolutionary movement is based on "the result of a painstaking and continuous effort to create the human political resources needed to formulate tactics, strategies, and organizational structures through each conjuncture." As we see today, politics and social scientific discourse are not well integrated in Oromo national discourse. Therefore, gossip,

rumors, innuendoes, suspicion, etc. dominate Oromo political discourse. Can Oromos afford to continue with such destructive trends?

All sectors of Oromo society need to debate and take concrete actions to advance their struggle under a centralized leadership. As Sen and Caren (1987: 96) comment on the movement of the oppressed people, "[r]espect for the many voices of our movement, for their cross-fertilizing potential, for the power of dialogue, for the humility to learn from the experiences of others are crucial to our vision." The current condition requires from Oromo nationalist leaders, particularly those who lead Oromo organizations, to study and to understand the structural and conjunctural problems that face the Oromo national struggle, and to develop a strategy step by step by formulating minimum and maximum objectives through establishing a common platform. It is essential for this minimum objective to focus on capturing state power in Oromia. Taking Oromia as a center of an emerging new state, Oromo nationalists should start to develop a new strategy of creating a multinational democratic state since there are other peoples who live in Oromia, and some neighboring peoples may also want to form a free union with Oromia. It is necessary that all Oromo nationalist groups agree on this minimum objective, despite their ideological differences, since it removes Ethiopian colonialism from the soil of Oromia. The core of this minimum objective is the consolidation of the Oromo national movement and the Oromo Liberation Army.

To achieve their minimum objective, the Oromo need to transform their numerical strength into a formidable political and economic power. This will lead to their being heard in the modern world system. The consolidation of the Oromo national movement assists in developing new tactics and strategies and taking political and economic actions on local, regional, and national levels; for instance, an economic boycott, such as refusing to sell and buy commodities from those who oppose their struggle, refusing to pay taxes, developing an alternative market, and sabotaging the economic activities of their enemies. Since the transnational elites are not concerned with social justice and Oromo freedom, Oromos through consolidating their national

movement need to disturb the relationship between the Tigrayan regime and the imperial interstate system by destabilizing the Ethiopian Empire. Taking the armed struggle as the focal point of the Oromo movement, it is necessary to develop such new tactics and strategies that can allow mass participation and actions.

It is true that the fulfillment of the minimum objective cannot automatically restore original Oromo democracy; but it will allow the restoration of Oromo history, culture, human dignity, and language. Oromo educational and other institutions will develop. Also, It will eliminate the Ethiopian colonial violence from the soil of Oromia and other areas. The fulfillment of the minimum objective of establishing a revolutionary state cannot also bring economic growth and social equality for all citizens. Exploring why revolutionary changes have failed to produce popular democracy and social equality in the capitalist world system, Skocpol and Trimberger (1994:128) assert that global "pressures have been more effective in determining the outcomes of revolutions than intra-national pressures for equality, participation and decentralization." Therefore, progressive social forces may need to continue to struggle for the maximum objectives, such as the restoration of Oromo democracy and social equality, after the political liberation of Oromia. In their struggle for economic development and social equality, progressive Oromos may also need to be part of a global movement that struggles for an egalitarian democratic world order. Egalitarianism and popular democracy may not be achieved in one nation since the capitalist world system can easily impose its logic on it. Therefore, the current Oromo problem must be addressed within this global structural limit.

Provided that the Oromo consolidate their national movement and liberation army there is not any doubt that the political liberation of Oromia is achievable in the near future. Nevertheless, the issues of restoring popular democracy, economic development, and social equality are ideal types that Oromos are aspiring to achieve in the future. Oromo elites cannot afford to mix the minimum and maximum objectives and to continue the political naiveté of rigid centralism, anarchism, and division since their size is small and since their survival and the existence of their

nation depend on achieving the minimum objective. If most Oromo elites in particular, and the Oromo people in general, do not recognize the global and regional forces that are threatening the survival of their nation and focus on the secondary contradictions in Oromo society, the present Oromos may lose their battle as the previous generations of Oromos who bravely but unsuccessfully fought against the alliance of Ethiopian colonialism and world imperialism. Therefore, this era requires that Oromo nationalists balance pragmatism with political idealism.

However, balancing pragmatism with political idealism does not require total abandonment of the struggle for democracy and social equality. But the struggle for democracy and social equality needs to be within the context of the Oromo liberation struggle. The Oromo national movement needs to combine revolutionary centralism and active and full participation of all sectors of the society in the national struggle. Oromo liberation organizations should realize that the idea of liberating Oromia through a top-down and rigid approach without the full participation of all sectors of Oromo society in the national struggle and decision-making can lead to disastrous results. They need to start to listen to different voices of the Oromo people and make their decisions based on these voices. These liberation organizations need to critically reassess their successes and failures. The period of teaching nationalism by a few elements is over since Oromo nationalism is already rooted in the Oromo masses; and the period of simple nationalist talk is over, since Oromo revolutionaries who are engaged in political and armed struggle need material, moral, and intellectual support.

### Conclusion

Anti-colonial nationalism is a revolutionary ideology for the colonized people who struggle to liberate themselves from colonialism. As a result, many nation-states still emerge and join the United Nations, despite their failures to bring about economic growth and social equality for former colonized nations. All social revolutions that took place, whether they disguised themselves in Marxist clothing or not, were

nationalists and failed to introduce an alternative social system to capitalism. That is why the true nature of the former Soviet Union and China has become clear to the world. Oromo nationalists need to learn from the successes and failures of those countries that experienced social revolutions. Realizing the global structural factors that confront them, and understanding the potential of human agency to transform these structures, Oromo leaders and various sectors of Oromo society should start to debate on the significance of balancing pragmatism with political idealism. This new era of globalization requires new political and ideological strategies that can replace the old ones.

The survival and victory of the colonized nations like Oromia require a critical and comprehensive understanding of the global world system, all forces that work against their interests on regional and global levels, and developing flexible political strategies and taking mass-based concrete political actions. Provided that they develop a matured political strategy and consolidate the Oromo liberation movement and the Oromo Liberation Army, Oromos can enter the next century with victory because of their mass-based nationalism, democratic heritage, and numerical strength that the dying Ethiopian Empire could not manipulate. The seed of Oromo survival and liberation is the Oromo Liberation Army. Despite the fact that both the global and regional forces have tried to destroy it, the Oromo Liberation Army has survived and expanded without external assistance because of the commitment and support of the Oromo farmers and other sectors of Oromo society.

Oromo in the diaspora need to start to understand the world for what it is and search for friends for the Oromo national struggle. The lack of foreign assistance is one of the greatest weaknesses of the Oromo struggle. Oromo in the diaspora, like their people in Oromia, must fully support the Oromo national movement led by the OLF and its liberation army materially, morally and intellectually. At the same time, they must constructively struggle so that they can participate in this struggle not as docile followers but as active forces that can make a difference. The result of this national struggle is not predetermined and it is going to be shaped by all Oromo revolutionary forces that actively support and fully

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participate in this national movement. Therefore, the Oromo Liberation Army deserves full support from all sectors of Oromo society so that the Oromo national movement is reinvented and consolidated through the process of constant struggle.

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# THE SIIQEE INSTITUTION OF OROMO WOMEN

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*Kuwee Kumsa*

## Introduction

Women's struggle against domination and oppression has taken different forms that vary across time and culture. For Oromo women of precolonial times, the form was a collective struggle through building the **siiqqee** solidarity. **Siiqqee** is a stick symbolizing a socially sanctioned set of rights exercised by Oromo women. This paper uses a historical feminist perspective to explore what **siiqqee** is, what rights it symbolized, what sanctions it enforced, what factors contributed to its decline, how it is practiced by contemporary Oromo women, and the prospects for reviving the **siiqqee** principles on a new basis. As the study stretches over a century, and since there is a dearth of written material on the subject, a few methods are combined for data collection. In addition to conducting an extensive library research, I have interviewed anthropologists and custodians of Oromo oral literature. Also, I have also used unpublished studies, e-mail messages, and letters of personal correspondence with permission. The collected data are categorized and analyzed in three sections: The **siiqqee** institution before colonialism is expounded in part one, part two explores some survival patterns of **siiqqee** rights after colonialism, and prospects for reviving the principles of **siiqqee** on a new basis are discussed in part three. But first, a brief historical background of the people and their culture is in order.

## Historical Background

The Oromo are an ancient people of the so called Kushitic stock who live in the Horn of Africa. Presently they inhabit large fertile areas on both sides of the Great Rift Valley -- the very point of origin of human beings. Balkanized during the European Scramble for Africa,

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today they live in the present-day Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. Constituting 25-30 million people, they are the most numerous among the nations of the region. In the Ethiopian empire alone, they constitute more than half of the population. Their language, Afaan Oromoo, is the second most widely spoken indigenous language in the whole of Africa, second only to Hausa (Melbaa, 1991; Kassam and Megerssa, 1994).

During their long history of egalitarian culture, the Oromo developed a uniquely democratic socio-political structure known as **Gadaa** (Cerulli, 1922; Huntingford, 1955; Legesse, 1973; Melbaa, 1991), and an extraordinarily accurate time-reckoning system, the **Ayyaanaa** calendar (Megerssa, 1993). Legesse (1973: 279) states:

The **Gada** System is keyed to a remarkably sophisticated system of time reckoning. The system is based on accurate astronomic observations associated with a complete day-month nomenclature. The total system is a permutation calendar the like of which has been recorded only three times in the history of mankind. It occurs among the Chinese, the Hindu, and the Mayans - three civilizations far removed from Borana [Oromo].

**Gadaa**, observes Melbaa, is an institution that governed the life of every individual in the Oromo society from birth to death. Under **Gadaa** governance, the Oromo created and sustained a powerful nation in the region for many centuries. According to Jalata (1993:20), "The **Gadaa**, as a political, economic, social, and religious institution, was the pillar of the Oromo culture and civilization." Every male Oromo was born into one of the five age-grade sets.<sup>1</sup> In the political structures of **Gadaa**, power shifted among some of these five parties every eight years where the outgoing party moved into an advisory council, handing power ceremonially to the next party. The event of power transfer is marked by a meritocratic election where the candidate lists his deeds of honor and bravery and is elected upon the agreement of the assembly (Megerssa, 1993). The next generation of the out-going party come to

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power only after 40 years, thus rendering power transference from parents to children impossible. The *Gadaa* politico-military structures actively excluded women. But women wielded power and control in the domestic scene where they had *de facto* control over the most important resources (Legesse, 1973; Bartels, 1983; Waqayyo, 1991).

Yet, despite this rich history and egalitarian culture, the Oromo are little known to the outside world. Anthropologists have studied only branches of the Oromo. Historians wrote often about separate sections under different names and only seldom under one unified name, Oromo. Until two decades ago, they were rarely referred to as Oromo. In Kenya, the different *gosa* (clans) of the Oromo are referred to by the names of their *gosa* as Booran, Gabra, Garrii, Orma and Saakuyyee. In Somalia, they are similarly known as Jaarso, Anniyya and Gurgura. But it is Ethiopian historiography that introduced a distorted picture of the Oromo to the rest of the world by the derogatory name of Abyssinian<sup>2</sup> invention, "Galla".

The Oromo were balkanized by European and Ethiopian colonialism in the late 1800s. But, unlike European guns that penetrated the area and tipped the regional balance of power, Western and Abyssinian "civilization" and "modernization" failed to reach the heart of Oromoland. In the newly-forged Ethiopian empire where the greater bulk of the Oromo population was incorporated, an out-moded Abyssinian social formation and peripheral capitalism were imposed. *Gadaa* was banned along with the teaching of Oromo history, and the Oromo language and culture were suppressed or destroyed. Today, the Oromo in the Ethiopian empire live as an oppressed majority fighting against Abyssinian colonialism (Jalata, 1993). Smaller sections of the Oromo were incorporated into the then British empire, now in today's Kenya and Somalia. Forcefully separated from the main body of their Oromo kin, today these people live as marginalized minorities – economically exploited, politically dominated, and culturally degraded. This historical background assists our understanding of an important Oromo institution known as *siggee*.

## The Siiqqee Institution Before Colonialism

### What is Siiqqee?

Siiqqee leapt to my mind as a symbol that can be used in organizing Oromo women. But I did not know much more about it than a very superficial meaning of it. In an attempt to get to a deeper meaning of siiqqee, I asked Oromos, women and men, what they knew about it.<sup>3</sup> The responses I got varied widely and included the following:

"Siiqqee is a stick, just a simple stick!"

"Siiqqee is a stick signifying the honor of Oromo women."

"Siiqqee is a blessing."

"Siiqqee is a weapon of an Oromo woman."

"Siiqqee is a ceremonial marriage stick given to a girl."

"Siiqqee is a religious stick Oromo women used for prayer."

I was left more confused than when I began. But this did not cause frustration. Instead, it became an inspiration, and despite the daunting dearth of written literature, I attempted to frame some concept of siiqqee that might shed some light on the deeper meaning.<sup>4</sup>

What is siiqqee, then? Above, it is described as the elephant in the famous fable was described: as each part experienced by each blind man. Like the elephant, siiqqee is also much more than the sum of all that has been said so far. Yes, physically siiqqee is a stick, but as the custodians of Oromo oral literature say, a deeper and richer symbolic meaning of it should be sought within the context of the history and culture of the people who defined, named and practiced it. Apart from that, they say, the essential meaning is lost. Let me, therefore, try to trace siiqqee in history and culture to help us begin understanding the depth of its meaning. At the risk of making erroneous interpretations, but with the hope of breaking a path for future research to correct the

mistakes I may make in my overenthusiasm, I will attempt to reconstruct **siiqqee** from bits and fragments of information.

### Tracing Siiqqee in History and Culture

During the period of **Gadaa** rule, women were actively excluded from the politico-military structures. They were not born into a **Gadaa** grade; they were only married into one (Kelly, 1992:125; Legesse, 1973:19). Bartels (1983:284) says that women were considered sources of life; for them, taking life was considered taboo. Qumbi (1989) also observes that, "The very old, the very young and all women, in the **Gadaa** system, are considered innocent and peace-loving." **Gadaa** dictated a deep division between the sexes where crossing the boundary was intolerable. But, despite its high gender-role segregation, **gadaa** was uniquely egalitarian because the two separate domains had a strong functional interdependence and one was not valued any less than the other (Legesse, 1973; Waaqayyo, 1991).

On the other hand, women were considered **halaga** (outsiders or strangers) in the **gosa** (clan). They were not members of the **gosa** into which they were born, or the one into which they were married. They were rather bonds between the different families (Legesse, 1973). But Megerssa<sup>5</sup> asserts that there was a check and balance mechanism built into the **gadaa** system by which **siiqqee** was institutionalized, and women formed parallel organizations of their own which actively excluded men. Kelly (1992) also observes these parallel organizations known as **gaas eyba** among the Orma Oromo of Kenya. Although women were considered strangers, Megerssa states, they were also regarded as **muka laaftuu** (soft wood -- a depiction of their liminality) and the law for those categorized as such protected them. **Siiqqee**, he asserts, was the weapon by which Oromo women fought for their rights. **Gadaa** laws provided for them and society honored it. Thus the **siiqqee** institution functioned hand in hand with the **Gadaa** system as one of its built-in mechanisms of checks and balances.

**Gadaa** was also a religious institution where the Oromo believed in **Waaq** (their God), which is one as a supreme being, but also many as **ayyaana**, which exist in everybody and everything in the universe. In the Oromo religion, then, **Waaq** creates and regulates the existence of all animate and inanimate as well as material and non-material nature placing them in a well-balanced cosmic order (Bartels, 1983). As an extension of this phenomenon, the Oromo believe that society collapses unless a balance is struck between the power of male and female and everything that surrounds them in the cosmic order of **Waaq's** wisdom.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the interdependence of the male and the female is considered a precondition for peace and prosperity in the metaphysical as well as the practical sense (Kelly, 1992). The concept of this peace and order of **Waaq**, to which the Oromo generally refer as **safuu**, is extremely important in Oromo religious and political thought. If the balance is disturbed, it is said that **safuu** is lost. And the loss of **safuu** is the loss of **seera Waaq** (**Waaq's** law and order) which signals the reign of chaos and disaster.<sup>7</sup>

To understand the significance of **siqqee** in Oromo culture, we should first place it in the context of the traditional values and functions of sticks known by the generic name of **ulee**.<sup>8</sup> We cannot understand **siqqee** in isolation from **ulee** for it falls under this category of Oromo material culture. **Ulee** is a collective term the Oromo used to refer to those sticks that are purposely cut and fashioned for specific social, cultural and religious functions. Different **ulee** are made of different trees which specialize in different functions. The functions of the different **ulee** are, therefore, determined by the kind of tree from which they are made.<sup>9</sup>

The two types of **ulee** that are cut and fashioned to serve as marriage sticks are called **siqqee** and **horooroo**. **Siqqee** is given to the bride and **horooroo** to the bridegroom on the day of their marriage. Except for **Qottoo**<sup>10</sup>, who maintains that **siqqee** and **horooroo** are made out of the **odaa** tree, other participants agree that both types of **ulee** are made out of the tree called **harooressa**. According to Megerssa, the

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name of this tree is a compound noun made of 'hara' and 'horeessa' (hara + Horeessa = haroressa). **Hara** means a body of water. In Oromo society, water is symbolically regarded as the source of all life. A **nama**<sup>11</sup> (human being) deprived of **hara** is deprived of all the basic rights including the right to her/his life. **Hara-horeessa**, when traced to its roots in the traditional Oromo society, therefore, signifies the basic human rights to which an individual is entitled for as long as she/he lives. Participants agree that upon the death of the owners, the functions of both **siiqqee** and **horooroo** also come to an end when they are broken into halves and placed on the graves of the deceased. Thus **siiqqee** and **horooroo** are symbolic regulators of a healthy and balanced relationship of power between female and male Oromo for as long as they live.

This balance and justice is a part and parcel of the general cosmic order of **seera Waaq** that is conceptualized as **safuu**. The fact that **siiqqee** is cut and fashioned from **haroressa**, then, defines its purpose to be used as a weapon to fight against any force that threatens the basic rights of a married woman to her life. As participants note, **siiqqee** is never kept dry. To keep it wet, it is regularly anointed with fresh butter. When not in use, **siiqqee** is placed at **boroo**<sup>12</sup>, a special place of honor in the house. After some time it turns a shiny dark red color because of the butter and the smoke it absorbs. Kelly (1992:161) also finds that among the Oromo, the marriage stick is carefully protected and kept inside the house until brought out for ritual use. But, in her description, there is no distinction between women's and men's sticks and the name **wodesa** is used for both.

There is not much agreement among participants as to who gives the **siiqqee** to the girl on the day of her marriage. Some say it is the father, some say it is the mother, still others say they both do it together. But according to Megerssa, it is the mother who gives it to her daughter, and there is a symbolic meaning to this. The mother gives **siiqqee** to her daughter during the blessing ceremony. As she blesses her daughter in her turn, the mother holds one end of the **siiqqee** and the daughter holds the other. This symbolizes the tie between the mother and the daughter

on the one hand, and the tie among all women who are considered **halaga** on the other. And, Megerssa asserts, Oromo society honors these female ties and sanctions them.

### When is Siiqqee Used?

The use of **siiqqee** should be examined vis-a-vis the prevalence of **safuu** of **Waaq**. In times when **safuu** prevails, Oromo women take their **siiqqee** from **boroo** to use it for various economic, social and religious activities. They take it with them to all **jila** (ceremonial occasions) as a symbol of their honor and as an indication of their married status. They touch the property designated to them with the tip of their **siiqqee** signifying that they have owned it (Oromtittii, 1986). According to Fattoo,<sup>13</sup> Oromo women use their **siiqqee** to mobilize **jiga** (collective labor) during seasons of hard work. He also notes that when they perform their solidarity ritual, women dip the tip of their **siiqqee** in the blood of the animal slaughtered for sacrifice and touch each others' foreheads as a sign of taking an oath to support one another until they die. In religious ceremonies, when they pray to **Waaq**, or to **Ateetee** - the female deity, they hold their **siiqqee**, Birruu<sup>14</sup> notes. He also observes that Oromo women support each other by using their **siiqqee** to "beg" for a child for women with no children. Oromo women who have no children are less respected and considered even more the stranger and outsider, **halaga**, because they "failed" to produce the son that would tie them to their husbands' clans.<sup>15</sup> But here also society has created a balancing mechanism of adopting a child, widely known as **guddifaccha**. The "begging" of a child, which Birruu explains is the ritual by which women go to the family with children, raise their **siiqqee** collectively, name a child and demand that s/he be given to the woman with no child. Upon the sight of the raised **siiqqee**, Birruu holds, no mother or family would deny the women their demand.

When there are special ceremonies of blessings, two elderly women hold their **siiqqee** in an inverted V form and the person should

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pass under this to receive the blessings (Oromtittii, 1986). Fattoo agrees and adds that during **Gadaa** power transfer ceremonies, the newly-elected officers pass under such held **siiqqee** to receive their blessings. Women raise their **siiqqee** both when they bless and when they curse. Because women are considered innocent and peace-loving, Birruu observes, they use their **siiqqee** to perform **araara** (reconciliation).

Participants agree on the only occasion when **siiqqee** is not used. Made of **harooressa**, **siiqqee** is involved with all the activities of life, not of death. Thus the only social gathering where women do not use **siiqqee** is a funeral. The breaking of **siiqqee** upon the death of its owner signifies the end of its functions with the end of life's activities. **Siiqqee** regulates the performance of **nama** in accordance with the **safuu** of **Waaq's** cosmic order, and within the life-span allotted to the woman. By the time of her death, **siiqqee** will have accomplished its mission of guarding **seera Waaq** (**Waaq's** law).

In times when **safuu** is lost and **seera Waaq** is violated, Oromo women use their **siiqqee** for a rather political purpose. On these occasions, Megerssa notes, **siiqqee** is used as a weapon to fight against violations of **seera Waaq** and loss of **safuu**. Infringement of women's rights is regarded as the loss of **safuu**. And, in these cases, women use **siiqqee** to fight for their own rights, and to stand in solidarity with other women whose rights are violated. Megerssa holds that these violations are very rare because both men and women often respect their boundaries. But when they do occur and a woman's rights are infringed upon, he notes, she grabs her **siiqqee**, bursts out of the house, and screams. This is known as **iyya siiqqee** (**siiqqee** scream).

### Some Rights Symbolized by Siiqqee

#### Property Rights

Land may be an important form of property in many societies, and especially so for the Oromo, because they are farmers and

pastoralists. However, Fattoo claims, the general belief among the Oromo is that land belongs to **Waaq**. So people only own and control the produce of tamed and untamed nature. Women build and own their houses, and have **de facto** control over the most valuable resources and activities in and around the house (Legesse, 1973). They control stationary property while men control the mobile (**Waaqayyo**, 1991). Tracing the origin of women's property, Godaana<sup>16</sup> states, "We are given livestock by our **gosa** when we are married and when we go to our parents and relatives on **siiqqee** visitations. We are also given property by our husbands' parents and relatives when we give birth and perform religious rituals." In agreement, both **Huqqa**<sup>17</sup> and **Jilo**<sup>18</sup> note that women don't go to wars to conquer. They "fight" in peace, "conquer" with **siiqqee**, and touch their property by the tip of it. The touch of **siiqqee** signifies their ownership over the property. According to Megerssa, women have the right to dispose of their property in any manner they deem fit. Interference of men is considered the loss of **safuu** and is a cause for **siiqqee** rebellion.

### Control over Sexuality and Fertility

In precolonial Oromo society, even though marriage does not take place without the consent of the girl, it is indissoluble once it is consummated. **Gadaa** has no laws or institutions that deal with separation. Marriage is a social pact, the purpose of which is to raise children and maintain the continuity of society. Sexual gratification, however, is regarded as an individual matter and society allows mechanisms of maintaining extramarital sexual relationships. Thus, sexual incompatibility cannot break up a marriage. This extramarital arrangement seems a common response to the prevalent polygyny where men keep several wives and all the children born legally belong to the husband. Legesse (1973:18-32) argues that this arrangement is one of the important factors contributing to the stability of families.

The scramble of men for the control of women's labor and reproduction traces its origin to the rise of private property<sup>19</sup>. Its

purpose is to make sure that property passes onto biological heirs. Indeed, patriarchal societies seek access to female sexuality in different forms and in varying degrees. Only a few centuries ago, in Europe, the genital bodies of upper class girls and women were locked with "chastity belts" to prevent illegitimate children.<sup>20</sup> But Oromo women of the same era seem to have had much more control over their sexuality and reproduction. All children born by the wife belonged to the husband by law. Although through "modernization" much of this control may have been lost, and many "modernized" Oromo men whose masculinity is threatened may have constructed mental "chastity belts," in areas where tradition prevails, Oromo women still maintain control over their own sexuality and fertility. Father Bartels (1983:228) writes about a wise Oromo elder who, in no hypocritical terms, admitted to the fear that lurks in many men's minds by saying, "Nobody knows who my father is unless it is my mother."

Bartels (1983:218) also states that it is to a woman's credit to have several extramarital relationships as long as they remain within the lineage and the various boundaries of the incest taboo. This prevalent practice extends from among the Orma of Kenya to the Macca of western Oromoland. Holcomb and Kelly also observe this sanctioned freedom of Oromo women to take lovers. In Kelly's words, "The Orma practice institutionalized adultery [extramarital relationships]" (1992). When a woman's *garayyu* (*sanyo*)<sup>21</sup> visits, he leaves his coat and spear outside to indicate that the house is occupied (Legesse, 1973:26; Bartels, 1983:218). Legesse notes that if the husband comes and notices the signs of the visitation, he must turn around and go to his other wife's house or to his lover's. If he fails to do so and lingers about, it is a violation of the woman's rights. Holcomb says, "The house is her private space and should not be invaded." And Megerssa adds that such an invasion of her privacy is regarded as opening the *subba*<sup>22</sup> and peeking into her secrets. This, in turn, is regarded as loss of *safuu*. Thus, it calls for a *siiqee* rebellion in order to restore the cosmic order of *seera Waaq*.

Women may regard it as their sacred duty to guard this balance of **safuu Waaq** in terms of sexual relationships. Why men acknowledge it, however, seems a bit more intriguing. Infertility in women cannot be hidden, and the mechanism to make up for the woman with no children is **guddifaccha**. But is there a parallel mechanism for male infertility? Why is male infertility rarely discussed? I argue that the extramarital sexual relationships of the woman cover for male infertility within the context of traditional Oromo society. This is another factor contributing to the stability of families evidenced by Legesse (1973).

### **Social Rights**

Married women have the right to organize and form the **siiqqee** sisterhood of solidarity. Because women as a group are considered **halaga** and excluded from the **Gadaa** grades, they stick together and count on one another through the **siiqqee** which they all have in common. According to Megerssa, in the strange **gosa** where women live as strangers, **siiqqee** represents the mother and they even address each other as "daughters of a mother." They get together regularly for prayers as well as for other important individual and community matters. If men try to stop women from attending these **walargee** (meetings), it is considered against **safuu**. Kelly (1992:185) calls the Orma **gaas eyba** meetings "women's moot" and she discusses two factors that make many men ambivalent about this women's institution. First, she observes "women are recognized as having the right and even a sacred duty to attend these meetings, regardless of the opinion of individual husbands..... Secondly, men recognize that the **gaas eyba** provides women with singular opportunity for corporate action backed by ritual authority." Interfering with these rights calls for a **siiqqee** scream.

### Religious and Moral Authority

Because of their liminality, women wield a special religious power where they draw an enormous moral and ritual authority. Men, therefore, try to avoid their curse and seek their blessings. Kelly (1993:182) says, "Women in general are symbolically and politically liminal and correspondingly enjoy special sacred power as a class." Some participants agree that people respect and revere a woman because **Waaq** made her to be respected and revered. "You are a spittle who became a **nama** (human being). I am a spittle who became a **nama**, all through the miracles of the woman. No one wants trouble with **Waaq**," says Huqqa, hinting that interference with a woman's sacred authority is regarded as violating **seera Waaq** and **safuu**. These rights are also represented by **siiqqee**, the violation of which is a cause for trouble.

### Sanctions Enforcing Siiqqee Rights

The laws and social sanctions that enforce **siiqqee** rights are all interconnected and interdependent. Sanctions range from mild to severe, the degree of their severity depends on the seriousness of the violation. Most of them are enforced stage by stage as the violation becomes more serious. Minor individual violations may invoke only the milder sanctions, but once they get to the point where the woman seeks support from fellow women, then the matter is of a serious concern to the whole community, and collective action is required both on the part of women and on the part of men.

### The Law of Muka Laaftuu

Participants agree that in **Gadaa**, law is not handed down to the people. The process of legislation goes from bottom up and the constitution is amended every eight years during the power transfer ceremonies. And, according to Megerssa, the law of **muka laaftuu** is

no exception. The name **muka laaftuu** (soft wood) signifies that it is legislated to protect the "softer" and the weaker segments of the population. This protection covers women because they fall under the category of the liminal. Thus, if a woman complains, additional witnesses are not required in order to punish the offender. Her words are trusted as truth and taken at face value.

### **The Abaarsa Siiqqee**

In the traditional Oromo society, **abaarsa** (curse) is an important mechanism of social control (Bartels, 1983; Kelly, 1992). Megerssa notes that the more liminal an Oromo is, the more endowed she/he is with power to curse and bless. The weaker they grow physically, the more powerful they became spiritually. Kelly (1992:216) warns that the power of curse "reinforces patriarchal control; i.e., the control of men over women and that of seniors over juniors". However, she also attests that this power is strong in those who are socially most liminal. Thus women, the elderly, and the very young have such power which the dominant groups revere and respect. To curse and to bless, women raise their **siiqqee** both individually and collectively. The collective act, however, is believed to be more powerful and effective than the individual. So fear of **abaarsa siiqqee** acts as a deterrent, and people avoid what they believe would trigger women's wrath.

### **The Iyya Siiqqee**

According to Megerssa, **iyya siiqqee** was another deterrent. When the infringements upon her rights are serious and cannot be curbed by any of the above sanctions, an Oromo woman grabs her **siiqqee**, bursts out of the house, raises her **siiqqee** high, and screams. Why does she scream? Who is out there? What kind of support is she seeking? **Iyya siiqqee** is a mode of communication between Oromo women. It is a way of telling one another that **seera Waaq** is disturbed and that **safuu**

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is lost. Women consider it their sacred duty to restore peace and order of **Waaq**. Thus, when her rights are violated, a woman fights a political battle and screams to mobilize support. Through **iyya siiqqee**, Megerssa maintains, the woman invokes the **siiqqee** solidarity by saying:

**"Intala Aayyaa dhageetee?  
Oduun si geetee?"**

"Mother's daughter did you hear? Did you hear?  
Did the news come to you?"

Megerssa asserts that all women who hear the **iyya siiqqee**, grab their own **siiqqee**, burst out of their houses, raise their **siiqqee** high and join in the scream. Because the restoration of **safuu** is a collective action, women must give up whatever they are doing. Even those who are breast-feeding at the time of the scream should let the babies cry and leave the house to join in the scream. When **safuu** is lost and **Waaq's** peace is disturbed, it should be restored immediately before any kind of normal life activities can be resumed. Violation of a woman's rights is like breaking her **siiqqee**, asserts Megerssa. And breaking the **siiqqee** is regarded as killing the woman. Thus, in response to the first **iyya siiqqee** where women are called upon as daughters of a mother, each woman grabs her **siiqqee** and joins the scream saying:

**"Eeyee dhagahee! Oduun na gahee!"**  
"Yes I've heard! Yes I've heard! I have heard the news!"

### **The Godaansa Siiqqee**

Women get together and confer, Megerssa says, and if they decide that the case is a serious violation, they abandon their children and their homes and set out on **godaansa siiqqee** (**siiqqee** trek). They leave the village and assemble under a **qilxuu** tree, considered a female

tree. Once assembled there, women **hayyuu** (leaders) recite the law of **Waaq** and the law of **nama**. They reiterate the whole philosophy behind **siiqqee** rights where a thorough session of consciousness-raising takes place. Events of old time violations and punishments are recited at the assembly by elderly women who may have witnessed or heard about them. They say, "During the **Gadaa** of so and so this and this happened and so and so was punished by such and such....." And they vow to cross the river, and to cross the water! According to Megerssa, water is the source of all life<sup>23</sup> in the Oromo creation story, and when women vow to cross the water, they mean they would rather all die than see **Waaq's** peace disturbed and **safuu** lost. They vow never to come back until the person who committed the violation is punished and **Waaq's** order and peace is set back on track --until justice is done and **safuu** is restored.

Back in the village, Megerssa maintains, hell breaks loose. Men say: "**Ibiddi biyyaa dhaame** [The fire of the whole country has gone out]!" Fire going out signifies the collapse of society and the perishing of life. It means disaster. Megerssa says, in these rare situations, men quickly get together and elect a **manguddo** or a **jaarsa** (an elder) to make peace with the women on rebellion and to restore **safuu** of **Waaq**. Before he sets off, the elected **jaarsa** should take all metal ornaments from his stick and from his body as a sign of going in **nagaya** (peace). When he reaches the women, he does not greet them. The Oromo greeting is **nagaya** which means have you peace? Or are you in peace? But, because it is obvious there cannot be peace of **Waaq** when **safuu** is lost, Megerssa says, the **jaarsa** uses a purely ritual language instead of common greetings. This ritual phrase which Megerssa could neither translate into English nor find its meaning in Oromo is **diltee dilnaa!**

If the women suspect the reputation of the **Jaarsa**, then they will not accept the peace talks. There are different codes of communication for acceptance and for refusal. In cases of rejection, they all sing in chorus in a line that rhymes with the ritual phrase of the **Jaarsa**, "**Diltee Dilnaa!**" In response they say: "**Didnee jirraa!**" "We have refused!" then, the **Jaarsa** will turn around and leave without saying a word.

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According to Megerssa, this indicates that the matter is serious, and that men must send a more reputable **Jaarsa** immediately. But, if the women agree among themselves that the **Jaarsa** is reputable enough to mediate, their unanimous reply will be: "**Hoofkali!**" It means, "Be relieved!" or "Say what you came to say!" Then they spread leaves on the ground and invite him to sit among them under the female **Qilxuu** tree.

Women then begin to do the **himata** (complaint), Megerssa elaborates. As the wisest, the most revered, and the most respected, the elderly women, whose breasts are wrinkled and crumpled and whose faces are filled with furrows, get up one by one to talk of **safuu Waaq**. Each one of the elderly women pulls down her **katee**<sup>24</sup> exposing her wrinkled and crumpled breasts as a sign of supreme moral authority, dignity, and wisdom. No individual cases are discussed. They do **himata** for **Waaqa fi lafa** (for heaven and for earth), **marga fi bishaan** (for grass and for water), **ifa fi dukkana** (for light and for darkness), and **aadaa fi seera** (for custom and for law). They do **himata** to restore **safuu**. And, as a gesture of **araara** (reconciliation), the women announce their verdict on the present violation and announce the punishment it entails. The **Jaarsa** listens with a quiet reverence and takes the message back to the village. Society honors the verdict of its women by coming to the **Qilxuu** and taking part in the process of punishment and reconciliation. Together, the community celebrates the restoration of **Waaq's** law and order. The guilty man, besides paying his fine in property to the **siiqqee** sisterhood, slaughters a sacrificial animal as a gesture of pledge to mend his ways. He is also made to cook and feed the party at the feast as a gesture of reconciliation. He is humiliated before the whole community by performing the role taboo. Women dance and sing insulting songs in obscene language. Megerssa recites only the chorus:

**"Gurbaan Waaq raatesse. Nu karaamesse!"**

**"The boy whom Waaq made a fool. Make us rejoice!"**

### Disqualification from Gadaa Elections

The women call him names and refer to him as a boy, not a man. Humiliation is part of the punishment. But the sanction does not end there. According to Megerssa, a man who has a record of **siiqqee** violations is considered **nama gadi** (below human) and is not elected to any of the **Gadaa** offices. Violation of a woman's rights is detrimental to his merits, and **Gadaa** elections are meritocratic. Therefore men are deterred from infringing upon women's rights, boundaries are respected, and these kinds of extreme cases are incidents that rarely take place.

### The Duula Kutaa

But what happens if they do take place and menfolk ignore the **siiqqee** trek, or if they fail to send a respectable enough **Jaarsa**? Then, says Megerssa, people from the neighboring clan will flood the place to receive the women on **siiqqee** rebellion into their homes. In the traditional Oromo society, women on a **siiqqee** trek are regarded with special respect and reverence as they set out to accomplish their sacred duty of restoring **safuu**. The clan which receives the **siiqqee** women sends for their properties and children immediately. If their men refuse, they will declare **waraana kutaa** (war between clans) to restore **Waaq's** order and peace. So men try their best to avoid violating the borders in the first place. But if it is violated, **safuu** is lost and women set out on a **siiqqee** trek, they must make haste to fulfil women's demands and get them back to their homes before other clans declare war on them. But, even if no war is declared, Megerssa claims, a community minus its women has already collapsed as a community. It is not a community any more. But social sanctions do go as far as declaring war to protect women's rights in the balance of power **Waaq** created. Thus, the **siiqqee** has been institutionalized in the traditional Oromo society of precolonial times.

## The Siiqqee Institution After Colonialism

### The Decline of Gadaa

The **Gadaa** system and its institution of **siiqqee** have not been static phenomena. On the contrary, they have been undergoing changes even before conquest. The dynamics, however, were not uniform in all parts of Oromoland. Nor did they take place at the same time. But, even though internal factors such as class and state formation processes had begun to weaken it in some Oromo areas, it was the interplay of external factors such as Turko-Egyptian colonialism, European and, Abyssinian colonialism and the spread of Islam and Christianity that finally reduced **Gadaa** as a politico-military structure in most parts (Bulcha, 1988; Jalata, 1993). Colonialism destroyed what was there, but it did not replace **Gadaa** by a superior political organization.<sup>25</sup> Instead, it instituted an Abyssinian colonial system that exterminated a large portion of Oromo and depopulated Oromoland by selling Oromo men and women into slavery. Slavery produced an exceptionally adverse impact upon Oromo women who became the hottest market items most hunted by slave-drivers.<sup>26</sup> The disintegration of **Gadaa** also meant the disintegration of the parallel women's organization. **Siiqqee**, as one of the central institutions of **Gadaa**, could not stay intact in isolation. In the absence of enforcing mechanisms and societal sanctions, **siiqqee** rights became restricted to ritual. Now women do not wield power as strongly as they did during the **Gadaa** rule.

### Superimposition of New Over Old Values

With the imposition of Abyssinian social formation, a strongly patriarchal hierarchy and new feudal-type sanctions were grafted onto the Oromo values (Bulcha, 1988; Tolesa, 1990; Jalata, 1993; Megerssa, 1993). Ethiopian colonial reorganization was introduced along with intense ideological bombardment. Although the whole Oromo society

has been affected, the degree of adversity and the implications for Oromo women, I argue, are more severe. It meant that instead of separate but equally valued power domains of men and women, a hierarchically-ordered value system was to be instituted with the king at the apex and the Oromo woman at the lowest rung of the ladder. Not only did the men's sphere become more valued than the women's, but also the men supplanted women as the head of the domestic sphere. The interdependence of the sexes vanished Oromo women, who previously owned their houses, resources, and their bodies, lost their economic control and social status to male dominance, causing them to be reduced to property themselves, and to be owned by men. The horizontal relationships between women and men, and those between women and women, vanished under Abyssinian social formation, and all relationships were to be replaced by vertical ones, pushing the now impoverished Oromo women further and further down.

To the Oromo, whose **Waaq** creates all the physical and spiritual worlds in the universe and organizes them into a thoroughly interconnected phenomenon of **safuu**, neither Islam nor Christianity brought a better explanation of the cosmic order. The Oromo conversion to these religions, then, had its reasons in other factors, not in the superiority of a new philosophy. Indeed, a number of the Oromo people have resisted both religions and continue to worship their own **Waaq** to this day (Bartels, 1983; Jalata, 1993). Christianity invaded the Oromo from two directions: the Abyssinian Orthodox state, and the white Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Although the Oromo fiercely resisted, the theocratic state machinery overpowered them and forcibly converted some of them to Coptic Orthodoxy. But in some areas where missionaries operated, Oromos converted to the new religions *en masse* as an act of protest against the state-imposed Orthodox religion. Islam, on the other hand, came to Oromoland through trade and conquest. Some Oromos were coercively converted, but others voluntarily embraced Islam as an act of protest against Abyssinian Coptic Orthodoxy in order to maintain their separate identity (Jalata, 1993).

## The Siiqqee Institution of Oromo Women

Conversion meant that Oromo values were replaced by Christian or Moslem values. Oromo women were robbed of their ritual power and moral authority because their religion was denounced as "paganism" and those who practiced it were labelled "heathen" and subjected to persecution. Also, women lost control over their sexuality and fertility under the newly labelled "sin" of adultery. Neither religious philosophy recognized the women's **siiqqee** rights as both vied for ideological bombardment of the Oromo. Huqqa and Jilo both state that the **siiqqee** was totally suppressed by both religions. Women who converted to these religions, they maintain, do not have their **siiqqee** any more. Nor does **siiqqee** have any significant power to change the circumstances of even those women like Xiqqo Godaana who still own it.<sup>27</sup> Kelly (1992: 327-340) also observes that wife-beating is wide-spread among the Orma Oromo. He hints that this escalating male aggression may be attributed, among other factors, to the constant crises, stresses, and disempowerment associated with a century of colonialism. The Orma male, once the self-confident and dominant group of the area, are now threatened and marginalized.

### Women's Strategies and Siiqqee Survival

On an optimistic note, I argue that neither a century of political, economic, and cultural degradation, nor the ideological bombardment of Islam and Christianity can completely obliterate **siiqqee**. It is so deeply rooted in the heart of the Oromo culture that it has become an inalienable part of the people and their behavior. True, in some areas the symbolic meaning it held, the power it wielded, and the set of rights it represented, have been divorced from the stick. But women do use their **siiqqee** today, albeit mainly for rituals. True, in areas where **Gadaa** is thoroughly repressed and only the name **siiqqee** is preserved in songs and blessings, people may not be able to articulate the deeper meaning of it. But, all these notwithstanding, today, even in the areas where the name **siiqqee** is only vaguely remembered, the songs, the poems, the folklore, and most of all the deeply ingrained patterns of behavior that

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go down through generations, remain intact. Colonial oppression may have been complete in some ways, but, I argue, it has failed to destroy the *siiqqee* culture because Oromo women have devised strategies to preserve a lot of the *siiqqee* resilience.

### **Holding on to Moral Authority**

In Oromo milieux where *siiqqee* is still practiced, Birruu and Fattoo tell stories of how Oromo women defy colonial and religious authorities in preserving their *siiqqee* rights. Drawing on their *siiqqee* moral authority, women still perform their traditional mission of peace and reconciliation between Oromo groups and individuals. Women actually prevent Oromos from taking each other to colonial or religious courts. Even today, "When they see women's *siiqqee*," Birruu asserts, "no one refuses them their demand be it a child, a bride, property or service of any kind." Both Birruu and Fattoo assert that Oromo women still wield significant power with their *siiqqee* and that the Oromo society reveres and respects them.

### **Refusal to Relinquish Control**

According to Holcomb<sup>28</sup>, Oromo women still wield strong power and control despite the imposition of new values. Men's status as head of families is only nominal. "It is not the way men talked," Holcomb argues, "it is the way they behaved towards their women that told how much they respected them. If women did not agree, nothing would work, nothing would happen." Holcomb's assertions are in reference to her research findings. In 1976, missionaries failed to introduce a self-sufficient congregation and withdrew from one region where she worked. The failure, of course, was blamed on the work of the devil and conditions not being ripe for the penetration of the Holy Spirit. Obviously dissatisfied with this explanation, Holcomb conducted research to explore what really prevented the missionaries from building an indigenous church in the area. She was surprised to find that the real

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power behind the failure of the missionaries was the power of Oromo women.

Missionaries went to Oromoland with their own biases and tried to stop the preparation of *farso*,<sup>29</sup> for *daboo*<sup>30</sup>, depicting it as alcoholic and therefore sinful. Oromo men accepted the depiction and tried to persuade their women. For women, *farso* is the basic formula used to get agricultural work done. Women had complete economic control in managing grain in the homestead, converting it through the *farso* into labor to harvest crops. Oromo women's status and power very much depended on how effectively they organized and mobilized labor to get in a large crop, and the preparation of *farso* was an essential part of this activity. Hindering it meant the loss of women's power and control. Thus, they resisted it and women's power prevailed. Although Holcomb says that she came across the name *siiqqee* only in *seenaa* (girls marriage songs), I argue, the behavior of the Oromo women she described in her research is yet another resilient pattern of *siiqqee* survival.

### Siiqqee Rebellion and Punishment

Kelly (1992:168-9) writes about the myth of *Ako Boneya*, the powerful and rebellious Oromo woman. Her instructions, Kelly observes, "provided the charter for women's subsequent insubordination to male rule." Indeed, Kelly notes that Orma women keep a small ceremonial knife in their sacred pouch to remind themselves of their support for the rebellion of *Ako Boneya*. Kelly (1992: 187) also discusses details of her observations of how Orma women punish a male offender when a woman's rights are violated:

If women of the *gaas eyba* agree that the man's offence is sufficiently serious, they will take one of the following actions, depending on the severity of the offence and the reputation of the offender. First a senior woman of the

**gaas eeyba** may discretely approach the offender about his behaviour and suggest he offer an animal to be sacrificed on behalf of the **gaas eyba** as an act of reconciliation and pledge to mend his ways. Secondly, a senior woman of the **gaas eyba** may discretely approach clan elders to notify them of the women's concerns and thereby refer the matter to them.

If the first two options are ineffective, the women of the **gaas eyba** will conduct their own reprisal ritual. They ambush the offender in the bush or on the road, bind him, insult him verbally using obscene language that they would not normally utter in the direct presence of an adult male, pinch him, and whip him with leafy branches or knotted strips of cloth. In extreme cases, they may force him to crawl over thorny or rocky ground while they whip him and some may expose their bodies in an insulting fashion. They demand livestock sacrifice as the price to cease their attack. If he refuses, they may tie him to a tree in the bush and seize one of his animals themselves. Other men rarely intervene....

Here again, even though Kelly does not mention the name **siiqqee**, the behavior is very similar to the **siiqqee** rebellion of Oromo women to restore **safuu**. This is the form, I argue, in which the deeply ingrained **siiqqee** power has survived a century of colonial oppression among Orma women.

### **Keeping Sexual Gratification Sacred**

Even after a century of male dominance and oppression, Oromo women still exercise control over their sexuality and fertility. Holcomb tells of the utter frustration of the Ethiopian Orthodox priests to stop the

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**garayyu** practice, labelling it an "adulterous" and "sinful" act. But Oromo women who viewed sexual gratification and marriage as having separate spaces, considered it sacred and their legitimate right. They considered it their sacred duty of keeping the balance of **safuu Waaq**. So, in defiance to the priests' labels, and against the threats of burning in hellfire, they maintained and practiced **garayyu**. "These women are good Orthodox Christians," Holcomb argues, "yet, instead of giving up everything that is theirs in order to take up the Orthodox values, they have preserved some of their Oromo values and taken up some of the impositions selectively." She observes that women's liaisons are still honored by society as their private space that is not to be invaded.

### Oromization of Presbyterianism

The old time birth rituals of Oromo women still survive in many areas (Bartels, 1983). Even in the "modernized" families of Oromo Presbyterian pastors and evangelists, where Oromo religion is considered "paganism" and the name **Waaq** is adopted for the Christian God, Oromo women still maintain their culture. The name **Ateetee**, the female deity they invoke as they sing, may sometimes be confused with the name of the biblical Mary, but Oromo women have kept their traditional Oromo birth rituals intact.<sup>31</sup> Cerulli [1922:130] also attests to the resilience of **Ateetee** pointing out that it is "...another proof of the strange religious tolerance of the Galla [Oromo] who have been converted to Christianity and to Islam only superficially, and still retain their pagan [Oromo] religious conceptions."

These rituals create an exclusive space for women where they get together in the spirit of sisterhood to celebrate birth and to support women with no children by crying with them and praying to **Ateetee** together.<sup>32</sup> Women's behavior of creating women's space for such solidarity and collective power indicates that the principles of **siiqqee** sisterhood are still in action. Thus, I argue, although it came to Presbyterianize them, the change has been bidirectional and these women

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have, indeed, Oromized Presbyterianism itself. I assert that the change occurred both ways because of the deeply ingrained *siiqqee* resilience.

### Reviving *Siiqqee* on a New Basis

The most important principle of *siiqqee*, I believe, is building sisterhood and allying to fight against oppression. For the Oromo women of the old times, the countervailing group was just the Oromo male. In the contemporary world, however, forms of oppression and its perpetrators have been multiplied; domination, oppression, and exploitation have been globalized; and Oromo women have been pushed down to the bottom-most rung of the economic, political, and social ladder of the emerging world-wide oppressive hierarchy. But they are not fragile objects that are easily crushed under this formidable weight. They are, indeed, challenging the system as they are being changed by it. It is within this process of their dynamic multifarious struggle that the prospects of reviving *siiqqee* on a new basis must be examined.

### Rejection of Gender Roles

In the *siiqqee* sisterhood, Oromo women fought for their rights within the socially defined domains of segregated gender roles. But many contemporary Oromo women have rejected these ascribed roles. Today, some of them are breaking out of traditional boundaries to achieve new roles. Even though, rejection of gender roles had been an ongoing process on local and individual levels, the stage at the national level was set at the peak of Oromo cultural resistance in 1977 when Iffinash Qannoo, a young popular Oromo singer, took the stage and sang the *geerarsa* --the bravery song of Oromo men. This is how the incident is described in a letter:

When she [Qanno] said "*Dubartummaan fafaa ree!*  
[Being a woman is not a flaw!]" it was clear that the

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rebellion was not just against national oppression, but against gender oppression too. When we [Oromo women] stormed the stage kissing and hugging her, it was clear hers was not a single voice. It was a volcanic eruption of the voices of at least 15 million Oromo women, roaring against centuries of oppressive silence and invisibility.<sup>33</sup>

Many Oromo women have been waging a bitter struggle against national oppression on the one hand and gender oppression on the other. They have come a long way, and today, there are many young Oromo women who have gone as far as grabbing the gun and taking to the woods to join the armed struggle for national liberation. Here is another letter describing this unquenchable thirst for liberation:

The bracelet of my engagement felt like a handcuff. My necklace felt like a heavy wrought-iron chain around my neck. The veil they were going to wrap me in, I envisioned as a blindfold which my parents put around my eyes so that I could not see where I was going..... I desperately wanted to free myself. I ran to the bushes with all the engagement jewelry. I did not want to leave it behind.... it was my enslaver. I wanted it to contribute towards my freedom, not my enslavement.<sup>34</sup>

Is National Liberation a solution? Although the name national liberation has been adopted by most revolutionary organizations, in the context of contemporary world where oppressors have become increasingly interdependent, "national liberation" has been a mere euphemism for national independence. Thus, in all the countries where "National Liberation" has been achieved, it has failed to deliver women's liberation (Mies, 1982). In Africa's newest nation of Eritrea, women freedom fighters have been ordered back to the kitchen after "liberation."<sup>35</sup> Yet, this is not a new phenomenon but, one that has kept repeating itself in

history. Women in North America who had been actively working in the labor force were ordered back to their homes upon the return of war veterans.<sup>36</sup> Given this, the Oromo national liberation struggle may not be an exception.

Many Oromo women have trusted and joined the armed struggle of the OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) to fight for their liberation both from national and gender oppression. But how liberating is the Liberation Front itself? Women fighters say they are happy because they are treated equally and do everything from cooking to fighting equally with their men combatants. Indeed, they have proved to be excellent fighters. Many have become platoon commanders of guerrilla ranks. However, a closer examination of the structure of the OLF reveals that decision-making roles remain taboo for Oromo women.<sup>37</sup> Jiilcha (1992) points out that Oromo women fought and died in the front lines but are excluded from the major decision-making bodies. Gamada (1991) also points an accusing finger to Oromo National Liberation Fronts criticising them for claiming to promote women's participation at all levels, but in reality preventing them from rising. So the liberation struggle becomes self-defeating as it ends up oppressing the very people it set out to liberate.

Hooks (1984) discusses such ambivalence of revolutionaries and how they undermine their own struggle by embracing some form of oppression and fighting only against others. Collins (1990) also notes the multiple levels of oppression and how men, even as they are oppressed themselves, deny that they may be oppressors to some women. Both Hooks and Collins point to the multifarious nature of oppression and call for the multifarious forms of resistance required to begin the liberating process. How does *siiqqee* help in this liberating process?

### **Reclaiming Siiqqee**

Over the years of struggle for liberation, many Oromo women have been organized under Marxist-oriented groups only to be told to subordinate gender questions to class, and not to raise them while

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imperialism and colonialism are out there. They have been organized under various national liberation fronts only to be told to subordinate gender oppression to national oppression, and not to raise it while the national enemy is out there. As their discontent grew on the one hand, on the other, their quest for a truly liberating organization has become ever more important. Gone are the days of false consciousness.<sup>38</sup>

Today, many Oromo women are in the active process of searching for meaning, interpreting their very existence, realizing themselves, reclaiming their history, and creating their identity. As they are enhancing the quest for liberation, they are more and more drawing upon the culture of their foremothers. In the last decade, some gestures of reclaiming *siiqqee* have been observed. *Oromtittii*, a Journal of Oromo Women in Europe, has taken it as an emblem. *Qunnamtii*, a bilingual newsletter of Oromos in North America, has adopted it for marking its women's column. And some Oromo women's groups are using it occasionally in cultural shows. Recently, an Oromo women's organization in the homeland has named itself "The *siiqqee* of Oromo Women." But the very idea of using *siiqqee* as an organizing symbol has, for the large part, remained without a claim. Maybe it is time to lay claim to it and begin the work of reviving *siiqqee* sisterhood and solidarity.

Waaqayyo (1991) argues that the Oromo have no need to look for outside ideologies. The basic features for building democracy are in the culture itself, she asserts. Both the Marxiam and Liberal ideologies have failed the Oromo. Even though some Oromo women dismiss *Gadaa* as patriarchal male-democracy which had no place for women, Holcomb (1994) argues that this dismissal is premature. She says that *Gadaa* may not have been patriarchal, but that the female aspects of it may have been overlooked by male anthropologists who studied it. Her concern, however, is not limited to gender biases of past studies. "My concern," she states, "is that the most valuable features for liberation may be lost with it." I suggest that Oromo women who struggle need to reconceptualize and to redefine *Gadaa* from their own perspective and

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to use the symbolism of **siiqqee** as an organizing principle in their quest for liberation.

From the argument so far, then, it is clear that Oromo women need to form multifarious organizations and build multifarious alliances at all levels. Pointing out why a women's multicultural alliance is needed now more than ever, Albrecht and Brewer (1990) say that globalization of the economy, and the interrelatedness and interdependence of oppression, calls for a reconceptualization of organization. Thus, they argue, feminists must seek social change at the personal, local, state, national, and international levels. The type of bonding that is the essence of sisterhood, Hooks (1984) argues, is the bonding on the basis of shared strengths and resources. For Oromo women to build sisterhood and solidarity among themselves, and with other women of the world, I see no starting point that is stronger and wealthier than their own culture and the experiences of the **siiqqee** resilience.

### Conclusion

The Oromo were actively consolidating their democratic governance of **Gadaa** and institutionalizing **siiqqee** at about the time Europeans were burning millions of women at the stake as witches. They killed 9 million women between the 15th and 17th centuries.<sup>39</sup> Today, the situation has been reversed. Forces that burned women in Europe have been let loose into the whole world. Today, while some privileged women of the industrialized world are struggling for equal parliamentary membership (the recent election in Norway shows they have even gained a majority), Oromo women, along with other oppressed women of the world, stranded in the aftermath of colonial exploitation and cultural degradation, are struggling for mere survival. Currently, the oppressive dynamics of the world politico-economic system has reached an unprecedented level. The world has shrunk and the dream of the "global village" has become a reality for forces of oppression. While oppression and exploitation are globalized on the one hand, on the

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other, the struggle of the oppressed has been fragmented, isolated, and localized. Can siiqqee solidarity be a symbol for breaking out of this isolation?

The very starting point for this study was, in fact, the desperate need to form a solidarity of sisterhood in response to my painful realization of the myriad divisive mechanisms of oppression. I felt and experienced that these isolating boundaries are constructed not only between women of different nations, but also between women of the same culture and even of the same family. In my desperation, I turned to the roots to find solace in the struggle of my foremothers. But, admittedly in this limited study, **siiqqee** can come out only as an inadequate reconstruction from bits and fragments of information. As it stands, this study is full of holes I have striven to fill. But I offer it as a beginning, as a stimulus for more and careful attention to **siiqqee**. Future in-depth research, I hope, will reveal more of the essential meanings of **siiqqee** symbolism and extend it to the broader level of a world-wide struggle. For today, as in "The Burning Times," women are struggling in isolation from one another. The Oromo concept of **safuu** that was the guiding principle for the institution of **siiqqee** can today be equated to the ideal of universal social justice, and can be applied to help dissolve the rigid and enslaving boundaries of internalized domination and oppression from among women.

### NOTES

1. See Legesse (1973) for details on the age-grade system. See also Melba (1988).
2. Abyssinians are descendents of Semitic-speaking Arab immigrants who crossed the Red Sea during the first millennium B.C., settled in the Horn and assimilated with the indigenous population, later they expanded south, and colonized the peoples to their south including the Oromo and appropriated the name Ethiopia and forged the present-day Ethiopian empire under their hegemonic rule (see for example Melbaa, 1991; Jalata, 1993; Kassam and Megerssa, 1994).

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3. This is the original six participants I had planned to interview at the beginning of my study. But, as it turned out, they did not know much more than I did. Thus, I set out on the mission of hunting and tracking down experts and custodians of Oromo Oral literature. The result of the new search produced three anthropologists and three custodians of Oromo oral literature, and three Oromos who were fairly knowledgeable on siiqqee.
4. The data collection, translation and transcription are done by the author.
5. Interview with author in June 1993, Toronto, Canada.
6. Here, Megerssa elaborates on the Oromo concept of gender relations; the concepts of "he" and "she" which, he asserts are different from the English usage of the personal pronouns. He says "he" in the Oromo thought refers to the dominant, but the dominant is not necessarily male. He says, for example, women after 48 years of age evolve out of the "she" and become "he" where as men after they accomplish their task in the Advisory Council shave their heads and become "she" in retirement. The cosmic order of Waaq, he asserts, is the balance between the dominant and the liminal, the physical and the spiritual, the male and the female, the young and the old, etc.
7. For details on safuu, please see Bartels (1983: 330-356). See also Megerssa (1993: 260-265).
8. For details on the classification of the different types of ulee, please see Kassam and Megerssa (in press).
9. The reference on this section is from the unpublished work of Kassam and Megerssa. Please see bibliography.
10. Interview with author on January 14, 1995 in Toronto, Canada
11. In the Oromo language, nama stands for both man and woman.
12. Boroo is the northern-most part of the house.
13. Interview with author On October 15, 1994 in Toronto, Canada
14. Telephone interview with author on December 12, 1994.

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15. Father Bartels gives a detailed account of how an infertile woman can feel isolated and devalued, especially in the birth songs and rituals. See also Cerulli, Enrico. *Folk Literature of the Galla of Southern Abyssinia*. Cambridge, 1922.
16. Interviewed by Dheeressa Qixxe on January 25, 1995, in Nairobi, Kenya.
17. Interviewed by Dheeressa Qixxe on January 25, 1995, in Nairobi, Kenya
18. Interviewed by Dheeressa Qixxe on January 27, 1995, in Nairobi, Kenya.
19. See Frederick Engles' *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*. ed E. B Leacock. New York: International Publishers, 1972.
20. For details on the history and practice of "Chastity belts" please see Dingwall (1931).
21. These are names given to the man an Oromo woman keeps as a lover. It is known by different names in different parts of Oromoland. This man may be the woman's childhood sweetheart whom she could not marry, or he may be a new lover.
22. According to Megerssa, subba is a container where the woman keeps all her secrets from the husband. What she keeps in it may be of various nature. It may be the gifts from of her garayyu (sanyo) or gifts she keeps to give to him. It may well be other personal things she treasures. In reference to **Ako Boneya's** story, Kelly (1992:169) mentions the "sacred pouch" of Orma women which is possibly the **subba**. She notes that Orma women keep a small ceremonial knife in their sacred pouch where men cannot touch them. The knife is for the symbolic castration of their husbands and sons if they acted disrespectfully.
23. See also Father Bartels (1983: 59-64) who also expounds water as the source of life.
24. **Katee** is a part of Oromo women's clothes above the waist.

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25. See, for example Waugh, 1936, pp. 25-26, where he says: The Abyssinians had nothing to give their subject peoples, nothing to teach them. They brought no crafts or knowledge, no new system of agriculture, drainage or road making, no medicine or hygiene, no higher political organization except in their rifles and belts of cartridges. They built nothing; they squatted in the villages in the thatched huts of the conquered people, dirty, idle and domineering, burning the timber, devouring the crops... "
26. See, for example, Krapf (1968:74) where he notes "that the Galla [Oromo] slaves, especially the young women, are much sought after by the slave dealers, and in Arabia fetch from 100 to 150 dollars each." See also Vivian (1969: 225-26) where he notes that "I am told that in Egypt a Galla [Oromo] slave is particularly esteemed, first for the possession of a good heart, and secondly, for the possession of a body which, like an ice plant, is always cool even in the most burning climate."
27. Xiqqoo Godaanaa is one of the participants in this study and interviewed by Dheeressa Qixxe on January 25, 1995, in Nairobi, Kenya.
28. Interview with author on November 5, 1994, in Toronto, Canada.
29. **Farso** is a homebrew prepared from fermenting grain and hops.
30. **Daboo** is a collective labour force which Oromo women mobilize during the seasons of hard work like harvesting. After the job is done, the workers sing and dance, eat and drink **farso**.
31. This is my own observation of widely practised birth rituals. I was born into a devoted Oromo Presbyterian family. My father is a "good", Oromo Presbyterian pastor. But as I was growing up I watched these birth rituals performed for the reception of every one of my siblings. The practice has, indeed, been stepped up as a result of the struggle for Oromo cultural revival. So instead of vanishing, it has come back with vengeance. At the height of this renaissance, I myself have recorded these birth rituals.
32. Here again, I know the story of a "good" Oromo Presbyterian woman who had no child. Concerned neighbours and "Good" Oromo Presbyterian women got together, "begged" for a baby daughter, made the woman lie with the baby in her arms and prayed to **Ateetee** performing all the rituals. In addition to her

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**guddifaccha** daughter, I also know that the prayer to invoke the power of **Ateetee** continued and that this woman gave birth to three children

33. This is from my personal correspondence file, a letter dated April 24, 1989.
34. This is another letter from my personal correspondence file, dated September 6, 1990.
35. See *Globe and Mail*, June 29, 1994, p. A13.
36. See, for example, *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*. 2nd ed. Burt et al eds. McLelland & Stewart, 1993. See also "Rosie the Riveter" (Audiovisual).
37. The source of this section of the paragraph is another study that I just completed
38. This paragraph refers to my own experiences with different Oromo organization that came and went under different names.
39. This was when the Roman Catholic Church was actively expanding into rural Europe and encountering resistance and rebellion led by wise women who wielded the power of healing both in spirituality and in medicine. The church labelled these wise women as witches and began persecuting and killing them in order to take over the power they wielded. This witch craze that swept Europe for three centuries coincides with the renaissance. For more details please see "The Burning Times," an Audiovisual prepared by Studio D of the National Film board of Canada.

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# POPULATION GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF OROMIA IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

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*Feyisa Demie*

## Introduction

Population growth has recently been viewed with some concern by development planners in the Horn of Africa. Part of this realization has come from the failure of many policy makers and planners to achieve a well coordinated sustainable development. The population of the Horn of Africa has increased rapidly, stretching available resources to their limit. During the last three decades, there has been an impressive growth of literature to address problems of development and population growth in the region.<sup>1</sup> Yet, Oromia's<sup>2</sup> population growth has been notoriously neglected in social research in general, and Oromo studies in particular. Oromia's population distribution has gone unnoticed by economists or demographers who have instead focused their attention on the study of the Ethiopian population growth and distribution as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

There are several reasons for this oversight, one being the lack of adequate district and provincial level statistical information in Ethiopia. Politically, it was not in the interest of the successive Ethiopian governments to encourage studies which make any reference to ethnicity, so any attempt was discouraged. Realizing that these research problems deserve attention, a number of economists have begun to study Oromia's economy and population by disaggregating the data produced on Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup> However, this area of Oromo Studies has not yet advanced as far as that of historical, political, and anthropological research.<sup>5</sup> This study attempts to estimate Oromia's population using the 1984 census. It also raises debates on the issues of the relation between population growth and sustainable development in Oromia.

A study of population growth in Oromia and sustainable development is of interest for several reasons. First, there is a lack of

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data to study population growth and sustainable development in Oromia. The data produced by the Central Statistical Office (CEO) on Ethiopia is at a higher level of aggregation and any attempt to disaggregate this data by region, province, and district will generate fairly reliable Oromia statistics that may be used for planning and policy formulation. Secondly, Oromia has one of the largest highland areas in Africa, with the land area above 2000 meters above sea level. The highland areas are densely populated and have favorable agricultural resources. In recent years, however, many parts of the highland regions of Oromia have become an area of ill-conceived government settlement schemes which have rapidly increased the population and environmental degradation. Thirdly, information on the growth of Oromia's population and land use pattern is non-existent or scattered in the literature and has not been analyzed. Few studies have been conducted which indicate the population of Oromia and its land area, and any detailed studies were hampered by the scarcity of data. Fourthly, there has been a concern among policy makers and development agencies about sustainable development in Oromia. In order to understand, formulate and implement population and land use policy measures, there is a need for sound research based information.

### **Background**

#### **Land Resources**

Oromia is located in the Horn of Africa between 2 degrees and 12 degrees North latitude and between 34 degrees and 44 degrees East longitude. A number of attempts have been made to estimate the land area of Oromia. Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa suggested that the Oromo land constitutes about 712,250 sq. kilometers.<sup>5</sup> On the basis of this figure it is argued that over half of the land area of Ethiopia is Oromia. Shunkuri also reported that at least one-half of the Ethiopian land area is Oromo land.<sup>7</sup> Estimating the land size of Ethiopia to be about 1,251,281.9 square miles, he argued that about 625,640.95 square

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miles is an Oromo area. Another previous study by Gada Melba also confirms that Oromia has an area of about 600,000 square kilometers.<sup>8</sup> The present study, which is based on the analysis of disaggregated district level land use data, also further supports the previous studies and concludes that Oromia extends over 604,752.1 square kilometers.

Table 1: Oromia Land Area and Population Distribution by Administrative Regions<sup>9</sup>

Administrative Regions	Area in Square Kilometres	Population 1994
Arssi	23,674.7	2,144,279
Bale	127,052.8	1,298,372
Borena - Gujii	102,604.5	1,006,387
Hararge	106,567.5	4,181,618
Illubabor	22,090.9	1,152,971
Jimma	16,569.8	1,887,266
Mecha-Tulema (Shoa)	66,997.9	8,716,331
Wellega	99,162.1	3,490,347
Wello	40,031.9	3,106,161
Oromia	604,752.1	26,983,732

Oromia is a highly favored region with temperate conditions and fertile and well drained soils. The soils are classified by Murphy (1959, 1963) in terms of fertility from good to excellent, average to fairly good, and useless to poor. Only one small area in the south-east was classified

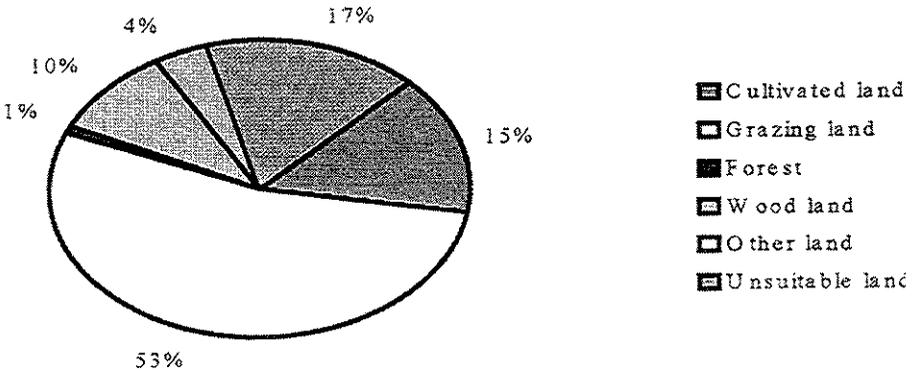
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as poor. The rest are very good for agricultural production. There are two main types of soils: the red to reddish-brown clay loam, and the black soils (Murphy, 1963). These soils types are fertile with excellent permeability and air-water ratios. They are also comparatively rich in potassium and organic material contents. Oromia has the potential for growing a wide variety of crops in large quantities. Wheat and barley can be cultivated in the cool highlands; maize, sorghum, and millet can be grown in the lower altitudes. Coffee and sugar-cane production can be carried out in the South. Livestock production can be undertaken in almost all parts of the country.

Land Use Patterns

Land is a finite resource of fundamental importance to the economy and the environment. The following figure (Figure 1) shows estimated land resources and major land use patterns in Oromia.

Land Use Pattern in Oromia (%)



Source: FAO (1984). *Data Book on Land use and Agriculture in Ethiopia*, Volume 1, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nation (FAO) Rome, 1984

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In 1984, of the total land area in Oromia, an estimated 15% was arable and under permanent crops. In the same year, approximately 8,757,820 hectares were under cultivation. Within this area, about 7,744,330 million hectares were actually under crop farming and 1,013,490 hectares were planted with permanent crops (fruit trees, coffee, etc.). Pasture land covers 30,740,470 hectares, which is 53% of the land area. There are also large areas of potentially highly productive land in Oromia which are presently used for nomadic grazing. The use of some areas would be limited by their inaccessibility or lack of water supply, while others have the additional problems of disease carriers, such as malarial mosquitoes. Nevertheless, there are thousands of hectares which are accessible and not subject to diseases. Thus, there are substantial opportunities for increasing the intensity of farming on already cultivated lands, for opening up new lands to specialized cropping activities, and for systems of mixed farming incorporating both crops and livestock.

### The Oromo Population

No census has ever been taken to estimate the Oromo population. We cannot, therefore, know exactly either the total population within the boundaries of Oromia or of the Oromo population elsewhere. All estimates are informed guesses. To show the divergence in the estimates we will look at the estimates made between 1850 and 1983. For example, Krapf, a German missionary, estimated the Oromo population in 1885 from six to eight million: "They [(Oromo)] extend, so to say, from the eight degree North to the third degree South in latitude, numbering in all from six to eight million, a total of which scarcely any other African race can boast (Krapf, 1888). The French Historian Martial de (1901) estimated the Oromo population between 1850 and 1870 at about 10 million. Paulischke (1889) and Huntingford (1955:23) also confirmed that the Oromo population of the time was very high. At any rate, between 1850 and 1885, the Oromo were the most populous ethnonational group in Africa. However, a number of historical

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circumstances affected the growth of the Oromo population and later led to a drastic reduction in their number. Martial de (1901) reported that the Oromo population was reduced to only five million by 1900. A number of factors were responsible for the reduction of the Oromo population by about 50%. First, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, millions of Oromos were killed by the savage army of Minilik, the emperor of Abyssinia (Melbaa, 1988 and Triminhham 1965). Second, during the time of the "Great Ethiopian Famine of 1888-1892," hungry hordes of Abyssinians moved from the North to Oromia in search of food and better opportunities. As a result, large number of Oromos also died of famine and epidemics.

Stace (1892) observed this situation in Harar and described it as follows: "...it is an actual fact that hyenas and dogs are feeding off the flesh of the dying in the streets of Harar during the night time. The cries and lamentations through the night in this large town are described as the most heartrending. This state of affairs is attributed entirely to the conduct of the Abyssinian soldiers, who ate up everything." Third, the Abyssinian policy at the time was to depopulate Oromia by enslavement and mass deportation of the Oromo population. Minilik and his governors followed the guide given in the Abyssinian law of the Kings, **The Feteha Negest**, which states "All men share liberty on the basis of national law. But war and strength of horses brings some to the service of others, because the law of war and victory makes vanquisher slaves of victors. Mosaic law says the unbelievers and their children must be held as slaves....." (quoted in Delebo, 1974 and Melba, 1988:65). Large number of Oromos were sold as slaves and were also given as wedding gifts as part of the dowry. For example, Minilik gave 500 Oromo slaves as a wedding gift to his son-in-law Araya-Selassie Yohannis: Emperors Minilik and Taitu owned large estates that included more than 70,000 slaves (Melba, 1988). All in all, the number of Oromos who died between 1850 and early 1900s because of war, war induced famine, and slavery, was estimated to be about 5 million.

There are many other valuable estimates of the Oromo population since 1900. The Italian official figure published by De Castro's in 1936

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estimated that the Oromo population made up about 43% of the population of the Ethiopian empire.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Daniel, et al. (1977) estimated the Oromo population to be about 43 percent of the 30 million Ethiopian population.<sup>11</sup> Anthropologist Paul Baxter,<sup>12</sup> Historian Patrick Gilkes,<sup>13</sup> and sociologist John Cohen,<sup>14</sup> who have lived among the Oromos and carried out extensive research, estimated that over 40% of the Ethiopian population are Oromos. Again this estimate confirms that the Oromos are the largest single ethnonational group in Ethiopia. A number of other estimates and studies, however, indicate that the Oromos make up half of the entire Ethiopian population. In 1969 Margery Perham<sup>15</sup> argued: "The Gallas [Oromo] are estimated to outnumber the Amhara and Tigreans, and they quite literally embrace half of the Empire." Similarly, Christopher Clapham,<sup>16</sup> Ulrich Braukamper,<sup>17</sup> Gada Melba,<sup>18</sup> Mohammed Hassen<sup>19</sup> and Adimasu Shunkuri<sup>20</sup> suggested that the Oromos compose half of the Ethiopian population. John Markakis says, "They are the biggest ethnic group in Northeast Africa, inhabiting a territory from the Abyssinian province of Tigre to the Tana River in Kenya."<sup>21</sup> It is also interesting to note the observations and estimates of John Markakis, Bonnie K. Holcomb, and Sisai Ibssa. Markakis argued that "at the end of pre-colonial period, the Oromos comprised one of the largest population groups in the Horn of Africa, perhaps more numerous than the Abyssinians."<sup>22</sup> Holcomb and Sisai further estimated that the "Oromo people account for over 60% of present day Ethiopia."<sup>23</sup>

Six main issues arise from these various estimates. First, an accurate population figure for Ethiopia is not obtainable. As noted by Baxter,<sup>24</sup> "it was not in the interest of the Ethiopian government to collect and publish accurate data on the ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity of Ethiopia." Any ethnically based statistics produced by the government in the past were politically motivated and therefore of little value for research. Under such circumstances, the relative strength of the major ethnonational groups will continue to remain a matter of estimation by scholars and other professionals. Second, the figures reported by scholars working in the Horn of Africa confirm without

doubt that the present day Ethiopia consists of a largely Oromo population, which constitutes about 50% of the Ethiopian population. A third interesting feature of the estimates is that the Abyssinians (Amhara-Tigre) are certainly a minority, with about 30% of the Ethiopian population.<sup>25</sup> Fourth, the Ethiopian official figures for the total population of the Oromo, or Oromo language speakers, are much lower than those estimated by scholars. The Ethiopian rulers have attempted to underestimate the Oromo population and to change the demographic structure of the Oromo areas. Mekuria Bulcha argued that underestimation of the Oromo population was done by fiddling with statistical data, and the re-location of people from Amhara-Tigre area to Oromia: "In a census report that the regime conducted in 1984, those Oromos who have learned to speak Amharic were registered as Amharas while the Guji and Borana, two Oromo groups in the South, were presented as a separate ethnic group."<sup>26</sup> The Wallo and the Raya-Azebo Oromo groups have always been miscounted by government official estimates. This, however, is not surprising if one carefully looks at the politics of number and ethnicity in Ethiopia. Paul Baxter noted that "Census figures were employed by the Imperial officials to show that Amharic was driving out the other languages of the empire, and particularly Oromo, by a sort of inverted linguistic Gresham's law."<sup>27</sup>

The Ethiopian government manipulation and underestimation of the Oromo population for political reasons were also observed by Africa Watch "though the Oromo actually outnumbered the Amhara, this politically-sensitive fact was suppressed, and the 1969 survey claimed that 7.8 million Amhara outnumbered 6.8 million Oromo."<sup>28</sup> The under-counting of the Oromo in 1969 was done by wrongly recording the Oromos who speak Amharic as Amharas, the Wallo Oromos as Amhara, the Raya Oromos in the North as Tigraian, the Metekel Oromos in Gojjam as Amhara, and by excluding the Borana Oromos. Fifth, no census was undertaken in the southern parts of Hararge and Bale administrative regions. The population estimate of this region was based on 1956 and 1962 sample surveys. However, the 1984 census found an additional 2.9 percent of the people compared to estimates derived from

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the 1956 and 1962 survey in this region. It is safe to assume that, had enumerators actually visited southern Hararge and Bale Oromo regions, they would have found greater numbers. An additional 2.9 percent on the official figure would imply a 1984 Bale population of 1,035,678 instead of 1,006,490 reported by the census. Sixth, the 1984 census was undertaken with a deliberate objective to 'prove' the Oromos are less numerous than Amharas. Enumerators were instructed to register any person who spoke Amharic in Oromia as Amhara. As a result of recording Oromos, Tigrains, Gurage, Adare, Eritreans, and other minority ethnic groups in Oromia who speak Amharic as Amhara, the Derg reported that the Amharas constitute 28% of the Ethiopian population and the Oromos about 29% of the Ethiopian population.

This was observed by Beekaa Dubbiisaa (1996) as follows: "In order to prove the Oromos are only a little more than a quarter of the Ethiopian population, the Derg directed the enumerators to register everybody in Oromia who spoke Amharic as Amhara. There are stories of how children were not registered as Oromos because they spoke only Amharic, whereas the mother was registered as an Oromo because she hardly spoke Amharic. Where parents or individuals tried to explain, the enumerators told them that it did not matter, they were executing what they were instructed to do. The ethnic and religious parts of the census information were highly flawed and unreliable. It is a well known fact that out of the 14 Administrative regions at the time of the exercise, almost 9 were Oromo regions. These Administrative regions are large compared to the three typical Amhara administrative regions that include Gojam, Begemdir, Part of Wallo, and part of Shoa (Beekaa, 1996). It is, therefore, remarkably surprising to say that the Amharas and the Oromos are about the same in population size, going against the conventionally accepted empirical observations and estimates which have shown that the Oromos are more numerous than the Amhara and Tigre population in Ethiopia. A conventionally accepted estimate by ethnic background shows that the population is 43-50% Oromo, compared to 21% Amharas and about 10% Tigrain (Daniel et al., 1977; Gilkes, 1975; Perham, 1969). Furthermore, the Ethiopian political leaders have also engaged

in manipulating census results by framing the questions according to their political interests, and misrepresenting facts on population migrations and language classifications.

The manipulation of census and population data have been part of Ethiopian government policy in the last hundred years. The issue of census results has been so politicized in Ethiopia that it is impossible to get reliable data on ethnic and religious backgrounds. The underlying reasons for such deliberate manipulation of population data related to ethnicity and religion are of course obvious: the Amhara ruling class did not want to share resources and political power among the various regions according to population sizes. Evidently, because of this deliberate policy, millions of Oromos were classified as non-Oromos, and a number of Oromo areas such as Wallo, Raya-Azebo, and Metekel provinces in Gojjam administrative regions have continued to be included in Abyssinian provinces. These methods of reporting and recording the population in Ethiopia certainly would continue to obscure the exact estimates of the Oromo population.

### **The Population of Oromia and Ethiopia**

The Empire state of Ethiopia was formed by the Abyssinian colonial conquest of Oromia, Sidama, Keffa, Wolayta, Kembata and Hadaya, Gurage, Somali, Eritrea, Afar, Gambella, Omotic people and Gedieo. Before the conquest and incorporation of these independent peoples into the empire, the Abyssinian state was constituted by Amhara and Tigray groups in the northern part of the current Ethiopia. Today, Ethiopia is composed of extremely diverse nations with different ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. The following table shows the land area and population of different nationalities in Ethiopia.

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Table 2. Estimated land area and population of Ethiopia by Regions<sup>29</sup>

REGIONS	AREA IN SQUARE KILOMETERS	PERCENT OF TOTAL LAND AREA	POPULATION 1984	POPULATION 1994	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION
Oromia	604,752.1	48.33	20,917,622	26,983,732	49.6
Amhara	131,912.9	10.54	6,832,714	8,814,201	16.2
Tigray	57,725.8	4.61	2,278,899	2,939,780	5.4
Omotic People	69,236.8	5.53	1,714,170	2,211,279	4.1
Sidama	6,793.6	0.54	1,415,830	1,826,421	3.4
Kembata & Hadaya	5,296.2	0.42	1,266,715	1,634,062	3.0
Gurage	9,144.2	0.73	1,200,581	1,548,749	2.8
Gambella	24,276.2	1.94	70,178	90,530	0.2
Wolayta	4,472.0	0.35	969,929	1,251,208	2.3
Somali	168,061.7	13.43	919,600	1,186,284	2.2
Geddeo	58,902.0	0.47	624,674	805,829	1.5
Afar	60,858.8	0.49	615,550	794,060	1.5
Kaffa	11,174.8	0.89	521,234	672,392	1.2
Eritrea	93,679.1	7.49	2,614,699	3,372,962	6.2
Ethiopia	1,251,281.9		42,184,952	54,134,049	100.

The table indicates that in 1984 Ethiopia had a land area of 1,251,282 square kilometers and an estimated population of 42,184,952. Of this population, 50% lived in Oromia<sup>30</sup> followed by 16% in Amhara administrative regions,<sup>31</sup> 5% in Tigray,<sup>32</sup> 4% in Omotic area, 3.4% in Sidama, 3% in Kembata and Hadaya, 3% in Gurage area, 2.8% in Wolayta, 2.2% in Somali settled area, 1.5% in Afar area, 1.2% in Kaffa, 0.2% in Gambella and 6.2% in Eritrea.<sup>33</sup>

### **Empirical Estimates of Ethnic Minorities in Oromia**

The population of Oromia in 1984 was about 20,917,622 or about 50% of the Ethiopian population. This includes the figure of three major ethnic minorities in Oromia; Adares estimated on the bases of the 1984 census to be about 84,000, Beni Shangul and Nilotic about 220,000, Abyssinians settlers and other migrants (Amhara and Tigray settlers, Eritreans, Gurage, Somali and others) about 2 million. There is no reliable figure but it is estimated that about 2.3 million of the population of Oromia may be counted as ethnic minorities or migrants from other part of Ethiopia. Most of the Abyssinian settlers leave in the capital city Addis Ababa (Finfine) and small towns known as "Katamas."

### **Population Growth in Oromia**

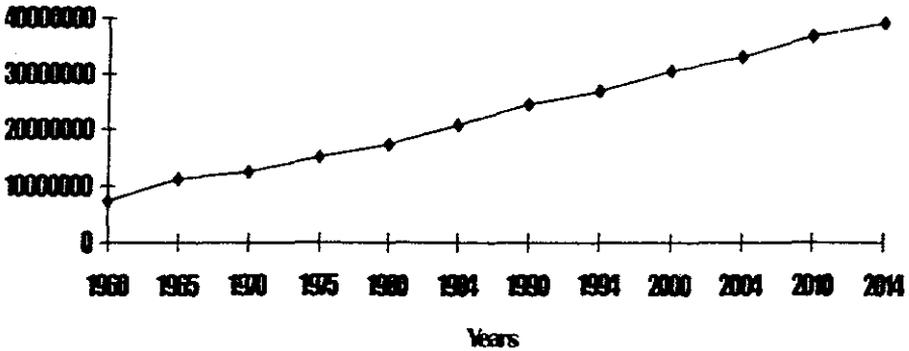
Few studies have analyzed the results of the various sample surveys in Ethiopia to study population growth rate. The analysis of the results of these surveys clearly indicates that there were annual growth rates of 1.6% to 2.9% between 1956 and 1980, and 5.9% increases between 1981 and 1984. There are a number of reasons for a sharp difference between the two periods. The reportedly slow growth rate between 1956 and 1980, and a sharp increase between 1981 and 1984, were apparently the results of under reporting during the National Sample Survey I and II, and improvements in the accuracy of later estimates and the census, rather than actual growth. This weakness in the data base is now recognized and a number of attempts were made by the Central Statistical Office to reconstruct population growth estimates using the 1984 census data. The Central Statistical Office amended the annual growth rates between 1960-65 to 2.2%, 1965-70 to 2.3%, 1970-75 to 2.4%, 1975-80 to 2.6% and 1980-85 to 2.8%.<sup>34</sup> It was further estimated that the growth rate would increase from 2.9% in 1985 to 3.0% in 1994.<sup>35</sup>

The population growth rates in different regions and national states in Ethiopia is highly varied. Oromia had a sharp increase in

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population due to the government's deliberate policy of resettling Abyssinian highlanders on Oromo land. Table 2 and Figure 2 summarize the major demographic estimates at national and provincial levels for Oromia. This figure shows Oromia had an estimated population of 13 million in 1970. The most recent census in 1984 gave a total population of 21 million. By the year 2004, Oromia's population is expected to reach 34 million. The forecast is that the total population can easily exceed 39 million by the year 2014.

Figure 2: Oromia Population Trends, 1960-2014



Historically the population has been concentrated in the highlands; consequently, the land in these regions has been over used resulting in soil erosion. In addition, due to population pressure in the highland areas, there has been migration of people to the lowlands. The majority of the population lives in rural areas, only about 12% of the population lives in urban centers and towns of 2,000 inhabitants or more. About one third of the urban population is found in small towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants, with the rest in towns above that size. Most of the towns are located in the Showa and Hararge regions. These are the regions where small scale industrialization has taken place, hence better employment opportunities and facilities are available.

The over-all population projections in Oromia indicate an annual growth rate between 2.5% and 2.9% between 1970 and 1985. The significance of this figure is that population growth takes place at a compound rate, therefore a 2.5% growth rate suggests a doubling of the population, say, in 30 years. In absolute terms, this means that Oromia's population is expected to increase from nearly 21 million in 1984 to over 39 million in the year 2014. The projections of urban and rural population also show an interesting difference between regions. The population growth rate in the rural areas is estimated at 2% per year. In contrast, the urban areas of Oromia have higher estimated population growth rates anticipated for the next two decades. The urban population in Oromia is now increasing by 6.6% per year as a result of natural increase and migration, and the capital city of Finfine is increasing by 10%.<sup>36</sup> This relatively fast rate of population growth poses a serious problem for the average standard of living in Oromia and makes clear the crucial importance of paying particular attention to the development of agriculture if the nation is to be able to feed itself at adequate nutritional levels.

Furthermore, an important feature of the present population of Oromia is its age composition. Young people up to 15 years of age constitute 47% of the total population, and only six percent of the total population are above age 60.<sup>37</sup> This structure, however, has an important significance in relation to the growth of the labor force and

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to the magnitude of the potential demand for employment opportunities in Oromia. First, a young population, early marriage, high fertility and improvement in public health facilities, indicate the potential for acceleration in the rate of population growth - perhaps above the current projections of between 2.5% and 2.9% per annum. Secondly, it indicates the burden on the national economy to support, to educate, and to create new job opportunities for the youngsters who year after year are being added to the population.

Given the above facts, the main concern with the issue of population growth in Oromia should not only be in terms of adequate food supply, but also it should take into account the problem of productively absorbing a fast growing labor force into a relatively weak economic system. To the extent that the problem of increasing food supply is dependent upon an improved farm technology, a major consideration in the improved technology in Oromia must therefore be labor utilization.

### **The Population Factor and Sustainable Agriculture Development**

The previous section has discussed Oromia's population and its annual growth rate. The concept of population growth makes little sense unless we also consider the impact of rapid population growth on the physical resource base (land). To what extent is the net increase in population a major obstacle to the realization of sustainable development? Any serious discussion about sustainable development must take the population factor into consideration. As indicated above, in 1984 the population of Oromia was estimated to be 20,917,622 and by the year 2004 it will be about 34 million. Since Oromia has a significantly large rural population, a population increase means more pressure on the available agricultural land. From the point of view of the agricultural planner, this level of population growth is noteworthy since the new population will need land to till for subsistence, and it is likely to add new pressure on the land which may push it beyond its ecological breaking point. It has already been indicated that because of the

restriction of the land potential, most of Oromia's rural population is concentrated in the highlands and the river basin of the country, which are also ecologically the most favorable for human settlements. The implied increase in population over the next decade or so is bound to further exacerbate the existing situation by making more demands on the same high potential areas. There are already many examples in the Tulama-Macha (Shoa) region of unbearable rural densities of population, particularly in the Selale province and Ada district. Here some localities were found to be supporting about 500 persons per square kilometers.

In the past, new population growth in Oromia and other parts of Ethiopia has been accommodated by making new agricultural land available to absorb the population. Such was the case with the massive re-settlement program in Western and Central Oromia, in Bale and the Arssi region between 1950 and 1989. These options are now diminishing. Soon it will be detrimental for Oromia to intensify agricultural land use and to raise agricultural production, thus letting the land deteriorate. A look at the actual man-land relationship in Oromia should be instructive. The picture is adequately summarized in Table 2. This table has been prepared from information available about all forms of land in each province, and this has been compared to population estimates for the year 2004. The table reveals the expected per capita land available in the year 2004. In some regions there will be adequate land and there is also the potential for irrigation to relieve the population pressure, at least in the short term. In contrast, the condition of the already intensively farmed agricultural areas in the Chilalo, Selale and Ada provinces will deteriorate in the next decades. Some of these high potential land areas will have less than 10 hectares per head of population, with most of them being around 3 hectares or less. This is clearly a worrisome development, especially when the population continues to expand rapidly in the highland areas of Oromia.

### Summary and Conclusions

The main purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of the relationship between population growth and sustainable development in Oromia. This has been a challenge intellectually and politically. Research in this area has seldom been conducted without speculation and controversy due to a lack of reliable empirical evidence in Ethiopia. The researchers who have ventured into the area have rarely avoided suspicion and political constraint; consequently, important questions are unanswered. What proportion of the Ethiopian population are Oromos? How much of the land area within present day Ethiopia is Oromo land? What is the relationship between population growth and sustainable development?

The study has generated rich and complex data sets. The major finding of the research shows that the population of Oromia accounts for 50% of the Ethiopian population. About 2% of these are ethnic minorities and colonial settlers. There is no reliable information to estimate the population of Ethiopia by ethnic background, but extrapolation of the 1984 census shows that the Oromo constitute about 48% of the Ethiopian population. This finding supports the ranges of previous estimates of the Oromo population between 43% (DeCastro 1936, Daniel et al. 1977) and 50% of the Ethiopian population (Perham, 1969; Braukamper, 1982; Melba, 1988; Hassen, 1993; Shunkuri, 1992; Clapham, 1970).

There has been genuine concern about the prospects for sustainable development in Oromia. This study also shows that the land resource base is very restrictive, and there was a rapid population growth at the rate of 2.9% during the last decade. Oromia has an area of 604,752 square kilometers and a population of about 27 million in 1994. The threat of rapid population growth is clear when projections are made to the year 2004 when Oromia's total population will be about 34 million. Even with the current population of about 28 million, food shortages have been experienced; but part of the problem has been the frequent droughts, inability of farmers to purchase new farm technology

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to boost crop yields, and the expropriation of surplus by the Ethiopian government, and the settlement of Amhara and Tigray population on Oromo lands. Oromia needs to adopt the policy of self-sufficiency in food production. To realize this, large areas of land will have to be brought under cultivation and efforts are required to ensure that this additional farm cultivation is not accompanied by massive environmental damage. It is, therefore, in the interest of sustainable development, studies should be carried out to map out the best directions for land use and agricultural production to the year 2000 and beyond.

### NOTES

1. For details study see, World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crises to Sustainable Growth*, 1989; M. Kevin, *A Strategy to Develop Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Focus for the World Bank*, 1993; Abbas Kesseb, *Strategies for Developing a Viable and Sustainable Agricultural Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa: Some Issues and Options*, 1992; Feyisa Demie, *Technical Change in Ethiopian Highland Farming Systems*, Department of Economics, Egerton University, Kenya, AGEC90-1, Printed by University of Education Material Centre, 1990, pp.116.
2. Throughout this paper Oromo refers to the Oromo nationality and Oromia to the homeland of the Oromo people; Ethiopia refers to the empire formed in the 1800s by means of colonial conquest, and Abyssinia refers to the historic homeland of Semitic speaking people of the highland kingdoms.
3. For details of the study of the Ethiopian population see H. Kloos, and A. Adunga (1989), "The Ethiopian Population, Growth and Distribution," *Geographical Journal*, 155:33-51; Berhanu Abegaz, "Papers in Ethiopian Demography I: Population Growth, Composition and Distribution," *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1984, pp. 19-46; L. Bondestan "The Population Situation in Ethiopia," in *Family Planning in Ethiopia*, No 1-3, 1972.
4. For instance, the author has already completed a disaggregation of Oromia and Ethiopia Statistical data by district, province, and Oromia's administrative regions. This includes data on land use, population, livestock production, crop production, forestry, human resources, farm management economics, farm

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commodity prices, farm research and technology data, extension services, rainfall data. For details of the tables see Feyisa Demie, "Oromia: Key Facts," Unpublished monograph, 1994; Feyisa Demie, *Technological Change in Ethiopian Highland Farming Systems*, Department of Economics, Egerton University, Kenya, AGEC90-1, Printed by University Educational Material Centre, 1990, p. 116.

5. A number of historical political and anthropological articles have been published in the *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1-2, 1994 and *Oromo Commentary*, 1991-1994.
6. B. K. Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa. 1990. *The Invention of Ethiopia; the Making of Dependent Colonial State in North East Africa*. Red Sea Press, Trenton, New Jersey, 1990, p.2.
7. Adimasu Shunkuri, "Oromo Liberation Movement: Comparative Significance and Implications for the Horn of Africa", *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Prospects for the Liberation of Oromia and its Impact on the Politics of the Horn of Africa*. the University of Minnesota, August 1-2, Minneapolis, 1992.
8. Gada Melba. 1988. *Oromia: Introduction*, second edition, Khartoum.
9. Source: Central Statistical Office, *Ethiopian Statistical Abstract*. Addis Ababa, 1984.
10. In addition, this estimates give the distribution of nationalities in Ethiopia as follows: Oromo 42.7%, Ethiopians 32.6%, Sidama and other S Western people 10.1% and Somalis 6.0%: Omotic and Nilotic groups 6.6% and Afar 2.0%. For details of this statistic see Margery Perham (1969). *Government of Ethiopia*, p. 266 and L. de Castro, *L'Ethiopia*, Milan, 1936, p. 301.
11. These findings which were published on Tatek confirms the Oromo population as 43%, Amhara, 21%, Tigray 11%, Somali 5%, Gurage 3.3%, Tigre 2.5%, Wolayta 2.3%, Afar 1.7%, Sidama 1.7%, Hadiya and Kambata 1.7%, Agawu 0.5%, Sao 0.5%, Kunama 0.3%, Adare 0.2%, and others 5%. For details see: Debebe Daniel, Ashanafi Girma and Aba Bora Ggusa, "The National

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Questions in Ethiopia" Ethiopian Student Union in Europe (ESUE), in Tatek, Amharic text, 1977, p. 42-49

12. Paul T.W. Baxter, "The Creation and Constitution of Oromo Nationality," *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa* Katsuyoshi Fukui and John Markakis, Ohio University Press and James Curry, 1994, p. 167.
13. Patrick Gilkes, *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia*. New York, St. Martin Press, 1975, p. 47
14. John Cohen, "Rural Change in Ethiopia: The Agricultural Development Unit," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*. Vol. 22, No. 4, July, 1974, p. 47.
15. Perham, Margery, Government of Ethiopia, 1966.
16. Christopher Clapham, *Haile Selassie's Government*, 1969
17. Ulrich Braukamper, "Ethnic Identity and Social Change Among Oromo Refugees in the Horn of Africa", *Northeast African Studies*, Vol.4, NO. 3, 1982, pp. 1-15.
18. Gada Melba. 1988. *Oromia: A Brief Introduction*.
19. Mohammed Hassen, "The Growth of Written Oromo Literature," *Proceedings of the International Conference on Resources Mobilization for the Liberation of Oromia*, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, July 31-August 1, 1993.
20. Adimasu Shunkuri, "Oromo Liberation Movement: Comparative Significance and Implications for the Horn of Africa," *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Prospects for the Liberation of Oromia and its Impact on the Politics of the Horn of Africa*, the University of Minnesota, August 1-2, Minneapolis, 1992.
21. Ulrich Braukamper, 1982, p.2.
22. John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*. Zed Book, Ltd., 1990.

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23. Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, 1990, p. 3.
24. Paul T. W. Baxter, "The Problem of the Oromo or the Problem for the Oromo?" *Nationalism and Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa*, 1983, I. M. Lewis (ed.), p. 135.
25. Patrick Gilkes, 1974, p. 204.
26. Mekuria Bulcha, "The Demographic Nightmare of the Past and Present Rulers of Ethiopia", *Oromo Commentary*. Vol. 4, No. 2, 1994, pp. 8-12.
27. Paul T. W. Baxter, "The Present State of Oromo Studies: A Resume", *Bulletin des Etudes Africains de Li Inalco*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1986, pp. 53-82.
28. Africa Watch, 1991, p. 36.
29. Source: Central Statistical Office, *Ethiopia 1984 Population and Housing Census Preliminary Report*. Vol. 1, no. 1, Addis Ababa, 1984; Districts data was used to compile and calculate size of area and populations for each National states.
30. Oromia's is the homeland of the Oromo nationality. The country is divided into 9 administrative regions which are further divided into 49 provinces including Arba Gugu, Chilalo and Ticho in Arssi administrative region; Dollo, Elkere, Mendeyo, Genale, Wabie in Bale administrative region; Harer, Chercher, Webera, Gara Muleta, Habro, Gurnsum, Dire Dawa, Jijiga in Harage administrative region; Buno Bedele, Gore, Motcha, Sor and Geba in Illubabor administrative region; Jimma and Limu in Jimma administrative region; Butajirra, Jibat and Mecha, Menegasha, Finefine, Selale, Merhabete, Tegulat and Bulga, Yerer and Kereyu and Jarra in Mecha and Tulema (Shoa) administrative region; Afero, Borena and Guiui in Borena-Gujji administrative region; Arjo, Assosa, Ghimbi, Horo Gudure, Kelem, Nekemte, and Metkel in Wellega Administrative region; Borena, Dessie, Kalu, Raya and Libo, Werehimenu, WERillu, Yeju and Raya-Azebo in Wallo Administrative region. These provinces are further sub-divided into districts. The population and the land area of Oromia indicated in the table were estimated on basis of the 1984 district level census returns.

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31. The Amhara Nationality inhabites Chilga, Gayint, Gonder, Libo , Semien, Wegera Provinces in Begemidri administrative region; Agawu Medir, Bahir Dar, Bichena, Kola Dega, Damot, Debra Markos and Motta provinces in Gojjam administrative region. The population and land of Amhar were established on the basis of the 1984 district level census returns.
32. Adwa, Agame, Axum, Enderta, Hulet Awalelo, Shire, Timbien provinces are the home land of the Tigray nationality. The population and the land of Tigray were established on the base of the data published by Central Statistical office in 1984. The Tigray People's Liberation Front claims that the Amhara provinces of Teslemti and Wolkait and the home of the land of the Raya Oromo is the province of Raya Kobo and Raya Azebo. These provinces were included in Amhara and Oromia respectively.
33. The population and the land of the other national states, including Sidama, Keffa, Wolayta; Gedieo; Kenbata and Hadaya and Gurage were estimated on the basis of the 1984 district level census returns. The population of Somali nationality was also estimated on the basis of census returns from Degahabur, Kelafo, Godie, Kebridehar, Welwel and Warder provinces and that of the Afar from Ambassel, Aussa and Asab provinces. The Ethiopian data in 1984 also cover Eritrea and the data used here is based on the returns from the provinces of Kele Guzy, Akordat, Gash, and Setit, Hammassien, Karen, Massawa, Sahel and Seraye. Furthermore, the data from Gardula, Geleb and Hamer Bako, Gamo, Goffa, Kula Konta, Maji and Goldia provinces were used to estimate the population and the land of the Omotic people.
34. Central Statistical Office, *Ethiopian Statistical Abstract*. 1987. Addis Ababa.
35. *Central Statistical Office, Population by Werdas, and Towns, by Sex and Average Household Size based on Preliminary Census results, and Projections, 1984-95*. Census Suppl. 1, Addis Ababa, 1985.
36. Feyisa Demie, *Oromia: Key Facts*, unpublished monograph. 1994
37. Ibid.

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## FATE OF CONQUERED PEOPLES AND MARGINAL LANDS UNDER IMPERIAL RULE: THE CASE OF THE AWASH RIVER BASIN

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*Assefa Kuru*

This article discusses the effects and consequences of Ethiopian government policy on the peoples inhabiting the Awash River Basin located within the Rift valley. The Basin covers an area of about 120 000 Km. Within the Basin, a complex ecological set-up links highlands and lowlands. The highlands are occupied mainly by the Oromo people who practice sedentary farming and livestock husbandry. The lowlands - - occupied by the Afar, Oromo, and Somali peoples -- provide a resource base for a pastoral economy. Both highlanders and lowlanders depend on each other by exchanging products. The production activities in each distinctive ecological zone differ. Each of the people has a unique and independent political system and social structure. Towards the end of the 19th century, however, these people were conquered and incorporated into the expanding Ethiopian empire. In 1962, after a long process of political coercion, and manoeuvre, the Ethiopian government set up the Awash Valley Authority (AVA) to supervise the development of the valley. Afterwards, large scale irrigation schemes and population settlement programs were launched in the valley.

The principal points of inquiry of this article focus on how the implementation of this policy disrupted or destabilized vital ecological and economic linkages of the upper and lower lands of the Awash Valley. It evaluates to what extent the "development schemes" were responsive to the conditions and needs of the local people, and their impacts on the human and ecological complexities. Use of land resources necessarily entails activities that cause change. Land use in agricultural and livestock production, pasture management, leisure activities, industrial requirements, and others tends to deplete vital nutrients. It is often advised that important environmental factors set limitations to land use. Ecologists advise land users that accounts of the

knowledge about the past environmental history must be taken into serious consideration in order to meet constraints of a given land for an economic use. Such general environmental histories involving geomorphology, climate, vegetation, pattern, and extent of human disturbances are important environmental factors that set limitations to land use.

As O'Keefe and Wisner have pointed out, land use is a common-sense term close to the reality of millions of peasant households in developing countries.<sup>1</sup> Land use, at whatever level of usage and technology or economic activity prevalent in the region or territory, involves resource extraction and destruction, the use of energy, and the emission of pollution in various forms. In its broadest definition, land use refers to the combination of subsoil, soil, biotic, hydrological and climatic characteristics which interact with social labor for the satisfaction of human needs. A simple working definition of land use, therefore, is the application of available human skill to an area of limited natural resources for productive purposes. The important constraints highlighted in this definition are physical environmental processes (available natural resources of the land) and human resources (labor, management skill, ..... etc.).

The Awash Valley inherits serious environmental factors that set limitations to its use. It is located within the Rift Valley which is prone to complex disruptive natural phenomena such as faulting and volcanic activity, even today.<sup>2</sup> The rift system extends from Lake Malawi, through the Western and Eastern Rifts of East Africa, into Ethiopia and on further north as far as the Red Sea and the Jordan Valley of Western Asia. Rifting probably marks the initial stages of fragmentation of the African continent.<sup>3</sup> The rates of separation across the Rift Valley are at present very slow by the standards of mature mid-oceanic ridges. At some distant time in the future, however, it is envisaged that the present rift valleys may be sufficiently broad and deep to carry new oceans.

The *Rift Valley* is prone to complex disruptive natural phenomena and it is sensitive to change. When plans to satisfy temporary economic needs are drawn, *knowledge about the environmental sensitivity* must be

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acquired. Otherwise, disruptive natural phenomena and destructive human activities ruin the resource base. The economy becomes unsustainable. Appropriate land use requires a careful consideration of the sensitive environmental factors because land use activities affect the environment. Because natural environmental factors are to a large extent beyond the control of humans, the society in question is obliged to structure itself in a way it can adapt to the environment. The values and norms regarding land use activities that society develops throughout its cultural history reflect the freedom, limits, and bounds that a given environment entails. Since land use and management of land resources involve various objectives, each decision maker contributes to all that take place in the environment. Application of available human skills to an area of limited natural resources depends on the stage of technology. Actions applied on a given ecological setting are, however, cumulative and can persist for many centuries. A normal land use evolves by the society through many centuries. When a sudden change in land use is introduced by an alien force, the newly introduced activity becomes strange to both the society and to the ecology. This study analyses what has happened in the Awash Valley since the 1960s with respect to sudden change in land use introduced by an alien force. It provides a brief history of the environment and land use in the Awash Basin, and examines the impact of the "Awash Development Project Scheme" on the indigenous people and the ecosystem.

### **Brief History of the Environment and Land Use**

The Awash Basin is an extensive area covering about 120,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The river and its tributaries effectively drain an area of about 70% of the highlands. The rest of the basin, found within the rift valley, possesses a semi-arid and hostile environment. The basin as a whole is characterized by a rectangular drainage pattern which reflects the control exerted by joint or fault systems of the Rift Valley. The Awash river rises from an altitude of 3000 m.a.s.l., and flows for 1,200 km in the generally northerly direction before entering Lake Abbe at an altitude of

240 m. a.s.l. The 2760 meter difference in altitude between the highlands and the lowlands has caused variations in temperature and rainfall which in turn, bring about a different system of vegetation and distinct land use systems.<sup>4</sup>

The average annual rainfall for the basin as a whole is about 710 mm. There is, however, a great deal of variation within the basin both in rainfall and temperature. According to a report of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission,<sup>5</sup> (RRC) the rainfall at the upper basin is about 1000 mm/year while at the lower plains it is only 215 mm/year. The average temperature at the lower plains is about 29° C but it drops to about 13°C at the plateau. Rainfall is highly seasonal confined to "small" rains in February/March, "big" rains in July/August, and erratic dry season rains that may occur between Mid-September or mid-June. The rains result in marked fluctuations in the river discharge and set natural environmental limitations in land use in the lower valley.

The region manifests three main vegetation zones which are essentially interdependent and tend to vary on an altitude basis: (1) the High Plateau (2500-3000 m. a.s.l.) zone; (2) the Mid-Altitude (1200-2500 m. a.s.l.) zone; and (3) the Lower Valley (1200-240 m. a.s.l.) zone. The High Plateau zone is predominantly covered by degraded montane savannah and forest lands while the Mid-Altitude zone is covered predominantly by woodland and tree-savannah. The Lower Valley zone is mainly covered by a tropical dry grass Savannah and its semi-desert part is interspersed with volcanic formations, basalt flows, and sand<sup>6</sup>.

The Awash Basin as a whole has been inhabited by the Afar, Oromo, and Somali peoples and the valley has been utilized by human beings for a long time. Perhaps, because the formation of the rift has tended to act as traps for sediments and great thickness of fluvial, lacustrine and volcanic rocks, these accumulations seem to have been source of its soil fertility. Many evidences reveal that this basin has supported human existence from antiquity<sup>7</sup>.

Taking the entire river basin as a whole, two contrasting land use systems have been developed: One is associated with the pastoral way of life and the other with an emphasis on sedentary cultivation.

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Geographically, the division between the systems is usually related to rainfall distribution and topography. Rain-fed cropping prevails in the High plateau (2500-3000 m.a.s.l.) and in some parts of the Mid-Altitude (1200-2500 m.a.s.l.). In these relatively high rainfall zones, the production of domestic livestock is one component of a diverse agricultural economy.

These High plateau and Mid-Altitude zones have been inhabited mainly by the Oromo who developed a social organization known as the Gada<sup>8</sup> system. The Gada system was a complex institution which played a central role in the pre-colonial socio-political system of the Oromo people. Decisions concerning the socio-economic questions of the community were made by the Gada council (*hayyu*) under the leadership of Abba-bokku<sup>9</sup>. The assembly as a whole was charged with the responsibility of resolving major economic questions, crises between descent groups, clans, or camps. To resolve a crisis, members of the assembly would engage in long and highly politicized debates. The majority of these crises had to do with the misuse of land resources such as agricultural fields, pastures for livestock grazing, conflict over use of water resources, but occasionally they were of a domestic nature. Beyond the resolution of conflict, the assembly also had the obligation to contribute to the economic well-being of the community. For example, in areas where pastoralism was practiced, the assembly would mobilize workers to help maintain cattle watering points that were essential for the pastoral life.

The economic occupations of the Oromo in this basin vary from sedentary farming to pastoralism. In the highlands, where an agricultural economy predominates, barley, *xaafi* (*Eragrostis tef*), wheat, chick peas, *warqe* (*Ensete edulis*), maize, sorghum and a variety of legumes are cultivated. The plateau region as a whole exhibits a mixed agricultural and pastoral economy. Compared to mixed agriculture, hunting and fishing are of little importance. Hunting and fishing are sometimes organized, especially towards the end of the dry season. The type of settlement in the high plateau is known as *qeyee*.<sup>10</sup> *Qeyee* is a kind of scattered homesteads. A typical homestead consists of one or more

houses surrounded by a fence (**dalla**).<sup>11</sup> Inside the enclosure, or immediately outside it, a cattle kraal (**dalla**) may be constructed. Agricultural land near the homestead is often fertilized by the spreading of manure from the cattle kraal or by moving the kraal from place to place. This process of fertilizing the land by cattle manure has been practiced by the Oromo for centuries and is known as **dalla diddirra** or **ciicata baasu**.<sup>12</sup>

The lowlands, occupied by the Afar, Oromo, and Somali peoples for many centuries, provide a resource base for a pastoral economy. These peoples have developed, through many centuries of experience in the environment, unique political structures that focus on appropriate land use. We have briefly described how the Oromo people's social structure (organization) pivoted on the need for appropriate land use. Let us also see how the political structure of the Afar people functioned.

Researchers<sup>13</sup> who have carefully studied the cultural practices of the Afar people describe how they developed a political structure organized on functional bases. A land-use and management system known as **malokti** (sing. **malak**) were developed by the Afar mainly to deal with appropriate land use. The management system specifically sets an organized access to water, farming land, woodland and pasture management through a centralized system of managers known as **malokti**. The main function of the livestock and pasture **malokti** are three: (1) to control and limit the entry of the outsiders and to co-ordinate access for resident herds; (2) to organize and co-ordinate the controlling of flooding and the management of irrigation of the pasture areas; and (3) to organize and co-ordinate the treatment of cattle diseases, or to isolate infected animals.

Regarding land use in the lower delta, Maknun Gamaledinn<sup>14</sup> remarks:

Within lower plains, then, and particularly in the delta, a strict system of controlled access to grazing operated. The Lower Awash Valley was viewed by the Afar, including those from outside the valley, as a refuge in times of drought..... The permanent Afar settlements in

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the delta area also provided food crops, which are significant during times of emergency. In the middle Valley, locally known as Badhu, the pattern was different. Here the Semi-nomadic Afar normally move between dry season sites and wet season sites. These movements extend over 5 km to 30 km, and are undertaken once or twice a year. Most of the women, children and elderly stay as long as possible in their main homesteads, which are close to the river banks, although these are subject to flooding and mosquito infestation during the rainy season. The village sites are based on clan membership. The wet season sites or villages, which are known as Gamta, normally include various clans who co-operate among themselves in watering their stock and possibly in protection against outside threats.

This long quotation emphasizes one basic value of pastoralism which revolves around seasonal movement. It appears that the patterns of available resources require the pastoral people to move their cattle to temporarily favorable environments in order to nourish their livestock and keep them reasonably healthy. The movement is necessary because the natural environment exhibits a variable resource endowment through a wide space and according to season. In this basin, the seasonal movement is governed by fluctuations of the Awash river discharge and flooding. These seasonal movements allow the grazing lands to regenerate; they ensure that water supplies and grasses do not get used up, and perhaps, prevent the region from becoming a desert. Evidently the movement practices have been adaptations to limits set within the domain of the environmental constraints.

Where sedentary farming is practiced, a seasonal movement is not necessary. In the Awash River Basin as a whole, however, one observes the interdependence of the two economic groups. As both groups essentially depend on the available resources that their immediate

environment can provide, the harsh environment has forced society to create an adaptive economic system whose mechanisms include: (1) migration and transhumance; (2) reciprocal arrangements with the highland cultivators, such as grazing rights on crop residues, stock loans, and trading (especially in food); and, (3) internal adjustment mechanisms adopted by pastoralists when confronting drought.<sup>15</sup>

The experience of the Oromo and Afar peoples tend to reveal one essential reality. Many centuries of cumulative knowledge about the available natural resources, their abundance and limitations, seem to have forced these peoples to adapt a land use system that responds to the natural ecological setting and regulates their activities within this bound. They utilize the highlands and lowlands by limiting their actions according to ecological settings, but inhabitants of each category also depend on one another by exchanging goods and products. The people living in the lowland areas have been depending on the management of livestock and pasture lands such that the cumulative knowledge of land use practice known as "pastoralism" evolves into stable and balanced eco-system. Looking at it from an ecological point of view and stage of technological development prevalent in the region, it appears that this land use practice offers the optimum if not the only environmentally sustainable way of utilizing the semi-arid spaces.

These land use systems of the region for millennia have been subjected to threats of extinction since the conquest of the people by an alien force.<sup>16</sup> The policies followed by the conquerors have imposed ecological instability and social disturbances that create persisting famine.<sup>17</sup> Ever since their conquest and incorporation into the expanding Ethiopian empire, the ways of life of the conquered peoples have been subjected to an alien force of subjugation. In order to conquer these peoples, the Abyssinians managed to secure external assistance, and they also enjoyed foreign help to sustain the empire. Before we proceed to describe what has happened to the peoples and the environment in the Awash basin after the conquest, let us briefly review the theory that victimized the conquered peoples.

### **Pastoralists: Victims of the Cattle Complex Theory**

Pastoralism is one of the oldest systems of land use. Ever since the American anthropologist Merville Herskovits<sup>18</sup> published his article, "Cattle Complex in East Africa," and argued that "livestock-dependent societies are characterized by a strong attachment to cattle, so strong that it structured the whole life of the people and all their basic values," the subject has received a lot of attention from many decision makers -- particularly the colonial powers. As Carl Gösta Widsrand (1975) observed, Herskovits' careful wording is in a sense true. The difficulty of the "cattle complex" theory lies, however, not so much in the carefully presented discussion about values, but in the way it has been misused, distorted and spread. In the words of Widsrand:

Pastoral values, and the attachment to cattle were invested with some mystical significance and the obvious non-economic behavior (in Western terms) was explained with reference to these mystic values. Masaai, Pokot, Turkana and other East African livestock peoples followed a way of life that was so completely alien to the experience of those who observed it superficially from a geographical and indeed cultural distance, that these observers had no other explanatory alternative except reference to mystery and exoticism. This was very much the outlook of the European administrator of the colonial era, but such ideas are prevalent even today.<sup>19</sup>

The indigenous peoples of the Awash Basin are still under colonial rule. In this hostile environment, their way of life depends on seasonal movements. To some extent pastoralism still persists, but this is not the way of life that the colonial powers prefer. The colonial outlook towards these peoples is not only a reference to mystery and exoticism, but also it subjects them to alien forces of destruction. The

Ethiopian authorities consider pastoralist peoples as problems and attempt to destroy them. The Afar, Oromo, or Somali peoples are closer to their own social systems than to the Ethiopian state; consequently, the Abyssinian authorities found it difficult to control these "pastoral" peoples. They introduced the policy of assimilation known Amharanization. When the policy of assimilation (or Amharanization) failed, they sought outright destruction. To accomplish this, however, external assistance was needed.

Capitalising on the "non-economic" behavior and "mystic values" of pastoralists expounded by the "cattle complex" theory, the Abyssinians have devised various "legal" instruments. Towards the end of the 1950s, the Imperial Ethiopian government declared that the Awash Valley territory was "empty." International funding agencies were invited to promote mechanized irrigated agri-businesses in the region.<sup>20</sup> Background surveys, feasibility studies, and project documents on the "non-economic" nature and "irrational" behavior of pastoralists were compiled. Though studies dismissed pastoralism as "non-economic" and the seasonal movements as "irrational," non of these studies cared to analyze the environmental impact of the proposed mechanized irrigation.

The issue related to the "non-economic" nature of pastoralism, is absurd, to say the least. It is true, that a pastoral economy does not aim at producing a marketable surplus. Pastoralism is a kind of economy whose important activities involve managing livestock and the natural resources necessary for livestock operations. The main aim of the economy based on this system is to provide goods and a regular supply of food and shelter for the family. The assertion that it is "non-economic" is more myth than reality.

Many pastoral economists and social anthropologists recognize<sup>21</sup> that a pastoral economy produces a surplus, and it is based on solid, viable economic tenets. As a basic economic idea, the person managing the livestock and the pasture recognizes that it is necessary to save some of the surplus of today's production in order to be able to invest in the future. A pastoral economy produces a surplus for the pastoralists; the capital is composed of land and livestock, and a surplus is produced as

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the offspring of the herd (some of the animals are used for consumption, some die, and the rest are saved as an investment in the future). The pastoral activity is not a capitalistic undertaking and it doesn't aim at producing a marketable surplus. In the pastoral venture there is no other way of investing the surplus except in the livestock. Most importantly, the land on which the venture is being practiced must be sustainable.

The issue of sustainability is very closely related to understanding environmental sensitivity. However, the project studies did not analyze the environmental impact of the so-called development schemes. People whose livelihood is attached to a pastoral economy are obliged to follow certain limits set by ecological factors in order to assure sustainability. The Awash Valley, as we briefly discussed, because of its location, exhibits rather complex and sensitive ecological set-ups. An arid climate prevails in the region. The Awash River, whose source is located in the high plateau in central Oromia is the life stream for pastoralists and their livestock in the valley. For the people who live in this harsh environment the Awash River is indispensable.

The histories of the Afar, Oromo, Somalis and other pastoral peoples who live in similar harsh environments reveal that, in order to earn a sustainable livelihood, the people have to pursue certain techniques called "adaptive resource management techniques." The central core of this technique relies on a seasonal movement. The seasonal movement technique seems to have emanated from a long experience of land use. It recognizes that certain environmental realities set limiting factors for land use. There are limits set by ecological factors, such as low rainfall and variation in its distribution, pest and vector hazards, limits of soil fertility and pasture distribution, etc. The adaptive resource management technique thrives to maintain sustainability by recognizing these limiting factors.

This ecologically sound and sustainable resource management technique, practiced by the indigenous peoples, however, is disliked by the colonial rulers. The seasonal movement has proven difficult to control and tax the people. When the policy makers attempt to control the people and generate revenue from them became ineffective, they had

to declare the whole valley "empty." Perhaps, because of their movements, politicians cannot organize the pastoral people the way they prefer. But were the irrigated agricultural "development project schemes"<sup>22</sup> established to generate export oriented cash crops useful for the people and the environment? Is this land use approach in this harsh environment sustainable? Whether such basic questions were considered or not shall be seen below.

### **Impacts of the "Development Project Scheme"**

Towards the end of 1950s the Ethiopian Government approached the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and solicited technical and financial help. In 1962, the Awash Valley Authority (AVA) was set up. Through the assistance of the FAO, the AVA pursued supervision of the development of the Valley for large scale irrigation schemes.

Evidently the Awash Basin, located between the massive highlands in Oromia and the Red Sea Coast, is crucial for the Ethiopian economy. Both the railways to Djibouti and the main road link to the port of Assab in Eritrea pass through the Awash Valley. The vast plain land in the valley and proximity of these vital communication systems to the neighboring countries' ports, played a crucial role for the Imperial Ethiopian state. As a result, the government initiated an "economic development" scheme in the Awash River Basin in the early 1960s. But, was the well-being of the people considered? How about the ecological disaster that the newly introduced activities may inflict on the environment?

### **Construction of Dams and Irrigation Schemes**

To regulate the flow of water three dams were built on the Awash. They were: (1) Abba samuel, (2) Koka-1, and (3) Koka-2. Koka-1 is the largest of the three. The main purpose of Koka-1 is to provide hydroelectric power for Finfinne (Addis Ababa). The

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completion of these dams began the demise of the pastoralists in the valley.

The Ethiopian authorities, showing contempt for the economic system of the pastoralists, decreed the whole valley as "vacant land" which allowed the state to set up any development project.<sup>23</sup> Prior to the establishment of the AVA, a series of studies were conducted by international agencies. These studies stipulated the intentions to supervise development in the valley, laid out designs for irrigated agricultural schemes, and settle pastoralists.<sup>24</sup> Under the control of the AVA, development in the Valley took the form of large scale mechanized commercial enterprises, mostly managed by foreign agrobusiness in joint ventures with the state.<sup>25</sup>

The most dramatic impact on the inhabitants of the valley came in 1972 after construction of the Koka-2 dam. Under pressure from the AVA and the irrigation scheme concessionaires, the amount of water released from the reservoirs between March and October was modified to allow for the cultivation of an additional 25,000 ha. (irrigation farming). The pastoral people, occupying the lower eastern portion of the valley along both banks of the river, had been directly affected by the activities of the AVA. Because a substantial area of the best grazing land was taken by irrigation agriculture, traditional pastoralists were displaced.<sup>26</sup> Outside this belt, the Great Plains could not support a great number of people and livestock in both the dry and wet seasons. The removal of this strategic grazing zone also meant the blocking of migration routes and livestock watering points for the Oromo people in Arsi at Nura Era, and in the Melka-sedi and Awash areas.<sup>27</sup>

### **Ecological Disaster and Human Suffering**

According to various sources,<sup>28</sup> before the dams and intrusion of irrigated farming, the inhabitants' way of life seemed to have been well balanced. There was ample forage for the animals, and rainfall at the highlands and flooding of the river provided enough pasture. Then, circumstances necessitated only a minimal amount of migration. This

balance supported an even greater amount of livestock and population but any upset in this balance reduced both.<sup>29</sup>

The construction of the irrigation schemes has produced economic, social, political, and ecological effects. On the local ecological level, destructive impacts prevailed. The forage resources were significantly reduced by laborers clearing timber for construction and fuel usage. Wood cutting and charcoal production by employees of the irrigation enterprises deforested the area. Charcoal making along the Addis Ababa-Assab and Batie-Assab roads resulted in large scale destruction of the Acacia woodlands and the deciduous bush vegetation. The high demand for wood and charcoal in the capital city and other large villages meant that vegetation in the Awash River basin was totally denuded in thirty years. The wet-season grazing areas were no longer available for pastoralists. Furthermore, the impact of the scheme is reflected not only on the natural eco-system but also on the pattern of social set-up and decision making.

Let us mention some of the impacts of the schemes. The introduction of irrigated development schemes disrupted the traditional economy of pastoralists and their pattern of life. The important dry season gatherings that brought a large number of people together and fostered social activities such as marriages were disrupted. At the same time the new groups lack of amity led to conflicts. Because the conflicts were so high, groups which before had many ritual links were separated.<sup>30</sup> Inhabitants of the valley were systematically excluded from the decision-making process. First in 1962 the AVA was established to manage the valley and settlement schemes. In 1977 the AVA was replaced by the Awash Valley Development Authority (AVDA) and settlement schemes were transferred to the Settlement Authority (SA).

The AVDA retained control of marketing. A growing number of state farms were stretched and the settlers have become a part-time wage labor force. In 1979 both the AVDA and the SA, which carried out similar activities, were merged into the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC). The Afar people were put into relief camps in perpetuity, often under coercion.<sup>31</sup> Land ownership rights were

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transferred to the colonial state under the name of "National Park." Although it encountered local resistance, this transference of landownership was imposed by military force. In these "National Parks" pastoralists have been excluded from essential seasonal grazing areas, and movement has been seriously restricted.<sup>32</sup>

As huge sections of the valley were allocated to large state farms and resettlement projects year after year, the development projects have led to the reduction of the grazing lands; consequently pastoralists engaged in over-grazing desertification. As the desertification process intensified, the drought that affected the entire Sahel region in 1984/85 brought with it a terrible famine. Grass became scarce, people and cattle perished. As the Ethiopian colonial authorities have consolidated their domination and subjugation of the colonized people, development seeking solutions that keep more with the indigenous culture have been totally neglected.

The government policy profoundly affected the value systems and people's way of life. Ideals of the settlement scheme do not encourage innovations that graft change on existing cultural elements. People were forced to settle. This is a profound change to the way of life of pastoral society. As the settlement project failed to incorporate deliberate innovations set by conscious evaluation of circumstances by the people themselves, it was doomed to failure. These projects negated the pastoralists' fundamental cultural traits, whether on the symbolic level (the relationship with the Semi-arid zone, cattle, religion...etc.) or at the technical practice level (stock-breeding, seasonal cattle migration, grazing habit...etc.). Since the projects were carried out according to alien ideals that threaten the traditional means of survival and upset the existing economic relations without taking into consideration the indigenous cultural practices, people were not only suspicious of the projects, but also rejected them outright. The projects, therefore, perpetuate conflicts and fail to fulfill the ideal objectives to "alleviate poverty and promote social justice."

## Discussion and Conclusion

Reports of the survey of the Awash River Basin reveal that there were careful studies of the basin. The studies recommended actions and proposed changes in land use. The overall policy that led to the creation of the AVA, and subsequent irrigation projects and settlement schemes, were based on studies and recommendations assisted by international institutions. A great deal of action had taken place in accordance with proposed plans. The recommended actions in land use posed detrimental effects on the environment and the local population. Why did the plans fail to incorporate the long accumulated experiences of the local people? It seems the indigenous people had managed to survive in this harsh environment by thorough consideration of the extremes rather than the average conditions<sup>33</sup> that prevail in the region. It is evident that the fatal problems of agriculturists and pastoralists in the arid environment likely arise when they encounter extreme environmental conditions. To withstand this, they had established a system that we refer to as "adaptive resource management techniques."

It is also well known that the environment in question is so harsh. Before the control, movement into the arid and semi-arid lands had been spontaneous and seasonal. The Ethiopian Imperial government policy encouraged planned settlement, irrigation schemes, and cultivation of the wetter margins of the arid and semi-arid lands. The sudden introduction of the mechanized irrigated farming system into this hostile environment brought about man-made famine to the indigenous peoples. Further, serious problems of famine originated from the imposition of colonial rule and the alienation of local peoples from the resources of the land they used to earn their living. This alien policy had created a situation of land scarcity to those peoples whose lands were expropriated.

Irrigation schemes were needed to meet settlement and agricultural needs. National parks or forest conservation policies were proclaimed to resolve conflicts in favor of wildlife.<sup>34</sup> These had marginalized the colonized population and their economic well-being. The theoretical basis of this policy was laid down in the "cattle complex

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theory" and the "un-economic" nature of pastoralism. The irrigation schemes were needed to increase export commodities, and not intended to improve the well-being of the indigenous people.

The general effects of policies revolving around irrigation schemes and settlement were meant to restrict people's movement. Why was such restriction necessary? What are the effects of these restrictions (restriction of movement on an arid-land)? Given restriction of movement, one can readily see that increasing population pressure on a smaller area (within the semi-arid lands) means exerting a forced impact. Such impacts can exert outcomes that may have immediate and long-term effects and consequences on the ecological balance and the general environment. The projects were not rooted in the local culture.<sup>35</sup> Indigenous cultures, however, contain within them the seeds necessary to facilitate further development. There is no wonder in observing "peoples' attitudes of indifference" to the alien "development" projects. These projects do not contain any of the seeds of *their* inherited cultural values. When they saw that the project activities *accelerated the depletion of the available natural resources and threatened the quality of life*, the indigenous people rejected these projects which threatened the survival of the society.

Given environmental circumstances in the Awash basin, *prevention of harmful activities on the environment is less costly than their subsequent correction*. The environmental considerations *must* be incorporated at the planning stage of development projects. The local people *must* also be involved in the decision making and implementation process. However, to carry out such policy successfully, it requires political will, a well-established method or mechanism suitable for monitoring activities, and follow-up observations of the impacts of the project. To reduce hazards and to ameliorate situations there is a need for an effective management policy. Close surveillance of activities that deplete natural resources requires monitoring. Careful research may provide information for an early warning of trends. What is the motive of excluding the local people from all decision-making processes?

The evidence confirms that successive Ethiopian governments have been more concerned with strengthening centralized control over the land than seriously seeking to ensure the survival and security of the rural peoples. Project pre-feasibility studies had not considered the *need to understand the fundamental role that the socio-cultural structures play in people's economic life*. Instead of negotiating and resolving a conflict, the government has chosen to firmly control the colonized territories. The net-effect of these actions has been to further intervene in the long-evolved relationship between people and the environment.

Measures and actions taken in the name of "*development and progress*" have failed to take into account the *variety of agro-ecological and cultural conditions prevailing in the Ethiopian empire*. *The most damaging practices have been refusing to recognize the cultural uniqueness of different peoples found in this empire*. So far *coercive measures have been applied on forcibly incorporated peoples into the empire to dissolve the cultural values and structures of these peoples*. The objective to have full control over the people *legitimized the power of colonial authorities to put priority on a unity question and to allocate a great amount of funds on war machinery*. Mostly because of this they have failed to take into account the *variety of agro-ecological and cultural conditions prevailing in the region*. Denying that the Ethiopian empire is a multicultural society, they promote a policy of mono-cultural socio-economic relationships under the Abyssinian rule. The evidences investigated reveal that the government irrigation schemes and settlement programs in the *Awash Valley* have completely ignored the prevailing environmental constraints and cultural realities. The project ideals consist of preconceived models that are inconsistent with the value system and the social organization of the indigenous people.

Historical evidences from the *Awash Valley* reveal that pastoralists in this region developed and maintained a *well-balanced system of land use* that sustained them for a long time. A pastoral economy that combined mobility with a certain degree of permanent settlement was practiced in the region for many centuries. These

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traditional ways of land use systems were destroyed by Ethiopian colonialism. With the help of the international funds and expertise, the Ethiopian government established schemes and settlement projects. As the schemes and projects were not meant for the local people and did not grow out of local awareness and needs, they were not supported by the local people. The models were based on *alien concepts* of land use and control. After thirty-five years of the existence of these projects, there is no clear evidence that *the socio-economic situations of the local population* have fared well. Because the imported ideas of land use did not incorporate local experiences gathered over time by the people, ecological problems prevailed. In effect, the so-called development schemes are not the local peoples' projects and they are used against them.

The disruptive effects of colonial rule gave a fatal blow to the long established political structure and values of the colonized people. The *Afar* almost lost their *Malokti management system*; and the *Oromo's gada* system has been curtailed seriously. The further development of these political systems ceased when the people were colonized. Loss of the political and cultural systems also meant loss of control over their land resources. The people lost entitlement over their resources and the freedom to develop their culture. They were deprived of alternative economic possibilities, and their sustenance became bleak as ecological disaster through desertification prevailed. It is now well documented that human suffering under the debilitating famine has become the fate of these people. The basic problem regarding marginal lands in the Awash basin arises from a colonial relationship that puts the peoples of the region as a whole under war and in conflicting situations with the central government. The main objective of the colonial government was (and still is) to have full control over the people and their resources. As the marginal lands in the Awash Basin have become the medium for the destructive process of this policy, the people subjected to alien Imperial Ethiopian rule are suffering under perpetual man-made famine.

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## NOTES

1. Phil and Ben Wisner, *O'Keefe*, eds. 1977. *Land use and Development. African Environment Special Report 5*. International African Institute.
2. According to several investigators, the middle Tertiary (roughly 25 million years ago) witnessed the beginning of general elevation of extensive areas of central and eastern Africa. Uplift has been accompanied by a number of other disruptive activities such as rifting, faulting and volcanism, all of which have continued intermittently to the present day. For more information, among many see for example; Gautied, A., 1967. "New Observations on the later Tertiary and early Quaternary in the Western Rift: the stratigraphy and palaeontological evidence." In W. W. Bishop and J.D. Clark, eds. *Background to Evolution in Africa*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, pp. 73-87.
3. For details see B. H. Baker, and J. Wohlenberg. 1971. *Structure and Evolution of the Kenya Rift Valley*. Natue, London, 229: 538-542.
4. For more details see Maknum Gamaledinn. 1987. "State Policy and Famine in the Awash Valley of Ethiopia: the Lessons for Conservation". In *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies, and Practice*, David Anderson and Richard Grove. eds. 327-244. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. RCC 1985. *The Challenge of Hunger*. Addis Ababa: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission.
6. For full description of the basin, see FAO (1965) *Report on the Survey of the Awash River Basin*. FAO, Rome, Italy: Volumes I-IV, 780 pp. and Illustrations.
7. The majority of East African hominid finds has been recovered in the Awash Valley and the recently found hominid exhibits the oldest ever discovered before. Donald Johnson found the famous fossil "Lucy" at Hadar, at a point where river erosion has exposed the site and claimed a discovery. "One of the earliest known humanoids walked between three and four millions ago."

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8. For fuller description of the gada system refer to ASMEROM LEGESSE. 1973. *GADA: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*. The Free Press. A division of Macmillan Publishing C., Inc. New York: P.T.W. BAXTER, 1978. Boran Age-sets and Generation-sets. GADA, a puzzle or a Meze. In P.T.W. BAXTER and A.C. Huntsloy, eds. *Age, Generation and Time*: 151 - 182
9. Abba Bokku literally means "father of the scepter" He is the head of the state for a period of eight years.
10. Queye is a kind of scattered homestead practiced by the Oromo. This settlement types described here are based on the experience of this author and referred to how they existed until the early part of the 1960s. Many policies attempting to destroy such settlement patterns were made by successive Ethiopian regimes. During Miniilik's early occupation the garrison towns know as mishig were introduced; during Haile Sellasie's time, concession farmers who expropriated the peasant farmers in the 1970s built townships; and what remained was almost destroyed by the villagization and settlement schemes of the Mengistu government policy in the 1980s
11. The term **dalla**, an Oromo term, has several meanings. It denotes cattle kraal as well as fencing around homesteads.
12. **Dalla diddiira** is practiced on regular time bases depending on the season of the year. Its main function is to fertilize the land (known as ciicataan qaljeessu in the Oromo language). During the wet rainy period, the kraal (**dalla**) is moved once every one or two weeks. During dry season, there is no need to move the kraal so often, but shifting places at least once a month is necessary for the comfort of the cattle.
13. See for instance, N.J. COSSINS. 1973. *No Way To Live: A Study of the Afar Clans of the Northeast Range Lands*. Addis-Ababa: Imperial Ethiopian Govt, Livestock & Meat Board; H. KLOOS (1982). *Development, Drought and Famine in the Awash Valley of Ethiopia*. *African Studies Review*, 25, 21-48 ; J. HELLAND (1977). *A Preliminary Report on the Afar*. Addis Ababa: ILCA ; J. HELLAND. (1980). *Five Essay on the Study of Pastoralists and the Development of Pastoralism*. Bergen: University of Bergen.

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14. Maknun Gamaledinn, 1987. Op. Cit.
15. These points are more fully analyzed by COSSINS, N.J. (1973). Ibid. M. CAMALEDINN. 1986. *The Political Economy of the Afar Region of Ethiopia: a Study in Peripheral Dynamism*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge
16. All of the people (the Afar, the Oromo, and the Somali) were conquered and made subjects of the Abyssinian people towards the end of 19th century.
17. Many people have wrote on the political aspects of famine in Ethiopia. see for example: M. F. LOFCHIE. 1975 "The Political and Economic Origins of African Hunger." *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 18, 551-67.; SEN, A. 1982. *Poverty and Famines: an essay in entitlement and deprivation*. London: Oxford University Press.; J. SHEPHERD. 1975. *The Politics of Starvation*. New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. W. FITZGERALD. 1980. *Drought, Famine and Revolution: Some Political Aspects of the Ethiopian Drought*. Unpublished Msc. thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, London University.
18. M. J. HERSKOVITS. 1926. "The Cattle Complex in East Africa". *American Anthropologist* 28. 653 ff, 1926
19. C. G. Widstrand, 1975 "The Rationale of Nomad Economy," *Ambio*, Vol. 4 No 4: 146-153.
20. D. A. CAPONERA 1956. *Water Control Legislation: Report to the Government of Ethiopia*. FAO Expanded Program of Technical Assistance. Report no. 550. Rome: FAO.
21. See for example: CHAYANOV, A.V. 1966 *The Theory of Peasant Economy*. American Economic Association, Homewood, Illinois.
22. For earlier studies of the Valley and analysis of problems, see: FAO 1967. *Report on the Survey of the Awash River Basin, General Report*, vol.1. Rome: FAO; N.J. COSSINS (1972). *Green Heart of a Dying Land: A Study of the New Cotton Wealth of the old Afar Sultanate of Awsa*. Addis Ababa: Sir Alexander Gibb & Partners/Huntings Ltd ; N.J. COSSINS 1973. Ibid.

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23. P. B. Diebold 1958, *Economic Policies for Expanding Agricultural Production: Report to the Government of Ethiopia*, Report No. 926. Rome: FAO , 1965
24. For details see Caponera, 1956; Diebold, 1958; FAO, 1965, op. cit.
25. L. Bondestam. 1974, "Peoples and Capitalism in the North-Lowland of Ethiopia." *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 12, 423-39.
26. By 1972, there were some 50,000 ha under irrigated agriculture. The Crucial irrigated belt constituted 16% of the total size of the flat grazing originally available. But in 1972, in the lower plains 23 % of the river flats were used for irrigate cropping (KLOOS, 1982; GOUDIE, A.G., 1972. Irrigated land settlement: Ethiopia: Informal technical report no.7. Rome: FAO).
27. (Kloos, 1982). op. cit.
28. H.E. Voelkner. 1974 *The Social Feasibility of Settling Semi-nomadic Afar on Irrigated Agriculture in the Awash Valley, Ethiopia*. Informal Technical Report, no. 23. Rome: FAO.
29. VOELKNER (1974) remarked that irrigated farming have had immediate effect (within 1 to 2 years) on the environment in the lower valley. He also concluded that effect of the drought (1972/73) may not have been as devastating had the river been allowed to flood as in its unregulated past and had the normally flooded area available as grazing area to the afar population
30. G. FLOOD, 1976. "Nomadism and its Future". *In Rehab: Drought and Famine in Ethiopia*, ed. Abdul Majid, London: International African Institute.
31. Maknun Gamaledinn, op. cit.
32. See C. HILLMAN. 1986 *The Bale National Park*. Unpublished seminar paper African Studies Center, Cambridge University .

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33. The ecological concept regarding considering "The Extremes Rather Than the Average Conditions," in land use is acknowledged to Makun Gamaledinn, op. cit.
34. For more details regarding the concept of National Parks or Forest Conservation gazette see Hillman, 1986; C. Hillman 1986. "The Bale National Park." Unpublished seminar paper African Studies Center, Cambridge University.
35. The word "culture" in this context is defined as the sum total of original solutions that a group of human beings invent to adapt to their natural and social environment. Culture in this sense is all inclusive, and considers every aspect of life, as put by Verhelst (1990) "know-how, technical knowledge, customs of food and dress, religion, mentality, values, language, symbols, socio-political power, methods of production and economic relations, and so on". Thiery G. Verhelst. 1990 *No Life Without Roots: Culture and Development*. Translated by Bob Cumming. Zed Books Ltd., London and New Jersey.

## REVIEW ESSAY

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### REVIEW ESSAY: GEZETENA GEZOT, MATCHA AND TULAMA SELF-HELP ASSOCIATION, by Olana Zoga.

*Mohammed Hassen*

The Matcha-Tulama Self-Help Association (1963-1967) represented a landmark in modern Oromo history. Landmark, because it led to the fermentation of Oromo national consciousness which distinguishes the pre-1960s Oromo history from the post 1960s history. It must be remembered that following the conquest and colonization of Oromia during and after the 1880s, the Oromo not only lost their sovereignty and independence, but also a dynamic leadership that would have coordinated their resistance against harsh colonial misrule. A leadership vacuum was deliberately created and maintained for the purpose of undermining Oromo unity while strengthening religious and regional cleavages. Deprived of leadership that articulated and represented Oromo interests, the Oromo were subjected to crude and cruel national oppression which assumed a multi-dimensional thrust simultaneously attacking Oromo unity, human dignity, cultural achievements, and religious and political institutions. In the land of their birth, the Oromo were reduced to landless and rightless *gabars* (serfs), who were abused and exploited. These outrageous crimes galvanized different Oromo groups into spontaneous resistance. "What all the resistance had in common, however, was that it was isolated, uncoordinated and restricted to only a few areas."<sup>1</sup> Oromo groups failed to coordinate their resistance, thus making each uprising an easy target of destruction. "And yet each group neither could nor would continue to live under inhuman conditions. Many were prepared to die resisting, with arms in their hands rather than live in abject humiliation."<sup>2</sup>

The Matcha-Tulama Association is a landmark in modern Oromo history; it was the first pan-Oromo movement that coordinated country-wide peaceful resistance, which gave birth to Oromo nationalism. The

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movement symbolized the collective will and firm determination of the Oromo to consolidate their unity, and regain their freedom and human dignity. It exploded the Ethiopian ruling elites' myth of Oromo disunity and demonstrated the vitality and depth of Oromo unity. The movement marked the beginning of a new political experience that was fundamental to the development of Oromo nationalism, the experience taught the Oromo that they needed national leadership not only to marshal their human, material and spiritual resources, to harmonize their activities and to channel their creative energy and innovations against the oppressive Ethiopian colonial system, but also to create a democratic future for themselves and other peoples of Ethiopia. The founding members of the Matcha-Tulama Self-Help Association symbolize the courage and sacrifices that have propelled millions of the Oromo into organized motion. The Association's country-wide multi-faceted activities recalled to life the crushed Oromo self-respect and self-confidence, and inspired them with a renewed vigor and determination to achieve their freedom and human dignity. The movement gave the Oromo freedom of the mind and the spirit, and a new sense of unity and nationhood. Since the 1960s, no force was able to kill the spirit of freedom, self-respect and human dignity which the Matcha-Tulama Self-Help Association implanted in the Oromo mind and the Oromo soul. Thus, it is almost impossible to discuss the history of the Oromo since the 1960s without reference to the Matcha-Tulama Association, which defined and shaped the future course of Oromo history.

Although the association was mentioned in a number of writings, the first truly major work on the association is Olana Zoga's **Gezetena Gezot, Matcha and Tulama Self-Help Association**. It is a remarkable book that depicts the activities of the association during its short existence, its leaders, their strength and weakness, the association's achievements and failures, the callous disregard with which it was destroyed, and the lessons to be drawn from its experience. Anyone who is interested in understanding Ethiopian history in the 1960s in general and Oromo history in particular will be rewarded by reading this book which is a timely addition to the growing literature on Oromo studies.

Olana Zoga, the author of this balanced, authoritative and comprehensive study on the Matcha-Tulama Association, is the son of one of the association's founding members. The author, himself, was an activist in the Ethiopian University movement in the early 1970s. His command of the Amharic language is excellent. His fairness and objectivity in presenting contentious issues is impressive. He conducted oral interviews with the founding members of the association who are still alive, with a sincere desire to learn from their experiences. The result is this book, a path breaking work on the history of the association. So far, it is the richest, the best and most fascinating, lucid, and beautifully written book on the formation, the activities and destruction of the Matcha-Tulama Association. The book is based on solid research coupled with interviews with the leaders of the association as well as with thirty other knowledgeable individuals (p. 4).

According to the author, the book was written for four purposes. The first is to record and pass on to the next generation the long history of the Oromo struggle for human dignity, freedom and equality. The second is to record the events of the 1960s so that we may learn from the mistakes of the period which would help us to build a better country in the future. The third is to record the Oromo people's resistance of the 1960s, the causes for and the ideology of that resistance. The final purpose for writing this book is to inform the present Oromo generation, which faces similar circumstances, of the intrigues and the political machination which destroyed the association in the 1960s. If the Oromo elites do not learn from the tragedy of the association, their fate in the 1990s will not be different from the fate of the leaders of the association in the 1960s (see below).

**Gezetenä Gzot, Matcha and Tulama Self-Help Association** has fourteen chapters. Chapter one deals with – "The Formation of the Association." In this chapter, the author discusses the 1960 military coup against Emperor Haile Selassie's regime, its aftermath, and the formation of the Matcha-Tulama Association. Although the 1960 coup failed in its main objective, it did shatter the myth of Emperor Haile Selassie's invincibility and exposed the weakness of his regime. On the

one hand, the 1960 failed coup sharpened the contradiction within the Amhara elite itself, while on the other hand, it deepened the conflict between the Amhara ruling class and the Oromo elite. The contradiction within the Amhara ruling elite is succinctly expressed in a manifesto produced by military officers who planned another coup in 1961. The officers, who expressed the political view of the advanced section of the Amhara ruling elite, lost confidence in the leadership of Emperor Haile Selassie. Even more importantly, the officers challenged the fundamental policy of the imperial regime. For those officers, the concept of Ethiopia was much more than the political, economic, cultural, language and religious supremacy of one ethnic group in the country. For those officers, especially lieutenant Beqele Sagu and Colonel Imru Wonde, who authorized the manifesto:

Ethiopia is the sum total of all its districts and people, while for our rulers Ethiopia means only the ruling class [i.e. the Amhara]. What is presented in the name of Ethiopian culture is the culture of the same ruling class [Amhara]. Whenever the issue of religion is raised Ethiopia is presented as the land of only one religion [i.e. Orthodox Christianity]. Whenever the issue of language is raised, the existence of various Ethiopian languages is denied [Amharic is recognized as the only language in the country]. In the present condition of Ethiopia, the cultures, religions and languages of our people are to be destroyed and replaced by the culture, religion, and language of the ruling class [i.e. Amhara], (p. 10).

The authors of the Manifesto not only succinctly express the reality of the Amhara ruling elites' domination of the Ethiopian political landscape, but they also argue for ending national domination and establishing of a democratic structure that abolishes tenancy and ensures equality and economic opportunity for all the peoples of Ethiopia. The

political view of the military officers of Oromo origin was partly shaped by the heightened tension within the Amhara ruling elite. It was partly a response to Emperor Haile Selassie's new discriminatory policy. After the 1960 failed coup, Emperor Haile Selassie's regime followed a secret policy of limiting the number of high ranking military officers of Oromo origin and controlling their promotion. This policy not only angered many high ranking officers of Oromo origin, but it also revealed the deeply seated anti-Oromo prejudice existing within the Amhara political establishment. Those officers whose cultural and ideological orientations would have integrated them "into the heart and the soul of the Ethiopian system"<sup>3</sup> were all Orthodox Christians who were culturally Amharized. They were loyal to the Emperor and were strong Ethiopian nationalists. Not a single high ranking officer of Oromo origin supported the 1960 failed coup; on the contrary, they opposed it. Colonels (later Brigadier Generals) Tadesse Birru, Jagama Kello, Waqejira Serda, Dawit Abdi and Major Qadida Guremeysa (pp. 349, 352) supported the Emperor and they were instrumental in aborting the 1960 coup. Yet, they were suspected of disloyalty and subjected to discrimination. This policy not only angered Oromo officers, but also encouraged them to be involved in political activities (p. 12).

Colonel Alemu Qietessa, one of the founding fathers of the Matcha-Tulama Association, was among the high ranking officers who was angered by the discriminatory policy of Haile Selassie. Another key founding father of the association was Haile Mariam Gamada, a man with an encyclopedic knowledge of Oromo history, a lawyer and a greatly respected leader. He chaired the committee that drafted the by-laws of the association, coined the name of the association and produced its logo: the *odaa* (sycamore tree), the symbol of freedom and self-administration (p. 19). The name of the association symbolized the unity of two major Oromo groups, that of the Matcha and Tulama, while its logo, the *odaa* indicates the desire for return to the original Oromo **Gada** democracy. Originally "the Oromo believed *odaa* to be the most sacred of trees, the shade of which was the source of peace, the center

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of religion, and the office of government--the meeting place for the democratically elected gada leaders."<sup>4</sup>

The association was formed on January 24, 1963. It had a policy-making board of thirteen men and seven committees. Colonel Alemu Qietessa was the President of the association and the Chairman of the Board; Beqele Nadhi was vice-president, Colonel Qadida Guremessa, the second vice-president, and Haile Mariam Gamada was general secretary. The main objectives of the founders of the association were to mobilize and organize the entire Oromo people for educational growth, improvement in health conditions and economic development (pp. 15-16). The leaders of the association submitted their by-laws to the government for legal recognition. One year and four months later (i.e. May of 1964) Haile Selassie's government gave permission for the association to function as a self-help organization. It was grudging recognition which the government officials later regretted (p. 21).

Chapter Two deals with the -- "Activities to Strengthen the Association." According to the author, once the government permitted the association to function as a self-help association, its leaders started mobilizing the people for economic development through public meetings. The first large public gathering took place in the town of Ginchi in Jibat and Matcha Awraja (sub-province), followed by another gathering in the same Awraja in the district of Jeledu, where Colonel Alemu Qietessa gave 10,000 hectares of his own land for the association's development activities (p. 24). Encouraged by promising development activities, Colonel Alemu Qietessa decided to invite prominent military officers of Oromo origin to join the association. The first to be invited was General Tadesse Birru, the Commander of the Rapid Force (riot battalion), the Deputy Commissioner of the national police force, the commander of the Territorial Army and the Chairman of the national literacy campaign. General Tadesse Birru was the most powerful officer of Oromo origin, a rising star within the Ethiopian political establishment.

He was a deeply religious man who was assimilated into Amhara culture, spoke Amharic and married an Amhara woman. He was an

ardent Ethiopian nationalist loyal to the Emperor and integrated into the heart and soul of the Ethiopian system. When he was invited to join the association, his answer was "I can not participate in tribal politics" (p. 24). But to his credit, as the Chairman of the National Literacy Campaign, he promised to help the association in its mission to spread literacy. In those days the literacy campaign was conducted only in the Amharic language for the purpose of spreading that language into non-Amhara areas. General Tadesse Birru not only enthusiastically supported the literacy program which would have facilitated the Amharization of the Oromo, but also he wanted to create an Ethiopian nation based on the equality of all Ethiopians. It was this officer who later became a militant Oromo nationalist, a symbol of courage and a great martyr. How did that happen? The story is long, and it is covered in several chapters. Here is how it started.

First, as a veteran of the anti-fascist resistance movement and an officer with long service both in the military and police forces, he was very popular in the Ethiopian political establishment. This popularity may have excited the ambition of the general and aroused the anxiety of Emperor Haile Selassie. Secondly, as a self-educated man, his love for knowledge and concern for the poor is admirable.

He had an extremely pleasant personality and was liked by the rank and file in the army [and police]. He was kind and considerate and was always on the side of the disadvantaged. Because of his sympathy for the poor, the Amhara [leaders] feared him, but they thought he was an Amhara national who could not be very dangerous to their oppressive system.<sup>5</sup>

Thirdly, General Tadesse Birru's enthusiastic support for the spread of literacy among the Oromo alarmed the Ethiopian Prime Minister of the day, Akelilu Habite Wolde. The latter, who assumed General Tadesse Birru to be an Amhara, confided in him the educational policy of Haile Selassie's government in these words:

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Tadesse! After you have started leading the literacy campaign, you talk a lot about learning. It is good to say learn. However, you must know whom we have to teach. We are leading the country by leaving behind the Oromo at least by a century. If you think you can educate them, they are an ocean [whose wave] can engulf you (p. 25).

In other words the Ethiopian Prime Minister discreetly instructed General Tadesse Birru to drastically curb the literacy campaign among the Oromo. From this, it follows that the Ethiopian government of the time feared that if the vast Oromo population had access to modern education, they would endanger the Amhara elites' hold on power. That was why as early as 1942, Afaan Oromo, the Oromo language, was banned from use in preaching, teaching, broadcasting and publishing. In fact, after 1942, the production of "Oromo literature was not only banned, but most of what was already available was collected and destroyed."<sup>6</sup> This means Haile Selassie's regime not only banned the use of the Oromo language, but also curbed literacy among the Oromo, even in the Amharic language. In other words, Emperor Haile Selassie's regime followed a secret policy of keeping the Oromo in the darkness of ignorance.

General Tadesse Birru could not believe what he heard from the mouth of the Ethiopian Prime Minister himself. The general was shocked and awakened by the policy designed to perpetuate ignorance among the Oromo! It was the realization of blatantly discriminatory government policy that inspired General Tadesse Birru to join the Matcha-Tulama Association on June 23, 1964. That was the turning point in the life of the general and in the activities of the association. When the Ethiopian Prime Minister got the news about Tadesse Birru joining the association, he realized that Tadesse was not an Amhara and he had mistakenly confided in him about the government's educational policy. To ensure damage control, the Ethiopian Prime Minister targeted General Tadesse Birru for destruction. The threat on General Tadesse

Birru's life transformed the movement by forcing it to focus more on political activities rather than on its economic development program (pp. 26-27).

Ironically, the leaders of the association wanted to use General Birru's fame, his charismatic personality, his standing within the government, and his loyalty for and closeness to the Emperor for the purpose of protecting and expanding the activities of the association. The leaders of the association did not realize that they inadvertently traded the calm activities of their organization for high stake publicity, which intensified the fear of the Amhara ruling elites, who were eager and ready to destroy both the association and its leaders. Here it suffices to say that after the association was legally recognized by the government, it attracted the elite of the Oromo society—civilian government officials, business and religious leaders, professionals and military officers. By joining it, the Oromo elite elevated their status and transformed the image of and the perception about the Matcha-Tulama Association. Above all, the Oromo elite provided the association with their talents, skills, knowledge, organizational capabilities and leadership qualities, and, in no time, they transformed what started as a self-help movement in the region of Shawa into a formidable pan-Oromo movement all over Oromia. It was a rapid transformation and a remarkable achievement, whose result became apparent in the restructuring of the association (p. 29).

After reorganization, the policy-making Board of Directors was enlarged to 15 members. The Committee of the Association also grew from seven to thirteen including: the Legal Committee, chaired by Bekele Nadhi; the Education Committee, chaired by General Tadesse Birru; the History and Information Organization Committee, chaired by Haile Mariam Gamada; the Cultural and Religious Committee, chaired by Haile Mariam Gemedo; the Committee for Provincial Branches, chaired by General Tadesse Birru; and the Advisory Committee, chaired by General Tadesse Birru. It is evident from this list that General Tadesse Birru and Haile Mariam Gamada were the key members of the

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association. Also, they were among the leaders targeted for destruction by the Ethiopian government.

Chapter Three deals with what is termed as "The Year of The Association's Activities." According to the author, considerable achievements were made in membership recruitment, as well as drafting and approving regulations for provincial district and local level development activities. The massive regulations were a blueprint for the establishment of a government within a government in terms of development activities (p. 37). The association's development activities were much more effective, energetic, and productive than the government's lukewarm development activities. This immediately aroused the envy and jealousy of provincial governors who traditionally pocketed public money collected in the name of development (p. 41). Contrary to the governors' policy of enriching themselves at the public's expense, the association followed a policy of using local funds for local development activities. For the purpose of raising funds and mobilizing the people for local activities, the association started organizing massive public gatherings, which became the main platform for political agitation as well as the launch pad for impressive development activities. The public gatherings were sponsored by the most privileged elements of the Oromo society such as **Dajazmach** Kebede Buzunesh, one of the most celebrated heroes of the war of resistance during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1935-41) who gave 50,000 hectares of his own land for the association's development activities!

It was Haji Robale Ture, one of the wealthiest men in the Arsi region, who organized the Itayaa gathering in May 1966, a historic event that brought together the western and eastern Oromo, Muslims, and Christians to open a new era of Oromo unity. In his speech to the thousands who were gathered at Itayaa, Haji Robale Ture stressed that as "Streams join together to form a river, people also join together to be a nation, to become a country" (p. 51). Haji Robale was clearly saying let us strengthen our unity and create our country. This was a quantum leap from the original goal of self-help activities in one province to the creation of an Oromo country. However, it must be stated clearly that

Haji Robale represents only the view of a radical minority within the association. The overwhelming majority of the members of the association, including General Tadesse Birru, did not question the territorial integrity of Ethiopia. What they questioned was the identity of Ethiopia that excluded the Oromo group. They questioned the image of Ethiopia built upon the supremacy of a single national group. They identified political, economic, and cultural inequality as the enemy of Ethiopia. Thus their view of Ethiopian nationalism was opposed to the supremacy of one ethnic group and was based on the equality of all the peoples of Ethiopia. What radicalized the association more than anything else was the realization that the government of Emperor Haile Selassie planned to destroy the association. The leaders of the association wanted to ignite the fire of Oromo nationalism that would outlive the destruction of the association and its leaders. It was stated at the politically charged Itayaa gathering:

.....that the Association spelled out its political objective which cemented Oromo unity and shattered all myths and lies about Oromo disunity. At that gathering.... the thousands of participants.... declared with one voice that all Oromo are one and will remain one people forever and that the artificial division that was created by the enemy is dead and buried..... Among other things, at the Itayaa meeting it was noted that: (1) less than one percent of Oromo school-age children ever get the opportunity to go to school; (2) less than one percent of the Oromo population get adequate medical services; (3) less than fifty percent of the Oromo population own land; (4) a very small percentage of the Oromo population have access to [modern] communication services. [And yet they], paid more than eighty percent of the taxes for education, health and communication.<sup>7</sup>

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At the Itayaa gathering, the leaders of the association not only articulated Oromo grievances, but also emphasized the importance of unity. Those who were at that meeting declared with one voice never to be divided again. From this perspective, the Itayaa gathering was the beginning of coordinated and united Oromo activities, under a single leadership (pp. 52, 167, 241), heralding the birth of Oromo nationalism. Those who were at that meeting even overcame religious prejudice and cultural taboos. Thus, the Muslims ate meat slaughtered by Christians and the Christians did likewise. This was an unprecedented event in Ethiopia which shocked and outraged the Amhara ruling elites who branded the association a "pagan" movement (p. 172). The Itayaa meeting was addressed in *Afaan Oromo*, the language proscribed for public use in Ethiopia.<sup>8</sup>

In short, the leaders of the association not only overcame religious and cultural taboos, (a remarkable achievement by itself) which strengthened Oromo unity, but also challenged the authority of the Ethiopian state with regard to the use of the Oromo language in public. It was out of this challenge that the political objective of producing literature in the Oromo language was born. It was also out of this challenge that the idea of correcting the distorted image of Oromo history was born (see below).

The Itayaa meeting was followed by several others, including a meeting held in Bishofutu (Debra Zeit) in June 1966. That meeting was organized by Lemma Guya (air force captain) who was immediately transferred from Bishoftu to Asmara and then imprisoned (p. 59). In 1966, the association formed branch offices in Arsi and several places in the Shawa province. The most important branch offices were formed in June 1966 both in the Wallaga and Hararghie provinces. It was Mrs. Astede Habte Mariam, the only woman in the highest policy making Board of the association, who played the crucial role in the formation of the Wallaga branch office. She was a member of the Oromo royal family of Nekamete and the sister of the Governor of Wallaga. On the day when the Wallaga branch office was formed, Colonel Alemu Qietessa, the president, General Taddesse Birru, General Jagma Kello, General Dawit Abdi, **Dajazmach** Kebede Buzunesh, **Dazamach** Figere

Selassie Habte Mariam (the governor of Wallaga), his sister, Princess Mahestena Habte Mariam (the wife of one of the deceased sons of Emperor Haile Selassie), Haile Mariam Gamada and many government officials were present. In short, the Wallaga branch office, chaired by Mrs. Astede Habte Mariam, included not only top provincial officials, but also a member of Haile Selassie's royal family. Others, such as Major General Waqjira Serda, Fitwarari Haile Michael Zewde Gobena (the great grand son of Ras Gobana) joined the association.

Through these top government officials, the association penetrated Emperor Haile Selassie's bureaucracy. These individuals were privileged members of the Oromo elite. Probably, they had much more in common with the Amhara ruling elites, into which they were assimilated, than with the ordinary Oromo, who were the victims of the Ethiopian system. By joining the association, they exposed the Achilles heel of the Ethiopian system - the policy of Amharization did not consider the assimilated individuals as equals with the Amhara elites.<sup>9</sup> There was a cultural stigma attached to the assimilated because of their origin. This predicament hastened the politicization of the culturally Amharized and the most privileged elements of the Oromo society. This prompted civilian officials and military officers to reassess their standing within the Ethiopian political establishment and to realize the importance of strengthening a pan-Oromo movement. For years they had thought of themselves as part of the Ethiopian system and sustained an illusion of equality in relation to the Amhara ruling elite. Now, for the first time, the Christianized and Amharized Oromo elite turned its energy towards asserting its equality and that of the Oromo people within the Ethiopian political landscape.

When the educated professionals find themselves unable to gain admission to posts commensurate with their degrees and talents; they tend to turn away also from the metropolitan culture of the dominant ethnic group and return to their 'own' culture, the culture of the once despised subject ethnic group. Exclusion breeds failed

assimilation, and reawakens an ethnic consciousness among the professional elites, at exactly the moment when the intellectuals are beginning to explore the historic roots of the community.<sup>10</sup>

Besides the establishment of a branch office in Wallaga, the other major achievement of the association in 1966 was the establishment of a branch office in Hararghie. It was Qanzmach Abdul Aziz Mohammed, a prominent member of the Ethiopian parliament, who played a crucial role in the establishment of the Hararghie branch, which was chaired by Major General Abeba Gamada, the Commander of the Third Division stationed in the city of Harar. The secretary of this branch was Colonel Hailu Regassa. Major Teka Tullu and Captain Debela Dinsa (Dhinsa) were among many members of Hararghie's branch office. Interestingly, the author failed to emphasize the following facts. First, Major General Abeba Gamada was among Haile Selassie's top officials who were massacred by the military regime in December 1974. Colonel Hailu Regassa and General Tadesse Birru were executed by the same regime in 1975. Also, Qanzmach Abdul Aziz Mohammed was executed by the same regime. Ironically, Teka Tullu and Debela Dhinsa were prominent members of the military regime that decimated so many members of the association. Let us continue with the rest of the history of the association.

In fact, before the end of 1986, the association had already established branch offices throughout Oromia and beyond. It was Tesfaye Digaga who established the association's branch office in Sidamo province. Abba Biya Abba Jobir and Dr. Moga Firissa established the Jimma branch office. Abera Yemer established the Wallo branch office. Shaykh Hussein Sura and Haji Adam Sado established the Bale branch office. Dr. Jamal Abdul Qadir and others established the branch office in the Illu Babor province. In July 1966, Zewga Bojia and his brothers organized a large gathering in the district of Jebat and Matcha. Like so many other members of the association, Zewga Bojia was also executed by the military regime.

Chapter four, which reflects the political maturity of the leaders of the association, deals with the efforts to unite the oppressed nationalities of Ethiopia against their common oppressors. Hence national oppression became the tie that bound together the oppressed peoples of southern Ethiopia (p. 75). The Matcha-Tulama Association provided an organizational framework, not only to unite the oppressed nationalities, but also to end national oppression in Ethiopia. Consequently, membership within the association was open to all. This was both a strength and a weakness of the association. It was a strength because the association became the first organization to unite the oppressed nationalities of southern Ethiopia, who, like the Oromo, were subjected to economic exploitation, political oppression, and cultural domination. It was a weakness because open membership provided a Trojan horse for the security agents of Haile Selassie's regime to infiltrate the association and to expose it to destruction (see below). Many Oromo and non-Oromo members of the Ethiopian Parliament were active members of the association. They were instrumental in establishing parliamentary caucuses and in popularizing the association. In other words, the leaders of the association recruited members from the Ethiopian bureaucracy, the parliament, the military, the police force, the university, and the media. They also recruited members from among the oppressed nationalities of southern Ethiopia.

Among the non-Oromo members of the Ethiopian Parliament, the following individuals were active members of the association. These were: (1) Mamo Komecha, the representative of the Gedewo people; (2) **Fitwarari** Abayenh Fano, the representative of the Gamo people; (3) Mulu Meja, the representative of Waleyeta people; (4) Wolde Amanuel Dubale, the representative of the Sidama people; (5) **Fitwarari** Ketta, the representative of the Gamo people; (6) **Grazmach** Bogale Walalu, a member of the upper House of the Parliament (i.e. Senate); (7) **Qanzmach** Gebre Oddo, the representative of the Gimira people; (8) **Qanzmach** Eretam Erecha, the representative of the Gamo district people; (9) **Balambras** Basha Gudo, the representative of Kulo Konta people; (10) Kebede Borena, the representative of Haiqoch and Butajira

people; (11) Obsee Barqo, from Gedewso; (12) Qanzmach Haile Donomor, from Mocha; and (13) Dajazmach Abdurahman Ojallo, from Bella Shangul. Many individuals from Adare, Afar and Issa, actively participated in the association (pp. 75-77). In short, there were 26 non-Oromo individuals who held responsible positions within the various committees of the association. This demonstrates that the association had broad support among and trust of the elites of the oppressed nationalities of Southern Ethiopia which it mobilized against collective national oppression.

The association attracted not only the members of the parliament, high ranking military and civilian officials, and wealthy traditional leaders, but also Haile Selassie I University students. They included Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir, Barro Tumsa, Ibssa Gutama, Yohannes Leta, Mekonnen Galan and many others. Except for Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir, who was martyred in 1968 (see below), the rest were the founding members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in early 1974. Many university students who were members of the association are not mentioned in the book, including Taha Ali Abdi, a founding member of the Oromo Liberation Front. This means the OLF leaders were the product of the Matcha-Tulama Association itself (see below).

Chapter five, titled "The Heat," depicts governmental power used to destroy the association. In late 1966, the government passed new laws which undermined the association's activities and were used as a legal cover for the destruction of the association. The association planned to organize a mass meeting on October 15, 1966 in the town of Dheera in the Arsi province. Dajazmach Sahelu Dufayee, who was alarmed by the rapid spread of the association's activities, ordered the organizers not to hold the meeting. The organizers, led by the militant nationalist Haji Robale Ture, defied the order although they were immediately detained. Their imprisonment galvanized the people, and what was supposed to be a meeting for discussion about development activity was transformed into a challenge against government policy toward the Oromo. The meeting attracted tens of thousands of Oromo peasants. It also attracted the leaders of the association from Addis Abeba, including General Tadesse

Birru, General Dawit Abdi, Dazamach Kebede Buzensh, Dr. Moga Firrisa, Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir and many others. In his speech to the gathering, General Tadesse Birru told the people to expect nothing good from the Amhara rulers and to depend on themselves to protect and safeguard their association.

He warned them that government officials may take drastic action against the association and its leaders.<sup>11</sup> His prophetic warning became a reality, the same day when the governor's agents fired on those who were returning home from the meeting, killing a woman and wounding two other individuals (p. 114). Many leaders of the association in Arsi were arrested. The Amhara leaders of Arsi immediately embarked on poisonous anti-Oromo propaganda, even claiming that the Oromo were "aliens" who came from Kenya, to which they have to be returned (p. 114). To those who have some knowledge of Ethiopian history, the threat of Oromo expulsion from historical Abyssinia is not new. It was attempted by both Emperors Tewodros (1855-68) and Yohannes (1872-89). What was new in 1966 was the fact that eighty years after the Oromo were conquered and incorporated into the Ethiopian empire, they were still considered by The Amhara ruling elites as "aliens" who had to be frightened into submission by the threat of expulsion! Such insensitivity and callous disregard for Oromo feeling and national dignity not only angered the leaders of the association, but also changed their attitudes towards the Emperor who refused to heed their plea for justice. Up to this point, the leaders of the association remained loyal to the Emperor. For them, the Emperor was not part of the conspiracy to destroy the association and its leaders.

However, when the Emperor refused to stop governmental attacks on the association, the association leaders' loyalty to the Emperor, especially that of General Tadesse Birru, melted away. For the first time, the unthinkable—the idea of physical elimination of the Emperor—started taking shape in the mind of General Tadesse Birru. The Emperor knew General Tadesse's state of mind through his planted agents in the movement and put all the leaders of the association under constant observation by secret service men. It soon became obvious for

the leaders that the government planned to destroy their association. Then and there, General Tadesse Birru's major weaknesses, i.e., impatience, impulsive behavior, lack of foresight and preparation, and rashness to take action without considering its consequences,<sup>12</sup>

Although the leaders of the association kept regular secret contact with the leaders of the armed resistance in the Oromo region of Bale, (see below) they did not plan to conduct their own armed struggle. Confronted with an imminent attack on their association, they reactively decided to rely on the men-in-uniform (who were members of the association), for attacking the Emperor and capturing state power. In early November 1966, the threat to the life of Tadesse Birru became very clear. The life of the General and the survival of the association had to be assured either through appeal to the Emperor or through an attempt on his life. Appeal they did, but they did not prepare themselves adequately for the attack on the Emperor. Sadly the association that focused on economic development activities and political awareness campaigns did not develop any effective military strategy. This was its major weakness (p. 296). Yet General Tadesse Birru proceeded with his rash, unplanned, and not carefully thought-out plot to organize the assassination of the Emperor.

For that purpose, a hastily prepared meeting was held at General Tadesse's residence on the evening of November 2, 1966. Those who participated in that fateful meeting included the host, **Dajazmach Kebede Buzensh**, **Dajazmach Daniel Abeba** (the grandson of Ras Gobana), Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir, Tesfayee Degaga, Bekle Makonnen, Dr. Moga Firissa, Ketema Yefru, (the future Ethiopian Foreign Minister) and many soldiers. It is impossible to understand why General Tadesse Birru included Ketema Yefru, the godson of the Emperor, in that plot. Either the General was too trusting, or naive, or both. Ketema Yefru, a leading member of the Amhara ruling elite, was probably a planted agent at the highest level of the association. Ketema Yefru had nothing to gain by participating in the plot to assassinate the Emperor. He had everything to gain by betraying the trust which Tadesse Birru placed in him. Of all individuals who participated in the meeting of November 2,

1966, only Ketema Yefru remained on best terms both with the Emperor and the Ethiopian Prime Minister. This means Ketema Yefru not only escaped punishment but also was promoted to Foreign Minister, the post he held until the end of Haile Selassie's reign in 1974! Be that as it may, those who met at General Tadesse Birru's residence discussed the course of action to be taken and planned to attack the Emperor, while he was enroute to St. Georgis Church in Addis Abeba. In fact, at the hastily called meeting, only one issue -- the attack on the Emperor -- was discussed. There was no fall back plan if the attack failed to materialize. The Emperor was to be assassinated on November 3, 1966, on the thirty-sixth, the celebration of his coronation! Preparation for this event lasted only a few hours, weapons were distributed, and a soldier who was to throw the first hand grenade at the Emperor was hand picked by General Tadesse Birru, whose goal was to seize state power in the confusion that would follow the Emperor's assassination. In other words, Tadesse Birru aspired to replace the Emperor, declare a republic, and become its first leader. However, the plot was poorly, openly, hastily and carelessly planned. The government's security men not only knew what was plotted but also detained those who were returning home with weapons in their hands! The key planted agent within the top leadership of the association helped the government to easily foil the planned attack on the Emperor (pp. 122-23). The plot was a disastrous failure!

Although **Dazamach** Kebede Buzunsh and General Tadesse Birru rebelled, through the intervention and promise of pardon by Princess Tenagne Worq, the Emperor's favorite daughter, and Abuna Tewoflows, the patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, they were given a temporary pardon. **Dajazmach** Kebede Buzunsh was the first to receive a full pardon from the Emperor. General Tadesse Birru followed suit a few days later. In the presence of Princess Tenagne Worq, the Patriarch, Major General Asafa Demissie, the Emperor's personal bodyguard, **Dajazmach** Kebede Buzunesh, and **Dajazmach** Kifle Ergetu, the Emperor greeted General Tadesse Birru with these words: "I pardon you for what you consciously or unconsciously did" and ordered him to return to his job (p. 132). The unsuspecting General

thanked the Emperor and went home believing that he was forgiven and his plot forgotten.

General Tadesse Birru lacked the cunning and political acumen of Emperor Haile Selassie, whose regime always prepared traps for its enemies and fabricated evidence for their punishment (p. 193). On occasions, the Emperor's security men arranged for the death of his enemy. Once the enemy was eliminated, the Emperor posthumously promoted his victim, who was then buried with great fanfare at the Trinity Church Cemetery, the burial place for great patriots and well known dignitaries! (pp. 190-92). General Tadesse Birru had neither the information about what was planned for him nor the farsightedness to suspect that the pardon was a ruse, a time-buying device, intended to diffuse tension, disarm and imprison the prominent leaders of the association.

Chapter six deals with Byzantine imperial politics. The irony of promise and betrayal at Haile Selassie's palace is captured in the Amharic aphorism, "Even if the Sky Comes Down, the King's Word (promise) Can Not be Altered." Pardon was given to Tadesse Birru, but it was altered as easily as it was given. It soon became apparent that Emperor Haile Selassie pardoned General Tadesse Birru precisely because he wanted to avoid embarrassment while a meeting of the Organization of African Unity was taking place. This was followed by a state visit by the President of Czechoslovakia. Once those events were completed without incident, it was time to launch poisonous propaganda against the organization, arrest its leaders and destroy its legal existence. The government claimed that the association planted an explosive at the Cinema Hall in Addis Abeba. The explosive was planted by the government security men, one of whom lost his hand while planting it. No one was killed in the explosion although there were 654 individuals in the Cinema Hall at the time! A few days after the explosion, Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir was arrested and blamed by the government for causing the explosion (138-48). Mamo was taken to the Cinema Hall and photographed ten days after the explosion. After he was tortured day and night, he signed a forced confession (p. 161) that became a

pretext for arresting the leaders of the association. General Tadesse Birru was surrounded in his house by 35 to 40 policemen and ordered to surrender. He refused and fought bravely. He was not a wise politician, but he was a brave soldier. He broke out of the encirclement, killing two and wounding others (p. 153). He escaped to the rural area and rebelled for the second time. His second rebellion was as unplanned as the first one and even worse. He was unaware that his second rebellion was doomed from the beginning. He seemed to have expected a miracle, (wide spread support for his cause, which never materialized) and if no miracle occurred, he was ready to accept the ultimate sacrifice. In other words, his second rebellion was a reactive response to the government's attempt to arrest him. He was alone. He was punished by hunger and exposed to dangerous elements. As if that were not enough, he fell into a ditch and broke his left leg.

General Tadesse Birru attempted to recuperate in the house of an Oromo peasant called Abba Jifar Waqayo, who seemed to have compared the current miserable condition of the General with the power and majesty of Emperor Haile Selassie. Probably attracted by the promise of an \$8,000 Ethiopian bir reward (p. 288), he betrayed the General for the cause of the Emperor. By betraying General Tadesse Birru, and taking blood money, Abba Jifar Waqayo's name will remain in infamy in Oromo history (p. 171). Betrayed by the man who was supposed to nurse him, General Tadesse Birru was overpowered, disarmed and captured. His arrival in Addis Abeba as a prisoner closed this short chapter on his attempt to overthrow Emperor Haile Selassie. It was the saddest episode, into which he was provoked without any preparation, and those who planned his destruction and that of the association were delighted with their easy victory over what they termed "destroying The Pagan Movement in its Infancy" (p. 172). Those who captured Tadesse Birru were immediately rewarded. Captain Gebeyhu Dube was promoted to the rank of major, and Hamsa Alaqa Mahari Maasho was promoted to the rank of lieutenant (p. 290). Those who spearheaded the arrest of the leaders and the destruction of the association were rewarded, too. Those who were rewarded include

**Dajzmach Kifle Eregetu**, who was appointed Minister of the Interior; **Major General Deresse Dubule**, in charge of the Security Department; and **Major General Yelema Shebeshi**, who was appointed police commissioner (p. 289).

Chapters seven through ten deal with the trials of prisoners, mockery of the Ethiopian justice system, the punishment that was inflicted on the leaders of the association, the destruction of the association and the role of **Mamo Mazamir** within the association. After their arrest, the association's leaders were imprisoned in separate cells for the purpose of spreading misinformation among them, inspiring betrayal and turning the isolated prisoners against one another; however, that strategy did not work. Despite promises of immediate release from prison, of monetary rewards, and of ambassadorial appointments, no one agreed to testify against other association leaders. The prisoners maintained remarkable unity, despite inhuman torture, the prospect of life imprisonment and the possibility of death sentence. What spirit was it that moved them to accept incredible sufferings, long imprisonment and possible loss of life itself? Without a doubt, it was their firm commitment to the objectives for which the association was formed and their political awakening that propelled these leaders to a new historical stage of defying Ethiopian authorities even in the face of death. By so doing, they have become the symbol of courage and heroism which still motivates thousands of men and women through the hills, valleys, gorges, and forests of Oromia. Their sacrifices became their strength, a measure of their worth as leaders. The secret of Oromo nationalism made the Oromo politics of the 1960s radically different from the situation of the 1880s, when countrywide Oromo national awareness did not exist. It took eighty years for Oromo political consciousness to develop and this, more than anything else, is a testament to the crude nature of Abyssinian colonialism in Oromia.

Chapter seven deals with the trial of the prisoners. Three civilian and two military officers (Major Generals **Shiferaw Tesema** and **Wolde Tsedeq Gebre Meskel**) were hand picked by the government to preside over the trials of the leaders of the association. Fourteen

prominent leaders of the association including General Tadesse Birru, Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir, Qanzmach Mokonnen Wasanu, Haile Mariam Gameda, Colonel Alemu Qietessa, and General Dawit Abdi were brought to court in Addis Abeba, while the case of seven members of the association was handled in the province of Arsi (224-5).

The government brought 81 witnesses against the leaders of the association, although their fate was decided upon even before their case was brought to court. This means the court was used as a legal cover to destroy the association (pp. 225, 251). In this court drama, which was intended as a public relations exercise, the government security agents were the prosecutors of the plaintiffs and the witnesses (p. 256). Also, they were the torturers who mercilessly brutalized and dehumanized the imprisoned leaders of the Association. Not a single leader of the association escaped excruciating torture. Among those who were most severely tortured and crippled was Haile Mariam Gamada, accused by Emperor Haile Selassie of being the organizing genius behind the Matcha-Tulama Association (p. 401). For his trial, Haile Mariam Gamada was brought to court on a stretcher! Although he was permitted to receive medical treatment because of Prince Ras Imru's appeal to the Emperor, Haile Mariam Gamada died within a week after being admitted to a hospital. When he was transferred from his prison cell to a hospital, Haile Mariam Gamada, said farewell to his comrades-in-arms with these words: "Neither the imprisonment and killing of the leaders nor banning the association will deter the nation's struggle [for freedom]. What we did [through our activities] is like a snake that entered a stomach. Whether it is pulled out or left there, the result is one and the same. It has spread its poison" (p. 297).

In other words, Haile Mariam Gamada told his friends that through the activities of the association they spread poison in the body-politics of the Ethiopian state. The said poison was a metaphor for Oromo nationalism, which is challenging the Ethiopian state. Haile Mariam Gamada went on to say " I am exhausted. I feel I am on the verge of death. I do not expect to recover. So this is my last farewell to you. Whether we die or not, our ideas [about the freedom of the

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Oromo] will be realized by our children or grandchildren" (p. 402). He died a few days later calmly and with confidence that he did not die in vain. In his defense, General Tadesse Birru argued that:

What makes the freedom of a people complete are many, the most fundamental of which is their equality before the law. I am denied equality before the law because of my nationality. Officers, who were imprisoned before me were paid their salary until their case was decided in court. Because of my nationality, I am treated differently. What is more, other officers were neither disgraced, nor tortured, while in police custody. Why am I disgraced and severely tortured? Spreading literacy among the Oromo, who are left behind in terms of education became my crime. I have been the victim of national oppression. I have been wrongly accused of things I did not do (pp. 257-58).

The court never considered General Tadesse Birru's argument in its deliberation. On the contrary, the court sentenced General Tadesse Birru and Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir to death (p. 261). General Dawit Abdi received a disgraceful discharge from the military and ten years imprisonment. Colonel Alemu Qietessa faced the same fate. Others received sentences from seven to ten years of imprisonment. Even those who refused to testify against their comrades were sentenced to ten years. This was the Ethiopian justice at its best! (p. 276)

Those who were instrumental in sentencing the leaders of the association either to death or to long term imprisonment were given "gifts" of money, land or promotion. The gift was blood money for punishing the innocent and destroying a legally established association. For instance Dajazmach Kifle Ergetu, the Minister of the Interior was given 200 gashas (200 x 40 hectares) of prime land from Gamu Gofa province and 15 gashas from Kaffa province. Major General Dresse Dubale, Minister of Security was given 30 gashas of prime land in the

Awash River Valley. Wag Siyoum Wasen Haile was appointed Ethiopia's ambassador to the Kingdom of Jordan for spying on the family members of the imprisoned leaders. One of the civilian judges who sentenced the leaders of the association, namely Agafari Schelu, (p. 289) was promoted to the rank of **Fitawarari**.

Although Emperor Haile Selassie changed General Tadesse's death sentence into life imprisonment, Mamo Mazamir was hung in Addis Abeba prison in 1969, thus becoming a great martyr to the Oromo cause. His final words still resonate with the new generation of nationalist Oromo:

I do not die in vain. My blood will water the freedom struggle of the Oromo people. I am certain that those who sentenced me to death for things I did not do, including the emperor and his officials, will receive their due punishment from the Ethiopian people. It may be delayed, but the inalienable rights of the Oromo people will be restored by the blood of their children (p. 278).

Mamo Mazamir was hung for three reasons all of which make him one of the most militant fathers of Oromo nationalism. First Mamo produced a draft of the "History of the Oromo" which was confiscated and destroyed by the government security men. Mamo realized the degree to which Oromo history was distorted in Ethiopian historiography. It was that distortion which became one of the arsenals for disparaging Oromo culture and undermining Oromo national identity. Mamo, like Haile Mariam Gamada rejected Ethiopian historiography. For Mamo, what is presented as Ethiopian history and taught in the school is the history of the Amhara and Tigray ruling elites, who perpetuated the stereotype images of the Oromo. Thus, Mamo made the writing of Oromo history not only the precondition for correcting the distorted image of Oromo history, but also the ideological battleground for the Matcha-Tulama Association. In addition to this, the draft document, which Mamo prepared, included a plan for a new

government, and a blueprint for a new constitution that would abolish tenancy (p. 249). This was too much for the Amhara ruling elites.

Secondly, Mamo Mazamir was an exceptionally gifted individual who had tremendous organizational skills and boundless energy. His command of both oral and written Oromo, Amharic, and English was remarkable. At the time when a number of the leaders of the association could not speak in the Oromo language, Mamo produced poems that brought tears of joy to the audience. He was an orator who attracted the Oromo youth to the movement. Most of all, Mamo was responsible for writing short plays in the Oromo language that were shown during the Matcha-Tulama Association gatherings. His short plays depicted that Oromo labor and Oromo wealth sustained the Amhara ruling elites, who imposed vicious tyranny on the oppressed people of Ethiopia. Through his fierce oratory, poems, and short plays he moved the Oromo to tears of anger against the Ethiopian system. He made the Oromo conscious of their deprivation and the distortion of their history, and urged them to be agents of their own liberation. He was the moving spirit of Oromo political consciousness that had to be crushed by the Amhara ruling elite sooner than later. His hanging represents the attempts of the Ethiopian ruling elite to suppress the Oromo political awakening.

Thirdly, and equally important, Mamo Mazamir was a highly educated and a well-read revolutionary, who was probably the only communist within the leadership of the association (p. 428). He was instrumental in establishing an organizational link between the association and the Oromo armed struggle in the region of Bale. He wrote a letter on September 10, 1965, to the leaders of the armed struggle:

The history of mankind shows that a people who rise in the struggle for freedom and independence, in defiance of death, is always victorious.... The life and death struggle of the oppressed masses in the Ethiopian Empire against the hegemony of the Amhara and their allies headed by American imperialism is a sacred liberation struggle of millions of oppressed and humiliated

people.... That struggle will surely intensify in the course of time as the oppressed people's organizational means and consciousness become deeply rooted. As you learnt in our discussions, the Macha and Tulama democratic movements, which was created to raise the consciousness of the Oromo people, is the present concrete situation is working day and night to put in hand coordination activities that are within our reach. In fact, the militant members are working now on the means of organizing a nationwide people's movement which is based on realizing the aspirations of Oromo people as a whole. Please, keep up your heroic armed struggle, defending every inch of the Oromo Nation to the last drop of your blood. The decisive war of resistance you are conducting in Bale will, despite the maneuvers of imperialism, zionism and local reaction, be victorious. We shall continue doing everything we can to keep in touch with you.<sup>13</sup>

This letter shows that the leaders of the association and the leaders of the armed struggle in Bale discussed how to coordinate their joint efforts. There were similar meetings and an exchange of letters up to October 1967 (p. 167). The link between the two movements intensified at the time when the association was radicalized and the armed struggle had already liberated as much as 75% of the province of Bale from the Ethiopian administration. The radicalization of the association, and the success of the armed struggle in Bale, alarmed the Amhara ruling elite "and the thought of the two in combination" became their nightmare. Hanging Mamo Mazamir was part of the strategy for dealing with that nightmare.

Interestingly, those who witnessed Mamo's hanging in prison included the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Aklilu Habte Wolde, who did so much to destroy General Tadesse Birru and the Matcha-Tulama Association. Other top government officials who witnessed that dreadful

event were the Prime Minister's brother, Akele Woreq Habte Wolde; **Dajazmach** Sahelu Dufaye, the governor of Arsi; **Dajazmach** Kefle Eregatu, the Minister of Interior; Major General Deresse Dubale, Minister of Security; Major General Yelma Shehashi, Police Commissioner; and others (p. 278). It is a remarkable irony of history, that these very officials who glorified over the hanging of Mamo Mazamir in 1969 were massacred in the same prison in December 1974 and buried in a mass grave! Today they belong to the dust bin of history conveniently condemned and forgotten even by what is left of the Amhara ruling elite. Mamo did not die in vain. Today he is a great hero, the ultimate symbol of courage and the source of inspiration for millions of Oromo youth. The Oromo political consciousness for which he gave his life has now become a mass movement all over Oromia.

Chapters eleven through thirteen deal with some of the major achievements of the association, the contribution of the underground Oromo movement to the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974, and what is to be done for creating a better country for the well-being of all the peoples of Ethiopia.

After General Tadesse Birru was transferred to serve his life-imprisonment in Galamso, Hararghie, he secretly contacted Oromo elders in the region and encouraged them to prepare the people for armed struggle (pp. 297-98). His imprisonment in Galamso left the Oromo of the region an invaluable legacy. Not only did it make him the rallying symbol of Oromo nationalism, but it also created a revolutionary tradition in the region. The roots of this tradition were planted deep in the soil of the Chercher highlands, giving birth to the formation of the first small guerrilla army, led by the gallant Elemu Qiltu.

After the Matcha-Tulama Association was banned in 1967, some of its members fled to Somalia where they started organizing themselves against the imperial regime. Others like Ejeta Fayissa fled to the Sudan, where he formed the branch of the association (pp. 298-99). He returned to Ethiopia in 1974, after Haile Selassie's regime was overthrown, but he was captured and imprisoned for ten years by the military regime. He died shortly after his release from prison. The militant members of

the association who remained behind in Addis Abeba transformed the banned association into an underground movement, which organized members into study circles and cultural committees. For political agitation the leaders of the underground movement produced literature in Afaan Oromo, English and Amharic. Among the underground papers, **The Oromos: Voice Against Tyranny** and *Kana Beekta* played a measurable role in exposing the oppressive nature of successive Ethiopian regimes. *Voice* in particular aired a clear-cut political message. It called on the Oromos and other oppressed peoples to form a united front against their common oppressors. In its May 1971 issue, *Voice* had the following message on the question of a united front:

... for an Oromo worthy of the name, ... there is one and only one way to dignity, security, liberty and freedom. That single and sure way is to hold a common front against his oppressors and their instruments of subjugation. In this, he is ready and willing to join hands in the spirit of brotherhood, equality and mutual respect, with oppressed nationalities and all persons and institutions of goodwill, he is equally ready and prepared to pay any sacrifice and oppose any person or groups that in any way hinder his mission for liberation from all forms of oppression and subjugation. An Oromo has no empire to build but a mission to break an imperial yoke, that makes this mission sacred and his sacrifices never too dear.<sup>14</sup>

Haile Selassie's regime accused the leaders of the association of plotting to dismember Ethiopia. It was on the banner of "protecting the territorial integrity of Ethiopia" that the first pan-Oromo movement was destroyed and its leaders cruelly punished. However from the book, there is nothing to indicate that the leaders of the association even distantly intended the dismembering of Ethiopia. Probably martyred

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heroes such as Mamo Mazamir, Haile Mariam Gamada and, later General Tadesse Birru, General Abeba Gamada, Colonel Hailu Regassa, **Qanzmach** Abdel Aziz Mohammed, Zewga Bojia and others never entertained the idea of breaking up Ethiopia. All they struggled and died for was the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Oromo people.

The issue was persistently confused by the Amhara ruling class which looks upon any genuine struggle for the inalienable rights and equality of peoples as a dagger aimed at its privileges. Indeed, this is true. If there was equality among all the peoples of Ethiopia, there would be no room for the colonial caste that now dominates the political, cultural and social scene in Ethiopia. Behind the banner of defending and protecting the "territorial integrity" of Ethiopia, the Amhara ruling class has not only continued to confuse the real issue in Ethiopia but has managed to internationalize the issue of its own survival and privileges.<sup>15</sup>

Among the members of the Matcha-Tulama underground movement, the brothers Rev. Gudina Tumsa and Barro Tumsa played a remarkable role in keeping alive the spirit of resistance (pp. 300-301). They both gave their lives for the Oromo cause. In fact, Barro Tumsa was not only the moving spirit of the underground movement but he was also instrumental in the formation of the Oromo Liberation Front in early 1974. Under his leadership, the underground movement contributed to the overthrow of Haile Selassie's regime in 1974 in four major ways. First, its members effectively used the media, thus exposing the tyranny of the Haile Selassie regime. Secondly, its parliamentary members in the Ethiopian parliament regularly challenged many of the regime's policies. Thirdly, its members conducted agitation among the university and high school students. Fourthly, and most importantly, the underground members of the military and police forces played a role in the formation of the military junta that overthrew the Emperor in September 1974 (pp.

301-302). According to Olana Zoga, the main achievements of the association follow: (1) it created political awareness among the Oromo; (2) it united the Oromo across regional and religious divides; (3) it undermined the importance of the crown, the symbol of Amhara ethnic supremacy; (4) it exposed the Amhara ruling elite's policy of "divide and destroy"; (5) it demonstrated that Oromo traitors have always worked against the fundamental interests of their people; (6) and (7) it established a clear connection between the Oromo struggle for freedom and the struggle for democracy in Ethiopia (pp. 315-316, 320-321).

One interesting point discussed in the book is the grotesque distortion of Oromo history in Ethiopian historiography. The author mentions a number of writers, both Ethiopians and foreigners, who are guilty of making the Oromo a people without history. In particular, the author singles out Tesfaye Mekonnen for disfiguring and distorting Oromo history (p. 335). The author also indicted Harold Marcus on four grounds. First, according to the author, Marcus writes about events and personalities that are known without making any fresh and original contribution to Ethiopian history. Second, for Marcus, Ethiopian history is the history of the Abyssinian kings, thus making most of the peoples of the country without history. Third, Marcus' view of Ethiopian history is colored by his own political prejudice against the Oromo. Finally, according to the author, Marcus points an accusing finger at the Oromo for what happened in Ethiopia in 1991/1992 (pp. 361, 367). The author goes on to say that the present Ethiopian generation must be free from not only historical distortion, which adds fuel to the fire of conflict, but also from the political ideology that promotes the hegemony of the Amhara or Tigray elites and the superiority of the Amhara language and culture (p. 322).

In the final chapter, the author discusses the individual history of 22 leaders of the Matcha-Tulama Association, of which only the history of Colonel Alemu Qietessa, Haile Mariam Gamada, and General Tadesse Birru will be summarized below. Colonel Alemu Qietessa, a founding member and still president of the Matcha-Tulama Association, was born in 1914 in Jeldu Shawa province. He joined the imperial body-

guard in 1934 and fought against the invading Italian force in 1935. Then he joined the resistance force and after Emperor Haile Selassie was restored to power in 1941, he received modern military training and served in the military establishment for many years. He is a man who endured pain and sorrow in the Oromo national struggle for freedom (pp. 387-92). He is a gifted orator, an able leader, and a man with wide experience.

This remarkable leader is the symbol and the spirit of Oromo nationalism. He, himself, is the living [history]. His knowledge of the Oromo language, the power and beauty of his words, the depth of his ideas, the clarity of his thought and the logic of his argument, all make him a remarkable historian who is a living hero, the legend in his own time. He has a particular way of using words, interspersed with proverbs. He can make you laugh and feel proud one moment and cry and feel sad the next.<sup>16</sup>

Haile Mariam Gamada was born to a peasant Oromo family in Jedda Wereda (subdistrict), Shawa province, in 1915. He was a secondary school student when the Italian fascist forces invaded Ethiopia in 1935. He joined the resistance force under the leadership of Ras Abeba Aregay, the grandson of Ras Gobana. He was captured as a prisoner of war by the Italians, then exiled and imprisoned in Somalia for three years. After Ethiopia was "liberated" in 1941, he returned to the country and worked in the Ministry of Labor in Shawa, Tigrai, Hararghie, Kaffa, Illu Babor, Bale, Arsi and Sidamo. He travelled extensively all over the Oromo country and gathered information on Oromo history, traditions, customs, and political organizations. He was an intelligent observer, a keen learner and an avid reader, all of which made him a leading authority on Oromo history. Later on, he also received legal training at the Haile Selassie University. He made selfless efforts to free the Oromo from national oppression (pp. 398-402).

General Tadesse Birru was born into a deeply religious family in Salale, Shawa province. As a young man, he received an Orthodox church education. His father, Birru, was killed by poison gas while fighting against the invading Italian forces in 1935. His mother died within three months after the death of her husband. Tadesse joined his uncle, **Balambaras Beka**, who was one of the resistance leaders in Shawa province. He was captured as a prisoner of war, exiled to Somalia, and sentenced to life imprisonment in Mogadisho. When Mogadisho fell under British control in 1940, Tadesse was freed and recruited into the British force. He was given military training in Mombasa, Kenya and returned to Ethiopia to fight against the Italian forces. He was promoted to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant in 1942 and served in Hararghie province. Later on, he received advanced military training at the Haile Sellassie military training school in Holota, where he served as instructor. By 1955, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and transferred from the military to the police force. He established Rapid Force, the elite riot battalion. He earned fame and respect for his mastery of military science. He trained many of the best Ethiopian officers. Emperor Haile Selassie entrusted to him the training of a number of leaders of liberation movements in Africa, including Nelson Mandela of South Africa. In his recently published book, President Nelson Mandela acknowledges Tadessee Birru as the man under whose guidance he received his first military training in the early 1960s. In his own words,

I was lectured on military science by Colonel Tadesse who was also Assistant Commissioner of police . . . . In my study sessions, Colonel Tadesse discussed matters such as how to create a guerrilla force, how to command an army, and how to enforce discipline.<sup>17</sup>

After his return to South Africa, Nelson Mandela created **Umkhonto we Sizwe**, the spear of the nation, a new liberation army on the basis of "the art and science of soldiering"<sup>18</sup> which he received under Colonel

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Taddesse Birru. It is the irony of history that Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1963 by the Apartheid Regime of South Africa, while Taddesse Birru, too, was sentenced to life imprisonment by the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie. While Nelson Mandela lived to see his release from prison after twenty-seven years, to become the first democratically elected Black president of South Africa, Taddesse Birru, who struggled for the freedom and equality of the Oromo was executed without any due process of law and buried in a mass grave!

This, more than anything else, reflects the sad reality of the Oromo situation in Ethiopia, and the impunity with which their leaders are decimated! In this respect since the colonization of Oromia in the 1880s, from the time of Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-89) up to the times of Meles Zenawi (now,) Ethiopia has failed to produce a single government that did not destroy Oromo organizations, a single government that did not kill Oromo leaders, a single government that did not plunder Oromo property, a single government that did not abuse the human and democratic rights of the Oromo, a single government that did not slaughter innocent Oromo, a single government that did not divide the Oromo and turn them against each other, a single government that did not attempt to destroy the Oromo identity, a single government that respected Oromo national dignity, a single government that did not destroy Oromo institutions, and above all a single government that did not monopolize political and military power for the purpose of perpetuating colonial status quo in Oromia! This means that in Ethiopia governments have changed, leaders have changed. But the economic exploitation, political domination, and military subjugation of the Oromo, or the colonial status-quo of Oromia, remain constant. To end colonialism and create a free and independent Oromia are the ultimate goals of Oromo nationalism. Although it has not yet achieved its ultimate goals, the Oromo nationalism which the Matcha-Tulama Association created "has fundamentally altered the Oromo perception of themselves and how they are perceived by others."<sup>19</sup> Today the Oromo are free in their mind, soul, and spirit. Those who torment the Oromo

now must realize that they will never be able to kill the spirit of freedom, the love and yearning for self-determination that now reside in the Oromo nation. "Because of their numbers, geographical position and rich natural resources of Oromia, the Oromo are destined to play an important role in the future of the Horn of Africa. Consequently, Ethiopians should make an earnest effort to understand the reasons for and come to terms with the Oromo quest for self-determination."<sup>20</sup>

## NOTES

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 576.
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5. *Karaa Walabummaa: Information Bulletin of the Union of Oromo Students in Europe*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1983 : 5.
6. Mekuria Bulcha, "The Language Policies of Ethiopian Regimes and the History of Written Afaan Oromo: 1844-1994," *The Journal of Oromo Studies* Vol. I, No. 2 (Winter 1994): 99-100.
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8. John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987: 260
9. Mekuria Bulcha, *Ibid.*, 104.
10. Anthony D. Smith, "Nationalism, Ethnic Separatism and the Intelligentsia," in *National Separation* (ed.) by Colin H. Williams, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982): 31.
11. *Karaa Walabummaa, Ibid.*, 7.
12. These were the words of Colonel Alemu Qietessa, in his presentation on the "History of the Matcha-Tulama Association" at the 1995 Oromo Studies Association Conference, Washington, D.C., July 24, 1995.
13. Cited by Maneuver Tullu in "The Bale Oromos' Armed Struggle, 1963-1970: A Basic Lesson for the Oromo National Liberation Movement," *Saba Oromo: The Journal of the Oromo Students in Britain*, Vol. I, No. 1 (1980): 25-26.

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14. "The Oromo: Voice Against Tyranny." 1980 *Horn of Africa*, Vol. 3, No. 3 1980, p. 23.
15. Mohammed Hassen and Richard Greenfield, *Ibid.*, p. 582.
16. *The Oromo Studies Association Newsletter*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (August-September) 1995
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18. *Ibid.*
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## BOOK REVIEW

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Tecola W. Hagos. **Democratization? Ethiopia (1991-1994): A Personal View.** Cambridge, MA: Khepera Publishers, 1995, 372 pp, price \$20.00.

The author of the book is a fascinating personality who comes from a Tigrayan feudal family. Through education and long years of exile in the West, Tecola W. Hagos has transformed and liberated himself from the debilitating cultural environment to which he was born. He was an activist in the Ethiopian Student Movement at Addis Abeba University in the 1960s. He is a lawyer by training, an artist by inclination, and he was part of the revolutionary current that toppled Emperor Haile Selassie's regime in 1974. He was among the first EPRP members to be imprisoned by the **Dergue** (the military junta) that decimated the ranks of revolutionary youth in the empire state of Ethiopia. After his release from prison, he lived in exile for seventeen years, studying and continuing with his revolutionary activities. He joined the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which created or manufactured the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Forces (EPRDF). In other words, Tecola W. Hagos, the author of **Democratization? Ethiopia (1991-1994): A Personal View**, was part of the TPLF/EPRDF Movement that defeated the Military Regime in May 1991 and established the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). Under the TGE, he was a special legal advisor to President Meles Zenawi, and he knew the inner workings of the TPLF regime. He is a man of courage and conviction who did not sell his soul for material comfort and a position of power. In his own words, "I resigned from the Transitional Government of Ethiopia because I believe the new Ethiopian leaders were attempting to change a popular movement into a manipulative self-serving political machine that was bound to end in disaster" (Preface v).

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What makes Tecola Hagos a remarkable author is his systematic documentation of the process by which the hope for a new beginning since 1991 was dashed, the experiment in democratization of the political process was aborted and sabotaged, and the attempt to solve conflict through peaceful negotiation was abandoned in favor of military victory by the TPLF/EPRDF, for the sole purpose of consolidating the undisputed ascendancy of Meles Zenawi, as the new dictator of Ethiopia. Since 1991, many have written about the TPLF/EPRDF and its leaders; however, no one has exposed, to the extent that Hagos does, the tunnel vision of the TPLF/EPRDF leaders, their manipulation of the political process, their viciousness in dealing with people who disagree with them, and the extent to which these leaders dehumanize the people, plunder the economy, and degenerate the country in order to remain in power.

What is tragic in all of this is the fact that Ethiopians have lost some of their greatest heroes to the gargantuan appetite of Leviathan--the monster of power. It is particularly painful for me to witness people like Meles Zenawi, whom I once admired and wished a great future and creative leadership, someone who could have been a great statesman, becoming a despot and sellout, leader of a degenerating liberation movement and collaborating with some of the worst opportunists and turncoats from the brutal government of Mengistu. The way a great liberation movement is dying is not with a colorful big bang, but rather a whimsical collapse like an edifice eaten from within by termites (p. 234).

Throughout the book, Tecola Hagos is indignant about the transformation of the TPLF/EPRDF army from being "fighters for freedom" to an instrument of state terrorism. This is absolutely true. However, the author forgot to add that the TPLF/EPRDF soldiers have been the weapons for destruction of those people who struggle for their own freedom and self-determination such as the Oromo nation. In fact,

his silence on the issue of the Oromo quest for self-determination is the weakest part (see below) of an otherwise remarkable book.

The book covers many interesting topics, including tragic dramas about the new Ethiopian "democracy" and its gross violation of human rights in Ethiopia with the backing of western governments, especially the government of the United States, and the new Ethiopian Constitution, which gave Meles Zenawi absolute power, placing him among the ranks of Ethiopian despots and tyrants, whose historic missions have been nothing but the destruction of human lives and material property. Tecola Hagos's book is the latest addition to the sickening tale of Ethiopian leaders, the tormentors of their subjects, who betray the country and the people at every twist and turn. Ethiopian despots, including those who currently preside over the destruction of our people, are the products of an Abyssinian feudal cultural species of humanity who always choose to make ".....their own personal advancement over and above the goals and aspirations of their followers and Ethiopians in general" (Preface VII).

Chapter one of the book deals with the author's world view and personal effort to understand the failed democratization process from 1991 to 1994. According to the author, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), which was formed by the TPLF/EPRDF and the OLF was based on the Transitional period Charter adopted on July 5, 1991. The Charter ".....laid down major human and political rights, principles and the organizational structure of the TGE" (pp. 1-2). The Transitional period was meant to establish the democratization process, so as to empower the people; however, the TPLF/EPRDF leaders used the Transitional period for the purpose of consolidating their own power. "What remained in power since 1991 is an illegitimate power structure, a reestablishment of feudalism and autocracy dressed in new symbols with the descendants of yesterday's feudal warlords as the main actors in this sickening Ethiopian political tragedy" (p. 5). The author went on to add the following indictment: "Ethiopia's feudal structure represents one of the worst structures of oppression in the world, and it was/is a system that gave birth to some of the most degenerate leaders who obstructed very much needed social, economic and political changes" (p. 5, f.n. 5).

Tecola Hagos establishes conclusively that the key leaders of the TPLF, such as Meles Zenawi, Sebehat Nega, Seyoum Mesfin, and Seye Abraha, are the direct descendants of the Tigrayan feudal warlords of earlier times. These individuals, who "...professed commitment to social revolution and to Marxism-Leninism ....just [as] a ploy skillfully used to mobilize the tens of thousands of sons and daughters of poor farmers" (p. 4) established their own dictatorship in the name of democracy. .... [In] their ambition and class interest they were light years removed from the people they claimed to represent" (p. 11).

From such insightful criticism of the TPLF/EPRDF leaders, the author moves to history and asserts that "Ethiopian civilization was sustained on the backs, sweat and blood, and the sacrifice of its citizens" (p. 20). The author forgot to add, however, that since their conquest during and after the 1880s, the Oromo sweat and blood sustained a parasitic Ethiopian feudal class.

Chapter two discusses the regional and/or federal structure. The author asserts that Ethiopia "... is not, as some would have us believe, a colonial nation" (p. 21). However, for the conquered Oromo, their colonial experience is still a living reality, which no amount of sophisticated argument can remove. Only the decolonization of Oromia and the self-determination of the Oromo will end the reality of Ethiopian colonialism in Oromia. The author asserts that "contrary to popular sentiment, the fact is that most Amharas and Tigreans suffered as much, if not more oppression, degradation and grinding poverty as the rest of the population at the hands of ruthless Amhara or Tigraei or Oromo despots" p. 27). No one denies that the Amhara and Tigrean peasants suffered grinding poverty and oppression at the hands of their feudal despots. They did not, however, suffer the fate of the Oromo, who were conquered and colonized, who lost their lands and became slaves and serfs in the land of their birth, who were dehumanized and treated as second class colonial subjects, who lost their human dignity and self-respect, whose culture, language, religious, and political institutions were exposed to unmitigated attack, who were abused, exploited, and insulted in all manners. These were people who once led an independent

existence. Ethiopian intellectuals, including Tecola Hagos, do not understand or seem not to understand what happened to the Oromo under successive Ethiopian regimes.

Tecola Hagos tells us that he once believed in the concept of self-determination "in its more expanded mode;" however, he no longer believes in it (p. 30). "The difficulty I am struggling with is that the idea of self-determination which I was able to justify easily in the context of the political situation in Ethiopia before 1991, is almost impossible to justify in the present political situation in Ethiopia unless I put the current government of Meles Zenawi in the same category with the last two autocratic and dictatorial governments" (p. 31). For the Oromo, Meles Zenawi's regime is as autocratic, terrorist, and dictatorial as the two previous regimes. The limited use of the Oromo language, in the media, in administration, and in education in Oromia, is not the gift from Meles's regime. Rather, it is the fruit of seventeen years of Oromo struggle against the previous military regime. In Meles Zenawi's regime, the Oromo are controlled as tightly as they were controlled during the two previous regimes. The plunder of Oromo property and human rights violations in Oromia are as bad, if not worse, under Meles Zenawi's regime. There is no fundamental difference between the current regime and the two previous autocratic regimes.

In Chapters three, four, and five the author discusses the Constitution drafting commission, the reorganization of the Judiciary, and the role of foreign experts, especially American academics, who helped and abated the TPLF/EPRDF leaders sabotage of the democratization process in Ethiopia. The advice and consent of the U.S. and Western Europe legitimized the dictatorship of Meles and his associates (p. 58). According to Tecola Hagos, the Constitution drafting commission lacked professionalism, legal expertise, and general knowledge about the role of the Constitution in creating a civil society and democratic institutions. "In general the approach to this Ethiopian Constitution is very similar to the limitations set by the 1955 Revised Constitution of Ethiopia promulgated by Emperor Haile Selassie" (p. 42). Members of the Constitution Drafting Commission were hand-picked by

Meles Zenawi, who used them as a cover and political decoy to legalize his illegal regime.

The draft and final provisions of the Constitution seem to have been designed for the sole purpose of legitimizing the predetermined ascendance of Meles Zenawai as Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is the head of government, Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. Even though members of the Council of Representatives [TPLF/EPRDF ] are elected for five years at a time there is no limit to the number of times they could be re-elected. This means a single political organization could stay in power easily for twenty, thirty years or even until the Second Coming (p. 49).

This means the sons of yesterday's Tigrayan feudal warlords are serious about their long-term goal of dominating the Ethiopian political landscape so as to regain "...political ground lost in the last one hundred years, i.e., since the death of [Emperor] Yohannes IV [1889], and more recently as a class since the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974" (p. 9). Tecola Hagos is at his best when discussing the major shortcomings of the New Ethiopian Constitution, which took away the political empowerment of the people of Ethiopia, demystified imperial power, and returned power to the sons of former Tigrayan feudal warlords and their collaborators (p. 55).

Since 1992, the TPLF/EPRDF regime has systematically disarmed the Oromo and other peoples of Ethiopia. The author stresses that citizens have to be "...empowered with the right to bear arms" so as to protect themselves against "...government forces or any of its agents" when their rights are trampled upon. He suggests something new, and interesting, which expresses his profound opposition to human rights violations under the current TPLF/EPRDF regime. In the future draft Constitution "...it might be advisable to include a provision which would

require any subordinate military personnel to shoot a commanding officer who gives an order to fire on unarmed civilians for any reason" (p. 57). Such a drastic measure would have decimated the ranks of Ethiopian officers, who now act with impunity to give the order to fire on civilian populations, including Oromo children and women, young and old, sick and weak.

As we know, it was with the help of foreign military experts, political and economic advisors, and above all with European military technology, that Abyssinian rulers, especially Menilik, were able to conquer the Oromo and to establish the modern Ethiopian empire. Tecola Hagos, who appears to be oblivious to the role foreign advisors played in the creation and maintenance of the Ethiopian empire, concludes that "Ethiopians are cursed with an affliction, a serious flaw of character, which is the tendency to credit foreigners with qualities exceedingly higher than what is true, and to heed advise given them by foreigners with great reverence" (p. 72).

Despotic Ethiopian leaders - Menilik, Haile Selassie, Mengistu Haile Mariam, and now Meles Zenawi - have always heeded foreign advice when such advice strengthened their despotism. Among those who advised Meles Zenawi to abandon the attempt to establish democracy in Ethiopia was Samuel Huntington of Harvard University. According to Tecola Hagos, "Meles was told by Huntington that democracy was not possible in Ethiopia because democracy has a premium in terms of economic development as a prerequisite" (p. 77). Of course neither Huntington nor Tecola Hagos has realized the relevance of Oromo democracy to the democratization process in Ethiopia. Even if they did, the TPLF/EPRDF leaders were not interested in Oromo democracy because democracy at its minimum includes a free and fair election. If a modicum of free and fair elections were held in Ethiopia, the TPLF/EPRDF leaders would lose power. It was to pre-empt such a prospect that the TPLF/EPRDF leaders suppressed "...other political groups such as the OLF... [which] is an affront to the development of democracy in Ethiopia" (p. 85). The TPLF/EPRDF leaders embarked on suppressing independent

organizations, such as the Oromo Liberation Front and others, with the advice from experts such as Samuel Huntington, and with the consent and full knowledge of western governments, especially the government of the United States, which has always supported dictatorial regimes. According to Tecola Hagos, "....Huntington[']s .... advice to the Ethiopian government is fascism, no matter how it is cleverly camouflaged in democratic sounding words and phrases" (p. 88).

Chapter six deals with opposition leaders and organizations such as the OLF. In July 1991, there were twenty-one political organizations which signed the Charter of the Transition period. However, by October 1993, there were no more than seven founding members of the Charter, which means they were illegally and brutally suppressed with the consent and connivance of the U.S. government. Tecola Hagos made an interesting observation on the organizations manufactured by the TPLF leaders: "Whether it is Tamrat's group, the EPDM, or the OPDO or all the other TPLF affiliated political organizations, they have not succeeded in mobilizing the type of popular political clout that would warrant their continued participation as part of the .... Ethiopian governments. That may be one of the reasons why today, Tamrat Layene, the former Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister, finds himself in prison in Addis Abeba. This is also the fate of several hundred OPDO members who were lucky to escape the TPLF firing squads. The reward for serving dictatorship has always been dismissal from jobs, imprisonment, or secret assassination. It does not take a great leap of imagination to see that those OPDO members who now torment the Oromo people on behalf of their masters will receive due "reward" from the TPLF/EPRDF leaders in the form of dismissal from their jobs, imprisonment and execution.

Tecola Hagos's attempt to trace the development of the Oromo Liberation Front is erroneous. His characterization of the 1976 OLF program as "....decidedly anachronistic" (p. 118) is wrong, his knowledge of Oromo history is non-existent (p. 120), and his observation of the Oromo issue is based on a biased opinion rather than an informed view. His claim that "the problems of the OLF with the EPRDF after

the formation of the TGE might have been the consequence of earlier, inadequate preparation and lack of political and organizational maturity of the leaders thereof" (P. 119) is incorrect. The OLF leadership did its level best to cooperate with the TPLF/EPRDF leaders while the leaders of the latter organizations did their best to destroy the political and military capacity of the OLF as an organization. If the truth is told, the TPLF leaders wanted the OLF to play the role of OPDO. It was only after the OLF leaders decisively rejected the "mission" that the TPLF leaders assigned to them that Meles Zenawi and Company created OPDO from prisoners of war. To their credit, the OLF leaders refused to be the instrument for the TPLF's control of Oromo destiny and to exploit their resources. However, Tecola Hagos is correct in saying, "The OLF never reached the military capacity it could easily have achieved throughout its political life, as it lacked the organizational skill of its northern counterparts (pp. 118-119). He also correctly characterizes the OLF as an inept organization" (p. 185). It is the ineptness of the OLF leadership that exposed its own fighters to destruction in 1992 and emboldened the TPLF/EPRDF soldiers to massacre innocent Oromos and plunder their property with impunity. The OLF leaders were not even able to bring to the attention of OAU, UN and other organizations and the international community in a forceful manner, the litany of crimes that have been committed against the Oromo by the current Ethiopian regime.

In Chapter seven, the author discusses the missed opportunities between 1991 and 1994 during which time the TPLF/EPRDF leaders legitimized "... an inherently defective quasi-Stalinist system of political power structure" (p. 127). According to Tecola Hagos, Ethiopian leaders always lacked the basic qualities of great leaders such as compassion for "fellow human beings, a burning love of freedom, equality and justice" (p. 131). The current Ethiopian leaders not only lack these qualities, but they also suffer from "...alarming tendencies towards despotism, authoritarianism, narcissism and ferocious love of material and worldly comfort" (p. 131). The author indicts the current Ethiopian leaders for imitating past Ethiopian despots and for using fear

and terror for their art of governance. "If one had to imitate the behavior of leaders, it would have been better to imitate the actions of great leaders such as Gandhi or Mandela rather than the mannerism of brutish and primitive dictators and emperors from Ethiopia's past" (p. 141). I have never read anything written by an Ethiopian intellectual that depicts the brutish character of Ethiopian despots (past and present) as Tecola Hagos does with such honesty and integrity. Such an accurate and insightful observation not only demystifies Ethiopian history, but also hurts the egos of chauvinists who glorify the cruel and crude brutality of past Ethiopian leaders.

Chapter eight focuses on relations with other nations and international organizations. Tecola Hagos, who appears to have read a very limited portion of the works the great African scholar, Cheikh Anta Diop, accuses him of undermining the Ethiopian contribution to African and world civilizations (p. 146). Nothing could be further from the truth. The late Cheikh Anta Diop was a wonderful human being who spent a good deal of his life studying the ancient Egyptian civilization which flourished more than six thousand years ago. Diop's scientific work demonstrates (1) that ancient Egyptian civilization was an African (black) civilization; (2) that ancient Egyptian civilization formed the basis of western civilization; (3) that ancient Egyptians were mixed people, partly black Africans and partly non-blacks; (4) that the roots of ancient Egyptian civilization were derived from Nubia and Kush in the Nile Valley south of Egypt; and (5) that the builders of ancient Egyptian civilization were not the Egyptians of today. Tecola Hagos does not appear to realize that the ancient Egyptians were invaded by waves of other peoples, such as the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and finally by the Arabs during the seventh century A.D., all of which combined to alter the African character of the ancient Egyptians.

Egypt is the only country in the world that changed its language four times and also the texture of her people. Tecola Hagos claims that ".....Egypt is peopled by very few black Africans compared to Ethiopia, a country that is peopled totally by black Africans" (p. 147). This only reflects the reality of Egypt today. However, six thousand years ago,

probably the vast majority of Egyptians were black Africans. This is because ancient Egyptians belonged to the Afro-Asiatic language family speakers, who thousands of years ago spread over north Africa, the Nile Valley, and the Horn of Africa. Probably Tecola Hagos is unaware of the following linguistic facts. First, besides the language of ancient Egyptians, other branches of Afro-Asiatic language family speakers include Semitic languages speakers as well as Cushitic languages speakers. Secondly, the Oromo language, which belongs to the Cushitic branch, is the third most widely spoken Afro-Asiatic language in the world after Arabic and Hausa languages. This means like the Oromo, Hausa and many other peoples, ancient Egyptians belonged to the African branch of humanity. What is more, Cheikh Anta Diop never attempted to undermine the Ethiopian contribution to African and world civilizations. What probably angered Tecola Hagos was the fact that Cheikh Anta Diop did not trace the roots of Egyptian civilization to the Axumite civilization, which was much younger than the Egyptian civilization at least by four thousand years! Besides, Cheik Anta Diop never glorified Egyptian civilization. The great scholar was not a propagandist who glorified the fruits of his scientific labor, instead, Cheik Anta Diop presented an authentic picture of Egyptian civilization, the first black African civilization. Thus, Tecola Hagos's criticism of Diop's scholarship is groundless; however, his criticism of Emperor Menilik (1889-1913) is legitimate and historically accurate.

Contrary to what some modern historians and politicians have attempted to tell us, Menilik was not a nation builder but an opportunistic predatory empire builder..... With his insatiable appetite for political intrigue, and his desire to subjugate and oppress weak communities and people, Menilik did more harm against the building of Ethiopia into a modern 'nation' than any Ethiopian before or after him (p. 165).

In chapters ten through thirteen, Tecola Hagos discusses the strategies for political and economic survival, the TPLF/EPRDF "democracy," and the case for permanent revolution. What emerges from these chapters are: that the TPLF/EPRDF "... economic policy is still a command economy" (p. 192); that "Ethiopians... have never truly enjoyed property ownership rights which were not conditioned on the benevolence or caprice of despotic rulers" (p. 195); that the TPLF/EPRDF regime through its economic policy "...recreated past nightmares of the Mengistu era by making all rural land to be state owned, where farmers and others have only user rights" (p. 197); that "...the very survival of Ethiopian society is at stake" (p. 213); that "throughout Ethiopia's past, Ethiopia's best and brightest have been systematically eliminated" (p. 214); that the TPLF/EPRDF leaders are an "...opportunistic predatory group" (p. 219) whose boardroom democracy is nothing but autocracy and these leaders themselves are "...authoritarian and closet communists" (p. 219); that the TPLF/EPRDF leaders "...have no democratic tradition, since each of them grew up and matured in despotic and often oppressive social circumstance, even worse some grew up in feudal households" (p. 234); that Meles Zenawi and his associates have proved "...beyond any doubt, that they are not capable of bringing democracy to the people of Ethiopia" (p. 240); and that Ethiopian culture "...has degenerated into a culture of deprivation and grinding poverty, and a culture of wailing and lamenting" (p. 242). The litany of indignant indictments of Meles Zenawi's regime throughout the book is impressive.

Finally, this valuable book embodies a personal view of Tecola Hagos about the leaders of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia from 1991 to 1994. The book exposes the callous brutality of the current Ethiopian leaders against the people whose "crime" was their yearning for democracy. In fact, the book was inspired by and written for the purpose of exposing the TPLF/EPRDF leaders for what they are – anti-democratic, and terrorists who sabotaged the democratization process in Ethiopia. Hence **Democratization? Ethiopia (1991-1994): A Personal View** is a fascinating book. The author's love for the peoples of Ethiopia

and his optimism about their capacity to solve their own problems make this a truly interesting and much needed book on the TPLF/EPRDF-dominated Ethiopia and Oromia.

Mohammed Hassen  
Georgia State University



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