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The Oromo in Exile: Creating Knowledge and Promoting Social Justice

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Abstract

This paper explains how some Oromos who were forced to leave their country, Oromia, by successive colonial Ethiopian governments and live in exile have been organized in foreign lands to liberate their people and country by supporting the Oromo national movement. By demonstrating how global and regional forces have collaborated in the colonization, continued subjugation and dehumanization of the Oromo people, the paper illustrates how the Oromo people have lost their cultural, political, and social rights that are enshrined in the UN Universal Declaration of human rights and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and how they are still facing state terrorism and genocidal massacres. The financial support from powerful Western countries as well as the support from China to the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government is threatening the survival of the Oromo people in the 21st century. In response to these gross human rights violations, Oromo activist intellectuals and other Oromos in the Diaspora are engaged in creating knowledge and promoting justice for their downtrodden people on global level.

Keywords

Oromo, Oromia, Indigenous Peoples, State Terrorism, Genocide, Colonization

Although it is impossible to freely study, write, and publish on the issues of Oromo society in the Ethiopian Empire because of political repression, a few Oromo scholars in the Diaspora have been engaging in producing free and critical Oromo scholarship to address the political, economic, cultural, and social problems of this downtrodden people for almost two decades. As a member the Oromo Diaspora, I have been participating in and observing the development of Oromo scholarship. I have been living in exile in the United States since 1981 because the Ethiopian colonial government has been targeting for imprisonment or elimination activist Oromos like me, suspecting their participation in the Oromo national movement for national self-determination, statehood, and multinational democracy.

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In this paper, I focus on five major issues. First, I explore some theoretical and methodological insights of this article. Second, I introduce the Oromo people and their gross human rights violations by the Ethiopian colonial state and its supporters. Third, I explore the issues of the Oromo national struggle, my involvement in this struggle, and my intellectual journey that has been shaped by my commitment for social justice. Fourth, I identify and explore the process through which the Oromo Diaspora has emerged and how a few Oromo activist scholars in this group have struggled to dismantle the monopoly of knowledge production and dissemination by the Ethiopian elite and Ethiopianist scholars through developing an alternative knowledge of liberation and social justice. Fifth, I explain the significance of understanding the contradictions between Ethiopian and Oromo studies as the former represents mainly the knowledge for domination and exploitation and the later mainly the knowledge for liberation and social justice. Specifically, I explain why it is challenging to promote justice for indigenous peoples like the Oromo who do not have states in the capitalist world system.

Some Theoretical and Methodological Insights

By developing an analytical framework that draws from theories of the world system, globalization, nationalism, and social movements, this article frames the Oromo movement in the global context. This work combines a structural approach to global social change with a social constructionist model of human agency and social justice movements. The Oromo social justice movement is considered an integral part of the global political projects that have been attempting to humanize and democratize the racialized/ethnicized capitalist world system from below by establishing a single standard for humanity. Through examining the dynamic interplay of social structures and human agency that facilitated the development of this movement, this work employs interdisciplinary, multidimensional, historical, sociological, and critical approaches.

This work also requires critical social history that looks at societal issues from the bottom up, and specifically employs critical discourse that deals with long-term and world-scale social changes by challenging the scholarship that justifies injustices in the pretext of intellectual neutrality. The struggle for social justice in the form of self

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-determination, democracy, and popular sovereignty emerged in opposition to political absolutism, colonialism, racism, and continued subjugation in the capitalist world system (Jalata, 2001). Understanding of the essence of global capitalism and its political structures and injustices are necessary to clearly recognize the principles for which the Oromo people are struggling (Jalata, 2001). Global historical evidence demonstrates that oppressed nationalism has been the leading political ideology in guiding the political and cultural actions of a territorially or culturally defined group that sees its common destiny as a people or a 'nation' (Jalata, 2010).

Social changes in colonized and dominated societies and structural changes in the capitalist world system have facilitated the development of such a social justice movement. Through colonial expansion and incorporation, global capitalism brought together various population groups in a political unit called the state. In the state, the dominant or colonizing ethnonations either destroyed or absorbed subordinate ethnonations through structural assimilation or created a system that perpetuated exploitation and oppression by establishing racist policies and by denying structural assimilation and civil equality. The denial of human rights, structural assimilation, and equal citizenship rights to certain population groups based on the ideology of racism and other factors have contributed to the development of collective political consciousness and ethnonationalism in these societies (Jalata, 2010).

The Oromos have been denied basic aspects of their humanity since they were forced to enter into the global capitalist system via racial slavery and colonialism (Holcomb & Ibssa, 1990; Jalata, 1993). Just as other indigenous peoples were enslaved and/or colonized, the Oromos were colonized and subjugated by the combined forces of Europeans and Ethiopians (Holcomb & Ibssa, 1990). As we shall see below, the European colonial powers and successive hegemonic world powers have assisted the Ethiopian state to use superior military forces and collaborators to enslave and colonize directly the Oromo and other peoples in the Horn of Africa to exploit their labor power and economic resources through looting, piracy, genocide, expropriation, annexation, and continued subjugation. Consequently, the Oromo movement emerged as a cultural, intellectual, ideological, and political movement in opposition to Ethiopian settler colonialism and its par-

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ticular institutions that have denied the Oromos either political space or autonomous cultural, political, and economic development. Collective historical and contemporary grievances and the heritage of cultural resistance combined with urbanization and formal education had facilitated the emergence and development of Oromo nationalism (Jalata, 1998).

Like other national liberation movements that have gained political legitimacy because they based their struggles on the grievances of collective memories to regain for the colonized peoples economic, political, and cultural rights, the Oromo movement also used these devices to reject national subordination and exploitation. When the dominant racial/ethnonational groups have justified and rationalized their privileged position by a racist discourse (Roediger, 1991; Huttenback, 1976), the oppressed ethnonational groups among them, here the Oromo, have developed a collective national consciousness to challenge the position of the colonizing structures and to restore some elements of their lost cultural, political, and economic rights. 'The return to the source' as Amílcar Cabral calls it involves ethno-class consciousness and political activism necessary to envision the overthrow of oppressive cultural, political and economic conditions and of decadent ideological systems. Gurutz J. Bereciartu (1994, p. 129) explains how 'the national formation of underdeveloped areas' is created within a nation-state, and how 'under the pretext of a shared country,' there exist, in reality, persons without a country.

As we shall see below, the Oromos developed their nationalism from the past Oromo cultural memory, the collective dehumanization of Ethiopian colonialism and slavery, and the hope for survival as a people in the future. Without totally killing the colonized or enslaved population groups, the force of domination cannot have complete control over the spirits and the minds of the subordinated population. Consequently, the Oromos formed associations and organizations reflecting on their collective grievances and cultural memory. The lost past is remembered from ancestral memory preserved in skills, rituals, habits, religion, and other forms of cultural memory. In Oromo society songs, proverbs, stories, and other means of expression were used to articulate the dehumanization of collective oppression and exploitation and the aspiration of freedom. Such memories and consciousness pass from generation to generation. Moreover,

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cultural revival and nationalism help the dominated groups such as the Oromos to use their suppressed cultural elements and popular historical memories to organize and struggle for their respective liberation.

The Oromos gradually developed their nationalism recognizing their everlasting history and culture by overcoming the onslaught of slavery and colonialism. 'One critical intervening process which must occur to get from oppression to resistance,' S. M. Buechler (1993, p. 228) notes, 'is the social construction of a collective identity which unites a significant segment of the movement's potential constituency.' The Oromos, like other colonized peoples, needed urbanite and educated elements, political and cultural organizations, and political opportunities in order to develop nationalism and struggle to dismantle Ethiopian colonialism. According to McAdam et al. (1998, p. 171),

While broad political, economic, and organizational factors may combine to create a certain 'macro potential' for collective action, that potential can only be realized through complex mobilization dynamics that unfold at either the micro or some intermediate institutional level. At the same time, these mobilization processes are clearly collective, rather than an individual phenomenon.

Let me now introduce the Oromo people and their victimization and struggle.

The Oromo: From Freedom to Colonial Victimization

The Oromo people are best known for their former egalitarian and democratic social system known as *Gadaa* and their military organization that enabled them to emerge as one of the strongest ethnations in the Horn of Africa between the 12th and mid-19th centuries (Legesse, 2006 [2000]). *Gadaa* was a form of constitutional government; it was also a social system. Politically it was practiced through the election of political leaders; corrupt or dictatorial leaders would be removed from power through *buqisu*, or recall before their official tenure. The rule of law was the central guiding principle of the Oromo government. Oromo women had a parallel institution known as *siqqee*. This institution promoted gender equality in Oromo society.

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Generally speaking, under the administration of the *Gadaa* system the Oromo people were sovereign and free and no other society could impose their authority over them.

Gadaa closely connected social and political structures. Male Oromos were organized according to age and generation for both social and political activities. In the *Gadaa* government, the *Abba Boku* was an elected 'chairman' who presided over the assembly and proclaimed laws. The *Abba Dula* (the defense minister) was one of the leading figures in the government, and he was the leader of the army. A council known as *Shanee* or *Salgee* and retired *Gadaa* officials also assisted the *Abba Boku* in running the government. *Gadaa* laws were passed by the *Chaffee* or *Gumii* (assembly) and implemented by officials. This assembly is called *Caafee* or *Gumii Gayo* (multitude of assembly), and held every eight years. Representatives of different sectors of Oromo society and interested individuals participated in this assembly.

All *Gadaa* officials were elected for eight years by universal adult male suffrage; the main criteria for election to office included bravery, knowledge, honesty, demonstrated ability, and courage. The *Gadaa* government worked on local, regional, and central levels. The political philosophy of the *Gadaa* system was manifested in three main principles of checks and balances created to avoid subordination and exploitation: periodic succession of eight years, balanced opposition between different sectors, and power sharing between higher and lower political organs. The *Gadaa* government was based on popular democracy and equal representation for adult males. This government had independent executive, legislative, and judicial branches for balancing and checking the power of political leaders to avoid corruption and misuse of power.

Some elements of *Gadaa* are still practiced in southern and others regions of Oromia (the Oromo country). The *Gadaa* system was the pillar of Oromo culture and civilization, and it helped Oromos develop democratic political, economic, social, and religious institutions for many centuries. The *Gadaa* political system and military organization enabled Oromos to defend themselves against enemies who were competing with them for land, water, and power for many centuries. This system was partially destroyed by the Ethiopian colonial system during the last decades of the 19th century, as we shall see below.

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Today Oromos are engaged in a national liberation movement under the leadership of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) to achieve their national self-determination and to restore Oromo democracy. Most Oromos support this liberation organization and its army, the Oromo Liberation Army. There are many Oromo organizations in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Australia, and Africa that support the Oromo national movement. The Oromo people are struggling for self-determination and the opportunity to reinvent an Oromia state that will reflect the *Gadaa* system of popular and representative democracy. The Oromo call their nation and country Oromia. They also aspire to construct a multinational democratic state from a union of free ethnonations on the principles of mutual solidarity, egalitarian democratic principles, and social justice through dismantling racial/ethnonational and other forms of hierarchies (Jalata, 2010).

The Oromo are one of the largest ethnonations in Africa with a population estimated at about 40 million people in Ethiopia alone. In the Horn of Africa they are estimated at 50 million. Oromia is located mainly within the Ethiopian Empire and covers an area of 600,000 sq km (232,000 sq mi). During the last decades of the 19th century, the Oromo people were colonized and mainly incorporated into Abyssinia/Ethiopia and lost their sovereignty and independent institutional and cultural development. Great Britain, France, and Italy supported the Ethiopian colonization of the Oromo nation. Oromia is considered the richest region of the Horn of Africa because of its agricultural and natural resources. It is considered by many to be the 'bread basket' of the Horn. Agricultural resources including barley, wheat, sorghum, *xxaffii* (a grain), maize, coffee, oil seeds, *chat* (stimulant leaf), oranges, and cattle are abundant in Oromia. Oromia is also rich in gold, silver, platinum, marble, uranium, nickel, natural gas, and other minerals. It has several large and small rivers that are necessary for agriculture and to produce hydroelectric power.

Today the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government and its domestic and international supporters exploit the resources of Oromia. The nominal state of Oromia is still a colony of Ethiopia. There are millions of Oromo refugees in Africa, the Middle East, North America, Australia, Europe and other parts of the world. Particularly, the number of Oromo refugees has increased since 1992, when the Tigrayan-

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led Ethiopian government started its terrorism and genocidal massacres on Oromo society. The Ethiopian colonial terrorism and genocide that started during the last decades of the 19th century still continue in the 21st century. Ethiopia, former Abyssinia, terrorized and committed genocide on the Oromo people during the Scramble for Africa with the help of European imperial powers and the modern weapons they received from them (Holcomb & Ibssa, 1990).

During Ethiopian colonial expansion ‘the charming Oromo land, [would] be ploughed by the iron and the fire; flooded with blood and the orgy of pillage’ (De Salviac, 2005[1901], p. 349). Calling this event as ‘the theatre of a great massacre,’ Martial De Salviac (2005, p. 349) states,

The conduct of Abyssinian armies invading a land is simply barbaric. They contrive a sudden irruption, more often at night. At daybreak, the fire begins; surprised men in the huts or in the fields are three quarter massacred and horribly mutilated; the women and the children and many men are reduced to captivity; the soldiers lead the frightened herds toward the camp, take away the grain and the flour which they load on the shoulders of their prisoners spurred on by blows of the whip, destroy the harvest, then, gluttoned with booty and intoxicated with blood, go to walk a bit further from the devastation. That is what they call ‘civilizing a land.

The Oromo oral story also testifies that Ethiopians/Abyssinians destroyed and looted the resources of Oromia, and committed genocide on the Oromo people through massacre, slavery, depopulation, cutting hands, famine, and diseases during and after the colonization of Oromia. Recognizing this tragedy, ‘the Oromo said: ‘It is *Waaqa* [God] ... who has subjected us to the Amhara” (De Salviac, 2005, p. 350). According to Martial De Salviac (2005, p. 8), ‘With equal arms, the Abyssinia [would] never [conquer] an inch of land. With the power of firearms imported from Europe, Menelik [Abyssinian warlord] began a murderous revenge.’

The colonization of Oromia involved human tragedy and destruction:

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The Abyssinian, in bloody raids, operated by surprise, mowed down without pity, in the country of the Oromo population, a mournful harvest of slaves for which the Muslims were thirsty and whom they bought at very high price. An Oromo child [boy] would cost up to 800 francs in Cairo; an Oromo girl would well be worth two thousand francs in Constantinople (De Salviac 2005, p. 28)

The Ethiopian government massacred half of the Oromo population (five million out of ten million) and their leadership during its colonial expansion (De Salviac, 2005, pp. 6-7, 278). According to Alexander Bulatovich (2000, pp. 68-69),

The dreadful annihilation of more than half of the population during the conquest took away from the Gallas [Oromos] all possibilities of thinking about any sort of uprising...Without a doubt, the Galla, with their least five million population, occupying the best land, all speaking one language, could represent a tremendous force if united.

The destruction of Oromo lives, institutions, and Oromian natural beauty were aspects of Ethiopian colonial terrorism. The surviving Oromos who used to enjoy an egalitarian democracy were forced to face genocide, state terrorism, political repression, and an impoverished life. Bulatovich explains about the *Gadaa* administration and notes 'the peaceful free way of life, which could have become the ideal for philosophers and writers of the eighteenth century, if they had known it, was completely changed. Their peaceful way of life is broken; freedom is lost; and the independent, freedom loving Gallas find themselves under the severe authority of the Abyssinian conquerors' (Bulatovich, 2000, pp. 68-69).

Ethiopian colonialists also destroyed Oromo natural resources and the beauty of Oromia. Oromia was 'an oasis luxuriant with large trees' and known for its 'opulent and dark greenery used to shoot up from the soil' (De Salviac, 2005, pp. 21-22). De Salviac (2005, p. 21) also notes

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the greenery and the shade delight the eyes all over and give the landscape richness and a variety which make it like *a garden without boundary*. Healthful climate, uniform and temperate, fertility of the soil, beauty of the inhabitants, the security in which their houses seem to be situated, makes one dream of remaining in such a beautiful country.

The Abyssinian colonialists devastated 'the forests by pulling from it the laths for their houses and [made] campfires or firewood for their dwellings...[They were] the great destructors of trees, others [accused] them of exercising their barbarity against the forests for the sole pleasure of ravaging' (De Salviac, 2005, p. 20). Bulatovich (2000, p. 21) applied to Oromia the phrase 'flowing in milk and honey' to indicate its abundant wealth in cattle and honey.

The Ethiopian colonial state gradually established settler colonialism in Oromia and developed five major types of colonial institutions, namely, slavery, the colonial landholding system, the *nafoxanya-gabbar* system (semi-slavery), the Oromo collaborative class, and garrison and non-garrison cities. It introduced the process of forced recruitment of labor via slavery and the *nafoxanya-gabbar* (semi-slavery) system.¹ The colonial state expropriated almost all Oromo lands and divided up the Oromo among colonial officials and soldiers and their collaborators to force them to produce agricultural commodities and food for local consumption and an international market. The Oromo farmers were reduced to serfs or slaves or semi-slaves and coerced to work without remuneration for the settlers, intermediaries, and the colonial state for certain days every week. Whenever they failed to provide free labor or pay taxes or tributes, the settlers enslaved their children or wives.

The colonial terrorism that started during the reign of Menelik has continued under successive Ethiopian governments. The Haile Selassie government continued the policies of Menelik until it was overthrown by the popular revolt of 1974. The Haile Selassie government terrorized the Oromo of Raya-Azabo, Wallo, Hararghe, Bale and other regions because of their political and cultural resistance to the Amhara-Tigray domination. It also imprisoned, tortured or hanged prominent Oromo leaders including Mamo Mazamir and Haile Mariam Gamada who organized and led the Macca-Tuulama Self-Help

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Association in the early 1960s. The military regime that emerged in 1974 under the leadership of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam continued state terrorism, dictatorship, and Ethiopian colonial policies. Currently, the Meles regime is continuing similar colonial policies and practices in Oromia and other places.

When Oromo activists and the people started to resist the military regime, it intensified its state terrorism. The Military regime (derg) and its supporters committed massive human rights violations in the name of the so-called Revolution. According to Norman J. Singer (1978, pp. 672-673),

Those killed in the first three months of the campaign of the 'Red Revolutionary Terror'...numbered around 4000-5000 [in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa) alone], the killings continued in March 1978, spreading to the rest of the country...Those detained for political instruction numbered from 30,000 upwards...Torture methods emphasized in the Red Terror...included severe beating on the head, soles of the feet... and shoulders, with the victim hung by the wrists or suspended by wrists and feet from a horizontal bar...; sexual torture of boys and girls, including pushing bottles or red-hot iron bars into girls' vaginas; and other cruel methods.

The derg continued its mass imprisonments and killings. In 1980, one Oromo source mentioned 'the Oromo constitutes the majority of the more than two million prisoners that glut Ethiopia's jails today' (The Oromo Relief Association, 1980, p. 30). In the 1980s, thousands of Oromo nationalists were murdered or imprisoned; the regime also terrorized other elements of Oromo society. According to Gunnar Hasselblatt (1992, pp. 17-19) the military government

held mass shooting among the Oromo population, hoping to break the free, independent Oromo spirit. Sometimes a hundred, sometimes two hundred men were shot on this raised dry field...and were buried with bulldozers. Over years this procedure was repeated several times. When the method did not work and the Oromo population could not be forced into submission, other methods were used. The victims were

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made to lie down with their heads on stone, and their skulls were smashed with another stone. The...government...tried everything to consolidate its reign of terror and exploitation of Oromia...When the Oromo movement could not be quenched by shooting or by the smashing of skulls, [the government] came up with a new idea. Men's testicles were smashed between a hammer and an anvil. Three men tortured and maimed in this way are still living.

Ethiopia has maintained its oppressive and repressive structures on the Oromo by the assistance of successive global powers, namely, Great Britain, the United States, former Soviet Union, and China (Jalata 2010). As the former USSR supported the Mengistu regime, the US, powerful European countries and China are supporting the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government. Since 1992, the Tigrayan authoritarian-terrorist regime² has controlled the Oromo and denied them the freedom of expression, association, organization, the media, and all forms of communication and information networks. This government has been focusing on brutally attacking the Oromo national movement led by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and on robbing the economic resources of Oromia in order to enrich the Tigrayan elites and their collaborators and to specifically develop the Tigrayan region. To achieve its political and economic objectives, the regime primarily uses its puppet organization known as the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) which was created and is today controlled by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF); the OPDO is led by Tigrayan cadres, elements of Oromo speaking colonial settlers, and opportunistic Oromos who would do anything in exchange for luxurious lifestyles.

The minority Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government is attempting to give a final solution for a large political problem that has existed for several centuries—the relationship between the Oromos and their Amhara-Tigrayan colonizers. As we know from history, the policy of targeting and exterminating indigenous peoples exists in different parts of the world, and it has been an integral practice of the racialized capitalist world system since the 16th century. While claiming to promote Christian civilization, modernity, and commerce, European colonialists exterminated indigenous peoples in the Americas, Australia,

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Asia, and Africa over a period of several centuries in order to transfer their homelands and resources to European colonial settlers and their descendants. Specifically, the plans and actions that King Leopold of Belgium had for the Congo or Andrew Jackson of the United States for the Cherokees or colonial Germany for the Herero and Nama peoples in South West Africa (Namibia)³ are very similar to the grand plan and action the Meles government has for the Oromo nation.

The Meles regime is now completing the forced removal of Oromos from the areas surrounding Finfinnee (Addis Ababa) (Worku 2008, pp. 97-131). Furthermore, by evicting the Oromo farmers from their homelands with nominal or without compensation, the Meles regime has already leased several millions of hectares of Oromo lands to so-called investors from China, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, as well as from Europe.⁴ If the policy of land expropriation is allowed to continue, Tigrayans, Chinese, Djiboutians, Indians, Malaysians, Nigerians, Arabs and Europeans will soon replace the Oromo people. Meles never sold or leased Tigrayan lands, but has expanded modern agricultural development in his homeland, Tigray. When the Oromo are facing abject poverty and hunger, Tigrayan elite who depended on international food aid in the 1980s for their survival, are rich and powerful today. The Meles regime also sells Oromo minerals and other natural resources while evicting and impoverishing the Oromo people. Whenever the Oromo resist, the regime mercilessly brutalizes and/or kills them.

The political and military leaders of the Meles government are literally gangsters and robbers; they use state power to expropriate state corporations and lands in the name of privatization—all with the blessing of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In achieving its political and economic objectives, the Meles regime has been engaging in political repression, state terrorism, genocidal massacres, and gross human rights violations in Oromia and other regional states. Since the Oromo people have been resisting to Tigrayan colonial policies, they have been targeted by the Meles regime; they have been attacked and terrorized because of their economic resources, their acceptance of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) as their national leadership, and their refusal to submit to the orders of Tigrayan authorities and their collaborators.

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This regime has banned independent Oromo organizations including the OLF and declared war on those organizations and the Oromo people. It even outlawed Oromo journalists and other writers and closed down Oromo newspapers. As Mohammed Hassen asserts,

The attack on the free press has literally killed the few publications in the Oromo language in the Latin alphabet. The death of Oromo publications . . . has been a fatal blow to the flowering of Oromo literature and the standardization of the Oromo language itself. The Oromo magazines that have disappeared include *Gada*, *Biftu*, *Madda Walaabuu*, *Odaa*, and the *Urjii* magazine . . . Since 2002, there has not been a single newspaper or magazine that has expressed the legitimate political opinions of the Oromo in Ethiopia'

(Hassen, 2002, p. 31)

Almost all Oromo journalists are either in prison or killed, or in exile. The regime also banned Oromo musical groups and all professional associations.

Expanding their political repression, regional authorities formed quasi-government institutions known as *gott* and *garee* to maintain tighter political control over Oromia; they

imposed these new structures on...[rural] communities...More disturbing, regional authorities are using the *gott* and *garee* to monitor the speech and personal lives of the rural population, to restrict and control the movements of residents, and to enforce farmers' attendance at 'meetings' that are thinly disguised OPDO political rallies

(Human Rights Watch 2005, 17, 7 (A), p. 2)

Generally speaking, the Meles government has continued to eliminate or imprison politically conscious and self-respecting Oromos. Today, thousands of Oromos are in official and secret prisons simply because of their nationality and their resistance to injustice. After being jailed and released from prison after six years, Seye Abraha, the former Defense Minister of the regime who had previously participated in the massacring and imprisoning of thousands of Oromos, testified on

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January 5, 2008, to his audience in the state of Virginia in the U. S. that ‘esir betu Oromigna yinager,’ (‘the prison speaks Oromiffa [the Oromo language]’) and also noted that ‘about 99% of the prisoners in Qaliti are Oromos.’⁵

The Tigrayan state bureaucrats believe that Oromo intellectuals, businessmen and women, conscious Oromo farmers, students, and community and religious leaders are their enemies, and, hence, should be eliminated through terrorism and genocide (Hizbawi Adera, 1997). State terrorism is associated with issues of control over territory and resources and the construction of political and ideological domination (Pollock, 1996, 1997; Trueman, 1997; US Department of State, 1991-2007). State terrorism manifests itself as lethal violence in the form of war, assassination, murder, castration, burying alive, throwing off cliffs, hanging, torture, rape, and poisoning, forcing people to submission by intimidation, beating, and disarmament of citizens. The methods of killing include burning, bombing, the cutting of throats or arteries in the neck, strangulation, shooting, and the burying of people up to their necks in the ground. The agents and militia of Meles have burned houses and entire villages, exterminating thousands of Oromo men, women, and children. Government agents also killed thousands of Oromo activists through torture or by poisoning.

The Meles regime also practices different forms of torture on imprisoned Oromos and others. Former prisoners have testified that their arms and legs were tied tightly together on their backs and their naked bodies were whipped; large containers or bottles filled with water were fixed to their testicles, or if they were women, bottles or poles were pushed into their vaginas (Trueman, 2001). There were prisoners who were locked up in empty steel barrels and tormented with heat in the tropical sun during the day and with cold at night (Trueman, 2001). There were also prisoners who were forced into pits so that fire could be made on top of them (Trueman, 2001). The cadres, soldiers, and officials of the regime have frequently raped Oromo girls and women to demoralize them and their communities and to show how Tigrayan rulers and their collaborators wielded limitless power. As Bruna Fossati, Lydia Namarra and Peter Niggli (1996, p. 10) report, ‘in prison women are often humiliated and mistreated in the most brutal fashion. Torturers ram poles or bottles into their vaginas, connect electrodes to the lips of their vulva, or the victims are

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dragged into the forest and gang-raped by interrogation officers.’

Ethiopian soldiers have collected young Oromo girls and women into concentration camps and gang raped them in front of their relatives, fathers, brothers, and husbands to humiliate them and the Oromo people. State-sanctioned rape is a form of terrorism. The use of sexual violence is also a tactic of genocide that a dominant ethnonational group practices in order to destroy a subordinate ethnonational group. What Catherine MacKinnon (1994, pp. 11-12) says about ethnic cleansing in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina applies to the sexual abuse of Oromo women by the Tigrayan-led regime:

It is also rape unto death, rape as massacre, rape to kill and to make the victims wish they were dead. It is rape as an instrument of forced exile, rape to make you leave your home and never want to go back. It is rape to be seen and heard and watched and told to others: rape as spectacle. It is rape to drive a wedge through a community, to shatter a society, to destroy a people. It is rape as genocide.

The Tigrayan-led regime has used various mechanisms in repressing, controlling and destroying the Oromo people. It has imprisoned or killed thousands of Oromo women and men. Its agents have murdered prominent community leaders and left their corpses for hyenas by denying them burial to impose terror on the Oromo people. Furthermore, relatives of the murdered Oromos are not allowed to cry publicly to express their grievances, a once cultural practice.⁶ For instance, in 2007, the Meles militia killed twenty Oromos and left their corpses for hyenas on the mountain of Suufi in Eastern Oromia.⁷ According to *Human Rights Watch* (2005, pp. 1-2)

Since 1992, security forces have imprisoned thousands of Oromo on charges of plotting armed insurrection on behalf of the OLF. Such accusations have regularly been used as a transparent pretext to imprison individuals who publicly question government policies or actions. Security forces have tortured many detainees and subjected them to continuing harassment and abuse for years after their release. That harassment in turn has often destroyed victims’ ability to earn a

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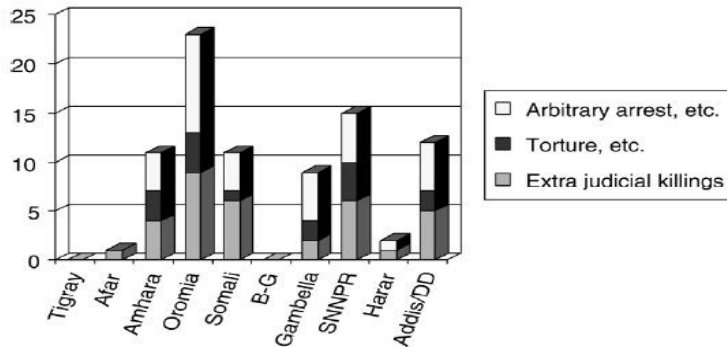
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livelihood and isolated them from their communities.

The Tigrayan-led government, like that of the Amhara, has denied the Oromo nation (Oromia) the right to national self-determination, and individual and collective social, cultural, economic and political rights that are enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples. Living under brutal successive Ethiopian colonial regimes for more than a century, the Oromos have been denied the right to fully develop as individuals and society. This regime has intensified the repression and underdevelopment of the Oromo people, both individually and collectively, because they have spearheaded the struggle against the regime. Under this racist and criminal regime, the Oromo

Figure 1. Accumulated reported human rights violations in Ethiopia as per regional state and type of violations, 1995–2005.



Source: (Tronvoll, Human Rights Violations in Federal Ethiopia: When Ethnic Identity is a Political Stigma). Cited in Susan Yirku, August 5, 2010, Maryhurst University, 'An Argument for U.S. Policy Support for a Free Ethiopian Media,' <http://addisvoice.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Ethiopia-Support-for-.pdf>, accessed on February 4, 2011.

people have suffered more than other national groups in the Ethiopian Empire. The regime has committed terrorism, genocide, and gross human rights violations against the Oromo population. Figures 1 and 2 testify that the Oromos have been the most arrested, tortured, killed

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and abused national group by the Meles regime.

The Meles regime has even targeted Oromia's environment and its animals. According to Mohammed Hassen (2002, pp. 37-38),

Oromo men, women, children, animals, and even the Oromo environment are all targets of the TPLF's tyranny. In cases where Oromo pastoralists were suspected of harboring OLF guerrilla fighters, TPLF soldiers punished them by destroying or confiscating their cattle or by poisoning the wells from which the cattle drank. On many occasions Oromo farmers, suspected of feeding OLF fighters, saw their farms burned to the ground and the defenseless members of their households brutally murdered. In 2000, when the TPLF government suspected OLF guerrillas of hiding in the forests of Oromia, its agents set fires that caused catastrophic environmental destruction in Oromia and other states in southern Ethiopia.

In addition to such environmental destruction and the murdering and raping of Oromos, the Meles regime has engaged in the genocidal massacres of Oromos. This regime has engaged in such crimes with little or no opposition from Western powers, particularly the United States. All these crimes against humanity are committed in the name of democracy and development. Article II of the United Nations Convention defines genocide as 'acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group' (Jonassohn, 1998, p. 9).

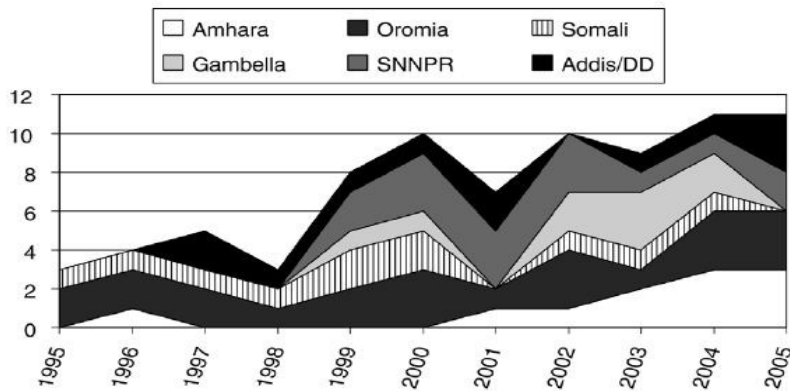
Kurt Jonassohn (1998, p. 9) also explains genocide as the planned destruction of any economic, political or social group. According to Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn (1990, p. 23), 'GENOCIDE is a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator.' Chalk and Jonassohn identify two major types of genocide: the first type is used to colonize and maintain an empire by terrorizing people perceived to be real or potential enemies. In this case, the main purpose of practicing genocide is to acquire land and other valuable resources. Then the maintenance of colonial domination by state elites requires the establishment of a cul

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Figure 2. Trends in regional distribution of reported human rights violations in Ethiopia, 1995–2005.



Tronvoll, Human Rights Violations in Federal Ethiopia: When Ethnic Identity is a Political Stigma). Cited in Susan Yirku, August 5, 2010, Maryrhurst University, 'An Argument for U.S. Policy Support for a Free Ethiopian Media,' <http://addisvoice.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Ethiopia- Support for .pdf>, accessed on February 4, 2011.

tural and ideological hegemony that can be practiced through genocidal massacres. By destroying elements of a population that resists colonial domination, hegemony can be established on the surviving population. This is the second type of genocide; this form of genocide is called ideological genocide. Jonassohn notes that ideological genocide develops 'in nation-states where ethnic groups develop chauvinistic ideas about their superiority and exclusiveness' (Jonassohn, 1998, p. 23).

The Tigrayan-led government sees Oromia as part of its empire, controls all of Oromia's resources, and attacks the Oromo since it perceives them as its potential or real enemies. It engages in genocide as Chalk and Johnassohn explain above with the intention of destroying the part of the Oromo nation composed of nationalists and leaders. Tigrayan state leaders are claiming to promote political ideologies such as 'revolutionary democracy' and 'federalism,' while at gunpoint attempting to legitimize Tigrayan ethnocracy and state power. They deny that they engage in massive human rights violations by claiming that they are democrats and revolutionaries; the Tigrayan-led

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government destroys the records of its political crimes. Johnassohn's description of a conspiracy of 'collective denial' of genocide is applicable to the denial of the occurrence of genocide in the Ethiopian Empire. According to Johnassohn,

There are many reasons for this: (a) in many societies such materials are not written down, or are destroyed rather than preserved in archives; (b) many perpetrators have recourse to elaborate means of hiding the truth, controlling access to information, and spreading carefully contrived disinformation; and (c) historically, most genocides were not reported because...there appears to have existed a sort of conspiracy of 'collective denial' whereby the disappearance of a people did not seem to require comment or even mention (1998, p. 11).

While the Tigrayan-led regime attempts to eliminate Oromo leaders through genocide in order to deny the Oromo their own political leadership, it prepares Tigrayan children for positions of leadership by providing them access to better education. This regime also limits educational opportunities to Oromo children to maintain a racial/ethnic division of labor. Although it is impossible to know exactly at this time how many Oromos have been murdered by the Meles government, Mohammed Hassen (2001) estimates that between 1992 and 2001, about 50,000 killings and 16,000 disappearances (euphemism for secret killings) took place in Oromia; he also notes that 90 percent of the killings were not reported. The Meles government hides its criminal activities and 'does not keep written records of its extrajudicial executions and prolonged detention of political prisoners' (Hassen, 2001, p. 30). Furthermore, the massive killings and genocide committed on the Sheko, Mezhenger, Sidama, Annuak, and Ogaden Somali peoples have shocked some sections of the international community.⁸ According to the Associated Press, Meles Zenawi and his followers are possible targets of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as are many leaders of African countries.

The president of Genocide Watch, Gregory Stanton, wrote on March 23, 2009, an open letter to the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights admiring the action that the ICC took in issuing a warrant for the arrest of President Omar al-Bashir of the

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Sudan and calling upon them to investigate the crimes Meles and his government have committed and still are committing against humanity in the Horn of Africa:

The action that the International Criminal Court has taken in this situation has restored hope to peace and justice loving people, affirming that international human rights law not only exists on paper, but in reality. It also sends an important message to perpetrators throughout the world that impunity for their crimes is not assured forever; which may be a primary reason that one of the first leaders to defend Omar al-Bashir and condemn the warrant was Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, whose government has also been implicated in a pattern of widespread perpetration of serious human rights atrocities in Ethiopia and in Somalia. He and those within his government may be keenly aware of their own vulnerability to similar actions by the ICC in the future that could upend a deeply entrenched system of government-supported impunity that has protected perpetrators from any accountability.

Stanton demonstrates in this letter how the Meles government has committed heinous crimes by being involved 'in the inciting, the empowerment or the perpetration of crimes against humanity, war crimes and even genocide, often justified by them as 'counter-insurgency.' He also states that the Meles government organized Ethiopian National Defense Forces and civilian militia groups to ruthlessly massacre 424 persons from the Annuak people in Gambella on December 2003 in order to suppress opposition and to 'exclude them from any involvement in the drilling for oil on their indigenous land.' According to Stanton, as militia groups chanted 'Today is the day for killing Annuak,' both the military and militias used machetes, axes and guns to kill the unarmed victims, frequently raping the women while chanting, 'Now there will be no more Annuak children.'

Reports from Amnesty International, the U.S. State Department, and the Human Rights Watch have been continuing to list the Zenawi's government extensive record of chilling crimes against the politically and economically oppressed peoples such as the Oromo. The Meles regime recently passed the so-called anti-terrorism law to

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legalize its crimes against humanity and to legally intensify its own repressive and terrorist activities. Ethiopia's anti-terrorism law could provide the Ethiopian government with a potent instrument to crack down on political dissent, including peaceful political demonstrations and public criticisms of government policy that are deemed supportive of armed opposition activity' (Human Rights Watch, 2009, p. 1). Generally speaking, the policies and practices of the Meles regime have forced millions of Oromos to become political refugees in Asia, Europe, Australia, and North America.

The alliance of the West with this regime has frightened neighboring countries such as Djibouti, Kenya, Sudan, and Yemen, and turned them against the Oromo struggle and Oromo refugees. Using the leverage of Western countries, the Meles regime has pressured neighboring governments to return or expel Oromo refugees from their countries. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has even failed to provide reasonable protection for thousands of Oromo refugees in Djibouti, Kenya, Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen. For example, on December 21 and 22, 2000, while five thousand Oromo refugees were refouled to Ethiopia, the UNHCR office in Djibouti denied any violation of its mandate had occurred. Between 2000 and 2004, hundreds of Oromo refugees were forced to return to Ethiopia from Djibouti to face imprisonment or death. 'The continuing refoulement of refugees from Djibouti,' notes the Oromia Support Group, 'especially the large scale refoulement of December 2000 and the 28 associated deaths by asphyxiation and shooting, should be publicly acknowledged by UNHCR and the Djibouti government.' Furthermore, the security agents of Ethiopia and neighboring countries still capture thousands of Oromo refugees and return them to Ethiopia.

By crossing borders and entering Somalia and Kenya, agents of the Ethiopian regime assassinated prominent Oromo leaders. And still today, the regime is killing prominent Oromos in Kenya and Somalia. Just in 2007 and 2008, Ethiopian security forces assassinated Oromos in Somalia and Kenya. One human rights organization notes that on February 5, 2008, the combined security forces of Ethiopia and Puntland, Somalia, bombed two hotels and consequently murdered 65 Oromo refugees and seriously injured more than 100 people. In 2009, the regime killed four Oromos by poisoning their food in

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Puntland.

When it comes to the Oromo, international organizations do not pay attention even if terrorist attacks occur and international laws are broken. The Oromo are being denied sanctuary in neighboring countries and are also even being denied the right to be refugees to some degree. Since some Oromo refugees are not welcomed by neighboring countries and international organizations, there are thousands of 'internal' Oromo refugees in Oromia and Ethiopia. Fleeing from Ethiopian state terrorism, these internal refugees hide in the bushes and remote villages. Suspecting that these internal refugees support the Oromo national struggle, the regime attempts to control their movements and the movement of other Oromos.

Without any doubt the Oromos are denied the right to national self-determination and individual and collective social, cultural, economic and political rights that are enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights. Living under brutal successive Ethiopian colonial regimes for more than a century has denied the Oromos the right to fully develop as individuals and society. Martha Nussbaum (2007, pp. 422-429) asserts that without the implementation of 'central human functional capabilities' individuals and groups cannot have rights to develop fully as human beings and she lists the following elements of these capabilities. These list includes life; bodily health integrity; senses, imagination, thought; practical reason; emotion; affiliation; play; and control over one's on political and material resources.

Since the Oromos are underdeveloped, mainly because of Ethiopian colonialism, they die prematurely due to the lack of good health service and adequate food and shelter. They do not have personal security and the right to move freely from place to place to seek protection; they are under constant fear of violence, war, state terrorism, rape, imprisonment and torture. The Oromos live in the darkness of abject poverty and ignorance in the 21st century and they could not develop their senses, imagination, and thoughts. The denial of adequate education and freedom contribute to these problems. The lack of education denies the Oromos the right to develop their practical reasoning through engaging 'in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.' Unfortunately, the government does not provide statisti-

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cal information on these and other problems. Understanding these complex problems, like other Oromo activist-scholars, I have been studying and exposing such crimes committed on the Oromo people.

The Development of the Oromo National Movement and my Intellectual Autobiographical Case

Colonized by and absorbed into Ethiopia in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Oromo were removed from the global community by the Abyssinian system of political slavery. Oromia was denied a 'status as a nation among the community of nations' (Holcomb, 1999, p. 3). The Ethiopians established a settler colonial structure in Oromia, erased the cultural identity and the language of the Oromo from public life and the historical record, and isolated Oromos from one another. Ethiopia became

the intermediary representative in the outside world for all the peoples contained within the empire. When the Oromo political system with its overarching integrative republican mechanism of public assemblies was officially dismantled and replaced by centralized Ethiopian administrative policies in Oromia, the isolation of the Oromo peoples was complete (Holcomb 1999, p. 5)

Because Ethiopia imposed its rule on the Oromo and maintained a colonial relationship with them, the Oromo never recognized the legitimacy of Ethiopian suzerainty and never assumed an Ethiopian identity for themselves. The effort to force an Ethiopian identity and culture upon the Oromo succeeded only in assimilating a few Oromos who attended the few public schools in Oromia, established and controlled by the Ethiopian regime. The majority of the Oromo did not receive formal education and remained largely unaffected by the assimilationist efforts. The Ethiopian colonial government in any case did not encourage structural assimilation or a policy of allowing its colonial subjects access to political opportunity, cultural and economic resources, education, or any resource or activity it deemed incompatible with its colonial interests.

Although marginalized, most Oromos kept their *Oromummaa* or Oromoness at the risk of being relegated to second-class citizen-

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ship within the Ethiopian colonial state. Disaffected, the Oromo continued to resist Ethiopian settler colonialism and to fight to regain their freedom and independence. Resistance sometimes took the form of local uprisings, including instances in which Ethiopian colonial settlers were expelled from Oromo areas (Jalata 1993, pp. 152-153). By the 1960s, Oromo resistance to the imposition of Ethiopian settler colonial rule had assumed the form of reform nationalism, a movement whose purpose was to demand for the Oromo accommodation and fair treatment as Ethiopian citizens (Jalata, 1997, pp. 83-114). Nonetheless, it took a while for Oromo nationalism to mature, in contrast to the relatively short time, from the 1920s to 1950s, that it took for nationalism to develop in various parts of colonial Africa.

Several factors contributed to the slow development of Oromo nationalism. The Ethiopian colonial state and its institutions impeded the development of an autonomous Oromo leadership by co-opting the submissive elements and liquidating the nationalist ones. State officials actively suppressed Oromo institutions, distorted Oromo history, and stunted the development of the Oromo language and culture. Denied access to formal education, the Oromo remained without formally trained and culturally grounded intellectuals. Only a handful of Oromos were fortunate enough to receive formal education, an experience that opened their eyes to the abysmal situation of the lives of their kin. One such fortunate Oromo was Onesimos Nasib, a former slave lad from western Oromia who was trained in Sweden as a Christian missionary.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Onesimos and his assistants, Aster Ganno, Lydia Dimbo, and Feben (Hirphee) Abba Magaal, as well as the Islamic religious scholar Sheik Bakri Saphalo, pioneered the production of written literature in Afaan Oromoo and tried to introduce literacy to Oromo society. The Ethiopian colonial government and the Orthodox Church suppressed the efforts of these scholars and thwarted the emergence of Oromo national consciousness. In addition, after achieving independence in 1960, Somalia worked hard to Somalize some Oromos, in its irredentist ambition to annex a part of Oromia to Somalia. Compressed between Ethiopia, which saw it as a major threat to Ethiopian territorial integrity, and Somalia, which regarded it as an obstacle to the realization of the dream of Greater Somalia, Oromo nationalism remained an idea in

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the minds of a few Oromos (Hassen, 1998, p. 189).

By the late 1960s, with the emergence a few Oromo intellectuals, the cumulative experiences of resistance and the politicized collective and individual grievances of the Oromo had begun to be transformed into an ideology of nationalism. The process was assisted by the migration of many Oromos from rural areas to cities and the emergence of a small conscious Oromo intelligentsia. Paradoxically, the collective consciousness of the Oromo or Oromo nationalism was kindled among the Oromo elite, who had been educated to be co-opted by the Ethiopian ruling class. Barred by the Ethiopian Constitution from establishing a political organization, the nascent Oromo educated class, in 1963, formed the Maccaa-Tuulama Self-Help Association (MTSHA) in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa), the capital city of the Ethiopian Empire. The association was on record as stating that its objective was to formulate programs to solve economic, social, and educational problems in Oromo society, but the very act of its founding was construed by the Ethiopians as an expression of the collective grievances of the Oromo people.

Even though MTSHA was scrupulous in declaring that its objective was to contribute to the state's effort to improve the social and economic welfare of the Oromo and other Ethiopians, the members of the Ethiopian ruling elite were not convinced that the association did not have a subversive political agenda. A campaign of defaming MTSHA subsequently got underway, as its members were harassed, denied treatment equal to that of other Ethiopian bureaucrats and civil servants, and frequently accused of disloyalty to the state. On one occasion, Aklilu Habte Wold, then the Ethiopian prime minister, confided to Brigadier General Tadasa Biru the government's undeclared policy to deny educational and professional opportunities to the Oromo. The general was an Ethiopianized Oromo who later joined the association because of this event. In 1966, the stunned general attempted unsuccessfully to assassinate Emperor Haile Sellassie and take over state power.

Haile Sellassie's government was alarmed by this daring action and by the level of Oromo discontent and political consciousness. In 1967, MTSHA was banned, some of its leaders executed, and others imprisoned. Oromo cultural groups, such as the Affran Qallo and the Biftu Ganamo musical bands, were accused of being conveyers of de-

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vious political messages and disbanded. Between 1968 and 1970, the Bale Oromo armed struggle, which had started in the early 1960s, was brutally suppressed by government forces with technical assistance from Great Britain, the United States, and Israel. The severity and speed with which the government reacted to the attempted assassination of Haile Sellassie made it plain to Oromo nationalists that reforming the Ethiopian state would never attain their demands for social and economic justice.

Oromo nationalism was subsequently forced to go underground. With the suppression of Oromo reform nationalism (calling for reforming but not overthrowing the empire's political and economic system), some Oromo nationalists fled to Somalia, the Middle East, and elsewhere to continue the struggle in exile. Others remained in Ethiopia. The continued denial of individual, civil, and collective rights and the suppression of Oromo organizations and movements forced Oromo leaders who remained in Ethiopia to press on with the Oromo struggle clandestinely. In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, they established an underground political movement and expanded their influence by organizing different political circles in different sectors of Oromo society, including students, professionals, workers, farmers, and soldiers. Using political pamphlets that they produced and distributed secretly, they framed the Oromo question as a colonial question and, by doing this, defined the future direction of the Oromo national movement. By the early 1970s, Oromo reform nationalism had been transformed into a revolutionary nationalism that had as its goal the dismantling of Ethiopian settler colonialism and the establishment of an independent state or an autonomous region within a federated, multinational, democratic society.

In 1973, the Oromo who had fled to foreign countries and received military training returned to Oromia to initiate an armed struggle under the leadership of Elemo Qilixu in eastern Oromia. In 1974, this group and the revolutionary nationalists who had remained in Ethiopia announced the creation of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) to spearhead the Oromo struggle. Soon, the OLF began to challenge Ethiopian colonial domination ideologically, intellectually, politically, and militarily. In response, the Ethiopian state initiated counterinsurgency operations against Oromo nationalists and the Oromo people. In the late 1970s and the 1980s, the OLF encountered

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difficulties as it sought to accelerate the pace of the struggle. International support was hard to come by, and acquiring bases from which to launch guerrilla attacks proved difficult. Ethiopia's relentless attacks and Somalia's challenge to Oromo nationalism, coupled with internal disagreement within the OLF leadership, stunted the growth of revolutionary Oromo nationalism, which had begun to develop quickly in the mid-1970s. In one incident in 1979, almost all the members of the OLF executive committee were wiped out on their way to an important organizational meeting in Somalia.

Oromo nationalists and veteran leaders like Tadassa Biru and Hailu Ragassa were killed in 1976. In 1980, the military regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam rounded up and murdered high-ranking OLF leaders and several hundred activists. Because of all these factors, the Oromo movement could not play a direct, leading role in the fall of the military regime in May 1991. With the demise of this regime, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), led by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), came to power with the support and endorsement of the U.S. government. A Transitional Government, composed of the EPDRF and various liberation organizations, the most prominent of which was the OLF, was formed to pave the way for the eventual establishment of an all-inclusive, democratic government in Ethiopia. During the early phases of the transitional period in 1991 and 1992, Oromo nationalism was transformed from an elite movement to a mass movement.

The development of the Oromo national movement representing the largest ethnonational group in Ethiopia was viewed by the TPLF as a major roadblock to the march toward the establishment of Tigrayan hegemony. In an effort to remove the obstacle, the TPLF-led ethnocentric Ethiopian government labeled Oromo nationalists, businessmen, and intellectuals as 'narrow nationalists' and 'enemies of the Ethiopian Revolution' and began a systematic effort to destroy Oromo nationalism altogether (Hizbawi Adera 1989). As explained above, thousands of Oromos were killed, imprisoned, and robbed of their property. Several prominent Oromo journalists and intellectuals were imprisoned illegally and many were killed. Even a relief organization that served the Oromo, the Oromo Relief Association (ORA), was outlawed and expelled from neighboring countries (Dibaba 1997). Despite the challenges to the Oromo people and their national move-

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ment, the OLF and other Oromo organizations continued the Oromo national struggle for self-determination.

The Emergence of the Oromo Diaspora and the Role of a few Activist Scholars

The intensification of the national struggle, as expected, brought Ethiopian state terrorism down on Oromos. These conditions have forced thousands of Oromos to seek protection in the West and join the African Diaspora groups that came before them.

The process of globalization that started in the sixteenth century is characterized at the present stage by a revolution in information, communications, and transportation technologies that have reduced the relevance of national boundaries, eliminated barriers to global investment, and allowed the easy movement of capital, information, technology, and labor. In the 1980s and increasingly in the 1990s, these global changes and structures, combined with oppressive conditions in the Ethiopian Empire, forced hundreds of thousands of Oromos out of their homeland and made them refugees in foreign lands. The dispersal of Oromos has now produced nascent Oromo Diaspora communities worldwide. Noting this phenomenon, Bonnie Holcomb commented: '[A]fter a century of separation from one another, Oromos have come together in the world beyond Oromia where communication was unrestricted' (Holcomb, 1999, p. 7).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Ethiopian military regime declared an all-out war against 'narrow nationalist' and 'secessionist' enemies of the revolution. With the support of the former Soviet Union, the regime attacked Oromo nationalists with unprecedented fury. Massive human rights violations were committed as political and religious persecution was unleashed and schemes of forced resettlement and villagization, a political project of creating peasant hamlets on government-selected sites, were carried out. The combined effect of these policies and attacks, summary executions, and political persecution caused the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Oromos, who migrated to neighboring countries (Bulcha, 2002, pp. 167-170). In the 1990s, the TPLF-dominated government of Ethiopia continued the long-standing persecution of the Oromo people and their independent political and civil organizations, this time with assistance from the West, particularly the United States. Oromo nationalist journalists,

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businessmen and businesswomen, intellectuals, teachers, students, farmers, artists, and civil servants were killed, imprisoned, or ‘disappeared’ without trace.

Ethiopian state terrorism ‘drove millions of people to abandon their homes to escape conscription, starvation, and certain death by seeking refuge beyond the borders of the empire’ (Holcomb, 1999, p. 7). In this process, about half a million Oromos were scattered around the world. Today there are about 50,000 Oromos in North America, the majority of who immigrated to the United States and Canada as refugees. A few others came as tourists and students but decided to remain for political or personal reasons. Among the latter group, some began organizing Oromo Diaspora associations in order to expand the support base for Oromo nationalism and the struggle for national liberation.⁹ Their ideas came to fruition in 1974 when 11 Oromos came together to form the Union of Oromos in North America (UONA). More Oromos joined UONA during its second congress in the following year. Promoting the Oromo national movement and openly advocating *Oromummaa* (Oromo culture, identity, and nationalism), OLF-affiliated organizations such as the UONA, the Union of Oromo Students in Europe (UOSE), and later the Oromo Studies Association (OSA), the Oromo Relief Association (ORA), Oromo community organizations, Oromo support groups, and Oromo Christian and Muslim communities sprang up in the West and in other parts of the world.

The base of the Oromo Diaspora community has been expanding recently in both number and diversity. As more refugees arrived in the West, the Oromo Diaspora was transformed from a handful of educated Christian males from Western and Central Oromia to a more broadly based representation of the population of Oromia. The new wave of arrivals brought women and children, farmers, traders, Muslims and traditional religionists, and persons of less urbanized, relatively less privileged, and consequently less ‘Ethiopianized’ background and experience (Holcomb, 1999, p. 17). Living outside the control of Ethiopia, the new Oromo Diaspora community quickly became engaged in building organizations that reflect *Oromummaa* and promote the Oromo struggle for self-determination, self-expression, and self-sufficiency both in Oromia and abroad. Although they are concentrated in big cities like Washington, DC, Minneapolis, Atlanta,

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Seattle, Toronto, and Ottawa, the members of the Oromo Diaspora community are scattered over most North American cities. They have raised the voice of the Oromo people in the First World.

My own life and intellectual development are intertwined with the creation of the Oromo Diaspora community and its efforts to produce knowledge for liberation and to promote social justice. As a member of this community, I have participated in producing Oromo-centric knowledge for promoting social justice for the Oromo people. In 1985 while I was engaging in graduate studies I joined UONA, and between 1987 and 1988 I served as the editor of *Waldhansso: Journal of the Union of Oromos in North America*. I was also a member of a group within UONA that gradually created the Oromo Studies Association in North America. While I was a graduate student between 1985 and 1989, my research was focused on Oromo studies. Since the Oromo were not known to the world at that time, it was not easy to convince my professors to research and write on Oromo society.

During my graduate studies in the Department of Sociology at Binghamton University, I requested one of the professors to be the director of my dissertation. In our conversations, this professor advised me to write my dissertation on South Africa rather than on my people, the Oromo. This professor further advised me that it was not good for my professional advancement to write on such obscure people that they did not yet achieve nationhood or people-hood. When the professor observed that I was very angry because of the insensitive comments, he apologized and agreed to direct my dissertation. Once he realized the situation of the Oromo people, he encouraged me to do my best. My main goal of pursuing graduate education was to develop my intellectual knowledge that would equip me to engage in Oromo studies to produce an Oromo-centric knowledge in order to challenge Ethiopian knowledge elites and their Ethiopianist collaborators who distorted Oromo history, culture, and identity and to promote social justice for the Oromo people. My involvement in the Oromo national movement in Oromia developed in me such commitment. Gradually I started to write and publish on Oromo society and to develop an emergent Oromo studies with other Oromo scholars in the Diaspora. The emergent Oromo studies have struggled to replace Ethiopian colonial history with a history of liberation, and to refute historical myths that have been produced to justify Ethiopian coloni-

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alism.

The Contradiction between the Knowledge for Domination and the Knowledge for Liberation

The Ethiopian knowledge elites and their global supporters have treated the Oromo as historical objects because of their powerlessness. These elites with the support of the Ethiopian state produced 'official history' that completely denied a historical space for the Oromo and other colonized peoples. The Oromo name was erased from history and replaced by the Galla, which connoted savage, cruel, orderless, destructive, slave, barbaric, inferior, uncultured, and ignorant. As R. M. Rahman (1993, p. 14) notes, 'domination of masses by elites is rooted not only in the polarization of control over the means of material production but also over the means of knowledge production, including control over social power to determine what is useful knowledge.' With their colonization and incorporation into Ethiopia, the Oromo could not develop independent institutions that would allow them to produce and disseminate their historical knowledge freely. However, in the Diaspora a few Oromo intellectuals have overcome this shortcoming by creating the Oromo Studies Association (OSA) and developing the emergent Oromo studies since the late 1980s.

Negative views about the Oromo have prevented most Ethiopian and Ethiopianist scholars from understanding Oromo history and culture. Tesema Ta'a (1980, pp. 98-99) asserts that 'old written records on the Oromo reflect some elements of racist ideology and have tremendous influence on some of the scholars of modern Ethiopian history who have, for one reason or another, not been able to detach themselves from the archaic and wrong views about the Oromo.' While Ethiopian elites and their supporters continue to support the Ethiopian version of history, Oromo scholars have realized the necessity of a plurality of centers in knowledge production and dissemination. A few innovative scholars have recognized the importance of looking at a society from different cultural centers and have developed the emergent Oromo studies. The emergent Oromo studies indicate that the Oromo are transforming their one hundred years of historical defeat to victory through intellectual, political, and armed struggle because of the emergence of an Oromo educated class that started

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to develop an Oromo national consciousness.

However, Oromo scholars and others who have interest in Oromo studies have been discouraged or prohibited by the Ethiopian state from studying Oromo culture and history. Consequently, Oromo studies have been developing in Europe and North America. Some of the Oromo and Oromia scholars in the Diaspora have committed themselves to serious scholarship and their works are becoming stepping-stones in the writing of the social and cultural history of the Oromo people. Contemporary publications on Oromo cultural and social history challenge a top-down paradigm to historiography and make the Oromo subjects rather than objects of history. 'Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource,' D. J. Haraway (1991, p. 198) writes, 'never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship of 'objective' knowledge.' Oromo studies as liberation knowledge recognize an Oromo agency and promote social justice.

In the capitalist world system, indigenous peoples who do not have states cannot fully develop their institutions, including an educational one, and promote social justice for their societies. Therefore, to promote their human rights that are enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, colonized peoples like the Oromo must intensify their national struggle to achieve national self-determination, statehood, and multinational democracy. The Diaspora communities such as that of the Oromo can only play supporting roles to the national movement of the colonized indigenous peoples around the world. At the beginning of the twentieth-first century, with the intensifications of globalization and the proliferation of ethnonationalisms, the nature and role of the nation-state are being challenged and changed by the globalizing structures, such as transnational elites, multinational corporations (Robinson, 1996), technological transformation, the revolution in international communication and transformation of information, and by forces of ethnonational diversity and multiculturalism (Bereciartu, 1994).

The development of ethnonational movements in different parts of the world shows that there are political and economic crises in various states in particular and the global system in general. The

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development of cultural and social movements among colonized peoples is seen as an integral part of the worldwide struggle for cultural identity, multiculturalism, economic freedom, social justice, and inalienable political and cultural rights of these peoples. The breaking down of the Soviet and Yugoslavian empires into several ethnonational states, the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa in the early 1990s, the division of Czechoslovakia into Czech and Slovakia, the liberation of Eritrea in 1991 in Africa and East Timor (Timor-Leste) in 2002 in Asia, and the referendum vote for secession in South Sudan in the beginning of 2011 prove the relevance of territorial or ethnonationalism and the principle of national self-determination. 'So while the revolutionary ideas of the French Revolution threatened monarchies and aristocracies in every state in Europe,' J. Kellas (1991, p. 27) writes, 'ethnic and linguistic nationalists took this further and threatened the boundaries of states as well.' Oppressed nationalism emerges in the process of social transformations through the interaction of the historical past with the present condition of the modern world system (Smith 1986).

Conclusion

For the first time since their colonization and incorporation into Ethiopia, in the late 1980s, Oromo intellectuals who live in exile and other international scholars created and developed the Oromo Studies Association (OSA), an independent institution that freely researches, publishes, and disseminates Oromo-centric knowledge to the world. In this effort, its journal called *the Journal of Oromo Studies* plays a central role. Describing the significance of creating and developing such an alternative institution, John Gaventa (1993, p. 131) argues that

fundamental questions must be raised about what knowledge is produced, by whom, for whose interests and toward what end. Such arguments begin to demand the creation of an alternative organization science—one that is not only for the people but is created with them and by them as well.

Similarly, scholars who built OSA have engaged in critical scholarship and they have published books and refereed journals and exposed the criminality of the Ethiopian colonial state and the deficiencies of Ethi-

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opian studies that objectified Oromo society.

By continuing to expand Oromo studies in the Diaspora and to challenge those scholars who downplay the Oromo struggle, culture, and civilization, Oromo and Oromia scholars have enhanced the growing awareness of the Oromo problem. The free production of Oromo knowledge and the Oromo struggle for national self-determination are fundamental human rights issues. Therefore, intellectuals who are involved in Oromo and Ethiopian studies must debate openly and honestly to transform their scholarship, and to suggest ways through which conflicts can be democratically and fairly resolved in the Ethiopian Empire. The building of democracy of knowledge is the first step toward this goal.

The emergent Oromo historical and cultural studies in the Diaspora started to have a serious impact on Oromo and Ethiopian studies. Scholars who are engaged in Oromo studies have effectively identified some of the deficiencies in Ethiopian studies and the gross human rights violations of the Oromo in Ethiopia. They have challenged the fallacy of the mainstream Ethiopian paradigm and built the new paradigm of Oromo social and cultural history. This new paradigm has already transformed the colonized Oromo from objects to subjects of history by breaking the Ethiopian studies monopoly of knowledge production and dissemination. These efforts have been parts and parcel of the Oromo struggle for national self-determination: to regain their political freedom and rebuild independent institutions. These intellectual achievements in the Diaspora can only fully benefit the Oromo masses in the Ethiopian Empire if the Oromo national movement fulfills its political objectives in Oromia.

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Endnotes

1. The Ethiopian settlers continued to depopulate Oromia through slave trade until the 1930s when the Italian fascists abolished slavery to recruit adequate labor for their agricultural plantations in the Horn of Africa. The *nafxanya-gabbar* system was also abolished during this time through the same process.
2. The Ethiopian state has been authoritarian to Amhara and Tigrayan communities;

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it has been terrorist regime to the colonized peoples like Oromo because it has been ruling by practicing state-terrorism and massive human rights violations.

3. In his book *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, Adam Hochschild (1998) vividly explains how King Leopold II of Belgium terrorized the people of Congo by dispossessing their lands and reducing them to semi-slaves in order to force them to collect ivory and harvest wild rubber. While claiming to develop the Congo Free States and to promote a humanitarian cause, King Leopold II established policies that resulted in the destruction of more than five million Africans by murder, diseases, and hunger. His Force Publique Officers led by a few Belgians and staffed by the natives committed horrendous crimes against humanity by burning villages, hanging, torturing, raping, flogging, and mutilating in order to terrorize the people and force them to work for the king. This organization is similar to the organization of Meles Zenawi called the OPDO that imposes a reign of terror on the Oromo people. Similarly, in his book, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*, Ben Kiernan (2007) explains how it took four centuries to decimate the indigenous peoples of the Americas through war, genocide, terrorism, diseases, and removal. He particularly discusses how the president of the United States, Andrew Jackson, destroyed the Cherokee Nation by removing them from their homelands and sending them to reservations. Jackson and his supporters and white settlers created civil war among the leadership of the Cherokee and made them to fight one another. In *The Trail of Tears and Indian Removal*, Amy H. Sturgis (2007) explores how the United States practiced racial or ethnic cleansing on the Cherokee nation. When the Cherokee people were removed from Georgia between 1838 and 1839, about eight hundred Cherokee perished, and they arrived in Oklahoma without any children and only a few elders. When the Herero and Nama peoples of Namibia resisted Germany colonialism, the German soldiers and settlers developed a plan to carry out a shoot-to-kill policy. They conducted extrajudicial killings, established concentration camps, and employed forced labor and death camps. The German colonial governor expressed the plan of Germany: '15 years from now, there will not be much left of the natives' (quoted in Kiernan, 2007: 381). This plan was implemented between 1904 and 1905 when the majority of Herero and Nama were exterminated. For further discussion, see Edwin Herbert, *Small Wars and Skirmishes 1902—18*, (Nottingham, Great Britain: Foundry Books, 2003).

4. Tamrat G. Giorgis (2009: 1), Addis Fortune staff writer, explains in the following: 'A new global trend is rising whereby companies from emerging economies grab vast land in poor host nations to grow and export cereals and grains to their home countries. It has happened here in Bako [, Oromia,], where people from India have been granted tens of thousands of hectares of land for commercial farming. The locals however, are unhappy.' Giorgis, Tamrat G. 'A Stranger Comes to Town.' *Addis Fortune*. Vol. 10, no. 486. August 23, 2009. p. 1. <<http://www.addisfortune.com/Vol%2010%20No%20486%20Archive/agenda.htm>>. While the Indian company Karuturi Global LTD has invested 4.3 billion dollars to lease 765,000 hectares of farmland from the Ethiopian government, peasant farmers have lost the lands they once farmed for subsistence to foreign investors and a land-expropriating government. Giorgis notes that Olivier De Schutter, a UN rapporteur, explained the central problem in this phenomenon: "frequently, they [farmers] do not have property titles to the land upon which they depend for their survival and well-being. They do not have possibilities of

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legal recourse in the event of expropriation?’ Besides India, various other foreign investors have been seizing subsistence farmable land: Olusegun Obasanjo, the former president of Nigeria, just purchased 20,000 sqm of land in Oromia, the region known as the breadbasket of Ethiopia, to invest in tourism and hotels; Ismael Omar Guelleh, president of Djibouti, purchased 10,000 sqm of land in Bishoftu, Oromia, (‘Debre Zeit’) to build ‘a holiday home’ and 3,000 hectares in Bale, Oromia, for agriculture production; and Egypt made a multimillion-dollar agricultural investment in 20,000 hectares of land. What is critical to note here is that these lands are in Oromia, the land of the Oromos—the primary political targets of the government. See O’Kadameri, Billie. ‘Indian Company Acquires 765, 000 hectares of land in Ethiopia.’ *Ethiopian Review*. November 2009. < <http://www.ethiopianreview.com/content/11418>>. Giorgis, Tamrat. ‘A Stranger Comes to Town.’ *Addis Fortune*. Vol. 10, No. 486. August 23, 2009. p. 3. <<http://www.addisfortune.com/Vol%2010%20No%20486%20Archive/agenda.htm>>. ‘World Leaders are Taking Notice of Land in Debre Zeit.’ *Capital*. Vol. 12. No. 577. <http://www.capitalethiopia.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12046:global-village&catid=12:local-ews&Itemid=4>. What does this prioritization of foreign economic investments.

5. Seye Abraha was a founder and former political bureau member of the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front. He was a chauvinist Tigrayan who did not hide his negative attitudes about the Oromos and the OLF, when he was the Defense Minister of Ethiopia; See ‘The Prison speaks Oromiffa,’ *Ethiopian Review*, January 17, 2008. Seye was jailed in Qaliti prison.

6. For example, the wife of Ahmed Mohamed Kuree, a seventy year-old elderly farmer, expressed on February 21, 2007, on the Voice of America, Afaan Oromo Program the following: ‘We found his prayer beads, his clothes and a single bone of his which the hyenas had left behind after devouring the rest of his body, and we took those items home. What is more, after we got home, they [government agents] condemned us for going to Gaara Suufii and for mourning. For fear of repercussions, we have not offered the customary prayer for my husband by reading from the Qur’an. Justice has not been served. That is where we are today.’

7. Ahmed Mohamed Kuree was one of these Oromos. Another Oromo, Ayisha Ali, a fourteen year-old teenager, was also killed and eaten by hyenas. Her mother said on the Voice of America, Afaan Oromo Program the following: ‘After we heard the rumor about the old man [Ahmed Mohamed Kuree] I followed his family to Gaara Suufii [in search of my daughter]. There we found her skirt, sweater, underwear and her hair, braided . . . That was all we found of my daughter’s remains.’ Ayisha was probably raped before she was killed.

8. In 2002, when the Sheko and Mezhenger peoples demanded their rights, the regime killed between 128 and 1,000 people. Nobody knows exactly how many people were killed since the government and the victims give different numbers. Similarly, on June 21, 2002, between 39 and 100 Sidamas were killed when government soldiers fired at 7,000 peaceful demonstrators in Hawas (Awash). Again government forces and colonial settlers committed genocidal massacres on the Annuak people of Gambella in December 2003 and beginning 2004; they killed 424 people and displaced about 50, 000 people. Currently, the regime is engaged in genocidal massacres, imprisonment, and massive human rights violations in Ogadenia and Oromia.

9. A few of these individuals, such as Lubee Biru, had connections with the Oromo

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national movement in Oromia. Telephone interviews with Lubee Biru, 20 December 2002.

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