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Winter 1993

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/asafa_jalata/43/
SOCIOCULTURAL ORIGINS OF THE OROMO NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN ETHIOPIA

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This paper examines social and cultural factors that have necessitated the emergence of the Oromo national movement. Since their incorporation into Ethiopia, the Oromo have lost their autonomous cultural and social development. With the help of the European colonial powers, the Ethiopians effectively occupied Oromia, expropriated Oromian economic resources, established settler colonialism, and repressed Oromo culture and negated Oromo history. The colonial settlers created oppressive institutions that facilitated the extraction of Oromo produce and labor. The Oromo have become second class citizens and lost political freedom and institutional power. Recently Oromo cultural resistance has been transformed into the Oromo national movement that struggled to redefine the relationship between the Oromo and the Ethiopians. The emergence of intellectual and professional groups in Oromo society has played a decisive role in this transformation.

INTRODUCTION

The Oromo\(^1\) are the largest ethnonational group in the Ethiopian Empire; and they have been politically, economically and culturally subordinated to the Amhara and Tigrayan ethnonational groups since their incorporation into Abyssinia/Ethiopia\(^2\) in the last decades of the 19th century. The Ethiopian colonial ruling class and its state expropriated the Oromo basic means of production, such as land and

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\(^1\) Of 83 million people in the Ethiopian Empire today, the Oromo is estimated to be half this population. The Ethiopian rulers do not want the exact number of the Oromo population to be known for political reasons. There are also Oromo branches in northern Kenya.

\(^2\) The name Ethiopia originated from the Greek word, "Aethiopēs." Classical Greek writers gave this name to the territories inhabited by black peoples. Later this name was adopted by Habashas or Abyssinians who preferred to call themselves Ethiopians because of political reasons.
cattle, established an Ethiopian system of rule over Oromia,² and reorganized productive relations³ and structurally repressed the cultural life of this people. As a result, the Oromo have been denied institutional power in educational, cultural, economic and political fields. Ethiopian colonialism has been practiced through violence, mass killings, mutilations, cultural destruction, enslavement and property expropriation (Melbaa, 1988; Marcus, 1975). Cabral (1973:41) asserts that colonial domination "is the negation of the historical process of the dominated people by means of violently usurping the free operation of the process of development of the productive forces." To reclaim their rights as a people and liberate their culture and productive forces from Ethiopian colonialism, the Oromo have transformed their resistance into the Oromo national movement. The emergence of a few educated Oromo nationalists has played a pivotal role in this transformation. This paper attempts to bring to light the Oromo national movement that has been ignored by Ethiopian scholars and most Ethiopianists.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Historical studies demonstrate that between the sixteenth and the last decades of the nineteenth centuries, Oromos and Ethiopians fought each other without one dominating the other (Holcomb and Ibsaa, 1990; Hassen, 1990; Jalata, 1990, 1993). Both Oromos and Ethiopians did not have necessary weapons and modern administrative expertise that would allow the creation of permanent colonial establishments; these problems were solved by the alliance of European colonial expansion with Ethiopian colonialism in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As Holcomb and Ibsaa (1990:387) describe, "Advisers who represented various capitalist countries were initially involved at every stage in forming the empire, and then at every level of government. These advisers were the conduits through which the capitalist ideology, embodied in strategy, was implemented in shaping Ethiopia. The advisers were involved in bringing surrounding peoples under the control of Abyssinian settlers..."

²Oromia is an Oromo country that almost occupies three-fourths of the Ethiopian Empire. Paul Baxter (1988) comments that "the name Oromia has been created by young Oromo nationalists for the independent state to which they aspire... The name Oromia thus serves the same purpose and is justified as 'Ghana', 'Mali', and 'Zimbabwe'."

³Productive relations are established through the process of commodity production and extraction between those who control or own the means of compulsion, the state, and the means of production and producers, and as well among producers. Those who control the means of compulsion usually reorganize productive relations through expropriation of the colonised population in order to facilitate more produce extraction.
When the rival European powers, particularly Britain, France and Italy, sought collaborators to obtain jumping-off places in the Horn of Africa, Yohannes of Tigray and Menelik of Amhara began to lay the foundation of the modern Ethiopian state with the assistance of these imperialist powers (Jalata, 1990). Therefore, the modern Ethiopian state was created in the processes of the expansion of the capitalist world economy and the alliance of the Ethiopian colonial class and the European imperialists. The European weaponry provided the means of conquest, and the advice the Ethiopians received from Europeans on state construction assisted in establishing the administrative means of colonial rule. The relationship between European imperialism and Ethiopian colonialism was embodied in the exchange of raw materials, on one hand, and modern technology, army and administrative expertise on the other (Jalata, 1991). The impact of European army technology and expertise effectively reflected as much on one of the European powers, the Italians, as it did on the Oromo.

When Menelik became the emperor of the Ethiopian Empire by replacing Yohannes in 1889, the status of the Italians' relations with Menelik was changed from ally to adversary. Using the Wuchale Treaty of May 2, 1889, the Italians expanded their Eritrean colony and claimed a protectorate over the Ethiopian Empire. Menelik confronted the Italians at the battle of Adwa, which lasted from December 1895 to March 1896, and defeated them with the modern weaponry they had partially provided him when they were allies. Regarding this event, one European commented as follows: "It is no doubt remarkable that a nation of niggers possessing three hundred thousand rifles should take a tone different from that of niggers who were not permitted to possess any." (Cited in Skinner 1969:102). For some time, the Italians were forced to discard their claim over the Ethiopian Empire, although their position in Eritrea was consolidated.

The Ethiopian colonial class occupied an intermediate status in the world economy and served its own interest and that of the European imperialists. The Oromo and other colonized peoples were targeted to provide raw materials for local and European markets. The colonial settlers built garrisons as their political centers for practicing colonial domination through the monopoly of the means of compulsion, wealth and capital accumulation, and cultural dissemination (Waugh, 1936; Jalata, 1991). The main mechanism of produce extraction was tribute collection in Ethiopia proper; hence the Ethiopian social system was more analogous to a tributary system. In the tributary system, the rules extracted tribute and labor from the cultivators who owned the basic means of production. The Ethiopian farmers supported their households, the state and the church from what they produced as agriculturalists. After its colonial expansion, Ethiopia even maintained its tributary nature and established colonial political economy in Oromia.
and other regions. Although the colonial state intensified land expropriation and produce extraction from the colonized peoples, capitalist productive relations did not emerge, nor were precapitalist relations maintained. Gradually merchant capitalism developed. With further integration of the Ethiopian Empire into the capitalist world economy, agrocapitalism emerged. Agrocapitalism started to extend its roots mainly through tenancy, sharecropping and the use of noncapitalist forced-labor systems.

Ethiopian dependent colonialism was mainly based on plundering and forced-labor recruitment systems. The Ethiopian colonial state controlled the process of forced recruitment of labor via the naf*xanya-gabbar system and slavery. The naf*xanya-gabbar system was created to force the colonized population to provide forced labor for the production of agricultural foodstuffs and other commodities needed by colonialists and imperialists (McClellan, 1978). Holcomb and Ibssa (1990:210–211) argue that the naf*xanya-gabbar system “had served overlapping functions...it had provided compensation for...northern Abyssinian officers and allies (such as the church), assuring their continued loyalty to the state; it has provided the labor essential to productivity in a technologically deficient system; and it had supplied a means of suppressing resistance.” Traditionally the Ethiopian ruling class recruited slaves as its main labor force through military campaigns (Baravelli, 1936:21). Ethiopian colonialism reduced some Oromos and others to slaves and semi-slaves (Bulcha, 1993; Oromo Relief Association, 1980). The conquered or raided captives who were enslaved by Ethiopians either served as domestic slaves or were exported as commodities (Garretson, 1974:224; LeRoy, 1979). For instance, one time, Menelik and his wife had 70,000 domestic slaves (Pankhurst, 1968:75). Slavery existed until the 1930s, when the Italians colonized Ethiopia and abolished the system in order to recruit adequate cheap labor for their agricultural plantations in the Horn.

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Agrocapitalism is a concept used to indicate the introduction of capitalism in agriculture prior to the development of peripheral capitalism in the Ethiopian Empire.

Gabbar is an Amharic word which means a farmer who pays tribute and taxes to his rulers. The farmer in Ethiopia proper fulfilled his obligations to the government and its functionaries by paying tribute, tax and forced labor. Although the meaning of this word almost remained the same in Ethiopia proper, with the creation of the Ethiopian Empire its meaning took a different direction. The gabbar was the colonized farmer who did not have control over his land, produce, life or children. The naf*xanya-gabbar system was established only in the colonized areas. The colonized people became semi-slaves and were divided among the Ethiopian colonists to produce commodities for local consumption and international market.
Sociocultural Origins of the Oromo

Ethiopian colonialism also depended on an Oromo collaborative class that was essential to enforce Ethiopian colonialism (McClellan, 1978; Markakis, 1974). This class joined the Ethiopian camp for economic and political advantages. The main task of this class was to ensure the continuous supply of products and labor for the settlers. Of course, this class was not always loyal to the Ethiopian state. For instance, some Oromo chiefs tried to use the Italian invasion of the mid-1930s to their advantage and establish their own state (Gilkes, 1975). The Ethiopian colonial state claimed absolute rights over Oromo lands and provided portions for its collaborators and officials in lieu of salary. Between 1889 and 1929, the state expropriated over 14,379,232 hectares of land (Pankhurst, 1966). Similarly, between 1942 and 1970, the state granted approximately 4,828,560 hectares of free land (Cohen, 1973). All these land grants were given to encourage the influx of more Ethiopians into Oromia. There were also lands that the colonial government confiscated from the colonized population for itself. The estimation of 1972 indicated 57,000,000 hectares as government lands, and about 55 million hectares of them were in Oromia (Cohen, 1973). The expropriation of lands continued until it was finalized in 1975.

When the Ethiopian colonial settlers controlled Oromian political economy with their European advisers, European, Indian and Arab merchants dominated commercial activities (Pankhurst, 1968:399). European legations, merchants and workers in collaboration with the Ethiopian colonialists linked the Ethiopian political economy into the world capitalist world economy. Between 1935 and 1941, Italian colonialism destroyed the Ethiopian government and its institutions and intensified capitalist production (Sbacchi, 1985; Bailey, 1980). The alliance between dominant world powers, such as Great Britain and the U.S., and the Ethiopian colonialists facilitated the development of colonial capitalism and extraction of Oromo produce. In 1941, Great Britain expelled the Italians and restored the Haile Selassie government and brought Ethiopia under its control for nearly a decade. Under the British auspice, Haile Selassie centralized its power; established a fiscal system with tax payments to officials of the Ministry of Finance instead of nobility; monetized and increased taxes; created a central armed forces and police; created institutions with necessary personnel by hiring Europeans and others and extended education mainly for children of Amharas and Tigrayans (Lefort, 1983:14).

Both Britain and the U.S. played very important roles in restoring and consolidating the Ethiopian state. The U.S. began its connection with Ethiopia in the 1940s and inherited Britain's position in Ethiopia.

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7Colonial capitalism emerges when a nation colonizes another nation in order to expropriate its means of production and use forced-labor recruitment systems to facilitate capital accumulation without adequate investment.
in 1952. The alliance between the Ethiopian colonialists and the American imperialists survived until the 1970s. The U.S. modernization programs expanded in the 1960s and the early 1970s. It dispatched its intellectuals and diplomats to apply modernization programs in building and maintaining the Ethiopian Empire in accord with the U.S. interest. The crisis of the Ethiopian Empire led to the overthrow of the Haile Selassie government and shifted Ethiopian alliance from the West to the East in the late 1970s. Criticizing western imperialism for everything that went wrong, the U.S.S.R. and its bloc countries had taken the responsibility of rebuilding and reconsolidating the disintegrating Ethiopian Empire.

Like other hegemonic powers, the Soviet Union was involved in Ethiopia for geopolitical reasons. It wanted to establish its hegemony in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean for commercial and military purposes. However, Ethiopia essentially remained the old empire. Soviet involvement in the empire discouraged questions of social justice, democracy, and rights of national self-determination. The crisis of Ethiopia in the early 1990s also failed to resolve the Oromo problem since the Tigray ethnic hegemony has replaced that of Amhara with the help of the USA, Sudan and Eritrea (Jalata, 1993). Therefore, the Oromo national movement that emerged in the 1960s has been gathering momentum and growing to determine Oromian national self-determination.

THE EMERGENCE OF OROMO NATIONALISM

Why did Oromo nationalism emerge in the 1960s? Colonization and subjugation were not enough to facilitate the development of Oromo nationalism. Of course, Oromos resisted colonialism and fought several battles against the Ethiopian occupying forces (Triulzi, 1980; Hassen, 1981; Gabre-Selassie, 1975). To resist Ethiopian colonial domination culturally, some Oromo groups accepted Islam (Trimmingham, 1965) while others accepted Protestant Christianity. In the 1960s, the emergence of intelligentsia and professional groups in Oromo society facilitated the transformation of cultural resistance to Oromo nationalism. Bulcha (1993:1) comments that "election to the Ethiopian parliament and recruitment into...armed forces and educational institutions gradually brought many Oromos together from the different corners of their country during the post Second World War period, they were able to see more clearly the similarity of their experiences and commonality of their aspirations. Consequently, Oromo nationalism...began to strongly manifest itself in the middle of the 1960s...." The 1960s was a period of the fermentation-process of Oromo national awakening that was followed by the development of the Oromo national
movement. Alter (1989:22) asserts that "the emergence of a national movement indicates that a population or a social group has reached a new stage on the road to nationhood: the transition to political action." Breuilly (1987:1) also considers "nationalism as a form of politics."

Oromo professional groups and intellectuals realized that the Ethiopian state had been controlled by the Ethiopian colonial ruling class that exploited and oppressed the Oromo by denying them access to state power. Hence, Oromo nationalism emerged as a political movement to seek Oromo political power.

The Ethiopian state delayed the development of Oromo national leadership by denying Oromos opportunities essential to develop an educated and organized leadership. Educational opportunities have been mainly provided for children of the Ethiopian colonial ruling class in order to perpetuate the Amhara-Tigray dominance (Tuso, 1982); for instance, in the 1960s, the colonized peoples (Oromo, Sidama, Somali, Walaya, etc.) were less than 10 percent of the student population while the Amhara-Tigrayan students were about 80 percent in Haile Selassie I University (Markakis, 1974). The division of labor has been ethnicized and Oromos and other colonized peoples have been mainly limited to agricultural activities. Cabral (1973:42-3) asserts that colonialism "by denying the historical development of the dominated people, necessarily also denies their cultural development." In the early 1960s, the emergence of Oromo nationalism manifested itself in the formation of the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association that formed a link with the Oromo farmer armed struggle in Bale (Jalata, 1993).

Understanding their own dilemma and the status of the Oromo, a few educated Oromos, army officers, soldiers, students, merchants and farmers who could not tolerate colonial mistreatment and second class citizenship created this association in 1963. It was only during this time after their colonization the Oromo began to produce a centralized leadership. By creating a centrally-led movement, Oromo professionals and intellectuals began to manifest a sense of Oromo solidarity "which in time of stress and danger can override class, factional and regional divisions within the community" (Smith, 1986:30). The main objectives of this association were the establishment of schools and health clinics and construction of roads to facilitate development in Oromia (Metcha-Tulama Association, 1963). Smith (1986:157) argues that the question of survival requires each ethnonational group to "take on some of the attributes of nationhood, and adopt a civic model...rational political centralization, mass literacy and social mobilization." This association attempted to mobilize the Oromo for education, development and political activism.

When the colonial government opposed the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association and attempted to destroy it, the association gradually transformed itself into a political movement and went underground.
Wood (1983:516) writes: "Although nominally a self-help association, it began to articulate the dissatisfaction of the Oromo with the government and particularly with their position in society. This position, together with its organization along the ethnic lines caused much government concern and within a year of its establishment the association was banned." The Ethiopian government did not like to see all Oromos — Muslims and Christians, soldiers and civilians, urban dwellers and farmers — come together to discuss and develop a strategy of improving their conditions through education and development. Because of this the leaders of this association were accused of being conspirators aiming to overthrow the government. As a result, some of these leaders were killed and others were imprisoned. The banning of this association and harsh repression forced a few Oromo revolutionary intellectuals and professionals to continue the struggle clandestinely.

The underground papers, The Oromos: Voice Against Tyranny and Kana Bekta (Do you know this?), were the living examples. These two papers began to explain the nature of Ethiopian colonialism and what the Oromo should do to regain their lost freedom. There were underground study and political circles in Finfiné; various historical documents and political pamphlets were produced and circulated among the Oromo in the early 1970s. Bakalcha Oromo and Oromia clandestinely produced and distributed political pamphlets agitating for revolution and decolonization of Oromia. Both of these organizations had their youth wings, namely Warraqa and Gucha Dargago, respectively.

Oromo nationalists have used their culture in developing Oromo nationalism. There were cultural and youth associations in some parts of Oromia that were doing cultural and political work in the 1960s and the 1970s. The Arffan Qallo and Biftu Ganamo musical groups were created in the 1960s in the City of Dire Dawa (Jalata, 1993). Most members of these musical groups were accused by the colonial government as subversive and put in jail or killed. In the early 1970s, there were also youth associations in western Oromia; the names of these associations were Burqa Boji, Biqiliu Mandi and Lalisa Nejo (Jalata, 1985). The members of these groups were students, teachers and development workers who tried to help develop Oromo nationalism for collective political action. The continuous failure of scattered and spontaneous efforts and the brutal suppression of cultural and social movements necessitated a nationwide coordinated political organization and a protracted armed struggle. Nationalists express their opposition to foreign domination through reviving and reaffirming their culture and engaging in a national liberation struggle (Gellner, 1983:57). The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was born in such process in 1973 and declared its program in 1974. This program was amended in 1976. According to the program of the OLF, "The fundamental objective of
the struggle is the realization of nation self-determination for the Oromo people and their liberation from oppression and exploitation in all their forms. This can only be realized through the successful consummation of the new democratic revolution...and the establishment of the people's democratic republic of Oromia." In its program, the OLF also recognizes the possibility of creating a multinational democratic state based on a voluntary association. The Oromo national struggle has militarily and politically penetrated the Oromo masses for almost two decades. Cabral (1973:43) correctly sees "the national liberation movement as the organized political expression of the culture of the people who are undertaking the struggle." Therefore, the emergence of Oromo nationalism has facilitated struggle on the interpretation of Oromo history and culture.

CONTENDING INTERPRETATIONS

Ethiopian scholars and most Ethiopianists distorted Oromo history by calling the Oromo "Galla" and degrading them as savage, pagan, slave, uncivilized, etc. The Oromo never called themselves Galla. The attack on the collective name of the Oromo has had historical significance. Explaining the historical importance of a collective name, Smith (1986:23) argues that an ethnonational "name 'evokes' an atmosphere and drama that has power and meaning for those whom it includes;" it is also an emblem that summarizes cultural totality. By replacing the name Oromo by Galla, Ethiopian scholars and their supporters attempted to destroy the essence of Oromoness. Without looking at linguistic, anthropological and historical data, some scholars have claimed and tried to depict the Oromo as "invaders" of "Ethiopia" and foreigners to the Horn of Africa. First, their collective name was changed from Oromo to Galla; and then they were denied a specific territory or homeland. Some Ethiopianists have also argued that the Oromo are a people without history and civilization. For instance, Ullendorf (1960:76) argues that "The Galla had nothing to contribute to the civilization of Ethiopia, they possessed no material culture, and their social organization was at a far lower stage of development than the population among whom they settled." This was intended to justify Ethiopian colonialism and cultural destruction and repression.

Most Ethiopianists have never questioned the mythical claims that the Ethiopian ruling class produced and used to justify the colonization

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8 This argument has been used to deny the Oromo their democratic rights and keep them in the second citizenship status. The assumption is that if the Oromo invaded Ethiopia, they do not deserve equal citizenship rights with Ethiopians. The Oromo are one of the original peoples of the Horn Africa and there is no evidence that shows they migrated from another continent to Africa.
of the Oromo and other peoples. The Ethiopians claimed that they recreated their medieval empire that had been broken up by the Muslims and the Oromos; and their kings claimed that Ethiopians imposed their God-given responsibility to rule and disseminate their "Christian civilization" to the so-called pagans (McClellan, 1978). Most Ethiopian scholars and Ethiopianists have never mentioned that the Ethiopians colonized the Oromo and other peoples with the help of the European powers to exploit their economic resources and labor; and the colonization of the Oromo was seen as the "reunification" of Ethiopia. Yet the Oromo have always been historically, linguistically, culturally and civilizationally different from the Abyssinians or Ethiopians. The failure to grasp the logic and history of the capitalist world-economy or the attempt to justify colonial domination has led most Ethiopianists and Ethiopian scholars to create and propogate more mythologies in the name of scholarship. Some of these scholars have argued that Ethiopia was a feudal empire and its subjugation of other peoples like the Oromo was a precapitalist conquest and not colonialism (Eshete, 1970); European imperialists could not defeat the Ethiopians because of their bravery and patriotism while colonizing other Africans (Eshete, 1982:14); the Ethiopians solved serious intertribal wars by establishing Ethiopian rule over the conquered peoples, making Ethiopian colonialism actually beneficial for the colonized peoples (Levine, 1974:26); and the primitiveness of these colonized peoples, particularly that of the Oromo, kept Ethiopia in a depressed state (Ullendorff, 1960:76). Levine (1992:16) argues that Ethiopian colonialism eliminated slavery and "protected all the peoples of greater Ethiopia from falling prey to European imperialism." Such arguments represent the typical Ethiopianist approach to Oromo history. Obviously these scholars have failed to grasp how the modern Ethiopian colonial state was created in the process of the expansion of the European-dominated capitalist world-economy. As Jewsiewicki (1986:12) notes, such interpretation "results neither from myopia nor from the deafness of the intellectuals but from the unwillingness to see and analyze the social conditions of the production of knowledge and the political conditions of its consumption."

Current research demonstrates that the Ethiopian colonial class and its state enjoyed an intermediate status in the capitalist world-economy and colonized the Oromo and other peoples without having the technical knowledge to produce firearms, and without developing the administrative and technical skills required to create a modern state. The European powers were interested in seeking regional collaborators who could be used to interfere in the affairs of the African peoples, and eventually create their dominions. The capitalist merchants wanted to get access to the interior of the Horn of Africa with the alliance of the
Ethiopians in order to channel and in due process, organize commerce and production processes with a view toward providing raw materials for the European market and a market for European goods (Jalata, 1991). But the ardent defenders of the Ethiopianist paradigm refuse to recognize the role of the capitalist world system in creating and maintaining the Ethiopian Empire. For example, Harold Marcus (1992:20) argues that

The idea that Ethiopians were incapable of the independent policies and actions is carried to the absurd in creative writings about the Oromo. Passionately engaged in the Oromo quest for political sovereignty, various authors seek to create a historical nation called Oromia and fabricate a glorious history for the non-existent country... Unable to concede that the Ethiopians could colonize the fictitious Oromia on their own and for their own reasons, the pro-Oromo authors 'show how imperialism penetrated the Horn of Africa and created coalitions with the successive Ethiopian colonial ruling class. This was achieved through the formation and maintenance of the Ethiopian state as a European informal colony, bringing various peoples, including the Oromo, under the logic of capitalism.'

Rather than reviewing the weaknesses of the Ethiopianist paradigm that has dismissed the history and culture of the colonized population, scholars like Marcus attempt to continue the negation and suppression of Oromo history and culture. The basic assumptions of such scholars have been that the Oromo people would gradually disappear through assimilation. Discussing such view, Smith (1981:2) comments that "Liberals have generally taken the view that, as mankind moved from a primitive, tribal stage of social organization towards large-scale industrial practices, the various primordial ties of religion, language, ethnicity and race which divided it would gradually but inexorably lose their hold and disappear... Ancient customs and traditions would become obsolete, and myths of common ancestry would be recognized for what they were and consigned to the museum of mankind's memory."

The Oromo have been seen as raw materials that must be sacrificed for the Ethiopian interest. That is why Marcus sees Oromia as a "fictitious" nation and "non-existent country." Marcus should have known that almost all countries or states that are members of the United Nations today are recent historical inventions. Two years ago many nations that have become sovereign nations in Eastern Europe were under the Soviet Empire. In the Horn of Africa, Eritrea has become a sovereign nation. Alter (1989:97-87) comments that there is "no ceiling on the potential number of independent entities. Guidelines to the size
of territory and population of a nation-state do not exist, nor is there a convincing case for refuting a people's desire for independence in their own state." Marcus does not provide any reason why Oromia is fictitious or non-existent. Most Ethiopian scholars and Ethiopians have studied about Ethiopian kings, churches and the ruling classes without critically studying productive social relations, and have reified models that do not correspond to real social life. Such studies are incomplete if they are not followed or accompanied by historical studies that deal with political economy, social structures and relations and the modern world system. Since there have been multiple histories and cultures in a given region or the world, intellectuals need multiple approaches to study them. Any perspective that does not recognize the necessity of decolonizing history, contradictions in interpretation of historical pasts and presents, contending voices, and conflicts and struggles between the dominant groups and the dominate groups fails to deal with social reality and reduces itself to dogma.

Defending Ethiopian historiography and viciously attacking the emerging Oromo studies, Marcus (1992:20) comments that "the inventive historical views about Oromos and Oromia now being presented as Gospel truth. Indeed, we are witnessing the creation of a new and poorly based historiography, the facts of which, if repeated often enough, will take on a veracity of their own." However, Marcus does not explain why his version of Ethiopian history is authentic and scientific truth while Oromo history is inventive and "gospel truth." African historiography has been dominated by scholars who have an ideology of cultural universalism and a top-down approach that completely ignored or distorted the social and cultural history of the colonized and subjugated peoples (Vansina, 1986). Wallerstein (1983:85) expounds that cultural universalism "did not make its way as a free-floating ideology but as one propagated by those who held economic and political power in the world system of historical capitalism." Most Ethiopians have contributed to the suppression of the production, reproduction and distribution of the historical knowledge of the Oromo people (Baxter, 1986; Jalata, 1993). Because of this, our knowledge of the cultural and social history of the Oromo people is still limited and

9Cultural universalism is a modern ideology that created and socialized an intermediate class all over the world through subordinating or destroying their multicultures in the name of science and technology. Immanuel Wallerstein (1983:85) writes: "Whereas racism served as a mechanism of world-wide control of direct producers, universalism served to direct the activities of the bourgeoisie of other states and various middle strata world-wide into channels that would maximize the close integration of production processes and the smooth operation of the interstate system, thereby facilitating the accumulation of capital."
fragmented. As Jewsewicki (1989:1) asserts, "Knowledge is socially produced and strongly related to the power relationships." Since the colonization of Oromia, most Ethiopian scholars and Ethiopians have propagated the cultural universalism of Christianity, progress and modernization. However, there have been a few Ethiopians who committed themselves to serious scholarship, and their works are becoming the stepping stone in Oromo studies.

Oromo scholars and others who are interested in Oromo studies have been discouraged or prohibited by the Ethiopian state from studying Oromo culture and history. Baxter (1986:55) asserts that "If Oromo studies are to develop they must depend on research carried out in Oromo lands among Oromo people, and increasingly by Oromo scholars. As long as scholars find it difficult, or impossible, to work in Ethiopia, except on very specialized and non-controversial topics such as the minitiae of grammar, then the future must be lean however fat the present may seem." Despite all these difficulties, recently a few books have been published on Oromo culture and social history. Historical and cultural studies that explain large-scale and long-term social changes in Oromo society only began in the 1980s. Prior to this period, those scholars who were interested in Oromo society, because of political reasons or narrow specialization in their intellectual professions spent their energies on small geographical areas or specific aspects of Oromo society without looking at larger Oromo issues (Tolesa, 1990). With the emergence of the Oromo national movement, a few scholars began to study larger issues and publish books and articles.

Criticizing Ethiopian historiography for distorting or ignoring Oromo history, Hassen (1990:2) argues that "the Oromo were never credited as creators of an original culture, or as having religious and democratic political institutions which flowered in patterns of their own making and nourished their spiritual and material well-being." The Oromo people independently developed their culture and history prior to their colonization by Ethiopia. Since most Ethiopians have seen the Oromo as a people without history and civilization, they attempted to deny that the Oromo invented the Gada system (an egalitarian social system) and their calendar. Haberland (1963:777) argued that the Oromo adopted the Gada system and their calendar from others without discovering from whom they adopted. Most Ethiopians have produced such unsubstantiated arguments in order to justify their interpretation of Oromo history and culture.

10 A few Ethiopians, such as P. T. W. Baxter, Charles McClellan, James McCann, Herbert S. Lewis, Bonnie K. Holcomb, Edmond J. Keller, B. W. Andrzejewski, Alessandro Trulsi, John Hinnant, Jan Hultin, and Lambert Bartels have tried to take different intellectual positions from the mainstream Ethiopians.
Gada was an Oromo democracy in which officials were elected for eight years based on the criteria of oratory, knowledge, honesty, bravery, leadership quality, demonstrated ability, etc. Explaining the philosophy of Oromo democracy, Legesse (1987:2) argues, "What is astonishing about this cultural tradition is how far Oromo have gone to ensure that power does not fall in the hands of war chiefs and despots. They achieve this goal by creating a system of checks and balances that is at least as complex as the systems we find in western democracies."

The political sophistication of the Gada government was manifested in its three principles of checks and balances that were created by the people to avoid subordination and exploitation. These three principles were periodic succession, balanced opposition and power sharing (Legesse, 1987). According to Legesse (1987:16), "The combined effects of these three principles is that they inhibit authoritarianism and block the natural tendency of individuals or groups to embark on a program of concentrating unlimited power in their hands and thereby eliminate all elements of popular participation and opposition."

As Wondji (1986:269) expounds, "For the peoples and nations in struggle for their effective liberation, history provides a valuable understanding of earlier patterns of development in these societies; it thus clarifies the problems of development in the present as well as analyzing those of the past." Therefore, it is important also to study Oromo religion that was an important element of Oromo culture and the Gada system. Hassen (1990:9) comments that "the possession of Qallu [Oromo spiritual leaders] and the common gada government seem to have been the 'special mark' of the Oromo nation." Bartels (1989) makes a significant contribution in Oromo religious studies. Bartels does not see Oromo religion as inferior to Christianity or Islam as most ethnocentricist and cultural universalist scholars and religious leaders do. Bartels (1989:14) notes that "to the Oromo, the traditional divinity is both one and, at the same time, also many. The supreme being whom they call Waga (sky/God), is the creator of all things and the source of all life. ...Waqa has appointed to every being its own place in a cosmic order of which he is also the guardian. Sin is simply a breaking of this cosmic order." Bartels asserts that Oromo religion considers the organization of human, spiritual and physical worlds as interconnected phenomena in which Waga that created them regulates their existence and functions in the cosmic order. Bartels (1989:15) argues that "whether they became Christians or Muslims, the Oromo's traditional modes of experiencing the divine have continued almost unaffected, in spite of the fact that several rituals and social institutions in which it was expressed, have been very diminished or apparently submerged in new ritual cloaks."
The emergent Oromo cultural and historical studies can have a serious impact on the future of Ethiopian studies. Scholars who are interested in Oromo studies have successfully exposed the major deficiencies in Ethiopian studies; therefore, the mainstream Ethiopian scholars and Ethiopians are having difficulties in keeping the Oromo at the historical periphery or ignoring or distorting Oromo history. Such cultural combat is "a response to outside domination and to the material condition of life" (Chilcote, 1991:39). As a result, most Ethiopians have lost the monopoly of knowledge production and distribution. As the Oromo continue their national liberation struggle both politically and militarily, Oromo intellectuals and others who study Oromo society will continue to build the new paradigm in Oromo studies. This new paradigm has already transformed the colonized Oromo from objects to subjects of history. The Oromo deserve a right to recover their interrupted history, humanity and political freedom.

CONCLUSION

Oromo nationalism has emerged in opposition to Ethiopian colonial practices. The Oromo national movement has raised three important issues: The redefinition of Oromo cultural identity, the liberation of the Oromo people from Ethiopian colonialism, and the transformation of Oromo society. Oromo nationalism is slowly growing, and most Oromos have already started to realize the importance of these issues. The crises of the Ethiopian state in the 1970s and the early 1990s have failed to address the Oromo question. The replacement of the Amhara ethnic hegemony with that of Tigray has already proved the determination of the new Tigrayan rules to perpetuate Ethiopian colonialism at gunpoint. As Enole (1986:218) argues, political changes "that accomplish nothing more than replacement of rulers from one ethnic group with men of another ethnic group do not produce revolutionary change."

During the transitional charter, between 1991 and 1992, the OLF agreed to build a multicultural society based on the principles of democracy and federation; but the refusal of the new colonial regime to the processes of decolonization, democritization and transformation forced the OLF to resume the armed struggle. Unless the new Ethiopian rulers and their supporters directly recognize the Oromo question and deal with it democratically, the next crisis of the Ethiopian Empire is going to be very disastrous.

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