

## WHAT IS NEXT FOR THE OROMO PEOPLE?<sup>1</sup>

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Thank you for inviting me to give a talk on the future of the Oromo people. To try to speculate on the future of the Oromo people is a very challenging task. Nevertheless, I try my best depending on my knowledge of the Oromo colonial history and national struggle in relation to the Ethiopian colonial state. Currently, the Oromo people and their national struggle are at a crossroads because of three major reasons. First, since the Oromo people are engaged in national struggle for self-determination, statehood, sovereignty, and democracy, the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government is systematically attacking and terrorizing them. Second, at the same time, the Oromo elites who suppose to provide guidance and leadership for the Oromo national movement are fragmented, ideologically confused, and have failed to understand the lethal danger the Oromo people are facing from the Habasha colonizing elites. Third, the Oromo people are suffering from absolute poverty, recurrent famines, and malnutrition because the Meles regime and its supporters loot their economic resources.

In addressing these three complex problems, I focus on five central issues. First, I explore the past and current status of the Oromo nation under Ethiopian colonialism. Second, I identify and explain the strengths and weaknesses of the Oromo elites in organizing and leading the Oromo national movement. Third, I explain the main characteristics of Oromo society. Fourth, I briefly identify the major opportunities and obstacles of the Oromo struggle. Finally, I suggest some urgent and practical measures that the Oromo elites and society should take to ensure the survival Oromia and to achieve national victory.

### **The Past and Current Status of the Oromo People**

The Ethiopian colonial terrorism and genocide that started during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century still continue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ethiopia, former Abyssinia, terrorized and committed genocide on the Oromo people during the Scramble for Africa with the help of European imperial powers and the modern weapons they received from them.<sup>2</sup> During Ethiopian colonial expansion, Oromia, “the charming Oromo land, [would] be ploughed by the iron and the fire; flooded with blood and the orgy of pillage.”<sup>3</sup> Calling this event as “the theatre of a great massacre,” Martial De Salviac states,

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

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<sup>1</sup>The Oromo-American Citizens Council, the Fourth Annual International Conference on Human Rights, March 13, 2009, The University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>2</sup> Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia*, (Trenton: The Red Sea Press, 1990); Asafa Jalata, *Oromia & Ethiopia*, (Denver: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Martial De Salviac, *An Ancient People, Great African Nation*, trans by Ayalew Kano (East Lansing, Michigan, 2005, [1901]), p. 349.

booty and intoxicated with blood, go to walk a bit further from the devastation. That is what they call 'civilizing a land.'<sup>4</sup>

The Oromo oral story also testifies that Ethiopians/Abyssinians destroyed and looted the resources of Oromia, and committed genocide on the Oromo people through massacre, slavery, depopulation, cutting hands, famine, and diseases during and after the colonization of Oromia. Recognizing this tragedy, "the Oromo said: 'It is *Waaqa* [God] ... who has subjected us to the Amhara.'<sup>5</sup> According to Martial De Salviac, "With equal arms, the Abyssinia [would] never [conquer] an inch of land. With the power of firearms imported from Europe, Menelik [Abyssinian warlord] began a murderous revenge."<sup>6</sup> The colonization of Oromia involved human tragedy and destruction: "The Abyssinian, in bloody raids, operated by surprise, mowed down without pity, in the country of the Oromo population, a mournful harvest of slaves for which the Muslims were thirsty and whom they bought at very high price. An Oromo child [boy] would cost up to 800 francs in Cairo; an Oromo girl would well be worth two thousand francs in Constantinople"<sup>7</sup>

The Ethiopian government massacred half of the Oromo population (five million out of ten million) and their leadership during its colonial expansion.<sup>8</sup> According to Alexander Bulatovich (2000: 68-69), "The dreadful annihilation of more than half of the population during the conquest took away from the Gallas [Oromos] all possibilities of thinking about any sort of uprising. . . . Without a doubt, the Galla, with their least five million population, occupying the best land, all speaking one language, could represent a tremendous force if united." The destruction of Oromo lives, institutions, and Oromian natural beauty were aspects of Ethiopian colonial terrorism. The surviving Oromos who used to enjoy an egalitarian democracy known as the *gada* system<sup>9</sup> were forced to face state terrorism, political repression, and an impoverished life. Bulatovich explains about the *gada* administration and notes that "the peaceful free way of life, which could have become the ideal for philosophers and writers of the eighteenth century, if they had known it, was completely changed. Their peaceful way of life is broken; freedom is lost; and the independent, freedom loving Gallas find themselves under the severe authority of the Abyssinian conquerors."<sup>10</sup>

Ethiopian colonialists also destroyed Oromo natural resources and the beauty of Oromia. Oromia was "an oasis luxuriant with large trees" and known for its "opulent and dark greenery used to shoot up from the soil."<sup>11</sup> De Salviac also notes that "the greenery and the shade delight the eyes all over and give the landscape richness and a variety which make it like a *garden without boundary*. Healthful climate, uniform and temperate, fertility of the soil, beauty of the inhabitants, the security in which their houses seem to be situated, makes one dream of remaining in such a beautiful country."<sup>12</sup> The Abyssinian colonialists devastated "the forests by

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 350.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> De Salviac, *ibid.*, pp. 6-8, 278; Alexander Bulatovich, *Ethiopia through Russian Eyes: Country in Transition*, translated by Richard Seltzer, (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2000), pp. 68-68.

<sup>9</sup> See Asmarom Largesse, *Oromo Democracy*, (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 2000). The *gada* system had the principles of checks and balances, balanced opposition, and power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs to prevent power falling into the hands of despots. Other principles included balanced representation of clans, lineages, regions, and confederacies; accountability of leaders; the settlement of disputes through reconciliation; and respect for basic rights and liberties.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Bulatovich, *ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>11</sup> De Salviac, *ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>12</sup> De Salviac, *ibid.*, p. 21.

pulling from it the laths for their houses and [made] campfires or firewood for their dwellings. . . . [They were] the great destructors of trees, others [accused] them of exercising their barbarity against the forests for the sole pleasure of ravaging.”<sup>13</sup> Bulatovich applied to Oromia the phrase “flowing in milk and honey”<sup>14</sup> to indicate its abundant wealth in cattle and honey.

The Ethiopian colonial state gradually established settler colonialism in Oromia and developed five major types of colonial institutions, namely, slavery, the colonial landholding system, the *nafoxanya-gabbar* system (semi-slavery), the Oromo collaborative class, and garrison and non-garrison cities. It introduced the process of forced recruitment of labor via slavery and the *nafoxanya-gabbar* (semi-slavery) system.<sup>15</sup> The colonial state expropriated almost all Oromo lands and divided up the Oromo among colonial officials and soldiers and their collaborators to force them to produce agricultural commodities and food for local consumption and an international market. The Oromo farmers were reduced to serfs or slaves or semi-slaves and coerced to work without remuneration for the settlers, intermediaries, and the colonial state for certain days every week. Whenever they failed to provide free labor or pay taxes or tributes, the settlers enslaved their children or wives.

The colonial terrorism that started during the reign of Menelik has continued under successive Ethiopian governments. The Haile Selassie government continued the policies of Menelik until it was overthrown by the popular revolt of 1974. The Selassie government terrorized the Oromo of Raya-Azabo, Wallo, Hararghe, Bale and other regions because of their political and cultural resistance to the Amhara-Tigray domination. It also imprisoned, tortured or hanged prominent Oromo leaders, such as Mamo Mazamir and Haile Mariam Gamada who organized and led the Macca-Tuulama Self-Help Association in the early 1960s. The military regime that emerged in 1974 under the leadership Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam continued state terrorism, dictatorship, and Ethiopian colonial policies. Currently, the Meles regime is continuing similar colonial policies and practices in Oromia and other places.

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

Those killed in the first three months of the campaign of the ‘Red Revolutionary Terror’ . . . numbered around 4000-5000 [in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa) alone], the killings continued in March 1978, spreading to the rest of the country . . . Those detained for political instruction numbered from 30,000 upwards . . . Torture methods emphasized in the Red Terror . . . included severe beating on the head, soles of the feet . . . and shoulders, with the victim hung by the wrists or suspended by wrists and feet from a horizontal bar . . . ; sexual torture of boys and girls, including pushing bottles or red-hot iron bars into girls’ vaginas; and other cruel methods.<sup>16</sup>

The derg continued its mass imprisonments and killings. In 1980, one Oromo source mentioned that “the Oromo constitutes the majority of the more than two million prisoners that glut Ethiopia’s jails today”<sup>17</sup> In the 1980s, thousands of Oromo nationalists were murdered or imprisoned; the regime also terrorized other elements of Oromo society. According to Gunnar

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Bulatovich, *ibid*, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> The Ethiopian settlers continued to depopulate Oromia through slave trade until the 1930s when the Italian fascists abolished slavery to recruit adequate labor for their agricultural plantations in the Horn of Africa. The *nafoxanya-gabbar* system was also abolished during this time through the same process. Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *ibid*, p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> Singer, Norman J. 1978. “Ethiopia: Human Rights, 1948-1978,” *Proceeding of the First International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*. April 13-16, pp. 672-673.

<sup>17</sup> The Oromo Relief Association, 1980, p. 30

## Hasselblatt, the military government

repeatedly held mass shooting among the Oromo population, hoping to break the free, independent Oromo spirit. Sometimes a hundred, sometimes two hundred men were shot on this raised dry field . . . and were buried with bulldozers. Over years this procedure was repeated several times. When the method did not work and the Oromo population could not be forced into submission, other methods were used. The victims were made to lie down with their heads on stone, and their skulls were smashed with another stone. The . . . government . . . tried everything to consolidate its reign of terror and exploitation of Oromia . . . . When the Oromo movement could not be quenched by shooting or by the smashing of skulls, [the government] came up with a new idea. Men's testicles were smashed between a hammer and an anvil. Three men tortured and maimed in this way are still living.<sup>18</sup>

Ethiopia has maintained its oppressive and repressive structures on the Oromo by the assistance of successive global powers, namely, Great Britain, the United States, former Soviet Union, and China.<sup>19</sup> As the former USSR supported the Mengistu regime, the US, powerful European countries and China are supporting the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government.

Since 1992, the Tigrayan authoritarian-terrorist regime<sup>20</sup> has controlled the Oromo and denied them the freedom of expression, association, organization, the media, and all forms of communication and information networks. This government has been focusing on brutally attacking the Oromo national movement led by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and on robbing the economic resources of Oromia in order to enrich the Tigrayan elites and their collaborators and to specifically develop the Tigrayan region. To achieve its political and economic objectives, the regime primarily uses its puppet organization known as the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) which was created and is today controlled by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF); the OPDO is led by Tigrayan cadres, elements of Oromo speaking colonial settlers, and opportunistic Oromos who would do anything in exchange for luxurious lifestyles.

The minority Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government is attempting to give a final solution for a large political problem that has existed for several centuries—the relationship between the Oromos and their Amhara-Tigrayan colonizers. As we know from history, the policy of targeting and exterminating indigenous peoples exists in different parts of the world, and it has been an integral practice of the racialized capitalist world system since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. While claiming to promote Christian civilization, modernity, and commerce, European colonialists exterminated indigenous peoples in the Americas, Australia, Asia, and Africa over a period of several centuries in order to transfer their resources to European colonial settlers and their descendants. Specifically, the plans and actions that King Leopold of Belgium had for the Congo or Andrew Jackson of the United States for the Cherokees or colonial Germany for the Herero and Nama peoples in South West Africa (Namibia)<sup>21</sup> are very similar to the grand plan and action the Meles government has for the Oromo nation.

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<sup>18</sup> Gunnar Hasselblatt, "After Fourteen Years: Return to Addis Ababa—and to a Free Oromia," December 1991-January 1992," A Travel Diary, Berlin, pp. 17-19.

<sup>19</sup>See Asafa Jalata, *Fighting Against the Injustice of the State and Globalization*.

<sup>20</sup>The Ethiopian state has been authoritarian to Amhara and Tigrayan communities; it has been terrorist regime to the colonized peoples like Oromo because it has been ruling by practicing state-terrorism and massive human rights violations.

<sup>21</sup>In his book *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, Adam Hochschild (1998) vividly explains how King Leopold II of Belgium terrorized the people of Congo by dispossessing their lands and reducing them to semi-slaves in order to force them to collect ivory and harvest wild rubber. While claiming to develop the Congo Free States and to promote a humanitarian cause, King Leopold II established policies that resulted in the destruction of more than five million Africans by murder, diseases, and hunger. His Force Publique Officers led by a few Belgians and staffed by the natives committed horrendous crimes against humanity by burning villages, hanging, torturing, raping, flogging, and mutilating in order

The Meles regime is now completing the forced removal of Oromos from the areas surrounding Finfinnee (Addis Ababa).<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, by evicting the Oromo farmers from their homelands with nominal or without compensation, the Meles regime has already leased several millions of hectares of Oromo lands to so-called investors from China, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, as well as from Europe.<sup>23</sup> If the policy of land expropriation is allowed to continue Tigrayans, Chinese, Djiboutians, Indians, Malaysians, Nigerians, Arabs and Europeans will soon replace the Oromo people. Meles never sold or leased Tigrayan lands, but has expanded modern agricultural development in his homeland, Tigray. When the Oromo are

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to terrorize the people and force them to work for the king. This organization is similar to the organization of Meles Zenawi called the OPDO that imposes a reign of terror on the Oromo people. Similarly, in his book, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*, Ben Kiernan (2007) explains how it took four centuries to decimate the indigenous peoples of the Americas through war, genocide, terrorism, diseases, and removal. He particularly discusses how the president of the United States, Andrew Jackson, destroyed the Cherokee Nation by removing them from their homelands and sending them to reservations. Jackson and his supporters and white settlers created civil war among the leadership of the Cherokee and made them to fight one another. In *The Trail of Tears and Indian Removal*, Amy H. Sturgis (2007) explores how the United States practiced racial or ethnic cleansing on the Cherokee nation. When the Cherokee people were removed from Georgia between 1838 and 1839, about eight hundred Cherokee perished, and they arrived in Oklahoma without any children and only a few elders. When the Herero and Nama peoples of Namibia resisted Germany colonialism, the German soldiers and settlers developed a plan to carry out a shoot-to-kill policy. They conducted extrajudicial killings, established concentration camps, and employed forced labor and death camps. The German colonial governor expressed the plan of Germany: “15 years from now, there will not be much left of the natives” (quoted in Kiernan, 2007: 381). This plan was implemented between 1904 and 1905 when the majority of Herero and Nama were exterminated. For further discussion, see Edwin Herbert, *Small Wars and Skirmishes 1902–18*, (Nottingham, Great Britain: Foundry Books, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Kenate Worku, “The Expansion of Addis Ababa and its Impact on the Surrounding Areas: A Preliminary Study of the Nefas Silk Lafto District,” *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, July 2008, pp. 97-131.

<sup>23</sup> Tamrat G. Giorgis (2009: 1), Addis Fortune staff writer, explains in the following: “A new global trend is rising whereby companies from emerging economies grab vast land in poor host nations to grow and export cereals and grains to their home countries. It has happened here in Bako [, Oromia,], where people from India have been granted tens of thousands of hectares of land for commercial farming. The locals however, are unhappy.” Giorgis, Tamrat G. “A Stranger Comes to Town.” *Addis Fortune*. Vol. 10, no. 486. August 23, 2009. p. 1.

< <http://www.addisfortune.com/Vol%2010%20No%20486%20Archive/agenda.htm>>. While the Indian company Karuturi Global LTD has invested 4.3 billion dollars to lease 765,000 hectares of farmland from the Ethiopian government, peasant farmers have lost the lands they once farmed for subsistence to foreign investors and a land-expropriating government. Giorgis notes that Olivier De Schutter, a UN rapporteur, explained the central problem in this phenomenon: “‘frequently, they [farmers] do not have property titles to the land upon which they depend for their survival and well-being. They do not have possibilities of legal recourse in the event of expropriation’.” Besides India, various other foreign investors have been seizing subsistence farmable land: Olusegun Obasanjo, the former president of Nigeria, just purchased 20,000 sqm of land in Oromia, the region known as the breadbasket of Ethiopia, to invest in tourism and hotels; Ismael Omar Guelleh, president of Djibouti, purchased 10,000 sqm of land in Bishoftu, Oromia, (“Debre Zeit”) to build “a holiday home” and 3,000 hectares in Bale, Oromia, for agriculture production; and Egypt made a multimillion-dollar agricultural investment in 20,000 hectares of land. What is critical to note here is that these lands are in Oromia, the land of the Oromos—the primary political targets of the government. See O’Kadameri, Billie. “Indian Company Acquires 765, 000 hectares of land in Ethiopia.” *Ethiopian Review*. November 2009. < <http://www.ethiopianreview.com/content/11418>>. Giorgis, Tamrat. “A Stranger Comes to Town.” *Addis Fortune*. Vol. 10, No. 486. August 23, 2009. p. 3. <<http://www.addisfortune.com/Vol%2010%20No%20486%20Archive/agenda.htm>>.

“World Leaders are Taking Notice of Land in Debre Zeit.” *Capital*. Vol. 12. No. 577. <[http://www.capitalethiopia.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=12046:global-village&catid=12:local-news&Itemid=4](http://www.capitalethiopia.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12046:global-village&catid=12:local-news&Itemid=4)>. What does this prioritization of foreign economic investments over the land rights of Oromo farmers mean for the hunger and malnutrition crises? With the WHO estimating in September 2009 that 6.2 million people in Ethiopia were in urgent need of food assistance, the subsistence farmers who lost their farms to government land expropriation and foreign investors are likely to join or have already joined this 6.2 million. Furthermore, what remains unanswered or unverified by documentation is where the money paid by investors is ending up. While the WHO makes such chilling projections about the hunger crisis, Ethiopian news and opinion journal *Ethiopian Review* announced in December 2009 that Prime Minister Meles Zenawi had amassed a net worth of \$1.2 billion making him the “11<sup>th</sup> richest head of government in the world.” Although it is quite difficult to currently prove from where Zenawi accumulated such wealth, there should be a serious concern as to how the leader of one of the poorest and most hungry countries in the world has been able to attain such prosperity. See “Ethiopia: Emergency and Humanitarian Action.” Weekly update: September 13, 2009. World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/hac/crises/eth/sitreps/13september2009/en/index.html>>.

“Editing War over Ethiopian Dictator’s Net Worth.” *Ethiopian Review*. <<http://www.ethiopianreview.com/content/11785>>.

facing abject poverty and hunger, Tigrayan elite who depended on international food aid in the 1980s for their survival, are rich and powerful today. The Meles regime also sells Oromo minerals and other natural resources while evicting and impoverishing the Oromo people. Whenever the Oromo resist, the regime mercilessly brutalizes or kills them.

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

This regime has banned independent Oromo organizations including the OLF and declared war on those organizations and the Oromo people. It even outlawed Oromo journalists and other writers and closed down Oromo newspapers. As Mohammed Hassen asserts, “The attack on the free press has literally killed the few publications in the Oromo language in the Latin alphabet. The death of Oromo publications . . . has been a fatal blow to the flowering of Oromo literature and the standardization of the Oromo language itself. The Oromo magazines that have disappeared include *Gada*, *Biftu*, *Madda Walaabuu*, *Odaa*, and the *Urjii* magazine . . . Since 2002, there has not been a single newspaper or magazine that has expressed the legitimate political opinions of the Oromo in Ethiopia.”<sup>24</sup> Almost all Oromo journalists are either in prison or killed, or in exile. The regime also banned Oromo musical groups and all professional associations.

Expanding their political repression, regional authorities formed quasi-government institutions known as *gott* and *garee* to maintain tighter political control of Oromia; they “imposed these new structures on . . . [rural] communities . . . . More disturbing, regional authorities are using the *gott* and *garee* to monitor the speech and personal lives of the rural population, to restrict and control the movements of residents, and to enforce farmers’ attendance at ‘meetings’ that are thinly disguised OPDO political rallies.”<sup>25</sup> Generally speaking, the Meles government has continued to eliminate or imprison politically conscious and self-respecting Oromos. Today, thousands of Oromos are in official and secret prisons simply because of their nationality and their resistance to injustice. After jailed and released from prison after six years, Seye Abraha, the former Defense Minister of the regime who had previously participated in the massacring and imprisoning thousands of Oromos, testified on January 5, 2008, to his audience in the state of Virginia in the U. S. that “esir betu Oromigna yinager,” (“the prison speaks Oromiffa [the Oromo language]”) and also noted that “about 99% of the prisoners in Qaliti are Oromos.”<sup>26</sup>

The Tigrayan state bureaucrats believe that Oromo intellectuals, businessmen and women, conscious Oromo farmers, students, and community and religious leaders are their

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<sup>24</sup> Mohammed Hassen, “Conquest, Tyranny, and Ethnocide against the Oromo,” *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2002, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> *Human Rights Watch*, May 2005, Vol. 17, No. 7 (A), p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Seye Abraha was a founder and former political bureau member of the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front. He was a chauvinist Tigrayan who did not hide his negative attitudes about the Oromos and the OLF, when he was the Defense Minister of Ethiopia; See “The Prison speaks Oromiffa,” *Ethiopian Review*, January 17, 2008. Seye was jailed in Qaliti prison.

enemies, and, hence, should be eliminated through terrorism and genocide.<sup>27</sup> State terrorism is associated with issues of control over territory and resources and the construction of political and ideological domination.<sup>28</sup> State terrorism manifests itself as lethal violence in the form of war, assassination, murder, castration, burying alive, throwing off cliffs, hanging, torture, rape, poisoning, forcing people to submission by intimidation, beating, and disarmament of citizens.<sup>29</sup> The methods of killing include burning, bombing, the cutting of throats or arteries in the neck, strangulation, shooting, and the burying of people up to their necks in the ground. The agents and militia of Meles have burned houses and entire villages, exterminating thousands of Oromo men, women, and children.

The Meles regime also practices different forms of torture on imprisoned Oromos and others. Former prisoners have testified that their arms and legs were tied tightly together on their backs and their naked bodies were whipped; large containers or bottles filled with water were fixed to their testicles, or if they were women, bottles or poles were pushed into their vaginas.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> There were also prisoners who were forced into pits so that fire could be made on top of them.<sup>32</sup> The cadres, soldiers, and officials of the regime have frequently raped Oromo girls and women to demoralize them and their communities and to show how Tigrayan rulers and their collaborators wielded limitless power. As Bruna Fossati, Lydia Namarra and Peter Niggli report, "in prison women are often humiliated and mistreated in the most brutal fashion. Torturers ram poles or bottles into their vaginas, connect electrodes to the lips of their vulva, or the victims are dragged into the forest and gang-raped by interrogation officers."<sup>33</sup>

Ethiopian soldiers have collected young Oromo girls and women into concentration camps and gang raped them in front of their relatives, fathers, brothers, and husbands to humiliate them and the Oromo people. State-sanctioned rape is a form of terrorism. The use of sexual violence is also a tactic of genocide that a dominant ethnonational group practices in order to destroy a subordinate ethnonational group. What Catherine MacKinnon says about ethnic cleansing in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina applies to the sexual abuse of Oromo women by the Tigrayan-led regime: "It is also rape unto death, rape as massacre, rape to kill and to make the victims wish they were dead. It is rape as an instrument of forced exile, rape to make you

<sup>27</sup> See Hizbawi Adera, a TPLF/EPRDF Political Pamphlet, December 1996-February 1997, Vol. 4, No. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Annamarie Oliverio explains two essential features of state terrorism: "First, the state reinforces the use of violence as a viable, effective, mitigating factor for managing conflict; second, such a view is reinforced by culturally constructed and socially organized processes, expressed through symbolic forms, and related in complex ways to present social interests. Within increasing economic and environmental globalization, gender politics, and the resurgence of nationalities within territorial boundaries, the discourse of terrorism, as a practice of statecraft, is crucial to the construction of political boundaries. As such, terrorism is invoked in the art of statecraft when multiple, often conflicting versions of the past are produced and, at particular historical moments, become sites of intense struggles." Annamarie Oliverio, "The State of Injustice," *ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>29</sup> See Sue Pollock, "Ethiopia-Human Tragedy in the Making: Democracy or Dictatorship?" *The Oromia Support Group*, 1996; Sue Pollock, "Politics and Conflict: Participation and Self-determination in Ethiopia: Conquest and the Quest for Freedom and Democracy," edited by Seyoum Y. Hameso, T. Trueman, and T. E. Erena, (London: TSC Publications, 1997), pp. 81-110; Trevor Trueman, "Democracy or dictatorship," in *Ethiopia, ibid.*, pp. 141-150; See U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 1991-2007; *Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch/Africa*, 1991-2007; *The Oromia Support Group*, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> See *Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch/Africa*, 1997; *Survival International*, 1995; *The Oromia Support Group*, 1997 series; Trevor Trueman, "Genocide against the Oromo People of Ethiopia? Western Influence," Paper Presented at the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Houston, Texas, November 14-18, 2001.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Bruna Fossati, L. Namarra, and Peter Niggli, *The New Rulers of Ethiopia and the Persecution of the Oromo: Reports from the Oromo Refugees in Djibouti*, (Dokumentation, Evangelischer Pressedienst Frankfurt am, 1996, p. 10.

leave your home and never want to go back. It is rape to be seen and heard and watched and told to others: rape as spectacle. It is rape to drive a wedge through a community, to shatter a society, to destroy a people. It is rape as genocide.”<sup>34</sup>

The Tigrayan-led regime has used various mechanisms in repressing, controlling and destroying the Oromo people. It has imprisoned or killed thousands of Oromo women and men. Its agents have murdered prominent community leaders and left their corpses for hyenas by denying them burial to impose terror on the Oromo people. Furthermore, relatives of the murdered Oromos are not allowed to cry publicly to express their grievances, a once cultural practice.<sup>35</sup> For instance, in 2007, the Meles militia killed twenty Oromos and left their corpses for hyenas on the mountain of Suufi in Eastern Oromia.<sup>36</sup> According to *Human Rights Watch*, “Since 1992, security forces have imprisoned thousands of Oromo on charges of plotting armed insurrection on behalf of the OLF. Such accusations have regularly been used as a transparent pretext to imprison individuals who publicly question government policies or actions. Security forces have tortured many detainees and subjected them to continuing harassment and abuse for years after their release. That harassment in turn has often destroyed victims’ ability to earn a livelihood and isolated them from their communities.”<sup>37</sup>

The Meles regime has even targeted Oromia’s environment and its animals. According to Mohammed Hassen,

Oromo men, women, children, animals, and even the Oromo environment are all targets of the TPLF’s tyranny. In cases where Oromo pastoralists were suspected of harboring OLF guerrilla fighters, TPLF soldiers punished them by destroying or confiscating their cattle or by poisoning the wells from which the cattle drank. On many occasions Oromo farmers, suspected of feeding OLF fighters, saw their farms burned to the ground and the defenseless members of their households brutally murdered. In 2000, when the TPLF government suspected OLF guerrillas of hiding in the forests of Oromia, its agents set fires that caused catastrophic environmental destruction in Oromia and other states in southern Ethiopia.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to such environmental destruction and the murdering and raping of Oromos, the Meles regime has engaged in the genocidal massacres of Oromos. This regime has engaged in such crimes with little or no opposition from Western powers, particularly the United States. All these crimes against humanity are committed in the name of democracy and development. Article II of the United Nations Convention defines genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”<sup>39</sup>

Kurt Jonassohn explains genocide as the planned destruction of any economic, political or social group.<sup>40</sup> According to Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, “GENOCIDE is a form of one-

<sup>34</sup> Catharine MacKinnon, “Rape, Genocide, and Women’s Human Rights,” *Harvard Women’s Law, Journal* 17, 1994, pp. 11-12.

<sup>35</sup> For example, the wife of Ahmed Mohamed Kuree, a seventy year-old elderly farmer, expressed on February 21, 2007, on the Voice of America, Afaan Oromo Program the following:<sup>35</sup> “We found his prayer beads, his clothes and a single bone of his which the hyenas had left behind after devouring the rest of his body, and we took those items home. What is more, after we got home, they [government agents] condemned us for going to Gaara Suufii and for mourning. For fear of repercussions, we have not offered the customary prayer for my husband by reading from the Qur’an. Justice has not been served. That is where we are today.”

<sup>36</sup> Ahmed Mohamed Kuree was one of these Oromos. Another Oromo, Ayisha Ali, a fourteen year-old teenager, was also killed and eaten by hyenas. Her mother said on the Voice of America, Afaan Oromo Program the following: “After we heard the rumor about the old man [Ahmed Mohamed Kuree] I followed his family to Gaara Suufii [in search of my daughter]. There we found her skirt, sweater, underwear and her hair, braided . . . That was all we found of my daughter’s remains.” Ayisha was probably raped before she was killed.

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2005, pp. 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> Mohammed Hassen, “Conquest, Tyranny, and Ethnocide against the Oromo,” pp.37-38.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Kurt Jonassohn, *Genocide and Gross Human Rights Violations: In Comparative Perspective*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers), 1998, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*



sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator.”<sup>41</sup> Chalk and Jonassohn identify two major types of genocide:<sup>42</sup> the first type is used to colonize and maintain an empire by terrorizing people perceived to be real or potential enemies. In this case, the main purpose of practicing genocide is to acquire land and other valuable resources. Then the maintenance of colonial domination by state elites requires the establishment of a cultural and ideological hegemony that can be practiced through genocidal massacres. By destroying elements of a population that resists colonial domination, hegemony can be established on the surviving population. This is the second type of genocide; this form of genocide is called ideological genocide. Jonassohn notes that ideological genocide develops “in nation-states where ethnic groups develop chauvinistic ideas about their superiority and exclusiveness.”<sup>43</sup>

The Tigrayan-led government sees Oromia as part of its empire, controls all of Oromia’s resources, and attacks the Oromo since it perceives them as its potential or real enemies. It engages in genocide as Chalk and Jonassohn explain above with the intention of destroying the part of the Oromo nation composed of nationalists and leaders. Tigrayan state leaders are claiming to promote political ideologies such as “revolutionary democracy” and “federalism,” while at gunpoint attempting to legitimize Tigrayan ethnocracy and state power. They deny that they engage in massive human rights violations by claiming that they are democrats and revolutionaries and by also destroying the records of their political crimes. Jonassohn’s description of a conspiracy of “collective denial” of genocide is applicable to the denial of the occurrence of genocide in the Ethiopian Empire. According to Jonassohn, “There are many reasons for this: (a) in many societies such materials are not written down, or are destroyed rather than preserved in archives; (b) many perpetrators have recourse to elaborate means of hiding the truth, controlling access to information, and spreading carefully contrived disinformation; and (c) historically, most genocides were not reported because . . . there appears to have existed a sort of conspiracy of ‘collective denial’ whereby the disappearance of a people did not seem to require comment or even mention.”<sup>44</sup>

While the Tigrayan regime attempts to eliminate Oromo leaders through genocide in order to deny the Oromo their own political leadership, it prepares Tigrayan children for positions of leadership by providing them access to better education. This regime also limits educational opportunities to Oromo children to maintain racial/ethnic division of labor. Although it is impossible to know exactly at this time how many Oromos have been murdered by the Meles government, Mohammed Hassen estimates that between 1992 and 2001, about 50,000 killings and 16,000 disappearances (euphemism for secret killings) took place in Oromia; he also notes that 90 percent of the killings were not reported.<sup>45</sup> The Meles government hides its criminal activities and “does not keep written records of its extrajudicial executions and prolonged detention of political prisoners.”<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the massive killings and genocide committed on the Sheko, Mezhenger, Sidama, Annuak, and Ogaden Somali peoples have shocked some

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<sup>41</sup> Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990, p. 23.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Kurt Jonassohn, *ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Mohammed Hassen “Is Genocide Against the Oromo in Ethiopia Possible,” *Paper Presented at the Fourth International Biennial Conference of the Association of Genocide Scholars*, Radisson Hotel, Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 10, 2001.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

sections of the international community.<sup>47</sup> According to the Associated Press, Meles Zenawi and his followers are possible targets of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as are many leaders of African countries.<sup>48</sup>

The president of Genocide Watch, Gregory Stanton, wrote on March 23, 2009, an open letter to the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights admiring the action that the ICC took in issuing a warrant for the arrest of President Omar al-Bashir of the Sudan and calling upon them to investigate the crimes Meles and his government have committed and still are committing against humanity in the Horn of Africa:

The action that the International Criminal Court has taken in this situation has restored hope to peace and justice loving people, affirming that international human rights law not only exists on paper, but in reality. It also sends an important message to perpetrators throughout the world that impunity for their crimes is not assured forever; which may be a primary reason that one of the first leaders to defend Omar al-Bashir and condemn the warrant was Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, whose government has also been implicated in a pattern of widespread perpetration of serious human rights atrocities in Ethiopia and in Somalia. He and those within his government may be keenly aware of their own vulnerability to similar actions by the ICC in the future that could upend a deeply entrenched system of government-supported impunity that has protected perpetrators from any accountability.<sup>49</sup>

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

Reports from Amnesty International, the U.S. State Department, and the Human Rights Watch have been continuing to list Zenawi’s government extensive record of chilling crimes against the politically and economically oppressed peoples such as the Oromo. The Meles regime recently passed the so-called anti-terrorism law to legalize its crimes against humanity and to legally intensify its own repressive and terrorist activities. Ethiopia’s anti-terrorism “law could provide the Ethiopian government with a potent instrument to crack down on political dissent, including peaceful political demonstrations and public criticisms of government policy that are deemed supportive of armed opposition activity.”<sup>50</sup> Generally speaking, the policies and practices of the Meles regime have forced millions of Oromos to become political refugees in Asia, Europe, Australia, and North America.

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<sup>47</sup> In 2002, when the Sheko and Mezhenger peoples demanded their rights, the regime killed between 128 and 1,000 people. Nobody knows exactly how many people were killed since the government and the victims give different numbers. Similarly, on June 21, 2002, between 39 and 100 Sidamas were killed when government soldiers fired at 7,000 peaceful demonstrators in Hawas (Awash). Again government forces and colonial settlers committed genocidal massacres on the Annuak people of Gambella in December 2003 and beginning 2004; they killed 424 people and displaced about 50, 000 people. Currently, the regime is engaged in genocidal massacres, imprisonment, and massive human rights violations in Ogadenia and Oromia.

<sup>48</sup> Associate Press, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Stanton, George. 2009. “An Open Letter to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,” Website: [www.genocidewatch.org](http://www.genocidewatch.org), accessed on April 1, 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Human Rights Watch, “An Analysis of Ethiopia’s Draft Anti-Terrorism Law,” updated June 30, 2009, p. 1.

The alliance of the West with this regime has frightened neighboring countries such as Djibouti, Kenya, Sudan, and Yemen, and turned them against the Oromo struggle and Oromo refugees. Using the leverage of Western countries, the Meles regime has pressured neighboring governments to return or expel Oromo refugees from their countries. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has even failed to provide reasonable protection for thousands of Oromo refugees in Djibouti, Kenya, Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen. For example, on December 21 and 22, 2000, while five thousand Oromo refugees were refouled to Ethiopia, the UNHCR office in Djibouti denied any violation of its mandate had occurred.<sup>51</sup> Between 2000 and 2004, hundreds of Oromo refugees were forced to return to Ethiopia from Djibouti to face imprisonment or death.<sup>52</sup> “The continuing refoulement of refugees from Djibouti,” notes the Oromia Support Group, “especially the large scale refoulement of December 2000 and the 28 associated deaths by asphyxiation and shooting, should be publicly acknowledged by UNHCR and the Djibouti government.”<sup>53</sup> The security agents of Ethiopia and neighboring countries still capture thousands of Oromo refugees and return them to Ethiopia.

By crossing borders and entering Somalia and Kenya, agents of the Ethiopian regime assassinated prominent Oromo leaders. And still today, the regime is killing prominent Oromos in Kenya and Somalia. Just in 2007 and 2008, Ethiopian security forces assassinated Oromos in Somalia and Kenya. One human rights organization notes that on February 5, 2008, the combined security forces of Ethiopia and Puntland, Somalia, bombed two hotels and consequently murdered 65 Oromo refugees and seriously injured more than 100 people.<sup>54</sup> In 2009, the regime killed four Oromos by poisoning their food in Puntland.<sup>55</sup>

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

When the Meles regime has been mobilizing the West and the imperial system and using their resources terrorizing and controlling the Oromo, the revolutionary nationalist Oromo elites have failed to consolidate the Oromo national struggle because of their ideological confusion and political fragmentation. As we shall see below, due to the lack of coherent, pragmatic, and strong political leadership, the Oromo national movement faces challenges from the unstable authoritarian-terrorist regime of Meles Zenawi. Moreover, the Oromo national struggle has created political and economic opportunities for those reactionary and opportunist Oromos who promote their personal and group interests by allying with and working for the Meles regime at the cost of the Oromo nation.

The sad thing is that the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government loots Oromian economic and natural resources to pay for the Oromo collaborators it organized as the OPDO to do its dirty job in Oromia. Had the Oromo national struggle built itself as a more unified, structured, and strong movement, the umbilical cord that links Oromo society to its enemy could have been cut. Today

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<sup>51</sup> *The Oromia Support Group*, “Press Release,” December 2002, no. 38, p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, July 2003, no. 39, pp. 16-18.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, December 2002, no. 38, pp. 18-20; July 2003, no. 39, pp. 18-19.

<sup>54</sup> [http://www.humanrightsleague.com/press\\_Releases.html](http://www.humanrightsleague.com/press_Releases.html), 2008

<sup>55</sup> See Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa, “Refugees Poisoned to Death in Puntland, Somalia,” December 19, 2009.

the Oromo collaborators that are stuffed in the OPDO mainly maintain such links. Until these “social cancers” exist in Oromo society, it cannot be imagined to liberate Oromia from Ethiopian settler colonialism. These dangerous social elements survive in Oromo society because of the failure of the revolutionary nationalist Oromo elites in establishing a more unified and structured organization and leadership that can mobilize most of the Oromo people to defend their national interest. At the same time, the fire of *Oromummaa* survives and expands because of the few selfless and determined Oromo nationalists. However, such nationalist leaders need to expand their mental horizons to re-map and reinvent the Oromo national movement by providing a centralized structured organization and leadership by mobilizing all organizational, cultural, and material resources of the Oromo for national survival and self-defense.

### **The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Oromo Elites**

As I have explained above, the indigenous independent Oromo leadership was destroyed or suppressed by the Ethiopian colonial system until the mid-20th century. At the same time, the Ethiopian colonial system created the Oromo collaborative class and imposed on Oromo society. Furthermore, the Ethiopian political system was designed to produce, through its educational institutions, a small number of Ethiopianized Oromo leaders who would function as intermediaries between the Ethiopian ruling class and the Oromo people. It intentionally limited the number of formally educated Oromo leaders by denying education to the overwhelming majority of Oromos. Through various political and cultural mechanisms, including assimilation, political marriage, religion, and divide and conquer policies, the Ethiopian government disconnected most of the few educated Oromo vassals from their cultural and historical roots, continuously forcing them to show fealty to their suzerain.

Only a few persons within nationalist circles clearly understood these complex problems by familiarizing themselves with Oromo history, culture, values, and various forms of the Oromo resistance to Ethiopian colonialism. These elements initiated the Oromo national movement in the early 1960s and the 1970s. Some of those who emerged as Oromo nationalist leaders were sometimes collaborators who were initially neutral or opposed to the Oromo nationalist movement because of their lack of political consciousness. Generally speaking, Oromo collaborative leaders have ensconced themselves in Oromo cities that have been overwhelmingly populated by Ethiopian colonial settlers. Ethiopian political, religious, educational, and media institutions have had powerful influence on most of this educated Oromo collaborator leadership. Consequently, some educated Oromos have joined Ethiopian political organizations and institutions.

The Ethiopian and Somali governments and other forces opposed to the Oromo emancipation; opportunist and reactionary Oromo vassals collaborated with these enemies and targeted the few Oromo nationalist intellectuals. Consequently, the founding leadership of the Macca-Tuulama Self-help Association (MTSA) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was decimated along with the membership of these organizations. In addition, within the Oromo nationalist camp, complex political problems and confusions emerged in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and recently in 2001 and 2008 because of the low level and uneven development of *Oromummaa*, the lack of political experience and maturity, and political opportunism. A few individuals, using clan or religious or regional politics have corrupted the movement by introducing conflict, suspicion, and other factors. Such problems have undermined the development of the Oromo national struggle. As a result, Oromo nationalists have been divided into camps that started to fight one another while fighting against the Ethiopian and other anti-

Oromo forces. In the process, the Oromo national movement has lost outstanding Oromo nationalist heroes and heroines.

Despite political fragmentation, ideological confusion, and multiplicity of enemies, the few Oromo nationalists who have survived the political onslaught from all directions managed to maintain the Oromo national movement, particularly the OLF. The political integrity and determination of some OLF leaders and members have allowed the movement to spread the concepts of *Oromummaa* and Oromo nationalism among the Oromo people.<sup>56</sup> When the Oromo people have accepted the OLF, the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government and other semi-fascist groups have attempted to totally destroy the Oromo national movement and Oromo nationalists. The leadership of the Oromo national movement wasn't prepared to face this political challenge; some of the reasons include (1) the lack of coherent and organic leadership or team leadership; (2) the absence of open and honest dialogue; (3) the low level and uneven development of *Oromummaa* and the lack of political, cultural, and ideological strategies with which to build *Oromummaa*; (4) the absence of accountability of some leaders and followers; (5) the attachment to borrowed political culture and ideologies; (6) the failure to mobilize Oromo human and material resources effectively, and (7) the absence of a more unified structured organization and matured leadership.

The Oromo national movement has been lacking a coherent and organic leadership as the result of the untimely death of some of its founding leaders such as Haile Mariam Gamada, Mamo Mazamir, Taddassa Biru, Baro Tumsa, Elemo Qilixu, Magarasa Bari, Demisie Techane, Aboma Mitiku, and Muhee Abdo. Despite the fact that there are Oromo political leaders who are well educated, to date they have not developed the organizational norms and culture of teamwork needed to conceptualize the theoretical, ideological and organizational concepts necessary to address the problems of Oromo leadership. The lack of coherent political leadership has denied the Oromo national movement the possibility of developing the formal and informal, political and social networks that can effectively help in developing *Oromummaa* and in taking collective political actions at the individual, relational and collective levels. Since the formal and informal networks have not been integrated, members of the Oromo political leadership have been unable to develop the organizational capacity necessary to engage in political dialogue and activities both in formal and informal settings.

The Oromo elites whether they are in leadership or not lack ideological coherence, political maturity, and skills for consensus building. They focus on their narrow perceptions and agendas. Hence they jump to form organizations that promote such perceptions and agendas at the cost of the national interest. In the 1970s, some Oromo elites joined Ethiopian and Somali organizations while a few created the OLF. Furthermore, the lack of ideological and political maturity led to the division of the OLF in the 1970s, and recently, in the 2001 and 2008. Without creating the Oromo national power, the Oromo elites fight on non-existence power. The Oromo elites have formed several nominal liberation fronts and other political organizations without engaging in armed and real political struggles. They did not yet establish a political and cultural mechanism that helps in resolving their contradictions. The Oromo elites have failed to understand that they are on one team that must work together to organize the Oromo nation for its liberation.

It is impossible to build an effective institutional order or organization without integrating formal and informal rules of the society. As a result of the lack of bureaucratic codes and

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<sup>56</sup> In 1991 along with other Oromo liberation organizations, the OLF hesitantly agreed to join in the formation of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia and in less than a year it taught its political objectives to the Oromo people.

procedures in Oromo tradition, Oromo political leaders and the Oromo community at-large have had no immediately-available, culturally-consistent models to draw upon when confronted with the need for establishing the bureaucratic structures that are an essential part of the overall liberation struggle. As a result, they have reacted in a number of different and contradictory ways. This lack of coherence in the leadership in turn has created conditions in which suspicion has flourished creating conditions that have prevented open and honest dialogue among leaders and between leaders and followers. In absence of a coherent organizational milieu, rumor, gossip, and impression management have replaced a critical and open dialogue within the movement. Like any movement, the Oromo national movement must develop a collective identity that results in collective action. Oromo nationalists cannot develop an *Oromummaa* that facilitates collective action without critical discussion and open dialogue.

The role of the leader is very important in building a leadership core through persuasion, analytical capacity, capacity to communicate, and capacity to listen and learn. The leader is responsible for the creation of formal and informal networks that allow for the development of an effective leading political team by bringing together layers of people who share strategic ideas to win over others. Recently, the Oromo movement has tried to create an exclusivist leadership that does not fit Oromo-centric democratic values. While the Oromo love their heroes and heroines and admire them, they expect open dialogue and interaction consistent with their democratic political tradition. The Oromo also reject the leadership style of the Habasha. The Oromo dislike exclusivist leaders who equate their personal interests with the interests of the organization they lead and separate themselves from the rank and file members. Colin Barker argues that exclusivist leaders “regard their offices as private property, resisting removal or control. To maintain their positions, they develop various means of control . . . The overall result is that the mechanism of organization becomes an end in itself.”<sup>57</sup>

Practically speaking, the Oromo political leadership is neither coherent nor exclusivist, although there has been an attempt by a few leaders to develop an exclusivist leadership modeled on the Habasha political culture. However, there is no question that the leadership of the Oromo national movement manifests some exclusivist characters. Just as the Oromo nationalist leadership lacks political coherence, some Oromos lack organizational discipline and engage in political anarchism or passivism. Without challenging anarchism and passivism among the Oromo populace and the exclusivist political tendency of the leadership, the Oromo nationalist movement cannot search “for combinations of forms of organization and leadership which are practically compatible with larger struggles for popular self-emancipation.”<sup>58</sup> Oromo nationalists need to speak up and struggle to develop leadership for self-emancipation through facilitating the integration of “leading” and “led” selves of the Oromo political leadership.

While struggling to build a democratic and coherent political leadership, Oromo nationalists must fight against political anarchism, passivism, and anti-leadership sentiment that emerge in some Oromo sectors. Anarchist and anti-leadership Oromo elites discourage the emergence of strong leadership by engaging in endless debate on secondary issues—such as clan, religious, and regional identity—and by making personal attacks on prominent Oromo leaders and organizations as a means of avoiding substantive debate. While demanding accountability from their leadership, Oromos must fight publicly against an anti-leadership ideology. Oromos need to acknowledge, value, encourage, and support an emerging democratic

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<sup>57</sup>Colin Barker, “Robert Michels and the ‘Cruel Game,’” *Leadership and Social Movements*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 26.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43.

Oromo political leadership since strengthening the leadership of the Oromo movement is essential in the struggle to defeat dangerous enemies. Since an amorphous and less structured leadership is functionally ineffective, the Oromo national struggle must have a more structured leadership that can provide the organizational capacity necessary to eventually take state power and establish a functioning democracy consistent with the principles of *Oromummaa*.

Oromo nationalists cannot build a more structured leadership without clearly understanding the processes of leadership and followership. According to Robert G. Lord and Douglas J. Brown, “Leaders may indeed be people who can be understood in terms of traits and behavioral styles, but leadership is a social process that involves both a leader and a follower.”<sup>59</sup> Just as Oromo leaders do not adequately understand the essence and characteristics of their followers, the followers lack information about their leaders and leadership. While Oromo political leaders like to lecture their followers and sympathizers, they are less interested in establishing formal and informal relationships with their followers and sympathizers in order to engage them in dialogical conversation. Because they care little about the opinions and experiences of their followers, they fail to ask for the input from their followers. But, as Lord and Brown argue, leaders cannot be effective without establishing “a stronger social bond among their direct and indirect followers, thus improving the direct and indirect followers’ performance.”<sup>60</sup>

Leadership is a processing of influencing followers and others by changing their perceptions through closely relating and communicating with them. Similarly, much of the Oromo populace has yet to developed constructive mechanisms by which they can influence their political leaders and hold them accountable. As a result, they engage in personal attacks and debate on peripheral issues blunting the impact of their personal political efforts and delaying the development of an effective political leadership. As we have seen, it is difficult to identify the weaknesses of the leadership without identifying those of the followership. I recognize that the role played by the Oromo national political leadership is dangerous, complex, and difficult. This leadership has been politically, ideologically, and militarily attacked both internally and externally. To date the movement has been able to survive by developing shared meaning, purpose, language, and symbols. But as the complexity of the Oromo movement increases and as the number of Oromo nationalists expands, the leadership will not be able to improve its organizational capacity without simultaneously developing a degree of internal cohesion, leadership expertise, and widespread support through the establishment of effective coalitions within and beyond the Oromo nationalist movement.

Without (1) changing the past habits, ideologies and approaches, (2) building internal cohesion by developing *Oromummaa* on the individual, relational and collective levels, and (3) fully mobilizing Oromo human and economic resources, the current Oromo political leadership will continue to face more crises and may eventually become a political liability. The Oromo national political leadership must be challenged to abandon its reliance on a narrow political circle and borrowed political ideologies and practices. In addition, it must be encouraged to embrace Oromo-centric democratic values, using them to develop different forms of organizational leadership in Oromo society thus making the dynamic connection between the values of Oromo society and its organizational structure.

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<sup>59</sup> Robert G. Lord and Douglas Brown, *Leadership Processes and Followers Self-Identity*, (Mahwal, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associate, Inc.: 2004), p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

The Oromo leadership should be pressured to speak with the Oromo people and listen as well, allowing the Oromo community at-large to engage in the process of self-emancipation by participating in and owning their national movement. According to Alan Johnson, “Self-emancipation is a political process in which the oppressed author their own liberation through popular struggles which are educational, producing a cognitive liberation” to defeat their enemies.<sup>61</sup> More than any time in its history, the Oromo national struggle now requires a more centralized structured organization and matured national leadership that can learn about the Oromo people in order to organize and lead them to take any necessary actions for national survival and liberation.

### **The Main Characteristics of Oromo Society**

After the Oromo were colonized and until Oromo nationalism emerged, Oromoness (*Oromummaa*) primarily remained on the personal and the interpersonal levels since the Oromo were denied the opportunities to form national institutions. Oromoness was targeted for destruction and colonial administrative regions that were established to suppress the Oromo people and exploit their resources were glorified and institutionalized. As a result, Oromo relational identities have been localized, and not strongly connected to the collective identity of national *Oromummaa*.

The Oromo have been separated from one another and prevented from exchanging goods and information on national level for more than a century. Their identities have been localized into clan families and colonial regions. They were also exposed to different cultures (i.e., languages, customs, values, etc.) and religions and adopted some elements of these cultures and religions. Consequently, today there are members of Oromo society and elites who have internalized clan and externally imposed regional or religious identities because of their low level of political consciousness or political opportunism, and the lack of clear understanding of *Oromummaa* or Oromo nationalism. What makes these problems complex is that some Oromos who claim that they are nationalists confuse their sub-identities with the Oromo national identity.

Oromo relational identities include extended families and clan families. Historically and culturally speaking, Oromo clans and clan families never had clear geopolitical boundaries among themselves. Consequently, there are clans in Oromo society that have the same name in southern, central, northern, western and eastern Oromia. For example, there are Jarso, Gida, Karayu, Galan, Nole and Jiru clans all over Oromia. The Ethiopian colonial system and borrowed cultural and religious identities were imposed on the Oromo creating regional and religious boundaries. Consequently, there were times when Christian Oromos were more identified with Habashas and Muslim Oromos were more identified with Arabs, Adares and Somalis than they were with other Oromos. Under these conditions, Oromo personal identities, such as religion replaced Oromoness, central Oromo values, and core Oromo self-schemas. There are Oromos who still confuse such identities with the Oromo central identity.

Colonial rulers saw Oromoness as a source of raw material that was ready to be transformed into other identities. In the colonial process, millions of Oromos lost their identities and assimilate to other peoples. Consequently, the number of Amharas, Tigres, Adares, Gurages, and Somalis has increased at the cost of the Oromo population. The Oromo self was attacked and distorted by Ethiopian colonial institutions. The attack on Oromo selves at personal,

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<sup>61</sup> Johnson, Alan. 2001. “Self-emancipation and Leadership: The Case of Martin Luther King,” *Leadership and Social Movements*, edited by Colin Barker, Alan Johnson and Michael Lavalette, (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 96.



interpersonal and collective-levels has undermined the self-confidence of some Oromo individuals by creating an inferiority complex within them. Without the emancipation of Oromo individuals from this inferiority complex and without overcoming the ignorance and the worldviews that their enemies imposed on them, they cannot have the self-confidence necessary to facilitate individual liberation and Oromo emancipation.

Because of internal cultural crises and external oppressive institutions, Oromo collective norms or organizational culture is at rudimentary level at this historical moment. So some comrades in an Oromo organization do not see themselves as members of a team, and they engage in undermining members in their team through gossips and rumors. For sake of self-promotion, they belittle their comrades in his or her absence. Such individuals do not have strong organizational culture or norm. Such individuals cannot develop a core of Oromo leadership that is required in building a strong liberation organization.

Today, the Oromo are diverse and heterogeneous people, and it is impossible to organize them for liberation without understanding these complexities. Some Oromo elites do not understand these issues. Collective identities are not automatically given, but they are “essential outcomes of the mobilization process and crucial prerequisite to movement success.”<sup>62</sup> Oromo nationalists can only reach a common understanding of Oromoness through open, critical, honest dialogue and debate. Fears, suspicions, misunderstandings and hopes or aspirations of Oromo individuals or groups should be discussed through invoking Oromo cultural memory and democratic principles. Through such discussion a single standard that respects the dignity and inalienable human rights of all persons with respect to political, social, and economic interaction should be established for all Oromos and their neighbors who support the rights to national self-determination.

Oromo personal and social identities can be fully released and mobilized for collective actions if reasonable Oromos recognize that they can freely start to shape their future aspirations or possibilities without discrimination. This is only possible through developing an Oromo identity on personal and collective levels that is broader and more inclusive than gender, class, clan, family, region, and religion. According to S.M. Buechler, “one critical intervening process which must occur to get from oppression to resistance is the social construction of a collective identity which unites a significant segment of the movement’s potential constituency.”<sup>63</sup> While recognizing the unity of Oromo peoplehood, it is important to recognize the existence of diversity in Oromo society. The lack of open dialogue among Oromo nationalists, political leaders, activists, and ordinary citizens on the issue of religious differences and/or the problems of colonial regional identities provided opportunities for those who profit from the continued subjugation of the Oromo people to employ a divide and conquer strategy by exploiting religious and regional differences among the Oromo people.

Since Turks, Arabs, Habashas, and Europeans imposed both Islam and Christianity on the Oromo in order to psychologically control and dominate them, Oromo nationalists must encourage an open dialogue among adherents of an indigenous Oromo religion, Islam and Christianity and reach a common understanding of what it means to be an Oromo and the positive role religion can play in Oromo society. Also, issues of clans and colonial regional identities must be addressed openly and honestly. Since these issues are not openly addressed, reactionary forces and opportunist Oromo individuals and groups turn Oromo on one another to

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<sup>62</sup>S. M.Buechler, “Beyond Resource Mobilization? Emerging Trends in Social Movement Theory,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, 34/2, 1993, p. 228.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

use them. Basing our understanding of these Oromo issues on *Oromummaa* eliminates differences that may emerge because of religious plurality and regional differences. The Ethiopian colonial regions do not correspond to Oromo group or regional identities. As a result the political diversity of Oromo society can and should transcend regional identities based on the boundaries of colonial regions.

The Oromo political problems have emerged primarily from low level of political consciousness, attitudes, behavior, and perceptions that have been shaped by a culture that valued domination and exploitation and have seen diversity and equality as threats to the colonial institutions most Oromos passed through. These problems still play a significant role in undermining the development of *Oromummaa* and the organizational capacity of the Oromo national movement. The behavior and political practices of most Oromos and elites and leaders of Oromo institutions in the Diaspora—like churches and mosques, associations, and political and community organizations—demonstrate that the impact of the ideology of domination and control that was impacted by Ethiopian colonial institutions and organizations is far-reaching. Despite the fact that the Oromo are proud of their democratic tradition, their behavior and practices in politics, religion, and community affairs indicate that they have learned more from Habashas and Oromo chiefs than from the *gada* system of democracy.

While the social and cultural construction of the Oromo collective identity is ongoing process, this process cannot be completed without the recognition that Oromo society is composed of a set of diverse and heterogeneous individuals and groups with a wide variety of cultural and economic experiences. Hence, Oromo nationalists need to recognize and value the diversity and unity of the Oromo people because “people who participate in collective action do so only when such action resonates with both an individual and a collective identity that makes such action meaningful.”<sup>64</sup> In every society, personal and social identities are flexible, and are not rigid and monolithic. Similarly, Oromo self-identity exists at the personal, interpersonal, and collective levels with this confederation of identity being continuously shaped by Oromo historical and cultural memory, current conditions, and hopes and aspirations for the future. According to Robert G. Lord and Douglas J. Brown, the self “is believed to be a system or a confederation of self-schemas that are derived from past experience . . . . In essence, the self is a collection of small, relatively independent processing units that are elicited in different contexts and each of which has specific cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral consequences.”<sup>65</sup>

The Oromo social selves emerge from the interplay between intimate personal relations and less personal relations. The former comprise the interpersonal or relational identity and the latter are a collective identity. The relational-level identity is based on perceptions or views of others about an individual. Thus, individual Oromos have knowledge of themselves from their personal viewpoints as well as knowledge from the perspective of significant others and larger social groups. The concept of individual self emerges from complex conditions that reflect past and present experiences and future possibilities. The self-concept allows individuals to have “the capacity to reinstate a past situation and locate themselves in it; they also have the capacity to project the self into future contexts, anticipating possible actions and their consequences for the self.”<sup>66</sup> Some Oromos are more familiar with their personal and relational selves than they are with their Oromo collective self, because their level of *Oromummaa* is rudimentary.

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Robert G. Lord and Douglas J. Brown, *ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

Oromo individuals have intimate relations with their family members, friends, and local communities. These interpersonal and close relations foster helping, nurturing, and caring relationships. Without developing these micro-relationships into the macro-relationship of *Oromummaa*, the building of Oromo national organizational capacity is illusive. Organizing Oromos requires learning about the multiplicity and flexibility of Oromo identities and fashioning from them a collective identity that encompasses the vast majority of the Oromo populace. This process can be facilitated by an Oromo political leadership that is willing to develop an understanding of the breadth of the diversity of Oromo society looking for those personal and relational identities that can be used to construct an Oromo collective identity, expanding *Oromummaa*. Change starts with individuals who are both leaders and followers.

Culture, collective grievances, and visions connect leaders and followers in oppressed society like the Oromo. Consequently, to be effective the Oromo political leadership must be guided by Oromo-centric cardinal values and principles that reflect honesty, fairness, single standard, equality and democracy in developing *Oromummaa*. Lord and Brown assert that “a critical task for leaders may be to construct group identities for followers that are both appealing and consistent with a leader’s goals. Indeed, this is a critical aspect of political leadership. Effective political leaders do not simply take context and identity as given, but actively construct both in a way that reconfigures the social world.”<sup>67</sup> The political leadership of Oromo society needs to understand the concept and essence of the changing selves of Oromos. These self-concepts include cognitive, psychological and behavioral activities of Oromo individuals.

Collective grievances, the Oromo language and history, the historical memory of the *gada* system and other forms of Oromo culture, and the hope for liberation have helped in maintaining fragmented connections among various Oromo groups. The emergence of Oromo nationalism from underground to public discourse in the 1990s allowed some Oromos to openly declare their *Oromummaa* without clearly realizing the connection between the personal and interpersonal selves and the Oromo collectivity. This articulation occurred without strong national institutions and organizational capacity that can cultivate and develop *Oromummaa* through transcending the political and religious barriers that undermine the collective identity of the Oromo. Oromo nationalists cannot build effective national institutions and organizations without taking Oromo personal, interpersonal and collective-level Oromo selves to a new level. Oromo collective selves develop through relations with one another. Good interpersonal relations and good treatment of one another create sense of security, confidence, sense of belonging, strong and effective bonds, willingness to admit and deal with mistakes and increase commitment to political objectives and organizations.

The individuality of an Oromo can be observed and examined in relation to the concept of self which is linked to psychological processes and outcomes, such as motivation, affection, self-management, information processing, interpersonal relations, commitment, dignity and self-respect, self-preservation and so forth. The Oromo self-concept as an extensive knowledge structure contains all pieces of information on self that an individual Oromo internalizes in his or her value systems. Every Oromo has a self-schema or a cognitive schema that organizes both perceptual and behavioral information. An individual’s self-schema can be easily captured by accessible knowledge that comes to mind quickly to evaluate information on any issue. The Oromo self is the central point at which personality, cognitive schema and social psychology meet. The Oromo self consists both personal or individual and social identities. The former is based on an individual’s comparison of oneself to other individuals and reveals one’s own

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

uniqueness and the latter are based on self-definition in relation to others or through group membership.

Without recognizing and confronting these issues at all levels, the Oromo movement cannot build its organizational capacity. The social experiment of exploring and understanding our internal selves at individual, relational and collective selves must start with the Oromo elites who aspire to organize and lead the Oromo people. Since the ideological and organizational tools that Oromo elites have borrowed from other cultures have reached their maximum limit of capacities and cannot move the Oromo movement forward in the quest for achieving self-determination and human liberation, Oromo nationalists must reorganize their approaches based on *Oromummaa* and *gada* democratic heritage. The Oromo elites have passed through schools that were designed to domesticate or “civilize” them and to mold them into intermediaries between the Oromo people and those who dominated and exploited them.

They have been disconnected from their history, culture, language, and worldviews, and have been trained by foreign educational and religious institutions that glorified the culture, history, language and religion of others. Consequently, some Oromo elites do not adequately understand Oromo history, culture and worldview. Today, such individuals have emerged as agents of the Tigrayan elites by joining the OPDO and are terrorizing the Oromo people. Although the Oromo movement has achieved many important accomplishments, the organizational and ideological tools that it has used did not provide an effective basis for organizing the Oromo people and enabling them to defend themselves from their enemies. At present, the Oromo human and material resources are scattered and used by the enemies of the Oromo nation.

Without a structured organization and national leadership, the Oromo people cannot take effective political actions that involve national self-defense and a popular and wide rebellion through the total mobilization of the nation. For many generations, young Oromos have been forced to fight as mercenaries and defended the interest of the Ethiopian state elites that have repressed and exploited their society. Even the Siad Barre government of Somalia used Oromo fighters as mercenaries. The Habasha elites and their Oromo collaborators claim that the Oromo fighters have built Ethiopia, and hence they are Ethiopians like Amharas and Tigrayans. To be forced to fight for their colonizers cannot make a people to share identity and to own a country with their colonizers. Therefore, fighting for the Ethiopian state could not make Oromo fighters equal citizens with their colonizers; the Ethiopian state they have fought for has maintained their second-class citizenship status through violence. Therefore, the Oromo elites and society must stop the utilization of the Oromo youth as raw materials by the Ethiopian state elites or others. The Oromo national movement by learning from the *gada* system must be able to mobilize and organize the Oromo youth to fight for the liberation of their nation and their fatherland, Oromia.

### **The Major Opportunities and Constraints for the Oromo Struggle**

The Oromo national movement that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s by a few determined nationalists reached the Oromo populace in the early 1990s. It took almost three decades and heavy sacrifices in the lives and sufferings of these few nationalists to resurrect the Oromo name, language, nationhood, and the name of Oromia from the dustbin of history. In this process, *Oromummaa*—Oromo national identity, culture, and nationalism—has been resurrected. Currently, the external and internal enemies of the Oromo people use the resurrected names and the Oromo language while attacking and suppressing the Oromo nationalists and self-respecting

Oromos. Since they could not stop the rising wave of *Oromummaa*, the Tigrayan colonial elites have used Oromo mercenaries to gradually destroy it.

Ethiopian colonialism had disconnected the Oromo nation from the international community for more than a century. However, with the resurrection of the Oromo national identity, culture, and nationalism, the Oromo people started to be represented in the world by its political refugees. For the first time in Oromo history, the Oromo people started to have its Diaspora that has a great potential to link Oromia to the global community. The Oromo-American Citizens Council is an element of the Oromo Diaspora. The imposition of Ethiopian state terrorism on the Oromo to suppress Oromo nationalism created and expanded the Oromo Diaspora in the world. In this process, a few serious Oromo intellectuals emerged on the global level and dug the graveyards of history to uncover Oromo history and culture and to publish books and journals that are stored in world libraries. Furthermore, in Oromia, millions of the *qubee* generation emerged as demonstrated by the recent Oromo student movement. The national projects that were designed by the MTSA and the OLF produced fundamental results that have become the cornerstones of the Oromo national struggle. These achievements are great political opportunities for the Oromo nation.

Unfortunately, since the Oromo national struggle did yet achieve its main objectives, the enemies of the Oromo people have created political constraints to abort the struggle. There are millions of Oromos who have betrayed their nation to satisfy their economic interests. By creating and building the OPDO and recruiting such Oromos to this subservient organization, the Meles regime uses them to attack the OLF and to suppress and control the Oromo people. The regime has also mobilized several ethnonations against the Oromo people and their movement. There are also anti-Oromo forces such as Amhara colonial organizations and others who use any opportunity to undermine the interest of the Oromo nation. The constraints of the Oromo struggle are not limited to these problems. The Oromo national movement did not yet secure adequate sympathy and support for the Oromo cause from the international community.

It is very clear that the Tigrayan-led government and its agents terrorize and rule the Oromo not because of their strengths but because of the weaknesses of the Oromo movement, political leadership, and Oromo society. If some elements of Oromo society are well organized under one structured organization and leadership, they can rebel and dismantle the Meles regime within a short period. The Tigrayan soldiers, cadres, and their agents can be easily dismantled in Oromia if substantial numbers of Oromos engage in self-defense and coordinated uprising. If the Oromo people intensify their struggle, the international community will recognize the political problem of the Oromo nation. The Oromo people will achieve their national self-determination by intensifying their national struggle by any means necessary and by receiving international recognition.

The crisis of the Ethiopian Empire that started in the early 1970s still continues. The popular uprisings of ethnonations, classes, and social groups challenged the collapsing Ethiopian state for several decades and introduced some changes. These uprisings resulted in the overthrowing of the Haile Selassie and Mengistu regimes and caused the emergence of the Meles government and Tigrayan ethnocracy. But these changes failed to change the nature of Ethiopian colonialism. Ethiopia is still ruled by an authoritarian-terrorist government that practices colonial terrorism and clandestine genocide on the colonized peoples such as the Oromo, Somali, Sidama, Annuak and others. The Tigrayan-led regime that emerged in 1991 has intensified the crisis of the Ethiopian state and created the conditions that will give a death-below for this state. We know that the Oromo nation lost its political opportunities in the 1970s and the 1990s and

remained politically insignificant force. Are the Oromo political leadership, organizations, and society ready to utilize the emerging political crisis that will emerge on the grave of the Meles government?

Learning from the past experiences of the Ethiopian state, we can understand that the Meles regime has already dug its own grave. This regime is already rotten from inside, and it only survives because of the weaknesses of different political forces in the empire and financial and diplomatic support it receive from powerful countries. What will happen if the Meles regime collapses for whatever reason? Are the Oromo liberation fronts and political organizations ready to use this political opportunity? Oromo nationalists, liberation fronts, political organizations, community organizations and associations should start a serious national political dialogue to overcome their political naiveté and immaturity in order to build a national political consensus that will enable them to capture state power in Oromia by any means necessary and to build multinational democracy with other nations that accept the principles of self-determination and democracy. While preparing themselves to use any available political opportunity, the Oromo national movement and society must start to fashion a national Gumii Gayyo to produce a designed political results. These designed political results can be produced through determination, hard work, sacrifice, and a collective effort of all Oromo liberation fronts, political organizations, and associations.

### **What is the Future of the Oromo People?**

The future of the Oromo people depends on what the Oromo liberation and political organizations and society will do to assure the survivability of the Oromo nation and its liberation from Ethiopian colonialism. The Oromo people have achieved what I have mentioned above by the determination and sacrifices of a few nationalist Oromos. Had millions of Oromos practically contributed their fair shares to the Oromo national movement, the level of the Oromo struggle would have been on the highest level or Oromia would have achieved its liberation. Furthermore, there are still millions of mercenary Oromos who are bleeding their nation by serving the enemies of the Oromo people. As I have already mentioned, some Oromo elites have promoted clan, regional or religious politics.

Currently, the mercenary Oromo elites promote the Tigrayan colonial objectives by joining the Ethiopian military, the so-called parliament and government, educational, and business institutions. Numerically Oromo mercenaries are the majority in the rubber-stamp parliament and the regional government of Oromia; they endorse the so-called laws of the Meles regime to enrich the Tigrayn region, Tigrayan elites and their domestic and international collaborators. These mercenaries participate in the criminal activities of the Meles government by taking marching order from their Tigrayan colonial masters. There are also Oromo mercenaries in churches and mosques who use the name of God, but engage in domesticating the minds of the Oromo to be subservient for their enemies. History demonstrates that churches and mosques play important roles in defending the victimized people and encouraging them to be united and struggle for their liberation. Several indigenous peoples around the world were decimated mainly because their enemies divided and turned them against one another. The colonized nations that could not defeat their traitors could not win their national victories.

If the politically consciousness Oromos start to fully contribute to the consolidation of the Oromo national movement through building the more structured organization and leadership, the Oromo nation will achieve its political victory. But, if the development *Oromummaa* is stagnated by the fragmentation and the political immaturity of its elites, the survival of the Oromo nation is

going to be in doubt. All Habasha elites want to destroy the Oromo national movement and its independent leadership by any means necessary. So they hate the OLF and attempt to destroy this organization and erase its name from the minds of the Oromo people. The Meles regime spends its full energy, money, and intellectual power in dividing the Oromo and turning them against their national struggle. The Tigrayan elites and their collaborators make an endless effort to make the Oromo people leaderless so that they can own Oromia and exploit its resources.

Colonialist committed genocide on indigenous people to expropriate their countries and resources in different parts of the world. Indigenous Americans and Australians and others were destroyed by the mechanisms of divide and conquer, state terrorism and genocide and replaced by the European settlers and their descendants. In the racialized capitalist world system might is right. The international system is a toothless tiger and it cannot effectively defend peoples like the Oromo who do not have state power. To overcome Tigrayan ethno-fascism and clandestine genocide, the Oromo elites must overcome their political ignorance and immaturity and consolidate the Oromo national movement into one structured organization and leadership in order to mobilize and organize the nation to prepare it for an inevitable confrontation with the enemy.

The future of the Oromo people will be decided by farsighted Oromo nationalists who can take practical political actions both in Oromia and the Diaspora to defeat both the internal and external enemies of the Oromo nation. Otherwise, the systematic destruction of the Oromo people will continue in order to transfer Oromian lands and natural resources to Tigrayan-led colonial settlers and their supporters. The Meles regime is attempting to give a final solution to the Oromo question. It is up to the Oromo elites and people to stop this terrorist regime and to determine their destiny as a nation. Those Oromos who believe in the existence of a free Oromia must engage in self-defense by any means necessary in their country. Specifically building the Oromo Liberation Army and Oromo self-defense forces is the priority of the day.

The Oromo Liberation Army and self-defense forces will lay the foundation of a sovereign Oromia state that can establish a multinational democracy with other interested peoples. The Diaspora Oromos must make adequate financial, intellectual and other contributions to enable the victimized Oromos to defend themselves. Overall, Oromo nationalists must start to reassess the tactics and strategies of their national struggle both in Oromia in the Diaspora to engage in practical organizational, ideological, and diplomatic actions. Unfortunately, those Oromos who are neutral and passive are indirectly contributing to the demise of the Oromo people. The future of the Oromo people is not predetermined; those committed Oromos who can take concrete liberation actions with whatever they can decide it.

When Oromo mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, and heroines and heroes are massacred in their villages and/or languish in Ethiopian prisons; when Oromo girls and women are violated and raped in their homes and communities and concentration camps; when Oromo fertile lands, minerals, and natural resources are expropriated and transferred to colonial forces and their international supporters; when the Oromo people are perishing by absolute poverty, recurrent famines, malnutrition, and diseases, how can we be sure about the survival of the Oromo nation? All Oromo elites who are in the nationalist camp, who are mercenaries, and neutrals must realize that the Ethiopian “colonial school system educated [them to be] fools and clowns, fascinated by the ideas and way of life” of their colonial masters. So they must be ready to reevaluate their education, knowledge, and ideology in order to confront the challenges that are facing their people. If the Oromo elites continue to be “fools and clowns” of the Amhara-

Tigrayan elites, they first allow the destruction of the Oromo nation and then the destruction of themselves. The Oromo elites cannot survive without the Oromo nation.

So what should the Oromo Diaspora in general the elites in particular should do to make sure the survival of their nation and the victory of their national struggle? History demonstrates that the determined people can liberate themselves. The Oromo elites in general and that of the Diaspora in particular must start to determine the destiny of their nation by taking the following concrete steps immediately. First, In the Diaspora, they must initiate town hall meetings in every town where the Oromo community live and discuss about the fate of the Oromo people by focusing in their achievements, failures, challenges, and constraints as a nation. In the Ethiopian Empire, the Oromo people are denied the freedom of self-expression, organization, and the media. Second, the Oromo in the Diaspora must stop the politics of self-destruction by avoiding engaging in clan, religious, and regional politics, and by isolating the Oromo mercenaries from every Oromo community.

Since the Oromo mercenaries use clan, religious, and regional politics to divide the Oromo people and turn them against one another, the Oromo community must reject them and their politics. The Oromo community must ostracize them by not relating to them and by refusing to participate on their social events such as death and marriage. Every Oromo community must identify, expose, and expel the Oromo mercenaries from their networks, churches, mosques, associations, and other social worlds. Third, the Oromo Diaspora must challenge the Oromo activists who have built their separate organizations in order to break down barriers among different Oromo organizations and unite them under one structured organization and leadership. Fourth, Oromo youth and women should be mobilized in order to actively participate in national dialogues and town hall meetings; they must play a leading role since they are less corrupted by the ideologies of egoism, clan, religious and regional politics.

Fifth, Oromo nationalists must establish the rule law fashioning on the principles of *gada* and other democratic traditions to use it in running their national affairs. Sixth, since unconscious people cannot liberate themselves from colonial domination, the Oromo Diaspora should receive liberation knowledge through regular dialogues, seminars, conferences, workshops, lectures, and study circles. The Oromo must learn their history, culture, language, and traditions; they also need to learn about the world around them. At this historical moment, the number one enemy of the Oromo people is political ignorance; Oromo nationalist must smash this enemy. When this is accomplished, the Oromo people are going to play their historical role that will commensurate with their number. When this sleeping giant nation will be awakened, others cannot use the Oromos as raw materials. One of the main reasons why forty million Oromos are terrorized and ruled by the elites that emerged from five million Tigrayans is lack political consciousness.

Seventh, every self-respecting Oromo must realize that he or she has power to determine the destiny of Oromia. Every Oromo must be educated about his or her potential power and what he or she must do to translate it to real power. Eighth, the Oromo Diaspora movement must start building from bottom-up a confederation of Oromo political, religious, community, and self-help organizations to create a Global Gumii Gayyo of Oromia that will contribute ideological, organizational, and financial resources for consolidating the Oromo struggle and the Oromo Liberation Army and self-defense militias in Oromia.

Ninth, all members of the Oromo Diaspora must engage in public diplomacy by becoming members of organizations such as the Orom-American Citizens Council. Tenth, Oromo nationalists in the Diaspora must start to build a well-regulated system that can provide support and security for Oromos who are determined to advance the Oromo national interest



whenever they face hardship beyond their control. Finally, the Oromo must believe that they will liberate themselves by any means necessary. There is no any doubt that, despite hardships and sacrifices, the Oromo “social volcano” that is being fermented will soon burn down Ethiopian colonial structures that perpetuate terrorism, genocide, disease, absolute poverty, and malnutrition in Oromia and beyond.