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Asafa Jalata, University of Tennessee - Knoxville

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Asafa Jalata

Department of Sociology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, USA

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Struggling for social justice in the capitalist world system: the cases of African Americans, Oromos, and Southern and Western Sudanese

Asafa Jalata*

Department of Sociology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, USA

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This article identifies and examines the processes through which the social justice movements of African Americans in the US, Oromos in Ethiopia, and Southern and Western Sudanese in Sudan emerged, and the successes and failures of these movements in a global and comparative perspective. It specifically explores four interrelated issues. First, the paper deals with some theoretical and methodological insights. Second, the piece explains how the racialized capitalist world system and its political structures facilitated the creation of the states of the US, Ethiopia, and Sudan and legalized racial/ethnonational oppression, colonialism, exploitation, and continued subjugation. Third, it explains comparatively the processes, developments, objectives, and outcomes of these movements. Finally, the paper explores issues of social justice as the promotion of the principle of political self-determination and democratic and human rights under the rule of law.

Keywords: social justice; democracy; the capitalist world system; racism; social/national movements; colonialism; exploitation; self-determination; the rule of law

African Americans in the US, Oromos in Ethiopia, and Southern and Western Sudanese in Sudan have struggled for social justice by opposing the racial and colonial policies and practices of their respective countries that subjected them to the status of second-class citizenship. These social justice movements emerged in opposition to colonial domination, racial/ethnonational hierarchy, economic and labor exploitation, cultural destruction and repression, and the denial of individual and collective rights. As African Americans suffered under American racial slavery and apartheid for almost four centuries, Oromos and Southern and Western Sudanese have been dominated and exploited by Ethiopian and Sudanese racial and colonial dictatorship respectively since the last decades of the nineteenth century. This paper focuses on similar efforts of the struggles of these peoples in pursuing the dream of social justice. Social justice is seen as a political process through which all human groups achieve a single standard for practising their respective self-determination and human and democratic rights without being subjected to any form of discrimination, oppression, and exploitation.

*Email: A jalata@utk.edu
Some theoretical and methodological insights

By developing an analytical framework that draws from theories of the world system and globalization, nationalism, revolutions, and social movements, this article frames the African American, Oromo, and Southern and Western Sudanese social justice movements in the global and comparative contexts. This work combines a structural approach to global social change with a social constructionist model of human agency and social justice movements. These social justice movements are considered an integral part of the global political projects that have been attempting to humanize and democratize the racialized 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 these three social justice movements, this work employs interdisciplinary, multidimensional, historical, and critical approaches.

Social change in colonized and dominated societies and structural changes in the capitalist world system have facilitated the development of these social justice movements. This comparative work 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. Analyzing these cases in a comparative-historical framework is an important departure from studies that compartmentalize global issues in a way that reproduces the conventional dichotomies among nations, regions, and core and peripheral parts of the world.

Global capitalism, political structures, and injustice

The struggles for social justice in the form of self-determination, democracy, and popular sovereignty emerged in opposition to political absolutism, colonialism, racism, and continued subjugation in the capitalist world system. Understanding of the essence of global capitalism and its political structures and injustices are necessary to clearly recognize the principles for which the struggles of African Americans, Oromos, and Southern and Western Sudanese developed. These groups have been denied basic aspects of their humanity since they were forced to enter into the global capitalist system via racial slavery and colonialism. Europeans and their African collaborators were involved in enslaveing the ancestors of African Americans and in colonizing Oromos and Southern and Western Sudanese. Just as African Americans were enslaved and shipped to America by the joined forces of African and European slave hunters and merchants, the combined forces of Ethiopians and Northern and Western Sudanese and European colonialists colonized Oromos and Southern Sudanese respectively (Jalata, 2001; 2004b).

The capitalist colonial powers used their superior military forces and collaborators to enslave and colonize directly or indirectly pre-capitalist societies to exploit their labor power and economic resources through looting, piracy, genocide, expropriation, annexation, and continued subjugation. Consequently, the original accumulation of wealth and capital occurred; this accumulated capital gradually facilitated the transformation of mercantilism into industrial capitalism and the expansion of the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and increased the demand for raw materials, free or cheap labor (mainly slaves).
markets, and the intensification of global colonial expansion (Marx, 1967; Rodney, 1972). The development of capitalism, the accumulation and concentration of capital or economic resources through the separation of the actual producers from their means of production, such as land, led to racialization/ethnicization and socialization of labor. As Karl Marx (1967, p. 17) notes,

The expropriation of the agricultural producers, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process. The history of expropriation, in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and different periods.

The processes of expropriation, slavery, and colonialism resulted in hierarchical organization of world populations through the creation of an elaborate discourse of race or racism. What is race or racism? As the meaning of race is illusive and complex, so is that of racism. Racism can be defined as a discourse and a practice in which a racial/ethnonational project is politically, socially, culturally, and scientifically constructed by elites in the capitalist world system to naturalize and justify racial/ethnonational inequality in which those at the top of the hierarchy oppress and exploit those below them by claiming biological and/or cultural superiority. "A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation or explanation of racial dynamics", Howard Winant (1994, p. 24) writes, "and an effort to organize and distribute resources along particular racial lines" (author’s emphasis). Simply put, racism is an expression of institutionalized patterns of colonizing structural power and social control in order to transfer labor and economic resources from the powerless to the powerful group.

By inventing nonexistent races, the racist ideology institutionalizes ‘the hierarchies involved in the worldwide division of labour’ (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, p. 6). Race and racism are socio-political constructs since all human groups are biologically and genetically more alike than different (Malik, 1996). To justify racial slavery and colonialism, the ideology of racism was developed in scientific and religious clothing and matured during the last decades of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Understanding of these issues is necessary to correctly address the problems of injustices in the US, Ethiopia, and Sudan. The global process that resulted in the colonial beginning of the US in the seventeenth century and the emergence of ‘modern’ Ethiopia and Sudan during the last decades of the nineteenth century brought about the continued subjugation and exploitation of the African American, Oromo, and Southern and Western Sudanese peoples via slavery and colonialism (Jalata, 2001; 2004a).

The US emerged in the process of the colonial expansion of the European-dominated racist capitalist world system (Rodney, 1972; Wallerstein, 1980; 1983). It was founded through establishing settler colonialism, practising genocide, and intensifying two types of labor recruitment systems: wage labor for poor whites and coerced labor for enslaved Africans (Roediger, 1991; Jalata, 2001). The White Anglo-Saxon Protestant group developed two major social stratification systems: class and racial caste systems (Du Bois, 1977[1935]; Cox, 1970[1948]; Saxton, 1990; Roediger, 1991). While the class system and gender hierarchy were maintained to protect the power of rich white males in an emerging white society, the racial caste (i.e., racial slavery and segregation) was invented to keep African Americans and others at the bottom of white society so that they would provide their labor and other resources
freely or cheaply (Fishman, 1997, p. 3). As the ideology of whiteness was used to exterminate Native Americans and to transfer their resources to white society, it was also used to explain and justify racial slavery and segregation. The settlers conveniently invented ‘Indian savagery’ through the ideology of whiteness and committed genocide on indigenous Americans (Roediger, 1991).

Although they happened in different centuries, similar conditions developed in the Horn of Africa when capitalism had broadened itself there via colonialism and slavery. From the late nineteenth century to the present, the ‘modern’ Ethiopian and Sudanese states have been formed, consolidated, and maintained by state terrorism and local connections. The Ethiopian state was created by the alliance of Abyssinian (Amhara-Tigray) dependent colonialism and European imperialism, and the Sudanese state by British colonialism known as the Anglo-Egyptian condominium. In both Sudan and Ethiopia, colonial political structures dominated by persons claiming Semitic descent emerged through a strategy of massive social and cultural destruction and political violence (Jalata, 2005).

Although Christianity is the main ideology of the Ethiopian state and Islam is the principal ideology of the Sudanese state, the elites and societies that have dominated the political structures in both countries share a strategy of racializing their own identities and those of indigenous Africans to racialize and marginalize indigenous population groups and facilitate the process of Abyssinianization and Christianization in Ethiopia and Arabization and Islamization in Sudan. In addition, just as successive Ethiopian state elites have maintained their legitimacy and survival through external connections and domestic political terrorism, the Sudanese state elites that emerged through the process of decolonization in the mid-twentieth century and have depended on external connections and terrorism or state violence for their legitimacy and survival. The practice of creating and supporting a neocolonial state in accordance with the interests of Europe started with the emergence of the modern Ethiopian state in Africa (Jalata, 1993; 2001).

Because of their Christian ideology and the willingness to collaborate with European imperialist powers, successive Ethiopian/Habasha (Amhara-Tigray) rulers received access to European technology, weapons, administrative and military expertise, and other skills needed for the construction of the modern state (Jalata, 1993; Holcomb & Ibssa, 1990, p. 1). Between 1868 and 1900, when Oromia (the Oromo country) was effectively colonized by Abyssinia/Ethiopia, the Menelik (Amhara warlord) forces reduced the Oromo population from 10 to 5 million; war, slavery, famine, and diseases contributed to the destruction of the Oromo people (Bulatovich, 2000). The main reason for this colonial expansion was to obtain commodities such as gold, ivory, coffee, musk, hides and skins, slaves, and land. The Ethiopian state and its agents had expropriated Oromo economic resources; Oromo institutions were destroyed or suppressed and lost their economic and political significance.

The Ethiopian state has been Abyssinianized and Christianized to exclude non-Habashas from decision-making power. Successive Ethiopian authoritarian-terrorist regimes have used the discourses of race, culture, and Christianity to link themselves to the Middle East, Europe, and North America and to consolidate their power against their fellow Ethiopians and the colonized populations, such as Oromos. Habashas have effectively used the discourse of racism, which combines the discourses of biological and cultural differences to justify unequal treatment of
different population groups and to destroy or suppress colonized peoples (Jalata, 2001). Globally, Habashas have used Semitic and Christian discourses to mobilize assistance from Jews, Arabs, Europeans, and Americans who see Habashas as being closer to themselves than the peoples whom they consider ‘real black’ (Jalata, 2001). John Sorenson (1993, p. 29) expresses this racist attitude as ‘a multiplicity of Ethiopians, blacks who are whites, the quintessential Africans who reject African identity’.

Habasha elites have recognized the importance of racial distinctions and used the discourse of racism to mobilize support for their political projects (Sorenson, 1998, p. 232). When policy issues are discussed, ideologies such as Semitic civility, Christianity, and the patriotism of Amharas and Tigrayans are used to valorize and legitimize Habasha dominance and power. Moreover, the barbarism, backwardness, and destructiveness of Oromos and other indigenous Africans are invented to deny them access to state power (Jalata, 2001, pp. 95–102). The Ethiopian state has historically obtained its political legitimacy and financed its engagement in human rights violations through global connections. The conditions in Sudan are similar to that of Ethiopia in many ways.

When, in the mid-1950s, various Sudanese political forces demanded their rights for national self-determination, the British colonial government announced its intention to decolonize Sudan. Since the British relinquished power, successive racialized Sudanese regimes – colonial, civil, or military – have imposed their political authority through repression and terrorism on Southern Sudanese and others to possess absolute control over the means of compulsion (the state) and the means of consumption (productive resources). As Catherine Besteman (1999, p. 129) explains,

> [ ]

...
The domination of the South by the North continued after Sudan achieved decolonization from British colonialism (Fluehr-Lobban, 1991, p. 72). Although the British colonial administration abolished slavery, its policies favored the north. When Britain was forced to leave Sudan by anti-colonial forces, the south and other regions came under the control of the north, and the south's demand for a federation was ignored and a unitary state was imposed. The system of southern education was changed; Arabic became the official language, and the north practically occupied state power (O'Ballance, 1977, p. 35). The southern Sudanese resisted northern Sudanese domination. Grievances such as increasing the number of northern troops in the south and the attempt to transfer southern soldiers to the north led to mutiny. The mutineers, who escaped imprisonment and execution by fleeing into the forest, initiated guerrilla warfare against the Sudanese state. The continued state repression of the south and indiscriminate killings of civilians for allegedly harboring the guerrilla fighters facilitated the development of southern nationalism. With the emergence of a resistance movement and a continuation of the demand for independence or federation, the state increased its political terrorism.

The ideology of racism has been used to practice and justify slavery, colonialism, genocide, state terrorism, and continued subjugation in the US, Ethiopia, and Sudan. Let us explore how these peoples have reacted to the injustices of capitalism and its racist structures and ideologies in these three countries.

The African American movement

The African American movement fully developed during the mid-twentieth century as a cultural, intellectual, ideological, and political movement whose purpose was to achieve civil equality, democracy, human dignity, and development by overthrowing white racial dictatorship. This development was facilitated by the cumulative struggles of the previous generations and social changes and conjunctures. As D. McAdam (1997, p. 178) asserts, 'the ability of insurgents to generate a social movement is ultimately dependent on the presence of an indigenous ‘infrastructure’ that can be used to link members of the aggrieved population into an organized campaign of mass political action'. The end of racial slavery in the mid-1860s occurred mainly because of the contradiction between the core capitalism of the American North and agricultural capitalism of the America South resulted in the Civil War and created conducive social structural and conjunctural factors for the development of the black struggle (Chase-Dunn, 1980). In other words, the Civil War, the defeat of the planters, and the abolition of slavery transformed the nature of the African American struggle.

As soon as the federal government left the fate of former slaves to every southern state in 1877 by abandoning its program that historians call the First Reconstruction, white society and southern states imposed apartheid on former slaves (see Du Bois, 1977[1935]). The ‘push’ factors, such as Jim Crow laws, racial dictatorship, and oppressive social control mechanisms, lawlessness, denial of political and cultural rights, poverty, lack of education and other opportunities, and ‘pull’ factors from the north, such as availability of jobs and the possibility of freedom, facilitated the great migration of black folk to northern and other cities. This mass migration transformed African Americans from rural and agricultural workers to industrial and urban workers. Consequently, they formed broader communities, associations,
fraternities, churches, mosques, schools, organizations, and other kinds of urban relations. The educated class and other activists who were previously isolated from the slaves found a fertile social ground in which they would sow their ideas of social change and struggle. African American activist intellectuals, such as W.E.B. Du Bois and others, politicized collective grievances, and mobilized white activists and reformers who participated in the antislavery movement and their children and others. Jenkins and Eckert (1986, pp. 812–815) call these white supporters ‘conscience constituencies’.

At the turn of the twentieth century, several African American organizations, such as the Niagara Movement (1905), the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People (NAACP) (1909), and the National Urban League (1911), and others emerged and initiated the African American social justice movement. Social structural factors and processes and conjunctures in the forms of war, migration, economic and political changes, urban community formation, and human agency in the form of the consolidation of the activist intellectual bloc, politicized political grievances, and the formation of autonomous institutions and organizations facilitated the development of the African American struggle for social justice in the first half of the twentieth century. This movement attempted to redefine black cultural identity that was distorted by racial dictatorship, to liberate blacks from the racial caste system, and to introduce a fundamental social transformation in the black community. Starting from the era of racial slavery, African Americans struggled to build their historical continuity and humanity through developing their peoplehood and cultural identity. ‘African Americans, slave and free’, C.E. Semmes (1992, p. 14) notes, ‘began to rediscover symbolic foundations for a redemptive African-centered consciousness’.

Black cultural nationalists gradually challenged the negative images of African-ness and blackness by refuting the false claim of the Western world racism that inflated the values of ‘Europeanness’ and ‘whiteness’ in the areas of civilization and culture. The white society forced upon African Americans cultural assimilation while denying them primary and secondary assimilation to maintain racial boundary mechanisms (see Semmes, 1992). Black cultural nationalism emerged in opposition to racist discourse and white cultural hegemony. African Americans reclaimed and retrieved their African heritage and accepted blackness as a mark of beauty by rejecting names such as ‘Negro’, ‘Nigger’, ‘colored’ that were given to them by white society, and replaced such names with black or African American. Prominent black activist scholars, artists, and literary figures moved to Harlem and made it a center of African American cultural and intellectual discourse (see Huggins, 1971; Bontemps, 1972). The Civil Rights Movement evolved from the African American cultural, ideological, intellectual, and political experiences that emerged in urban America.

The civil rights activists and their supporters formed various organizations to marshal human, financial, intellectual, and ideological resources to fight for black freedom by dismantling American apartheid. Further, the majority of African Americans became members of the urban working class during the first half of the twentieth century. This created conducive conditions for the development of black institutions and organizations. Then African Americans started to be connected together through social networks, the media, transportation, communication networks and technologies, etc., by overcoming their dispersion in rural areas. The geographic concentration in cities increased the density of interaction among them.
and facilitated recruitment in various movement organizations. Therefore, urbanization moved African Americans to the center of the nation’s attention and provided them with a central social location. Consequently, the indigenous institutions and organizations became the foundations of professional social movements and political organizations (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1998, p. 709). Gradually, the African American movement blossomed and galvanized the African American people and their supporters for collective action in the urban setting.

As the main national organization in the first half of the twentieth century, the NAACP engaged in legal struggle to challenge black disfranchisement and racial segregation. This organization expanded its branch offices to the south in 1918 and linked its activities to the black church and fought against lynching, segregated education and transportation, and political disfranchisement (Morris, 1984). The NAACP provided organizational and management skills for the black struggle by recruiting and training ministers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, union organizers, and other activists, and taught them how to organize themselves and establish working relationships among themselves (Morris, 1984). The lawyers of the NAACP successfully challenged the legality of school segregation, and the Supreme Court by its decision of Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas, ruled against the segregated public school system in 1954. The NAACP made serious preparatory work for the struggle of the 1950s and 1960s. Because of its legal successes, white racist and terrorist groups, such as White Citizens’ Council, the American States Rights Association, the National Association for the Advancement of White People, the Klu Klux Klan, intensified their organized attacks on the NAACP with the tacit acceptance of Southern States in the 1950s, and weakened it by creating an organizational vacuum for the black struggle in the south (Morris, 1984, pp. 28–30).

The African American people were further disillusioned and frustrated in the 1950s since their legal actions were opposed by the preponderance of white society. As a result, they were convinced that court actions by themselves could not destroy racial segregation without protest and militant action. As M.L. King (1964, p. 80) says, ‘We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed’. The founding of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942 by some black students and elites, white socialists, liberals, and pacifists contributed to the development of the nonviolent direct action strategy to fight against racial segregation in public facilities (Farmer, 1985). The direct action of CORE included sit-ins and freedom rides to desegregate the public transportation system. In the 1950s and 1960s, CORE combined its nonviolent struggle with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Farmer, 1985). Taking the black church as the center of social justice struggle in southern states because it had an independent leadership of clergymen, financial source, an organized mass base, and cultural and ideological foundation, African Americans started to create what Morris (1984) calls movement centers in the south. The SCLC was formed by these movement centers in 1957 as ‘the decentralized political arm of the Black church’ (Morris, 1984, pp. 28–30).

Martin Luther King emerged as the charismatic and sophisticated leader of the SCLC and the black struggle of the mid-twentieth century; he combined the social and otherworldly gospel in leading the struggle. He criticized the white church for ignoring its social mission and sanctioning the racial cast system, colonialism,
imperialism (Zepp, 1989). King understood the vital roles of the masses and elites in bringing progressive social changes, and developed with his colleagues the political strategy of involving the masses and elites in mass direct action through boycotts, demonstrations, and marches. This visionary and democratic leader dreamed and struggled to create a just and democratic multicultural society where all peoples could live together as brothers and sisters, where every person ‘will respect the dignity and worth of human personality' (King, 1969, p. 15). SCLC, SNCC, CORE and other organizations led effective desegregation campaigns. King used religion, the media, and nonviolence strategy, boycotts, mass mobilization, and participation in challenging American apartheid.

With the blossoming of the Civil Rights Movement two important laws were passed: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Recognizing that these civil rights laws would not fundamentally change the condition of the black poor, King started to expand the scope of the Civil Rights Movement. He raised human rights issues and aimed at creating an alliance with all poor and the working class in the US (Allen, 1983, p. 323). As a very complex religious and pragmatist leader, he challenged the racist capitalist system on its territory by developing different strategies and tactics of struggle. King (1969, p. 4) started a new movement known as the Poor People’s Campaign by calling upon the white and black churches to challenge status quo and to change an oppressive social order; he condemned racism, economic and labor exploitation, and war as the three primary evils in American society (Zepp, 1989, p. 54). King’s idea of integration was complex; he struggled to eliminate or reduce poverty by recognizing the connection among political power, wealth, and poverty. King was assassinated in 1968 as was another black leader, Malcolm X, who was assassinated in 1965. As Marable (1991, p. 105) comments, ‘King’s unfinished search for more radical reforms in America may have been the central reason he was killed’. There is no doubt that his ideological and intellectual maturation and commitment for the emancipation and development of all oppressed groups had shortened his life. The more King dared to challenge the racist and corrupt US system both domestically and internationally, the more he was targeted by the FBI’s COINTEL (counter-intelligence) program and the state/federal government (see Garrow, 1981).

‘Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were both assassinated’, R. Allen (1983, p. 322) writes, ‘at precisely the point at which they began working actively and consciously against the racism and exploitation generated by the American capitalist system, both at home and abroad’. The assassination of these two prominent leaders had frustrated the black people and increased their militancy. Both King and Malcolm, although having emerged through different routes to lead the black struggle, recognized the inability of the existing organizations to accomplish the objectives of the black movement. According to W.W. Sales (1994, p. 42), Malcolm X and King ‘recognized that further development of the movement required new organizational forms and for their supporters to relate to each other in new and different ways. King’s ‘Poor People’s Campaign’ represented this search while Malcolm X created the OAAU’. Since Malcolm X gradually evolved to become the militant leader, his understanding of the black question went beyond the comprehension of other leaders of the Nation of Islam. Black revolutionary nationalists focused upon the fundamental political, economic, cultural, ideological, and social transformations in black America. They were anti-racists, anti-capitalists,
anti-imperialists, and ‘opposed Jim Crow laws and simultaneously advocated all-
Black economic, political and social institutions’ (Marable, 1991, p. 55). They did
not think that they could depend on changes within the racist American capitalist
society, but mostly outside of the system.

These revolutionary elements struggled for human dignity and true equality. Malcolm X (Sales, 1994, p. 80) pointed ‘that our people want a complete freedom,
justice and equality, or recognition and respect as human beings... So, integration is
not the objective or separation the objective. The objective is complete respect as
human beings’. Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and other revolutionary leaders
forcefully articulated that black America should have control of its political
economy, life, and culture in order to fundamentally transform itself (Malcolm X,
1966; Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967). These revolutionaries fought to bring about a
fundamental social change in American society. The new black revolutionaries
believed ‘that black dignity and liberation are not possible in the United States
without profound changes in the system’ (Marine, 1986, p. 23). One of these groups,
the Black Panther Party developed the ten point program in 1966; this program
included the demands for political power, self-determination, full employment,
decent education, housing, food, and social justice to end police brutality and unfair
trial, and economic development (Marine, 1986, pp. 35–36). Some of these
revolutionary organizations attempted to engage in armed struggle. There were
massive black urban rebellions, too. The urban black rebellion from 1964 to 1972
was an integral part of black militancy, which the white establishment did not
tolerate.

While the government integrated black reformist elites by using civil rights laws,
it suppressed the black masses and revolutionaries. As a result, several hundreds of
African Americans who participated in rebellions and revolutionary leaders were
either killed or imprisoned or went into exile. The black struggle had some structural
limits. As reformist approaches limited the capacity of the struggle by preventing a
fundamental social change, revolutionary approaches invited repression from the
white establishment. Although the black movement resulted in the legal defeat of the
institutions of the racial caste system, individual and indirect institutional racism has
remained intact at the level of practice. Because of the opposition from the white
establishment and society and the lack of a long-term political and cultural strategy,
the majority of blacks are still poor, segregated and at the bottom of American
society. Despite the fact that the change that occurred transformed the mentality of
black Americans and white society to some degree, today most African Americans
live in American ghettos and are exposed to social ills, such as police brutality,
poverty, illiteracy, disease, chronic unemployment, crime, drug, and urban crises. In

the majority of blacks in America’s inner cities became worse than ever, wretched,
accounting for the fact that the overall life expectancy of blacks was ten years lower than
that of whites and that the black infant mortality rate was rising, higher in some cities
than in Bangladesh, Jamaica, or Costa Rica.

The struggle of African Americans also resulted in significant growth of the black
middle class. The objective of fundamentally transforming black America, however,
was not successful. Hence, the majority of African Americans still do not have
meaningful access to political, economic, and cultural resources of the country.
Although the movement introduced the agenda of multiculturalism, the struggle for cultural identity and multicultural democracy did not yet reach its desired goals. The denial of self-determination for the black community and the imposition of the politics of order on the black masses and revolutionaries still perpetuate the underdevelopment of black America. Today, the problems of African Americans are more complicated by the intensification of globalization and capital flight from urban America. So the struggle for social justice is not yet completed in the US as far as the black masses still face apartheid in American ghettos. Let us now turn to the struggle of Oromos for social justice in Ethiopia.

The Oromo national struggle

The Oromo movement only developed into a mass movement in the early 1990s (Jalata, 1997). This development occurred after a long period of resistance. Like African Americans, initially Oromos resisted slavery and colonization without systematically organizing themselves. Their cultural and political resistance continued after their colonization, and various Oromo groups continued to challenge Ethiopian settler colonialism in attempts to regain their freedom. However, a few Oromo elites and urbanites started to develop and manifest Oromo collective consciousness only by the early 1960s. The destruction of Oromo national leadership, the tight control of the government, the meagerness of a modern educational establishment, lack of transport and communication systems and mass media, the absence of written literature in the Oromo language and the limited nature of interaction among the Oromo in different regions ... may have contributed to retarding the growth of an Oromo national consciousness before the beginning of the 1960s. (Hassen, 1998, p. 193)

For a considerable length of time, Oromos lacked formally trained and culturally minded intellectuals. The Christianized Oromo former slave scholar, Onesimos Nasib, who was trained in Europe, and his team Aster Gano, Lidya Dimbo, and Feben (Hirphee) Abba Magaal, as well as another religious scholar, Sheik Bakri Sapalo, pioneered the production of written literature in Afaan Oromoo (the Oromo language) and tried to introduce literacy to Oromo society in the first half the twentieth century (Bulcha, 1993; Hassen, 1993). To deny education to Oromos, the Ethiopian colonial government and the Orthodox Church suppressed the efforts of these scholars. However, the gradual development of colonial/peripheral capitalism in Oromia (Oromo country), the emergence of a few conscious Oromo intellectuals and bureaucrats, the cumulative experiences of the previous struggle, and politicized collective and individual grievances, all facilitated the development of the Oromo movement (Jalata, 1993; 1998). Since the 1960s, some Oromos started to move to cities where colonial settlers were concentrated. As some Oromos moved from rural areas to cities, the condition of urban areas began to change. While a few were successful and became petty traders, most became laborers, semi-laborers, or unemployed. These groups and students contributed to the survival of the Oromo language and culture in urban areas where the colonialists were concentrated.

Oromos were prevented from organizing themselves, and they are still suppressed and tightly controlled by the institutions of the state. Oromo modes of communication, including movement, are still restricted. They have been denied opportunities
necessary for developing their own regional and national institutions and the Oromo system of knowledge that would facilitate the transmission of accumulated cultural experiences from generation to generation. Therefore, Oromo culture and tradition survived only on family and local levels. Oromos have been denied the freedom of organization, education, the media, and the freedom of expression. They have been denied even the right to organize cultural groups, such as musical groups, and have been prevented from using their own language in public and business arenas. Bonnie Holcomb (1999, p. 5) explains that the institutionalization of colonialism and racial/ethnonational hierarchy occurred ‘in such a way that the identity of the incorporated peoples was erased from public life and from formal and historical record. Abyssinia [Ethiopia] became the intermediary representative in the outside world for all peoples contained within the empire’.

The idea of developing the collective consciousness of Oromos was initiated by a few Oromos who were educated to be members of an Ethiopianized Oromo collaborative class, but who were not treated as equals with Ethiopians. Since there has been a fundamental contradiction between the interests of the Ethiopian colonizing structures and the colonized Oromos, Ethiopian society could not culturally and structurally assimilate the Oromo elites. The formation of the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association in the year 1963/1964 marked the public rise of the Oromo movement. Since the Ethiopian Constitution did not allow the establishment of political organizations, emerging Oromo leaders formed this association in accordance with Article 45 of his Imperial Majesty’s 1955 revised Constitution and Article 14, Number 505 of the Civil Code, as a civilian self-help association. According to M. Hassen (1998, p. 183), within a short time, the association transformed itself from a self-help development association in Shawan administrative region, into pan-Oromo movement that coordinated peaceful resistance, and in turn gave birth to Oromo political awareness. This means that since their conquest in the 1880s, the Oromo developed a single leadership . . . for two interrelated purposes: economic, educational and cultural development and to establish the political equality of the Oromo with other peoples of Ethiopia.

Despite the fact that Oromos have provided resources to build Ethiopian infrastructure and institutions, they are denied access to social amenities. When the Ethiopian government and Ethiopian elites continued conspiring to deny Oromos educational and professional opportunities and to destroy the leadership of the association, the association under its charismatic leader, Brigadier General Taddasa Biru, intensified the Oromo struggle (Zoga, 1993, pp. 118-133). The Oromo activist elements of the 1960s recognized what C. Geertz (1994, p. 30) describes:

The one aim is to be noticed; it is a search for identity, and a demand that identity be publicly acknowledged . . . The other aim is practical: it is a demand for progress for a rising standard of living, more effective political order, great social justice, and beyond that of ‘playing a part in the larger arena of world politics’, of exercising influence among the nations.

The Ethiopian colonial state and the Ethiopian settlers in Oromia did not tolerate any manifestation of Oromo consciousness. The Haile Selassie government banned the association in 1967, and its leaders were imprisoned or killed. Since the
association started ‘to articulate the dissatisfaction of the Oromo with the
government and particularly with their position in society’, it was not tolerated

The Ethiopian government did not even tolerate the existence of the Arffan Qallo
and the Biftu Ganamo musical groups because they expressed themselves in the
Oromo language and culture. They were banned like the association. Similarly,
the Bale Oromo-armed struggle that started in the early 1960s was suppressed with
the assistance of Great Britain, the United States, and Israel between 1968 and 1970
(Gilkes, 1975, pp. 217–218). The Macha-Tulama

movement marked the beginning of a new political experience that was crucial to the
growth of Oromo nationalism in the 1970s, an experience that taught the Oromo elites
that they needed a liberation movement that would marshal the resources of their
people, harmonize their actions and channel their creative activities and innovation
against the oppressive Ethiopian system. (Hassen, 1998, p. 196)

The suppression of this reform movement forced some Oromo nationalists to go
underground in Oromia, and others went to Somalia, the Middle East, and other
countries to continue the Oromo national movement. When Oromos were denied the
right to express themselves in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, a few Oromo
militant elements produced political pamphlets secretly. These pamphlets included
Kana Bekta (Do you know this?), and historical documents, such as The Oromos:
Voice against Tyranny. For the first time the original name of this people, Oromo was
used in this publication by rejecting the derogatory name, Galla. The Oromos: Voice
against Tyranny (1980, p. 23) raised the Oromo question as colonial and defined the
future direction of the Oromo national struggle:

[F]or an Oromo worthy of the name … there is one and only one way to dignity,
security, liberty and freedom. That single and sure way is to hold a common front
against his [her] oppressors and their instruments of subjugation. In this, he [she] is
ready and willing to join hands in the spirit of brotherhood, equality and mutual
respect, with oppressed nationalities and all persons and institutions of goodwill; he
[she] is equally ready and prepared to pay any sacrifice and oppose any person or groups
that in any way hinder his [her] mission for liberation from all forms of oppression and
subjugation.

The denial of individual and collective rights and the suppression all forms of
Oromo organizations and movements forced Oromo nationalists to pursue their
objectives in clandestine forms. B. Holcomb & S. Ibssa (1990, p. 299) note that

intellectuals who had survived the banning of Macha-Tulama had gone underground to
find a new approach. Those who had been able to leave the country were also searching
together for alternative tactics and strategies to achieve the objective they had espoused
and to find a new model for effective organization.

Consequently, Oromo political activists created the Ethiopian National Liberation
Front (ENLF) in 1971 and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in 1974. The ENLF’s
main objectives were to reform Ethiopia, introduce democracy, and bring civil
equality for all peoples by removing the imperial nature of Ethiopia (Jalata, 1994,
pp. 5–7). However, most Oromo nationalists did not endorse these objectives
recognizing the nature of Ethiopian elites, but rather determined to develop
revolutionary nationalism that attempted to dismantle Ethiopian settler colonialism and to establish a people’s democratic republic of Oromia or a multinational democracy based on voluntary political union of various peoples (Oromo Liberation Front Program, 1976).

The revolutionary Oromo leaders produced political pamphlets and expanded their sphere of influence by organizing different political circles in different sectors of Oromo society, such as students, professionals, workers, farmers, soldiers, students, and the army. Those Oromos who fled to foreign countries and received military training returned to Oromia to initiate armed struggle. The group that initiated the Oromo-armed struggle in 1973 and other revolutionary elements together created the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in 1974. As soon as the OLF began to challenge Ethiopian colonial domination ideologically, intellectually, politically, and militarily, the Ethiopian state initiated terrorism against Oromo nationalists and the Oromo people. Due to lack of international support and sanctuary, Ethiopian terrorism and Somali opposition to Oromo nationalism, the growth of the Oromo movement was slow in the 1970s and the 1980s.

Because of all these factors, the Oromo movement played a minor role in overthrowing the Amhara-led military regime headed by Mengistu Haile Mariam in May 1991. With the demise of the military regime, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), dominated by the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and supported by the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front and the US government came to power and then later established a Tigrayan-based minority authoritarian-terrorist government (Jalata, 2005). To obtain political legitimacy, at the beginning the new regime invited different liberation fronts, most prominent of which was the OLF, and other political organizations and established a transitional government. This regime persuaded these fronts and organizations that it would prepare a ground for the formation of a multinational federal democratic government of Ethiopia. However, in less than a year, the regime expelled all coalition partners by using intimidation, terrorism, and war, and established an ethnic-based party dictatorship without any opposition from the US and other Western countries (Trueman, 1997; Pollock, 1996, 1997). The US, other Western countries, and the African Union called the sham elections this regime used to legitimize its power satisfactory, fair, and free (Jalata, 2000). However, the feat was accomplished through systematic intimidation and outright terrorism.

During the transitional period the Oromo movement was transformed into a mass movement. The development of the Oromo national movement representing the largest ethnonational group in the Ethiopian empire prevented the Tigrayan-led minority regime from establishing its hegemony. Therefore, Oromos have become the main target of Ethiopian state terrorism. This government has accepted state violence against Oromos and others as a legitimate means of establishing political stability and order. Further, since this regime mainly survives on Oromo economic resources, it uses terrorist actions against the Oromo People (Oromia Support Group, Nov. 1997: 1). The terrorist activities of this regime have included actions such as systematic assassinations of prominent Oromos, open and hidden murders of thousands of Oromos, reinitiating of villagization and eviction of Oromo farmers and herders, expansion of prisons in Oromia, forcing thousands of Oromos into hidden and underground detention camps, looting of economic resources of Oromia.
to develop the Tigrayan region, and enrich Tigrayan elites and their collaborators (Oromia Support Group, 1996 and 1997 series).

State terrorism has manifested itself in Ethiopia in different forms: its obvious manifestation is violence against Oromos in the form of war, assassination, murder, castration, burying alive, throwing off cliffs, hanging, torture, rape, confiscation of properties by the police and the army, forcing people to submission by intimidation, beating, and disarming citizens (see Pollock, 1996, 1997). Former prisoners 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; 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; there were also prisoners who were forced into pits so that fire could be made on top of them (Fossati, Namara, & Niggli, 1996).

The government soldiers have openly shot thousands of people in rural Oromia and left their bodies for hyenas, or buried them in mass graves, or threw their corpses off cliffs; there have been other methods of killings, including burning, bombing, cutting throats or arteries in the neck, asphyxiation by tightly binding the chest or by strangulation, and burying people to their necks in the ground. The Ethiopian government attempts to destroy Oromo merchants and intellectuals by labeling them ‘narrow nationalists’ and ‘the enemy of the Ethiopian revolution’ (see Hizbawi Adera, Tahisas to Yekatit, 1989 E.C.). Hundreds of Oromo business people, intellectuals, and journalists have been harassed, killed or imprisoned and robbed of their properties. The intensification of state terrorism has created a very dangerous condition for Oromos and other colonized peoples. However, the Oromo movement still continues under difficult conditions. The more the state terrorizes Oromos, the more Oromo nationalism develops. The struggles of Southern and Western Sudanese are similar to that of Oromos, too.

The movements of Southern and Western Sudanese

The southern Sudanese movement emerged in opposition to the imposition of Northern Sudanese colonial domination, slavery, Arabization, and Islamization. With the emergence of a resistance movement and a continuation of the demand for independence or federation, the government increased its political terrorism on the south. Grievances such as increasing the number of northern troops in the south and the attempt to transfer southern soldiers to the north led to mutiny in the 1950s. Mading Deng (1991, p. 24) comments that

the conflict erupted in August 1955 when a mutiny by one southern battalion was triggered by a widely shared fear in the south that independence was going to mean a change of masters – from the British to the Arabs – and could entail the return of the slave trade in which blacks were the victims of the Arab north.

The mutineers, who escaped imprisonment and execution by fleeing into the forest, began to initiate guerrilla warfare against the Sudanese government. The continued government repression of the south and indiscriminate killings of civilians for allegedly harboring the guerrilla fighters facilitated the development of southern nationalism. To curb that impulse, the government intensified its Arabization and
Islamization policies: it nationalized private schools, prohibited missionary schools in 1957, and, in 1960, replaced the Sunday weekly holiday with Muslim Friday. Because of brutal repression, many government employees and soldiers deserted the government and joined a movement known as the Anya-Nya. In 1971 the Anya-Nya became the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM). This organization reached a negotiated political settlement with the Numayri government in 1972. The south accepted regional autonomy set forth in the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement and abandoned its demand for a separate army.

In 1983, Numaryi changed his mind and introduced the rule of sharia, or Islamic law. President Numaryi divided the south into three regions, thus violating the 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement. Consequently, the second phase of the struggle of the south started under the leadership of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) and its military unit, the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA). As the resistance increased, the south was exposed to mass poverty, economic and cultural dislocation, unemployment, recurring famine and disaster, war, and state terrorism. This political terrorism manifested itself in the form of summary executions, assassinations, mass imprisonments, rape, forced dislocation into concentration camps, constant destruction of houses, farms, and villages; robbery and theft, and militarization of rural communities (Amnesty International, 1995; Walgren 1994; Prendergast & Bickel 1994).

The Sudanese government has continued to use state terrorism and famine to crush the resistance struggles of southern and western Sudan. According to John Prendergast (2004a, p. 1),

the government’s helicopter gunships are blowing bombs and bullets into southern villages … Relief agencies, banned from many areas by the government, are begging for access to deliver food aid to a million people dependent on them for survival. Most bodies are added to the shocking two million victims of violence and famine in Sudan’s 19-year civil war.

The conflict between northern and southern Sudanese displaced 4.5 million people, compounded the famine crises, and increased the suffering and misery of the victims (Prendergast, 2004a, p. 1). The conflict has been

between the central government, dominated by a well-armed and well-funded Arab Islamist elite, and southern insurgents opposed to the regime. Sudan’s vast oil reserves, currently controlled by the government, are the greatest spoils of the war, but it is also a battle over land, religion, ideology and demands for self-determination. (Pendergast, 2004a, p. 1)

The conflict in Sudan sometimes goes beyond the south and north and religion and identity. It has also taken place among Muslims, not simply between Christians and Muslims, since ‘a small group from the centre of the country maintains power by any means necessary’ (Prendergast, 2004b, p. 1). The peoples of west Sudan who are currently facing state terrorism and genocide are Muslims, although they are not Arabized Muslims. As Prendergast (2004b, p. 1) notes, ‘Sudan is Rwanda in slow motion’. The Sudanese government created ‘the second largest death toll since World War II (the conflict with the SPLA)’, and it ‘is responsible for creating the worst humanitarian crisis in … Darfur’ from 2003 to 2007. Still the terrorism and genocide in Darfur are going on.
When two Darfurian rebel groups in western Sudan, namely, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), attacked military garrisons in western Sudan in February 2003, the government mobilized, armed, and unleashed a terrorist militia group known as ‘Janjaweed’ (Arab militia) to collectively punish the peoples of the Fur, Zaghawa, and Massalit. As of December 2006, public television reports from the US estimate that Janjaweed militia and government soldiers in west Sudan killed about 400,000 people. More than 2.5 million Western Sudanese have been displaced and crossed to neighboring Chad. The Arabized Sudanese state has been using state terrorism and genocide to resolve the political, social, and economic crises in Sudan. This state receives political and financial support from Arab countries (Oxford Analytica, 2004). It is a political tragedy that the United Nations and the African Union have failed to solve these genocidal crises.

Because of the pressure from Western countries and the intensification of the struggle of the Southern Sudanese, the Sudanese government signed a peace agreement in 2004 with the SPLA. Currently, the SPLA is part of the Sudanese government and it administers the Southern Sudan although the conflict between North and Southern Sudan is not yet totally resolved. However, the regime has refused to settle the conflict in Darfur and other areas peacefully, and has intensified genocide and massive human rights violations.

Comparing the movements

Despite the fact that the duration, character, mechanisms of domination, exploitation and oppression of these three societies have been different, they overcame the organized destruction and repression of their cultural elements and have struggled for cultural revival and nationalism. 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. Oppressed populations maintain their existence through cultural memory and popular consciousness and the hope of freedom (Bethel, 1997, p. 78). African Americans, Oromos and Southern and Western Sudanese formed their respective associations and organizations reflecting on their respective 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 African American, Oromo, and Southern and Western Sudanese societies songs, proverbs, stories, and other means of expression were used to articulate the dehumanization of collective oppression and exploitation and the aspiration of freedom. The cultural memories and popular historical consciousness of these three peoples emerged from their respective cultural foundations. Such memories and consciousness pass from generation to generation. Moreover, cultural revival and nationalism help the dominated groups to use their suppressed cultural elements and popular historical memories to organize and struggle for their respective liberation.

These groups have developed nationalist ideologies that promote the idea that their cultures and peoplehood are everlasting by surviving the onslaught of slavery or colonialism. The demand for the freedom of the colonized or dominated included the right to worship in dignity and the right to an identity that incorporated
memories of a lost homeland and imaginings of life freely lived’ (Bethel, 1997, p. 26). Like African Americans, Oromos and Southern and Western Sudanese needed urbanite and educated elements, political and cultural organizations, and political opportunities in order to develop nationalisms and struggle to dismantle Ethiopian and Northern Sudanese colonialisms respectively. Despite the fact that the end of racial slavery in the 1860s led to racial segregation, it provided African Americans opportunities to move to urban centers. The migration brought scattered people together in American ghettos to form social, geographical, and political communities that facilitated the emergence of the independent black church, mosque, and affiliated schools, and the formation of the educated class and associations and organizations.

However, Oromos and Southern and Western Sudanese are mainly rural peoples and denied autonomous educational, economic, cultural, and political institutions under Ethiopian and Northern Sudanese colonialisms respectively. Several factors have prevented Oromos and Southern and Western Sudanese from mobilizing their cultural resources to develop their respective nationalism fully. Similarly, African Americans under slavery were denied the opportunity of developing autonomous institutions. Free Blacks, however, could develop their autonomous institutions in spite of segregation. After slavery was abolished, African Americans could develop segregated autonomous cultural, educational, religious, and economic institutions. Despite the fact that these institutions could not fully develop since they were under internal colonial domination, they had free space that enabled them to contribute to the development of African American consciousness and nationalism.

These movements were produced by similar social structural and conjunctural factors. According to McAdam et al., 1998, p. 709),

> 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.

Comparable conditions facilitated the emergence and development of these movements. However, the duration and the way these three societies developed their respective collective identity, political consciousness, nationalism, human agency, and outcomes varied because of their respective social and political environments. For African American nationalism to develop fully, new historical conditions that would change the status of enslaved Africans were required. These conditions included the end of racial slavery.

The American racist and sexist democracy at least allowed free blacks and their children to develop separate institutions, such as churches, schools, and self-help associations. These institutions later provided political opportunities for the African American movement. But the indigenous Oromo and Southern and Western Sudanese institutions and organizations have been suppressed and denied freedom of development. State violence and tight control have disabled Oromo and Southern and Western Sudanese societies by creating and maintaining what J.D. McCarthy (1987, pp. 49–66) calls ‘infrastructure deficits’. As African American classical nationalists and white abolitionists were prevented from having access to the slave
population, Oromo and Southern and Western Sudanese activists have been prevented from educating and helping their respective masses. But while the black classical nationalists had the right to organize themselves, Oromo and Southern and Western Sudanese nationalists have been denied the right to openly organize themselves within their respective countries. That is why the Oromo and Southern and Western Sudanese movements are forced to engage in guerrilla-armed struggle.

Despite the fact that the U.S. Constitution was racist and endorsed racial slavery, it later provided limited political opportunities for freed blacks. Enslaved Africans were totally denied access to state power and prevented from having cultural, political, and economic institutions during slavery. After racial slavery ended between 1863 and 1865, African Americans were denied access to the American government and other public institutions, as well as private institutions, until the mid-1960s. But, they were allowed to have separate religious, economic, cultural, and educational institutions during American apartheid. All of these institutions laid the foundation of African American consciousness and nationalism. Even if they were segregated and oppressed, African Americans could openly organize themselves after the end of slavery and engage in a peaceful struggle for their rights. Of course, white terrorist organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan, sometimes prevented African Americans from freely organizing themselves. During the 1950s and the 1960s, African American leaders and activists used the U.S. Constitution effectively to obtain some rights for the black people. But as the black movement had become more organized and assertive the federal/state government and its security branches intensified the repression, assassination, and imprisonment of activists and leaders. According to Cedric J. Robinson (1997, pp. 151–152),

Across the country, local police department, county sheriffs, state law enforcement agencies, and their corporate counterparts – all largely managed by right-wing ideologues – conspired with the FBI and military intelligence in regional programs modelled on the COINTELPRO anti-Black militant agenda. The repression targeted SNCC, CORE, SCLC, the Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam – even the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party and the NAACP.

COINTELPRO was an impressive display of state power: both for what it had intended to achieve and what it unexpectedly spawned. By 1969, for example, it had orchestrated the assassinations of some twenty-nine Black Panthers ... and the jailing of hundreds of others. But their repression had also forged revolutionaries of young Black men and women whose original intent, as civil rights activists and nationalists, was essentially reformist.

There is no rule of law in Ethiopia and Sudan. Both Ethiopia and Sudan do not allow the freedom of expression and organization. The Ethiopian and Northern Sudanese states have been above their own rule of law, and they have liquidated some Oromo and Southern and Western Sudanese nationalists and other activists without any hesitation, respectively. That is why the Oromo and Southern and Western Sudanese movements have been underground movements while the African American struggle was legal and open. In the early 1970s, however, the FBI and police destroyed the Black Panthers Party and forced the Black Liberation Army to go underground. Comparatively speaking, the conditions of the Oromo and Southern and Western Sudanese struggles have been more difficult and dangerous. The activities of the Ethiopian and Sudanese government have been similar in several
areas to that of the Ku Klux Klan. There have been also terrorist organizations in Ethiopia and Sudan. In Ethiopia, they are called ‘Galla Gadayi’ (killers of Oromos), and in Sudan they are called Janjaweed (Arab militia). Oromos and Southern and Western Sudanese have been denied the right to engage in peaceful struggles. Since Oromo and Southern and Western Sudanese organizations have been secret or guerrilla organizations, they could not practice democracy within themselves and among themselves. But African Americans had relative freedom among themselves to discuss freely and openly and form a unity of purpose among most of the forces of the African American struggle.

Whenever Oromos have tried to struggle for their rights, the Ethiopian government has terrorized them with impunity. Similarly, the policies of colonialism, Arabization, Islamization, and terrorism have threatened the identity, culture, religion and survival of Southern and Western Sudanese. According to C. Fluehr-Lobban (1991, p. 71),

Sudan has offered one of the more provocative cases of state-supported Islamization in recent years because the government’s swiftness and readiness to apply the hudad punishment, a sharia was decreed to be national law in September 1983. The Islamization, using the coercive apparatus of the state, must be distinguished from the socio-cultural process of conversion to Islam that has been a major part of Sudanese history for the past five centuries.

However, Ethiopian and Sudanese colonialisms have been less effective in destroying Oromo and Southern and Western Sudanese cultural elements than American racial slavery. During slavery, African Americans were forced to abandon some elements of their culture, religions, and worldviews, and to accept the English language, Christianity, and to some extent European worldviews, although they sometimes used these imposed cultural elements for resistance. Despite the fact that the impact of racial slavery was devastating, as some scholars such as Holloway (1990) and Hall (2006) assert, African Americans had maintained some aspects of their African culture.

While African American peoplehood and nationalism developed from the process of intense oppression that caused the loss of previous social bonds and networks and the creation of new ones, Oromo and Southern and Western Sudanese nationalisms developed from oppressive colonial and racial structures in the presence of long-lasting social bonds and structures. Although the Ethiopian colonial government tried to impose its Orthodox Christianity on Oromos, only some Oromo groups accepted it. The majority of Oromos accepted Islam and other forms of Christianity in opposition to the Ethiopian colonizing structures. Similarly, despite the fact that Ethiopian colonizers tried to impose their language on Oromos, the majority of Oromos still speak their own language known as Afaan Oromoo. The majority of Southern Sudanese accepted Christianity in opposition to Islam, and speak their own languages. However, Western Sudanese accepted Islam. Despite the fact that they accepted Christianity or Islam, Oromos and Southern and Western Sudanese have maintained some elements of their indigenous religions.

During slavery, African Americans were under the total control of plantation and slave owners and the white government and its various institutions. After slavery was abolished, they were dominated and controlled by white society and the government and other institutions. Similarly, Oromos and Southern and Western Sudanese have
been dominated and controlled by Ethiopian and Northern Sudanese colonial governments and other institutions respectively. The incorporation of Oromia into Ethiopia made Oromos invisible in the world. Since Oromos were identified with Ethiopians, the very colonizers who suppressed an Oromo identity, they were not recognized in the world. As a result, the existence of Oromos and their national liberation struggle was largely hidden until the early 1990s. African American enslavement, segregation, and struggles were widely known to the world. Particularly the Soviet Union and its bloc and China, and almost all revolutionary countries exposed the fallacy of American democracy by citing the condition of African Americans. The media in the world paid great attention to the struggle of the black people because they struggled against the US, one of the hegemonic world powers. The problem of the Southern and Western Sudanese has been known to the world because of Western nations’ interests in opposing the Sudanese state and seeking a large share of its oil reserve.

Although it was racist, the American media also made the African American organizations and leaders known nationally and globally. Similarly, Western countries have popularised the struggle of Southern Sudan because they have opposed the Islamized state of Sudan. While Oromos still lack sympathizers and allies because of the lack of recognition, African Americans and Southern and Western Sudanese have enjoyed sympathy and support from oppressed peoples and revolutionary and democratic forces. The same instruments of American media that spread racist stereotypes also contributed to the recognition of the African American and Southern Sudanese movements. However, the world media has ignored the struggle of the Oromo people. Even today Oromos in the diaspora have difficulty in introducing themselves and their peoplehood to the world. The lack of media and the absence of communication technologies have prevented Oromos from playing ‘an important role in movement efforts to attract members, discredit opponents, and influence … the general public’ (McAdam et al., 1998, p. 716).

The African American movement reached its peak in the 1950s and the 1960s and won some legislative measures. By legally dismantling American apartheid, the African American movement succeeded in institutionalizing significant gains during the early 1970s. Blacks became an important voter bloc, participating at higher rates than whites of the same socioeconomic status and the number of black office holders rose rapidly. Although the socioeconomic gap between blacks and whites remained glaringly wide, significant progress against the most overt forms of racial discrimination in education and employment gradually became evident. (Jenkins & Eckert, 1986, p. 816–817)

The Southern Sudanese movement has recently signed a peace agreement with the Sudanese government. The result of this agreement will be seen soon. The Oromo and Western Sudanese movement have a long way to go to achieve their main objectives. However, as a result of the Oromo movement the geographic location of Oromia was designated and recognized within the Ethiopian territory. This is progress, even though some of its territories were partitioned and incorporated to different neighbouring regions. The Oromo language has been recognized and become the medium of instruction in elementary school. It is taught in an Oromo alphabet known as Qubee. However, the Tigrayan-led regime does not want the flowering of the Oromo language, literature, culture, and Oromo nationalism. Hence
it targets Oromo intellectuals, politicians, and other leaders for silencing. Despite all these challenges, Oromo nationalism is blossoming in reaction to Ethiopian state terrorism and massive human rights violations. Similarly, the Sudanese government is currently engaging in state terrorism and genocide against Western Sudanese.

Conclusion

The denial of structural assimilation and democratic and equal citizenship rights to African Americans, Oromos, and Southern and Western Sudanese, based on the ideology of racism, contributed to the development of collective political consciousness and social justice movements in these societies. White and Ethiopian and Northern Sudanese societies and their institutions have justified the hierarchical organization of peoples and the control of African Americans, Oromos, and Southern and Western Sudanese by racist discourses (Jalata, 1999). As White Americans used to call African Americans ‘Nigger’, Ethiopian used to call Oromos ‘Galla’, and Northern Sudanese called Southern and Western Sudanese ‘Abd’, a derogatory name that characterized them as slaves, pagan, backward. The colonization, subjugation and dehumanization of a human group denies the dignity that is associated with freedom of development, free expression, self-worthiness, self-respect, worldviews, and choices, and facilitates economic exploitation and underdevelopment. Since the subjugated groups are denied cultural and economic development and access to state power, they develop a collective national consciousness to challenge the dominant groups.

The movements of these peoples can be seen as an integral part of the worldwide struggle for cultural identity, multinational democracy, economic freedom, and inalienable political and cultural rights. Social justice movements have gained legitimacy because they base their struggles on the grievances of a collective memory to regain economic, political, and cultural rights by rejecting subordination, exploitation, and underdevelopment. The struggles of such movements involve confronting oppressive and exploitative institutions and social relations responsible for the mal-distribution of power, economic resources, justice, goods, and services and implementing popular democracy in the larger social system (Feagin, 2001, p. 11). This study demonstrates that in the capitalist world system the major contradictions are the racialization/ethnicization of state power, and the lack of accountability and multinational democracy. African Americans, Oromos, and Southern and Western Sudanese have respectively struggled to dismantle racial/ethnonational hierarchy, colonial domination, racial hegemony and those institutions that have been legitimated by the ideology of racism. These movements also show the necessity of the construction of legitimate states that can be accountable and democratic, and reflect a multinational society.

Without an accountable, democratic, and legitimate state, there cannot be peace, justice, and balanced and sustainable development. As Joe R. Feagin (2001, p. 11) explains, ‘social justice is not only a fundamental human right but is also essential for a society to be sustainable in the long term’. Therefore, the solution for racial/ethnonational problems lies in recognizing cultural diversity, promoting self-determination, expanding genuine multicultural or multinational democracy by eliminating the racialization/ethnicization of state power in the world. Although small steps have been taken toward these goals in the U.S. mainly because of the
black movement, the forces of reaction are currently active in destroying this important progress. As for Ethiopia and Sudan, because of the violent nature of the Ethiopian and Sudanese state elites and due to the assistance they get from outside, these elites are empowered to conduct more state terrorism, leading to crisis and disintegration. However, the opposition of the West to the Islamic state of Sudan for political and economic expediency has opened a temporary political opportunity for the Southern and Western Sudanese struggles. Generally speaking, the full implementation of social justice requires the dismantling of all forms of social stratification (i.e. racial/ethnic, gender and class hierarchies), and the implementation of self-determination and multinational democracy.

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