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# Urban Centers in Oromia: Consequences of Spatial Concentration of Power in Multinational Ethiopia

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# URBAN CENTERS IN OROMIA: CONSEQUENCES OF SPATIAL CONCENTRATION OF POWER IN MULTINATIONAL ETHIOPIA

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Asafa Jalata

This paper examines the essence and characteristics of cities and urban centers in Oromia (see maps 1 and 2) and the major consequences of the centralization and spatial concentration of Habasha (Amhara-Tigray) political power in a multinational Ethiopia. It specifically demonstrates how the integration of indigenous Oromo towns into the Ethiopian colonial structure and the formation of garrison and non-garrison

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cities and towns in Oromia consolidated Habasha political domination over the Oromo people. The Ethiopian colonial structure limited the access of Oromo urban residents, who are a minority in their own cities and towns, to institutions and opportunities, such as employment, education, health, mass media and other public services. In addition to exclusion, the Oromos have been prevented from developing autonomous institutions, organizations, culture, and language, and have been subordinated to the institutions and organizations of the Habasha colonial settlers in their own cities, towns, and homeland.

The issues of the Oromo urbanites cannot be sufficiently explained without locating them within larger problems of the colonization of Oromia by the alliance of Ethiopian settler colonialism and global imperialism. This paper explores four interrelated issues: First, it outlines methodological and theoretical narratives. Second, the paper specifically explains the evolution of indigenous Oromo urban centers and their integration into the Ethiopian colonial structure and the development of garrison and non-garrison cities and towns in Oromia. Third, it identifies and examines the major consequences of the spatial concentration of Amhara-Tigray political power in the Oromo and Habasha urban communities in Oromia. Finally, the paper explains the features of Oromian urban communities, the process of urban underdevelopment, and the effects of political repression and state terrorism on the Oromos.

### **METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL NARRATIVES**

Addressing the major consequences of the spatial concentration of Habasha political power in the heart

of Oromian cities and urban centers is a difficult and complex task because of the paucity of adequate data<sup>1</sup> and the methodological and theoretical challenges one faces due to the problem of dealing with the two contradictory worlds of the Oromos and Habashas that are interconnected and geographically located in the hearts of Oromia. Historical and comparative methods are used to address the root problems and the contradictions between the Oromo and Habasha communities in Oromian cities and urban centers by locating them in the regional and global political economy. These methods assist us in exploring the historical origins and development of pre-colonial and colonial towns in Oromia, and to historically situate, compare, and contrast the quality of life for Oromo and Amhara-Tigray communities in Oromian cities and urban centers.

This study uses critical, re-interpretative, comparative, and integrative modes of analyses. By using an integrative and critical theoretical framework, this research interconnects structural, cultural and behavioral approaches to explain the processes of policy formation and political action in order to determine why there are differential qualities of life and public services in the colonized and colonizing urban communities. Primarily structural approaches are rooted in Marxian and Weberian modes of analyses that focus on the impact of socio-economic relations in shaping political structures and policies (see DiGaetano and Storm 2003, Skocpol 1973). Structural analysts are concerned with “historically rooted and materially based processes of distribution, conflict, power, and domination, thought to drive social order and social change” (Lichbach 1997, 248). The political economy approach, as one aspect of struc-

tural modes of analyses, helps in identifying and explaining chains of factors that facilitate large-scale and long-term social, cultural, political, and economic changes. Analysts who adopt the political economy approach assume that “the most significant processes shaping human identities, interests, and interaction are such large-scale features of modernity as capitalist development, market rationality, state-building, secularization, political and scientific revolution, and the acceleration of instruments for the communication and diffusions of ideas” (Katznelson 1997, 83).

The structural or political economy approach does not adequately explain the behavioral and institutional forms of the Ethiopian colonial elites and state structures. Cultural analysis of political systems however can be used to explain the behavioral and institutional forms of the colonizing structure. This analytic approach provides assistance in understanding the basic values, symbols and belief systems that provide “a system of meaning that people use to manage their daily worlds, large and small; . . . culture is the basis and political identity that affects how people line up and how they act on wide range of matters” (Ross 1997, 42). According to Alan DiGaetano and Elizabeth Strom (2003, 360), “culture is linked to governance by ideological constructions through which participants in the political process interpret local events. Such ideological orientations also provide the core values upon which policy decisions are made.” C. Stone (1989, 6) notes that governments are based on “the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions.”

Through integrating the structural context, political culture, and political behavior in complex sets of relations and networks that DiGaetano and Strom (2003, 263) call “the institutional milieu,” we can explore the impact of the Ethiopian colonial institutions in general and garrison cities and towns in particular on the Oromo urbanites. According to DiGaetano and Strom (2003, 263),

Institutional milieu are the complexes of formal and informal political and governmental arrangements that mediate interactions among the structural contexts, political culture, and political actors. Formal institutional arrangements . . . include the governmental bodies . . . and partnerships that give visible form to urban governance through rules and organization. *Modes of governance* [emphasis in original] are the informal arrangements that define the governing relationships among and within formal institutions implicated in urban politics.

The integration of structural, cultural, and behavioral theoretical approaches is necessary to examine critically the situations of Oromo and Habasha communities in Oromian cities and urban centers.

### **PRE-COLONIAL URBAN CENTERS IN OROMIA**

This section explains the evolution of indigenous Oromo urban centers, and how these centers became the centers of Ethiopian colonial institutions and were used to dominate, control and exploit the Oromo people. Urban centers developed in pre-colonial Oromia because of the development of the division of labor and the emergence

of internal contradictions in Oromo society. Pre-colonial Oromia had a small number of urban centers because of the egalitarian political economy of Oromo society which was similar to what Karl Polanyi (1944, 47-48) calls “reciprocity and redistribution.” Urban centers and cities emerged in class-based societies: “Without a central power and a mechanism to generate a surplus over consumption and to concentrate it into urban areas, cities cannot grow” (Gilbert and Gugler 1995, 14). Historian Tesema Ta’a (1994, 678) asserts that in Western Oromia, the major factors for the development of towns in the first half of the nineteenth century were “further consolidation and centralization of the administration, extension of resource base, increase in agricultural production and the flourishing of trade.” The development of settled agriculture and the production of surplus food and other materials and trade networks “release a portion of the people from tasks of providing the elemental necessities of life” (see Johnson 1972, 1-2).

The transformation of pastoral modes of life into mixed and settled agriculture, the availability of surplus food and wealth, the processes of class differentiation and status group formation, the emergence of hereditary leaders by replacing democratic leaders, and the development of marketplaces with networks of local and long distance trade gradually led to the emergence of indigenous towns in Western Oromia (Ta’a 1994; Gemedo 1987; Tadasse 1983). The hereditary Leeqaa kingdoms “developed and consolidated their political power using better military organization, forging effective alliances, controlling local economic resources and dominating the long-distance trade as well as the main market villages” (Ta’a 1994, 676). The town of Naqamte<sup>2</sup> emerged

## Urban Centers in Oromia



Map 1: Oromia in the 1850s

Source: Mitchell, S. Augustus *A System of Modern Geography* (Philadelphia: J.H. Butler and Company, 1875).

in this process. Before the emergence of Naqamte, the *gadaa* government was centered in Komtoo. At that time Naqamte was a *qabiyyee* of the Kolobo clan. Bakare acquired Handaq when he was elected as the *abba duulaa* of the Mananya'a and moved his residence to Waacha, close to his new estate after dislodging Fido Bokisa. Naqamte grew around this locale.

Naqamte gradually developed into a central market-place where the people would exchange their products. Long distance caravan merchants frequently traveled to Naqamte in search of gold and ivory. The first monarchical leader of the Leeqaa Naqamte, Bakare Godana established a hereditary local Oromo kingdom of Leeqaa, ruling approximately between 1841 and 1868,



by destroying the Oromo democratic system of administration. He developed Naqamte into a permanent place and town. As soon as Bakare Godana “was elected as the *abba duulaa* [war leader] of the Na’a lineage group, [he] immediately started to ignore the basic tenets of the customary *gadaa* rules and regulations and [undermined] the superior powers of the *abba boku* [the main leader]. He gathered many followers and organized them into an effective [strike] force and entered into repeated conflicts with Fido Bokkisa, the contemporary *abba boku*” (Ta’a 1994, 677).

Bakare forced Fido Bokkisa to flee, controlling areas around Naqamte, such as Waacha.<sup>3</sup> Bakare established this settlement and consolidated his political and social organization by recruiting permanent body guards and soldiers. When he died in 1868, about 2000 people lived around Naqamte (Ta’a 1994, 678). The development and enlargement of Naqamte continued under the administration of his successors Moroda Bakare (r. 1868-1889) and Kumsa Moroda (1889-1923). It was during Kumsa’s administration that European travelers, merchants, and a few Ethiopians visited Naqamate and provided eyewitness accounts on the town. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, Weld Blundel (1900, 13), a British traveler, noted that “Nakamte is a large scattered town of some 40,000 inhabitants, situated on an undulating ground, with all the evidence of prosperity. All kinds of produce corn and honey being principal and large quantities of cotton . . . iron and copper metal from the west are to be seen in the market.” Another traveler, Hugues Le Roux (1902, 310-311), a French traveler, was amazed by the buildings in Naqamte and their various shapes and sizes. He witnessed that “a high density of popula-

tion living in compact villages in and around” the city (quoted in Ta’a 1994, 680). C.W. Major Gwynn (1937) admired how Naqamte was flourishing. Further, E.J. Bartleet (1934, 65) described how this city had commercial networks with Gojjam, Shawa, Bella Shangul, the Sudan, and Dembi Dollo, and had developed into an important and prosperous city. Adrien Zervos (1936, 397-399) described that because Naqamte was a very significant commercial center about seventy foreign merchants established import-export agencies in the city. The foreign merchants included Indians, Greeks, Lebanese, Armenians, Americans, and Arabs. The Swedish Evangelical Missionaries also opened a church, a hospital, and an elementary school in the city. There were indigenous settlements and towns similar to Naqamte in other parts of Oromia. Towns like Saqa, Jimma, Billo, Assandabo, Dappo, and Dembi Dollo developed during the nineteenth century.

South of Naqamte, Saqa emerged as the seat of the ruler of Limmu and as a local market in the early nineteenth century. As a center of commerce, Saqa was connected to Kafa and other Oromo kingdoms, Gojjam, and Gondar (Gemedo 1987, 30). The population of this city was estimated between ten and twelve thousand. Saqa declined in the late nineteenth century because of the weakening of the kingdom of Limmu and the emergence of other settlements and towns like Jimma and Billo (Gemedo 1987, 30). During the second half of the nineteenth century, Billo emerged as a main marketplace between the Gibe region and Gojjam. Several caravan merchants visited Billo and passed through it. Another important city was Jimma, the city that evolved from Hirmata and Jiren (see Map 2) settlements in the

middle of the nineteenth century as the commercial and administrative center of the Oromo kingdom of Jimma (Gemeda 1987, 32). Abba Jifar I (c. 1830-1854) selected Jiren as the political capital of his kingdom and his main *mesera* (residence), and Hirmata as the main market (*Gaba Gifti*) of his kingdom. While merchants lived in Hirmata, the *mootti* (King), his family, and followers lived in Jiren.

European travelers, such as Soleillet, Jules Borelli, Leopoldo Traversi, and Alexander Bulatovich (2000) stayed in Jiren at the court of the King. Later, Mendera emerged as the main residential area of the merchants and their agents; the merchants and their agents who were living in Mendera in 1911 included Dubail, a Swiss; Guingnions, a French; and Ydlibi, a Syrian (Gemeda 1987, 33). Further, Indian, Arab, and American merchants opened shops for their agents in the 1920s in Mendera.

Another urban center that emerged in the late nineteenth century was Dembi Dollo; this town also evolved from a marketplace. After struggling with its competitors, such as Abba Ghimbi, Abba Dassa and Burayu, Jote Tulu of Gidami brought Dembi Dollo under his administration (Tadasse 1983). After the death of Jote in 1918, Leeqaa Qellem and Sayyoo fell under the direct control of the Abyssinian colonial administration, and Habasha settlers began to arrive and establish the *nafoxayna-gabbar* system. The expropriation of Oromo lands by Ethiopian colonial settlers, and the intensification of taxation, and the inability of Oromos to pay heavy taxes forced many of them to migrate to Dembi Dollo in search of jobs, such as porterage (Tadasse 1983, 26). The Greeks introduced new ways of constructing houses; sawmills; the knowledge of making blocks of sandstone; production of various fruits

and crops, such as rice, mangoes, bananas, oranges, apricots, etc.; sewing and sewing machines; bakeries; hotels; cheese making; and so forth. There were also other Europeans and Americans who introduced some innovations to the city of Dembi Dollo. There was an Italian sawmill in 1919 near Dembi Dollo. The Italian Catholic mission built sawmills in Sakko to the west of Dembi Dollo. The American mission was established in 1919 and built a school, a hospital, and churches. Both the American and Catholic Italian missions introduced a modern education, health care, and Christianity to Dembi Dollo.

Land alienation and heavy land taxes forced Oromos to seek employment with Greek merchants, and poor Oromos became porters to transport goods between Dembi Dollo and Gambella. The first missionaries were medical doctors who combined religious gospel and medicine; they trained Oromo teachers and preachers to spread the Christian gospel among the Oromo community of the region. There are other pre-conquest Oromian cities that are not included in this paper due to lack of data. After Oromia was effectively colonized by the Habasha, indigenous Oromo urban centers were converted into garrison towns and became the center of the Ethiopian colonial administration. In these processes Oromos became a numerical and political minority in their own urban centers and culturally and economically subordinated to Habasha communities as we will see below.

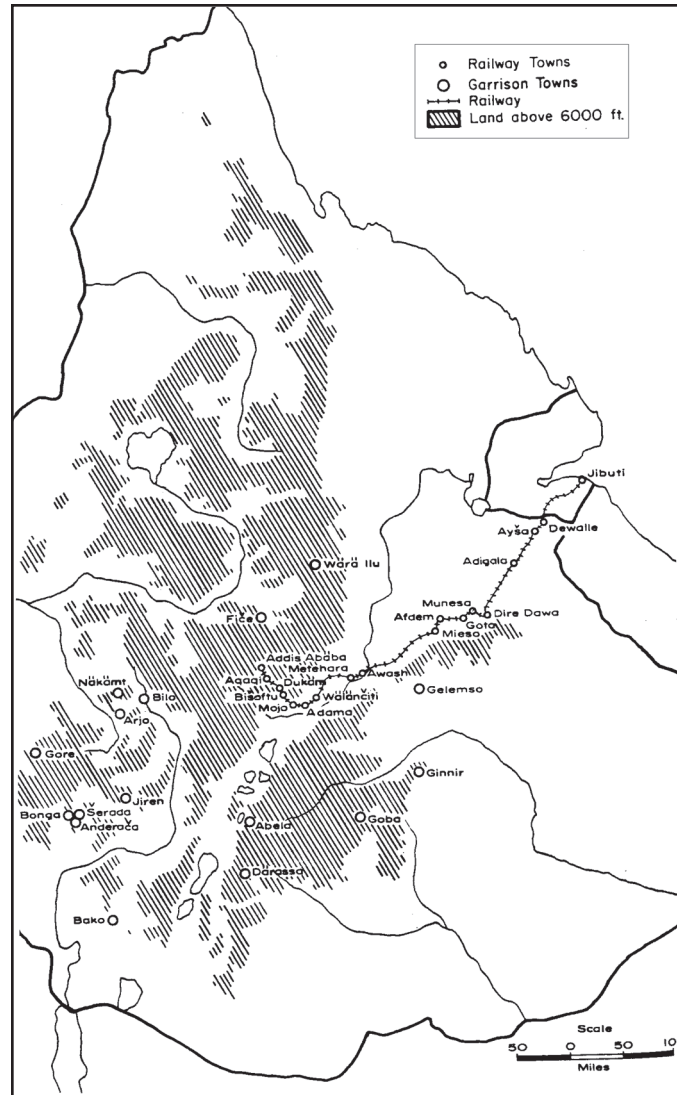
### **THE DEVELOPMENT GARRISON AND NON-GARRISON TOWNS**

The chains of factors that facilitated the development of both garrison and non-garrison cities and towns (see Map 2) included capitalist penetration; Abyssinian

colonial expansion, including the need to control strategic centers and the caravan trade as well as natural and human resources; the introduction of innovations, such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway line (see Map 2); and modern transportation and communication systems (see Benti 1988, 2000; Jalata 1993; Koehn and Koehn 1979). Alan Gilbert and Josef Gugler (1995, 16) note that “without the intrusion of industrial capitalism and imperialism some Third World societies would still lack major cities. In major parts of America and Africa urban development was superimposed by capitalism on essentially rural areas.” Just as European colonialists founded cities that reflected their power structures and protected their interests in their colonies, the Ethiopian colonialists created or developed urban centers and cities that they used for colonial domination and surplus extraction from Oromia. Gilbert and Gugler (1995, 18) correctly characterize such cities and urban centers as an “instrument of conquest.”

The Ethiopian colonial settlers created garrison towns and cities known as *katamas* in strategically and politically secured regions and brought the existing Oromo urban centers under their control. John Murray (1922, 35) points that “Convinced that much more was to be made out of the helpless Galla [Oromo] by their permanent exploitation, he [Menelik] began . . . to occupy the districts that he overran with permanent garrisons of his troops, providing at the same time for their administration under a hierarchy of his own officials.” Initially, Menelik, the founder of the Ethiopian Empire, developed garrison towns, such as Ankobar, Dabra Berhan, and Angolala in the mid-nineteenth century; the last was burned by the Oromo in 1868,

## Urban Centers in Oromia



Map 2: Railway Towns and Garrison Towns

Source: Akalou Wolde-Michael, "Urban Development in Ethiopia, (1889-1925) Early Phase," *The Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. Xi, no. 1 (1973), p. 1.

but recovered by Menelik. He also developed Leche, Feqre Gimb, Enaware, Tamo, and Warra Illu. Similarly, Yohannes founded Dase in northern Oromia in 1883. Menelik consolidated his garrison town of Warra Illu (see Map 2) in Wallo, northern Oromia, in 1870 and installed 40,000 soldiers there (Pankhurst 1985, 226); in the same year, the Wallo Oromo attacked and destroyed it. There were several Europeans at the re-created Warra Illu garrison town in 1879. The Wallo Oromo set fire to this town again and destroyed it in the same year.

Northern Oromia (north of Addis Ababa, see Map 3) gradually fell into Ethiopian hands. After bringing this strategically and politically significant region under his control, Menelik turned his attention to the Tulama Oromo who were residents of Finfinnee (currently Addis Ababa, see maps 1 and 2) and its surroundings (see Map 1). With the further colonization of the Oromo, the building of more *katamas* became essential. Richard Pankhurst (1977, 231) comments that “the desire to exercise more effective control over the Oromo . . . led Menilek [sic] in the latter part of 1878 to move further to the mountain of Wacaca where he dug the foundations for a new town.” He named this garrison town Entoto (later called Old Entoto). In 1882, Menelik transferred his settlement to a strategically and politically important place called Dildila and later named New Entoto. These settlements were created by evacuating or enslaving the Oromo living there (Pankhurst 1977, 232). After strengthening his army and accumulating massive fire-arms, Menelik built Addis Ababa, on the place known by the Oromo name Finfinnee, between 1886 and 1887 without primary consideration of strategy. Addis Ababa

emerged as the capital city of the Ethiopian Empire in the heart of Oromia.

The major portion of Oromo land on which this capital city was founded was owned by thirty-one Ethiopian officials (Pankhurst 1985, 204). The army commanders were given a large plots of lands on which they established their respective camps for their relatives, followers, and war captives (Benti 2000, 64). While most Oromos were evicted and forced to migrate to far places, others were permanently marginalized and turned into servants and laborers (Benti 2000, 278). Some Europeans and others had obtained Oromo lands from Menelik before the merchandization of land by giving him gifts. However, by the proclamation of October 27, 1907, Oromo land became a commodity to be sold and bought. This proclamation “gave Ethiopian and foreign [European] landlords a great deal more security of tenure” (Garretson 1974, 116). Some of these Europeans bought tracts of land and built their houses, shops, and offices. Making Addis Ababa the center of commerce, bureaucracy, and employment, the Ethiopian government attracted people from different parts of the world and Abyssinia proper to this city while the Oromo people were marginalized, segregated, and dehumanized in rural and urban areas alike. The people in the city mainly obtained their food and income from the surrounding Oromos; military commanders, soldiers, followers depended on the tribute and tax mainly collected from the Oromo people (Benti 2000, 54).

Gradually, Addis Abba gained regional and international importance. Several continental and international organizations made this capital city their center without recognizing the existence and suffering of the Oromo



people. Most countries opened their embassies and *non-governmental* agencies in Addis Ababa without considering the interest of the Oromo people. International merchants from Europe, Asia, and Arabia migrated to and dominated commercial activities in Addis Ababa and major towns. In 1899, there were three important shops in Addis Ababa; these were owned and operated by three French merchants (Pankhurst 1967, 53). Indian, Greek, Arab, and Armenian merchants became dominant in trade. These merchants expanded their operations to provincial towns. These non-African merchants “combined import-export businesses which were very profitable” (Pankhurst 1968, 399). Legesse Lemma (1979, 106) asserts that “West Europeans, mainly French and British, were engaged in high finance and international trade, while Arabs, Armenians, Indians and Greeks participated in relatively small-scale commerce.”

Addis Ababa was established at the crossroads of important trade routes from south to north and from east to west. It became the hub of the trade routes to Assab, Djibouti, Zeila, and Berbera, the Sudan through Wallaga, Gojjam, Ankobar, and Gondar, to Wallo and Massawa, and to Gambella. These routes connected the Ethiopian Empire with the British, Italian, and French colonies that completely surrounded it. With the centralization of Ethiopian power and the control of the market system, the colonialists benefitted from trade at community, regional, and central levels and strictly administered marketplaces to collect taxes and customs duties. While Ethiopians, Europeans, and others had representatives in Addis Ababa city affairs and “shared certain privileges of accessibility to and protection of the Emperor,” the Oromos were placed under direct

Ethiopian military rule (Garretson, 1974, 168-183). By granting concessions to European capitalists, the state introduced modern innovations, such as a railway, a few roads, a telephone and telegraph system, a postal system, a bank, the first modern school, and the first hospital.

By establishing his court in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa), Menelik “directed the administration . . . and governed the newly conquered Galla country [Oromia] and his acquisitions through the military officers in charge of the garrisons of his own troops, whom he could appoint and dismiss at his pleasure” (Murray 1922, 41). About Oromia and other colonized regions, Harold Marcus (1971, 165) says this: “Not only were these territories effectively occupied and policed, but they were also being economically and politically integrated into . . . Ethiopia.” The colonization of Oromia, the development of the transportation and communication systems, and the establishment of Addis Ababa and garrison towns facilitated the development of the Ethiopian institutional milieu and created “the integrating nucleus of the colonial economic system” (Althabe 1964, 1-3) in Oromia with the collusion of the capitalist world economy. Commodities and food products produced by Oromo labor flowed to and were concentrated in Addis Ababa and other urban centers for local consumption and international markets. According to Gilbert and Gugler (1995, 15), “the development of the world economy . . . created an interlinked economic system [in which] different cities perform the roles allocated to them within that system.”

The Abyssinian colonial settlers also built garrison towns like Gore, Jijiga, Asaba Teferi, Assala, Goba, and others in Oromia (see map, p. 3). These fortified settle-

ments had strong connections among themselves and with Addis Ababa in order to assist one another during emergencies. Although these towns were very backward compared to the European towns built in other parts of Africa during the colonial period, “the colonial structure . . . created a very special type of town: the centre of trade in goods and of colonial power, the town is the reflection, both economic and sociological, of colonial domination” (Althabe 1964, 3). Since there was no color line between the colonizer and the colonized peoples, as between Europeans and Africans, many scholars have failed to understand this colonial situation. The garrison towns gradually evolved into the major geopolitical centers for practicing political domination, wealth and capital accumulation, and religious and cultural dissemination. Akalou Wolde-Michael (1973, 10) describes that with Ethiopia’s colonial expansion “garrisons were set up all over newly acquired territories to hold down the conquered people. To maintain the army, part of the conquered land and, indeed, even the conquered people themselves as *gabbars* [semi-slaves] were assigned to the soldiers” and colonial officials.

From these garrison centers Ethiopian soldiers and colonial administrators were dispatched to impose colonial rule on Oromos through subjugation, enslavement, and expropriation of the basic means of production such as land, cattle, and other valuable resources. With products collected from Oromia and other regions, Menelik continuously purchased quantities of weapons and military expertise from Europe (see Jalata 1993). Further, products in the form of gold, grain, cattle, honey, and slaves were channeled to Ethiopian colonial settlers in Oromian urban centers and towns. The colonialists

gradually developed these urban centers into towns by using Oromo economic resources and labor and by building regulatory and service institutions such as offices, prisons, churches, medical and communication facilities, and schools. Several non-garrison towns emerged in eastern and western Oromia with the development of trade and communication networks. As rail service was introduced, the towns of Aqaqi, Bishoftu, Mojo, Adama, Walanchiti, Metahara, Awash, Mieso, Afdem, Gota, Munesa, and Dire Dawa (see Map 2) flourished.

While Oromos were evicted from their urban lands and forced to migrate to rural areas, Abyssinians were encouraged to migrate to cities and towns in Oromia. These processes were started by Menelik and have continued into the present. Menelik encouraged the migration of Abyssinians to the colonized areas in the late nineteenth century and the turn of the twentieth century. The great famines in Abyssinia proper also pushed people to migrate to Oromia and other colonized areas (Benti, 1988, 133). According to Charles W. McClellan (1978, 111-112), "Menelik's redistribution of . . . resources had two major foci: one involved the movement of resources directly to the north [Abyssinia] for reallocation there; the other, the movement of needy northerners to the south [mainly Oromia] to be provisioned with non-commercial resources." To solve economic and famine problems in Ethiopia proper, Menelik sent a series of large expeditions to Oromia. Harold Marcus (1975, 64-65) argues that "Expeditions were often organized during times of famine, when numerous refugees went along to settle in newly conquered lands along with the soldiers who stayed behind to garrison the fortified villages (*katamas*) erected as control points." Further, the

domination of institutions by Habashas and the glorification of the Amharic language, Orthodox Christianity, and Habasha culture encouraged the migration of more Ethiopians to Oromian cities and towns.

### **THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CENTRALIZATION OF HABASHA POLITICAL POWER**

The Ethiopian colonial state made Oromian cities and towns attractive to Ethiopians by providing them with land and by building churches, schools, hospitals, and supplying other social amenities. These favorable conditions enabled the Amharas to become the majority in most cities and consider themselves as hosts, and Oromos as outsiders and foreigners (see O'Connor 1983, 108). Social amenities, such as health services, transportation, and communication facilities, employment opportunities, industries concentrated in major cities and urban centers. For instance, there were 93 health centers and 649 clinics in Addis Ababa before 1974 (Benti 2000, 177). Menelik II Hospital was opened in 1910, Ras Tafari Makonnen Hospital in 1922, Empress Zawditu Hospital and Ras Dasta Damtew Hospital in 1931, Tesema Imperial Body Guard Hospital in 1944, St. Paul Hospital in 1947, and Dejach Balcha Hospital in 1948. Omedla (police) Hospital, Takle Haimonat Hospital, Princess Tsehai Memorial Hospital and other health centers and clinics were opened and concentrated in the same city. In the 1990s, there were 91 hospitals, 187 health centers, and 2,470 health stations in the Ethiopian Empire, and almost all of them were located in cities (Benti 2000, 182; Ministry of Ethiopia, 1995).

Oromos have been denied meaningful access to these hospitals and other health services, schools, colleges, and universities in Oromian cities and urban centers. In their own country and urban centers, Oromos have become foreigners and are even discouraged from migrating to larger cities (Benti 2001, 159). Oromian cities and town have been numerically, politically, economically, and culturally dominated by Abyssinians. For instance, in 1978, about 59 percent of the Addis Ababa population was Amharas and Tigrayans, 17 percent were Oromos, 17 percent were Gurages, cumulatively about 94 percent of the 1.1 million urban population (Benti 2000, 265). In 1994, almost 58 percent of the Addis Ababa populations were Amhara and Tigrayans (i.e., 48.3 and 7.6 percent respectively) and almost 20 percent were Oromos out of the population of 1 million (Ethiopian Central Statistical Authority, 1994, 44). Even in the two cities, namely Harar and Dire Dawa, where the Oromos are almost the majority ethnonational group (i.e., 52.3 percent and 48.0 percent respectively), they do not have political power and are denied the right to develop their institutions, language and culture. The manifestation of Oromo identity and language was not allowed in Oromian cities and towns until Oromo nationalists started to resist such colonial and racist policies in an organized way. In Oromian cities and town, the Oromo language was discouraged and despised and the Amharic language was glorified and became the official language of the Ethiopian empire (see Benti 2001, 158).

When people from different parts of the world visit Oromian cities and towns, they don't come into direct contact with the Oromo people, their culture, history and civilization. As Oromia was removed from the world

map by colonization, the Oromo people and their culture were removed from Oromian cities and towns through systematic government policies. The Ethiopian government made the culture and language of the Amhara the symbol and the defining trait of Ethiopian identity and nationalism. It prohibited the writing, broadcasting or speaking at public functions in the Oromo language as a part of its attempt to culturally assimilate the Oromo into the Amhara identity without structurally assimilating them (see Markakis 1994, 225). The Ethiopian state has been rooted in the Amhara-Tigrayan culture, language and Orthodox Christianity, and these characteristics were reflected in Oromian cities and towns. The Abyssinian colonial settlers created two worlds in different centers of Oromia: The world of those who have socially, politically, economically, and culturally dominated Oromian cities and towns, and the world of the people who lost their country and have become marginalized and impoverished. Only a few Oromos, who have collaborated with the Ethiopian colonial system, have escaped this humiliation. The Ethiopian government made it a requirement that Oromos and others who sought “upward mobility must do so within the Amhara cultural framework” (Shack 1973, 276).

Until they learned to speak Amharic, Oromos were denied employment in the government bureaucracy and the service industry (Benti 2001, 158-161). But ordinary Amharas and Tigrayans even without formal education could get different kinds of jobs in Oromian cities and towns because they spoke Amharic and they were members of the ethnonational group that dominated the institutions of government and business (Benti 2001, 161). In the early 1960s, Girma Amare (1963, 340), an

Amhara bureaucrat, declared that Oromos and others “wishing to obtain a position in government offices [are] required to have a good command of Amharic.” More than 60 percent of government bureaucrats, 75 of army officers, and 70 percent of governors in the colonized regions were Amharas by 1974 (Michael 1989, 71). Most of these positions are filled by Tigrayans today, since they took state power from the Amharas in 1991. Because the Oromos in cities and towns and rural areas do not have institutional and organizational control over their land and what they produce and their labor, they do not receive the benefits that can improve their quality of life. The Oromos live under Ethiopian political repression, darkness of ignorance, and poverty.<sup>4</sup>

Since urban areas and cities in Oromia are primarily populated by Ethiopian colonial settlers and their collaborators, they are the ones who have access to the limited public facilities such as schools and hospitals. Oromo urbanites like their rural counterparts have been exposed to massive and absolute poverty and have been denied their fundamental human rights and needs that Ron Shiffman (1995, 6-8) calls subsistence, protection, affection, and understanding. Most Oromos in urban and rural areas have low levels of subsistence because they lack adequate income, enough food, and livable homes. They do not have protection from disease because they are denied adequate access to health and medical services. They do not have protection from political violence because the Ethiopian state engages in massive human rights violations and state terrorism (Jalata 2000). Oromos have been ruled by successive authoritarian-terrorist regimes<sup>5</sup> which have exploited and impoverished them by expropriating their resources.



Successive Ethiopian regimes have not had any concern and affection for the Oromo people because they have been considered inferior people who do not deserve basic human rights (Jalata 2001). Oromos have been denied their inalienable right to self-determination and democracy. They have been denied the right to build their social, economic, cultural and organizational infrastructure.

Without political freedom, democracy, and a legitimate government, a community cannot improve its quality of life. People like the Oromos who do not have personal and public safety in their homes and communities, and who are denied the freedom of expression, association, and organization, are denied a good quality of life. In the twenty first century, when the world is changing quickly because of the intensification of globalization, social revolutions, as well as revolutions in technology, information, communication, and transportation, the Oromo people are relegated to the darkness of ignorance and poverty. Because of the magnitude of the problems of the Oromo people, it is impossible to provide a numerical face to the devastating effects of poverty, suffering, hunger, malnutrition, starvation, sickness, illiteracy and ignorance, alienation, and hopelessness. Because the majority of Oromo urbanites face these problems, they are underdeveloped.<sup>6</sup> When a community or a society lacks independence or autonomy to determine its political destiny through self-determination and democracy, it is confronted with the problems of underdevelopment, which is characterized as powerlessness, victimization, illiteracy, poverty, and other forms of socioeconomic crises (see Rodney 1982).

## **REACTION TO POLITICAL REPRESSION IN URBAN CENTERS**

Beginning in the 1960s, the migration of a few Oromos to urban areas brought about some changes. These migrants brought the Oromo language and culture to Oromian cities and towns. Some Oromo elites who were trained to be intermediaries started to recognize their lack of equal citizenship rights and the mistreatment of the Oromo people. Despite their individual achievements, these elites were given an inferior status to Ethiopians due to their Oromo identity. They started to form urban self-help associations because organizing a political party was not allowed. These self-help associations were united to form the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association. The formation of the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association in the year 1963-1964 marked the beginning of building urban community efforts to solve Oromo problems and the public rise of Oromo nationalism. The Oromo elites, by forming this association in Addis Ababa, started to express the collective grievances of the Oromo people, and to formulate programs to solve some economic, social and educational problems of Oromo society.

In May 1966, the leaders of the association at one of its meetings, articulated 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 [currently all Oromos are landless since the Ethiopian state owns Oromo land]; (4) . . . a very small percentage of the Oromo population has access to communication services. [And yet] the Oromo paid more than

eighty percent of the taxes for education, health, and communication” (Quoted in Hassen 1998, 205-206). The Ethiopian colonial state and the Ethiopian settlers in Oromia did not tolerate any manifestation of Oromo identity by either association or organization. To stop the development of Oromo consciousness and collective efforts, the Ethiopian government banned the Macha and Tulama Association in 1967, killed or imprisoned its leaders, and prevented Oromo urbanites from organizing and developing their communities. The banning of this association forced Oromo nationalism to go underground. These events forced some Oromo nationalists to go underground in Oromia; others went to Somalia, the Middle East, and other countries to continue the Oromo national movement. They clandestinely produced political pamphlets.<sup>7</sup>

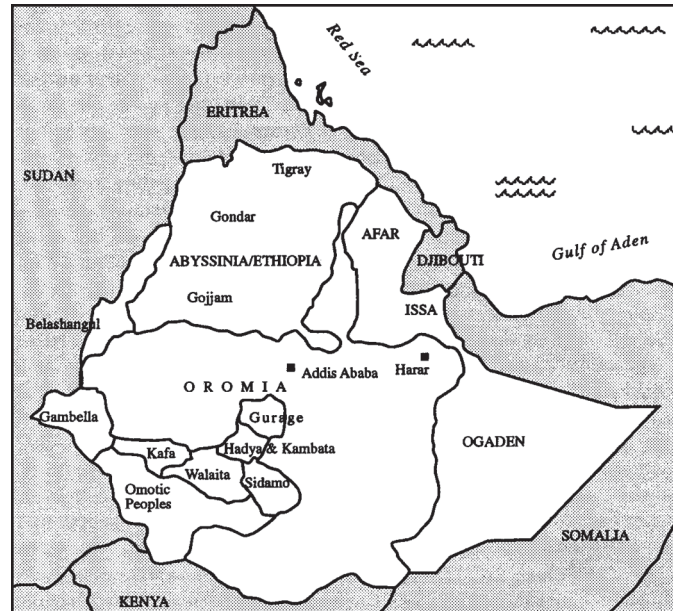
## **CONCLUSION**

At the beginning of the twenty first century, in Third World countries like Ethiopia, modern facilities, technologies, and public services are concentrated in cities and urban centers. The intensification of globalization as well as revolutions in transportation and communication technologies has allowed local and regional cities access to global cities and their services. The Oromos who are marginalized and impoverished in their own cities and towns have not received adequate benefit from the new technological and global changes. The Ethiopian state elites and the Ethiopian urban communities in Oromia are determined to maintain the existing political and economic order by investing meager available resources in building unproductive institutions, such as the army, security infrastructure and colonial bureaucracy. The

remaining economic resources are consumed or invested in social services that mainly benefit the Habashas.

Under these conditions, the chance to improve the quality of life through investing in Oromo communities is nonexistent. By dominating the Ethiopian political economy and centralizing and concentrating state power, successive Ethiopian regimes have formulated and implemented policies that benefit Habasha elites at the expense of Oromos and other colonized peoples. Ethiopian rulers, Menelik, Haile Selassie, Mengistu Haile Mariam, and Meles Zenawi, have caused the destruction of millions of lives to promote “their own personal advancement over and above the goals and aspirations of their followers and Ethiopians in general” (Hagos 1995, vii). These leaders have been more concerned with a “ferocious love of material and worldly comfort,” while ignoring the welfare of the people (Hagos 1995, 131). They have privatized and ethnicized public power, and used it for destroying rather than building a country.

The fundamental resolution of the contradictions between Oromo and Habasha urban communities requires the implementation of the principles of self-determination and multicultural democracy. Without an accountable, democratic and legitimate state, various population groups in Oromian cities and towns and the colonized regions may soon face dangerous conditions similar to Rwanda, Congo, and the former Yugoslavia. Today millions of Oromos are exposed to fatal diseases (including HIV/AIDS), famine and massive poverty in Oromian cities and urban centers. Since state-terrorism, poverty, famine, and ethnonational challenges are increasing and since the major world powers have a role in shaping these problems, they have a moral and



Map 3: Modern Oromia

Source: *The Oromo Commentary* 1991. Reprinted with permission.

political responsibility to become capable of mediating these processes and developing procedures and criteria by which these conflicts must be solved fairly and democratically before it is too late. On its part, while promoting the principles of self-determination and democracy, the Oromo leadership must demonstrate that the Oromo people because of their democratic tradition, demographic size, geographic location, and cultural ties with other oppressed ethnonations can play their constructive role in establishing a multinational democratic society and in bringing a just and durable peace. Whether they like it or not, the fates of Oromo and Habasha urban communities in Oromia are interconnected. Therefore, these two communities should start a constructive dia-

logue as equal partners and search for a common ground to work together to reorganize the existing urban political and economic arrangements to improve the quality of life, social services, and community development for all the people without exclusion and discrimination. As Habasha urban communities need to dissociate themselves from the ethnocratic Ethiopian state, the Oromo urbanites need to make constant efforts to demonstrate that they can democratically work with the Habasha communities without revenge and exclusion.

### Notes

1. These sensitive issues have been avoided by *Ethiopian Central Statistical Authority*. Because of censorship by the Ethiopian government, Oromo scholars and others who are interested in Oromo issues cannot collect information on the disparities in quality of life and public services between Oromo and Amhara communities in Oromia.
2. Naqamte was the center of *gadaa* at which the Leeqaa Oromos and their elected leaders administered their economic, political and religious services. It was there where “the *gada* officials gave justice deliberated on the defense of their territory and held prayers in cases of bad harvest ... or epidemic diseases” (Ta’a, 1994: 677).
3. Bakare Godana chose Wacha as the place of his residence because of the following reasons: Waacha was rich in water supply since it was surrounded by streams and springs. It was also economically rich because it was located near the Handaq forest which was endowed by resources such as ivory, cotton, honey, and other valuable products. Waacha had also a strategic significance since it was easy to attack or control the movement of the enemy from there.
4. It is superficial to discuss about the quality of life and public services in Oromian cities and towns without

having some understanding of the general political, economic, and social conditions in the Ethiopian Empire. In the early 1990s, out of the total population of 53,130,780, only 7,315,687 were living in urban areas (Ethiopian Central Statistical Authority, 1994: 41). Economic and health indicators of Ethiopia show the severity of the hardship the powerless people like the Oromo face. Ethiopia is one of the three poorest countries in the world, and its per capita income was only 116 U. S. dollars in 1997. Life expectancy is only 45 years. The mortality rate for children less than five years is 177 per 1,000 live births. The infant mortality rate is 113 per 1,000 live births. The maternal mortality rate is 1,400 per 100,000 births. Millions of people die of a simple disease because of lack of medical treatment. Less than half of the population has access to basic sanitation, and only 25 percent of the population has access to clean water (WHO, 1998). HIV/AIDS is having serious negative consequences. In 1997, 2,600,000 adults and children were infected with HIV/AIDS. Number of children orphaned by AIDS since the beginning of epidemic was 840,000. Although Oromos have been providing the majority of resources on which people in Ethiopia survive due to their numerical strength and abundant economic resources, such as land, natural resources, and labor, they do not have a reasonable access to public facilities and institutions.

5. The policies of the Ethiopian state are different in Ethiopia proper and the colonized regions. This state is authoritarian to Amhara and Tigrayan communities because it imposes dictatorship on them, and it is terrorist to the colonized peoples like the Oromos because it rules them through state-terrorism and massive human rights violations.
6. The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia do not provide vital information on education, poverty and disease in relation to ethnonational groups.

7. These pamphlets include *Kana Beekta?* and *The Oromos: Voice Against Tyranny*. For the first time the original name of this people, Oromo was used in publication by rejecting the derogatory name, *Galla*.

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