



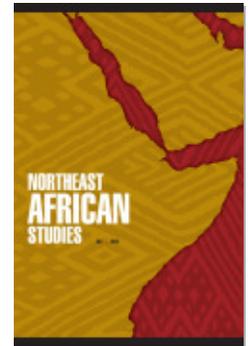
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Conquest, Tyranny, and Ethnocide against the Oromo: A Historical Assessment of Human Rights Conditions in Ethiopia, ca. 1880s–2002

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This article attempts to assess the human rights conditions of the Oromo people under four Ethiopian regimes. Beginning with the conquest and incorporation of Oromia into the Ethiopian empire, it provides an overview of the brutality and depredations that Oromos suffered at the hands of Ethiopian soldiers and administrators under Menelik (r. 1880s–1913) and the concerted attacks on the Oromo cultural heritage, language, and national identity during the six decades when Haile Sellassie dominated the Ethiopian political landscape (1916–74). Then it examines the violence against the Oromo national identity and the attempt to alter the demographic makeup of Oromia by the Ethiopian military-socialist regime (1974–91) and the massive human rights violations perpetrated against the Oromo since 1992 in the name of democracy and federalism. In all, the article shows that for more than a century, the Oromo have endured unrelenting attacks on their individual rights, their national identity and cultural institutions, and their independent organizations. Ethiopia has yet to produce a government that respects Oromo human rights.

Before I proceed, a few caveats are in order. First, the definition of human rights varies depending on cultural, historical, political, economic, and ideological considerations. In this article, I will follow the definition of Mahmood Monshipuri:

The concept of human rights . . . refers to . . . civil and political rights; rights to life, privacy, a fair trial, humane treatment, prohibition of torture and slavery, freedom of movement and residence; the right not to be arbitrarily arrested or detained; freedom of association, political participation, and equal protection under the law.²

Second, “Historians, in general, are most at home when dealing with events that have been allowed to settle over time.”³ It is easier to discuss Oromo human rights conditions before 1991, an era that belongs to history, than in the period since 1991, a highly contested period of history in the making. As I have noted elsewhere, “the present is an emotionally charged psychological moment.”⁴ While it is possible to present a relatively objective picture of Oromo human rights conditions based on the record produced by both Ethiopian and foreign writers,⁵ one cannot escape being accused of exaggerating the Oromo people’s plight and indulging in anti-Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) propaganda. My purpose is nevertheless to document the human rights conditions of the Oromo as a scholar loyal to the canons and standard practices of my discipline. If this article encourages others to write about human rights conditions in Ethiopia, its purpose will have been served.

Third, the Oromo do not have influential friends in positions of power among Western governments and the Western media. Diaspora Oromos do not have the numerical strength and resources necessary to capture the attention of either the governments or the media. Consequently, the sufferings of the Oromo have received little international attention. The apparent Western indifference to the misery of the Oromos has encouraged the TPLF authorities to continue their Oromo human rights violations with impunity. I believe my duty to the victims of human rights violations is “to record their plight so that they are not forgotten by history, and that history is not rewritten to conceal or distort embarrassing facts.”⁶ This article is an attempt to contribute in a small way to the effort of recording the past in its totality so that future generations will not have to relive their tortured past. Space does not permit me to provide a thorough account of human rights conditions in Ethiopia between the 1880s and 2002. Instead of a detailed discussion, I will outline the salient features of the human rights conditions experienced by the Oromo people

during the century after Menelik's conquests in the 1880s, and I will focus especially on the period after 1991.

Conquest, Exploitation, and Deculturation: The Imperial Period, 1880s–1974

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the steady flow of European warfare technology into Abyssinia and its virtual absence from Oromia facilitated and increased Abyssinian raids for slave and cattle into Oromo territory. This in turn heightened the Abyssinians' desire for a permanent occupation of Oromia. By the end of the century, the conquest and occupation of Oromo territory had been accomplished by King Menelik of Shewa (1865–89), later the emperor of Ethiopia (1889–1913).⁷ Though the Oromo put up stiff resistance, Menelik's soldiers used their superiority in modern European weapons to inflict heavy losses. The Arsi Oromo put up the longest and strongest resistance (1879–86) and sustained the greatest destruction. Explaining the brutality of the conquerors, Abbas Haji writes:

Mutilation seems to have been a well-thought strategy and was systematically used during the war of conquest against societies showing stubborn resistance. After the failure of four campaigns led by Menelik in person, the Shoan [Shewan] army was far from victorious so they introduced a systematic mutilation of the right hands of men and the right breast of women to terrify the Arsi and force them to abandon their hostility. It was believed that they would not have submitted.⁸

Such inhumane actions, according to Mekuria Bulcha, were meant to increase the psychological impact on the resisting Arsi Oromo.⁹ In September 1886, at a place called Azule, the army of Ras Darghe, Menelik's uncle, massacred 12,000 Arsi Oromo;¹⁰ while at Anole, "thousands of mutilated limbs and breasts were tied around the necks of victims who were sent back to their villages. Other mutilated hands were hung on a tree under which the Shoan [Shewan] soldiers sang and danced in celebration of this exploit."¹¹ The Arsi remember the event to

this day as “bara harka fi harma mura a Anole” (the year of hand and breast mutilation at Anole).

The way the conquests were conducted had long-lasting effects. An English traveler who passed through the land of the Arsi four years after the conquest had this to say about the devastation he observed:

Now was the time for the terrible [Oromo] to appear. Where was the country teeming with lusty war-like people? Certainly not here! What we found as we progressed was only a few poor villages of a hundred huts each and the native presenting the most abject appearance imaginable. Only four years ago they must have been a fine race of men. They loved to tell us of their former glory; their eyes would light up, and they would forget for the instant their present condition. Now the Abyssinians are the masters, and these poor people are only a remnant of a great tribe. . . . The Arussa [Arsi Oromo], here as elsewhere, were regarded as slaves and were even sold in the market as such. The troops were thoroughly drilled and armed with Remington’s or French rifles.¹²

The ruthless nature of Menelik’s warfare and the devastation of the Oromo constituted a pattern followed in other conquered areas and meant more than human rights violations. Martial de Salviac, a French missionary who lived among the Oromo during the conquest, observed that Menelik’s war of conquest and the natural calamities that followed reduced the Oromo population from an estimated 10 million in 1870 to 5 million in 1900.¹³ Alexander Bulatovich, a Russian officer who toured extensive areas of Oromo territory between 1896 and 1897 and gathered information both from Menelik’s soldiers and from their Oromo victims, concluded that “the dreadful annihilation of more than half of the population during the conquest took away from the Galla [Oromo] all possibility of thinking about any sort of uprising.”¹⁴

After the conquests, the Oromo institutions of self-government (including the Chafee assembly or parliament) were abolished.¹⁵ The indigenous leadership was liquidated or co-opted, the land confiscated, and cultural institutions destroyed. The conquerors banned religious

pilgrimages to the land of Abba Muuddaa¹⁶ and looted the property of both the settled and the pastoral communities.

As noted earlier, the Oromo population was reduced substantially due to massacres committed in many places by the Abyssinians. The massacres were inflicted for precisely the same reasons for which genocides were committed throughout history. Scholars have observed that a strong desire to exploit the wealth of the conquered was the most important factor in initiating genocide. As has been noted, “When such wealth was in the form of fertile land and other primary resources . . . [it] could only be acquired by occupation of the land, enslavement or extermination of the indigenous population.”¹⁷ Moreover, “most genocide[s] . . . were committed in the building and maintaining of empires.”¹⁸ Most importantly, genocide occurred in a political climate in which the differences between the perpetrators and the victims “were particularly large in terms of religion, language, manners, customs, and so on, then such as others were seen as less than fully human: pagans, savages, or even animals.”¹⁹ Menelik’s unbridled ambition to exploit “the green and lush Oromo lands and their boundless commodities (gold, civet, ivory, and coffee) and [their] prosperous markets”²⁰ was the primary motive for his empire-building venture, which resulted in the one-sided, mass killing of the Oromo. The Abyssinian soldiers were uninhibited in their killings because the Oromo were different from them in terms of religion, language, custom, culture, way of life, and political philosophy. The atrocities endured by the Oromo during Menelik’s conquest amount to genocide according to the strict definition of the term.²¹

The war of conquest, which produced thousands of captives for the emperor and his generals, intensified the slave trade and slavery in Ethiopia, earning for Menelik the ignoble epithet of “the greatest slave entrepreneur.”²² The Christian emperor of Ethiopia, known for issuing a number of proclamations abolishing the slave trade, reportedly possessed 70,000 domestic slaves at the beginning of the twentieth century, while his generals and soldiers were slavers who depopulated a number of areas.²³ Perpetuating slavery in the conquered regions had the twin goal of making the colonies pay for their own conquest and providing the opportunity of imbuing the “pagan” slaves with Christian virtues

and love.²⁴ In effect, it was easier for the Abyssinians to acculturate slaves than free human beings.

The conquered Oromo territories experienced a catastrophic population decline and unprecedented levels of exploitation owing to the avarice of Menelik's colonial governors and armed settlers from the northern lands, known as *naftayna*, who were granted land and laborers.²⁵ In most areas, two-thirds of the lands of the Oromo were taken away and distributed among the *naftayna*, the Orthodox Church, and the state. Only one-third was left for the Oromo, on condition that they supplied forced labor to the armed settlers, as well as taxes, dues, and tithes to the imperial court and the Orthodox Church. Menelik's colonial establishment in all the Oromo territory was built on and sustained by the labor of Oromo farmers, whose status was reduced to that of *gabbars* (serfs). Since the armed settlers were not paid salaries and did not engage in productive activities, they were given Oromo *gabbars* in lieu of salary and "as material property to be owned and used as personal property."²⁶ Burdensome and exhausting obligations were put on the Oromo *gabbar*, who, according to one scholar,

had to surrender a portion of the produce of the land to the landlord as tribute. The amount varied between a quarter and a third, but it was usually more as the legal ceiling was that it should not be more than three quarters! Besides, he paid a tenth of his total produce for the tithe. He was also expected to provide his landlord with honey, meat and firewood, dried grass and sundry other items. Labor service was an added burden, he had to grind the landlord's share of the grain, transport it to his residence, build his house, maintain his fences, care for his animals, and act as a porter, an escort or a messenger. There was an obligation to present gifts on religious holidays and other social occasions. The multiple exactions imposed on the Oromo *gabbars* meant the loss of considerable portions of the [*gabbars*'] production, onerous labor service and manifold other impositions.²⁷

When governors and their followers were transferred from one region to another, they took with them their private *gabbars*.²⁸ Reduced to the

status of *gabbar* and controlled by the predatory *naftayna*, the Oromo were denied not just basic human rights but also basic subsistence rights.

The violation of Oromo subsistence rights continued under the regime of Emperor Haile Sellassie. The limited development policy the emperor pursued in Oromo areas showed no concern for Oromo life. For instance, the land concession given to a Dutch company (HVA) for sugar plantations at Wanji and Metahara in the upper Awash River Valley led to the dispersion of the Jille and Karrayyu Oromo communities. After losing their traditional grazing land, the Jille disintegrated and virtually disappeared. The Karrayyu population was reduced from more than 200,000 to less than 10,000 today. After they lost their traditional grazing grounds, the Karrayyu were forced into malaria-infested areas where the deadly disease combined with attacks by Ethiopian government forces and cattle raiders hastened their destruction.²⁹

Economic exploitation was accompanied by sociocultural and psychological dehumanization of the Oromo. In the eyes of many Ethiopians, as Donald Donham keenly observed, the “Galla were pagans. They were uncivilized. *Ye Galla chewa ye gomen choma yellem* (it is impossible to find a Galla gentleman as it is to find fat in greens) or again *Galla inna shinfilla biyatbutim aytera* (even if you wash them, stomach lining and a Galla will never come clean).”³⁰ In one Amharic expression, Oromos were equated with human feces: “*Gallana sagara eyadar yegamal*” (Galla and human feces stink more every passing day). In another, even Oromo humanity was questioned: “*Saw naw Galla?*” (Is it human or Galla?).³¹

The assault on Oromo culture and identity was part of the policy of Amharization, which was pursued with greater intensity during the long reign of Haile Sellassie (1930–74) with the goal of ensuring the dominance of Amharic culture and the power of the Amhara elite. To implement the government’s policy of Amharization or de-Oromization, Oromo cultural and religious shrines and places of worship were destroyed. Oromo place names were replaced by Amharic names. The Oromo language was banned from being used for preaching, teaching, and writing. The Oromo national identity was attacked and the Oromo way of life was condemned in every way. The regime’s educational system, cultural institutions, and government bureaucracy were deployed

for the express purpose of denigrating the Oromo people, their history, culture, and way of life. All this was done to ensure “the establishment of the hegemony of the Amhara culture masquerading as ‘Ethiopian’ culture.”³² The production of literature in the Oromo language was banned. In the schoolbooks, “[T]he Oromo were described as a people without culture, history and heroes . . . [and] characterized not only as uncivilized, but uncivilizable. The Oromo language and culture were reduced to marks of illiteracy, shame, and backwardness as the schools pressed Oromo children to conform to Amhara culture.”³³ Owing to the language barrier, Oromos did not have full access to legal recourse and remedies in civil or criminal cases. This was because “In court or before an official, an Oromo had to speak Amharic or use an interpreter. Even a case between two Oromos, before an Oromo-speaking magistrate, had to be heard in Amharic.”³⁴

Oromo children were deprived of their language, culture, and identity, which destroyed their pride in their cultural heritage and kept them chained with no faith in themselves, their history, or their national identity.³⁵ “It remains the belief of the Amhara ruling elites that to be an Ethiopian one has to cease to be an Oromo. The two things were/are seen as incompatible.”³⁶ These measures constituted acts “of ethnocide—a term coined by the French after the [Second World] War to cover the destruction of a culture without killing off its bearers—and also qualify as genocide.”³⁷

It is this type of inhumanity that caused Ernest Gellner to describe Ethiopia as “a prison-house of nations if ever there was one.”³⁸ The brazen disregard for Oromo political, economic, and cultural rights continued unabated and in some ways paved the way for the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974, which brought young military officers to power.

Tyranny, Ethnocide, and Destruction of Identity: The Period of Military Rule, 1974–91

The military regime, known as the Derg, assumed de facto control of government on 28 June 1974, promising a bloodless revolution. The promise heightened Oromo aspirations to regain their land, political rights, human dignity, and equality. According to René Lefort, the fear

of an Oromo uprising and the desire to prevent it from happening forced the military regime into such radical measures as the land redistribution proclamation of 1975.³⁹ The regime's efforts to placate the Oromo, however, did not arrest the inexorable rise of the Oromo political awakening, which led to the establishment of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in 1974. However, it did not take long for the Derg to shed Oromo blood. In August 1974, under the pretext of fighting against a dozen OLF guerrilla fighters, the Ethiopian military regime sent more than 1,000 soldiers and ten tanks. They suddenly attacked unarmed Oromo peasants in Chercher (Eastern Ethiopia), killing several women, children, and men including Ellemo Qiltu, leader of the small guerrilla movement.⁴⁰ In April 1975, the Derg executed Colonel Hailu Regassa and General Tadesse Birru, a symbol of Oromo nationalism and the embodiment of the Oromo aspiration for equality, after three hours of secret trial and buried them the same day in a secret grave.⁴¹ This was the Derg's "justice" at its best.

That the Derg was determined to destroy Oromo nationalism by killing its leaders became evident in April 1976. Hundreds of Oromo peasants were massacred in the provinces of Kaffa, Illu-Abbadora, Arsi, Bale, and Harerge. This was the first time in the twentieth century that Oromos in six provinces were attacked simultaneously. One study noted:

Of all the criminal massacres from March 1975 to April 1976, the most revolting and racially inspired massacre was one conducted in Sidamo province against the Gujji Oromo. In November and December 1975, Major Takkala Wolde, the administrator of Arero *awraja* (district), together with Major Ketema Aytenfisu . . . caused a major public outcry by burning alive a number of Oromo peasants and their leaders. During their two months campaign of "pacification," they unleashed wanton destruction of [people] and property.⁴²

It is estimated that within the two months, more than 10,000 unarmed and defenseless Oromo men, women, and children were displaced and many among them were killed in Sidamo province. The decision to carry out these atrocities was probably made at the highest level

of government. When news of the massacre and the burning of peasant villages reached the Ethiopian capital, where large diplomatic and expatriate communities existed, the Ethiopian military regime became embarrassed and “punished” the culprits. The district administrator was hanged and Major Ketema Aytenfisu was expelled from membership of the Derg, but he was in fact rewarded with a better paying job and more benefits as a staff member in the palace administration.

During the Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977, when the regular Somali army invaded the Ogaden and occupied the town of Jijiga, Ethiopian administration collapsed everywhere in Harerge province. The demoralized, disgraced, frustrated, and defeated Ethiopian army, police, and bureaucracy blamed their defeat on Oromo farmers who allegedly acted as a Trojan horse for the invading Somali forces. Oromo farmers were made the convenient scapegoat for the army and the Amhara administration, in an effort to repair their damaged morale and pride. In the process, thousands of Oromos were imprisoned and killed. Many more fled their homes, seeking refuge in the countries adjoining Harerge province.

In 1977, in an irony of history, the Amhara landlords, who in 1974 opposed the revolution, became its ardent defenders and protectors. The Amhara landlords were quick to punish Oromo peasants for their support of the revolution. In 1978 alone, it is estimated that many thousands of Oromo peasants were killed in Harerge province and many more were massacred in Bale, Arsi, and Sidamo. In a manner that is reminiscent of Menelik’s punishing conquests, the military regime adopted a scorched-earth policy against the Oromo. In 1978,

looting and massacre became the lot of the Oromo peasants. In this revenge of history, it was not so much the events of the twentieth century that seemed to reassert themselves but the ferocious spirit of the era of Menelik’s colonization. The Amhara landlords seemed to be looking back nostalgically to the time of Menelik’s conquest when their forefathers looted and plundered the Oromo peasants as they liked.⁴³

Following the war, hundreds of thousands of Oromos who escaped death were forced to flee to refugee camps in the neighboring countries

of Somalia, Djibouti, and Kenya. About 6 million internally displaced people, half of whom were Oromos in the regions of Bale, Arsi, and Sidamo, were herded like cattle into “protected hamlets” that were called peasant villages. Farmers were forced to abandon their homesteads and move to sites chosen by the government. Within a few years, the military regime had “uprooted and regrouped over 8 million Oromo farmers into the so-called ‘new villages,’ a euphemism for concentration camps where Oromo labor and resources [were] totally controlled and dominated by the military regime.”⁴⁴

Behind the systematic destruction of Oromo human and material resources was the devious scheme of emptying the most valuable Oromo land to make room for northern settlers. In the mid-1980s, the regime started a program of resettling 3 million northerners in the south, mainly in Oromia. This was done ostensibly to rehabilitate drought and famine victims from northern Ethiopia, but the actual purpose was to alter the demographic makeup of Oromia. The government’s massive schemes of villagization of peasants, collectivization of their produce, and resettlement of northern farmers in the south had the more immediate benefit for the government of controlling the movements of Oromo farmers and preventing them from providing support to the OLF guerrillas in the region.

The Ethiopian military regime targeted the small number of educated Oromo for liquidation, accusing them of the unspecified crime of “narrow nationalism.” Even the most basic manifestation of Oromo national aspirations was declared a major enemy of the revolution. Increasingly, “Under the pretext of liquidating narrow nationalists ‘or anti-unity elements,’ anyone who possessed an elementary sense of Oromo national dignity, anyone concerned with the fate of Oromo culture, language and history . . . became subject to revolutionary measures, a euphemism for instant death.”⁴⁵ The indiscriminate killing had the political goal of depriving the Oromo of an educated leadership.

For 17 years, the Oromo suffered under a brutal military dictatorship. It is believed that hundreds of thousands⁴⁶ of Oromo farmers lost their lives between 1974 and 1991, not to mention the millions who were internally displaced and the thousands who were scattered as refugees in many parts of the world. When the authors of sorrow and destruction

were overthrown in May 1991, there was a sigh of relief and hope for a better future.

Hegemony, Violence, and State Terrorism: The “Democracy” Period, 1991–2002

Following the overthrow of the Derg, the OLF and other Oromo organizations participated in a national conference that discussed the future of Ethiopia and drafted a program of transition toward a democratic order. The OLF coauthored the Transitional Charter of the new Ethiopian government with the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Forces (EPRDF), the coalition of the various ethnic organizations affiliated with the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). Then the OLF joined the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), which some described “as a coalition government representing three main interests: the Oromo interest, the Amhara interest, and the Tigrayan interest, with others . . . being considered important but secondary.”⁴⁷

For the first time in modern Ethiopian history, the principle of respect for human rights was popularized in Ethiopia and enshrined in the Transitional Charter of July 1991. The charter was not a perfect document, but it represented a commitment to the human and democratic rights of the people. As a program of transition to democratic rule, the charter adopted four principles and aimed “to transform the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized nations. These four components were the supremacy of the law, power-sharing, the construction of a multi-national democratic state, and the establishment of just peace.”⁴⁸

Dashed Hopes

According to Leenco Lata, an OLF leader who participated in the national conference, the charter was not a proclamation or a decree of the new rulers. Rather, it was a product of the deliberations of a number of political groups and foreign observers. It was approved as “the rules governing the Transitional Government and as the supreme law of the land for the transitional period.”⁴⁹ The charter aimed at ending “an era

of subjugation and oppression, and replacing it by a new chapter of ‘freedom, equal rights and self-determination’ of all peoples.”⁵⁰

The charter was thus meant to democratize the unitary Ethiopian state, which was dominated by one ethnic group, and replace it with a federal system in which all citizens enjoyed equal rights. By initiating such a profound transformation, it was hoped that the Ethiopian state would be reconstituted into a legitimate authority that would be the ultimate decision-making body of the government in regard to maintaining law and order and enhancing societal cohesion.⁵¹ The future was uncertain, but the prevailing mood among the Oromo was one of optimism. The Transitional Charter incorporated major principles of political and human rights and the transitional period was expected to be the beginning of a process of democratization of the state and empowerment of the people. For several months after the establishment of the Transitional Government, there was a marked improvement in the human rights situation in Ethiopia.

In 1991, the stage was set for a gradual transition from authoritarian misrule to democratic governance. It appeared as if a tolerant political culture was developing in Ethiopia. Various organizations, including the TPLF and the OLF, worked together harmoniously. For a brief period there seemed to be a window of opportunity for the establishment of a democratic system that would promote human rights, economic development, and social welfare to foster peace and stability while also fostering cooperation and mutual understanding among the peoples of Ethiopia. However, before the first anniversary of the TGE, democracy was abandoned and autocratic rule was reinstated.

The hope for democratic rights was dashed as TPLF leaders implemented policies they had designed long before their military victory to maintain the colonial status quo in Oromia. First of all, the TPLF’s creation of the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO) led to the destruction of independent Oromo organizations and genuine Oromo representation.⁵² All independent Oromo organizations placed their hope in the promise of a democratic election. The leaders of the TPLF, however, fully aware that free and fair elections would not result in the election of their candidates in Oromo areas, resorted to manipulating the electoral process to establish Tigrayan political supremacy.⁵³ In 1992,

the TPLF-dominated Transitional Government closed more than 200 OLF campaign offices and imprisoned and killed hundreds of OLF cadres and supporters ahead of the elections scheduled to take place on 21 June 1992.⁵⁴ The electoral process itself, as documented by international observers, was marred by irregularities and outright fraud.⁵⁵ As the result of the harassment, imprisonment, and even killing of supporters of independent organizations, the OLF and several other independent organizations were forced to pull out of the election and the Transitional Government. For all the fanfare and democratic trappings, the 1992 elections were designed merely to give a veneer of legitimacy to the TPLF's rule.⁵⁶ While the sham elections brought them a measure of international recognition, internally, Ethiopia's leaders missed, in the words of one observer,

a golden opportunity to set their country on a new course. . . . The promise of a chance to choose their leaders and manage their own affairs had aroused great popular excitement for this thing called democracy. Millions of Ethiopians registered to vote, often despite huge obstacles because they believed that this time it was going to be different. What they got was more of the same, broken promises, betrayed hopes and yet another permutation of age-old imperial intrigue.⁵⁷

The Oromo people's hope for a peaceful devolution of power was shattered by the TPLF's blatant power-grab. The promise of the democratic experiment turned into the installation of TPLF hegemony in Ethiopia. What was billed as the first multiparty election turned into the inaugural ceremony of a single-party system.⁵⁸ The TPLF leaders learned from the episode that they can disregard international opinion and manipulate elections shamelessly. The same tactics were repeated during the elections of 1994, 1995, and 2000. The TPLF leaders used their military to keep their ill-gotten power, destroy all the independent Oromo organizations, and wage war in Oromia, and they justified their actions as a defense of "Revolutionary Democracy," an ideology invented by TPLF leaders to define the political opposition as enemies of democracy liable to be eliminated.⁵⁹

In contrast to previous Ethiopian regimes, the current government nominally subscribes to human rights conventions. The government claims that the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights was used as a guideline in drafting its democratic constitution, which affirmed respect for basic human rights, including the right to life and to the security and liberty of the person, the prohibition of inhumane treatment, and the right to equality, privacy, and freedom of expression.⁶⁰ Interestingly, 32 of the 106 articles of the new Ethiopian Constitution “consist of detailed human rights provisions. The Constitution also provides for the incorporation into domestic law of all the international human rights treaties to which Ethiopia is a party.”⁶¹ The regime admits that, in the past, torture and other cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatments were rampant in Ethiopia. Thousands of people were physically and morally disabled and the rule of law was ignored.⁶² This implies that, under the current government, there is the rule of law and people are not tortured, nor extrajudicially executed, nor subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment. On the basis of articles in its Constitution, the Ethiopian government leaders claimed that the “evil days” of human rights violations in Ethiopia were over.

Yet, according to Amnesty International, Ethiopia is one of two African states that have failed to ratify the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights.⁶³ Human Rights Watch/Africa states that the Ethiopian government verbally maintains that it is committed to enforcing human rights standards, but willfully violates these standards.⁶⁴ Other observers have concluded that, while the Ethiopian government admits that human rights violations do occur in Ethiopia, it blames the violations on local officials who are said to be unaware of human rights standards and on “the lack of a democratic culture and history of respect for human rights.”⁶⁵

Suppressing Dissent

The TPLF/EPRDF leadership seems not to care about the notion that an important mark of a democratic government is the extent to which it allows opposition groups to organize freely and contend for power. In

1993, several elected members were expelled from the Council of Representatives in a flagrant violation of the parliamentary immunity rights enshrined in the 1991 Transitional Charter. According to Tecola Hagos, “There were twenty-one ethnic political organizations that formed the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). As of October 1993, there were not more than seven of the liberation movement’s founding members of the Charter, which means the coalition government has collapsed.”⁶⁶

Democracy is based to a large extent on voluntary compliance with the rules of the political process.⁶⁷ The TPLF/EPRDF leaders not only control the government-run mass media but also use state resources to create surrogate organizations known, ironically, as people’s democratic organizations (PDOs). Each ostensibly representing a specific ethnic group, these organizations are under the firm grip of the TPLF and they do only the bidding of their patron. Members of these organizations are attracted and sustained by material rewards as well as political patronage. As I have written elsewhere,

To refuse to join the PDO means disloyalty to the new political class, which entails exclusion from a leadership role, expulsion from jobs and outright imprisonment. . . . In the face of strong opposition by various organizations and rejection by the vast majority of the peoples of Ethiopia, the new political class relies heavily on the instrument of despotic power which it monopolizes.⁶⁸

The complete absence of three important aspects of democracy, namely, competition, participation, and civil and political liberties, attests to the absence of respect for human rights in Ethiopia.⁶⁹ But independent organizations such as the OLF, which in any free election could pose a formidable political challenge to the TPLF/EPRDF leadership, were marginalized, suppressed, and prevented from emerging as a political force.

Since 1993, freedom of expression has been under attack in Ethiopia. According to Tecola Hagos,

The abuse inflicted by the current Ethiopian government against free speech and free press is not limited to only written or spoken criticisms, but goes much deeper in its far reaching, neurotic restrictions. In exactly the same manner as the former brutal government of Mengistu dealt with dissenting voices, imagined or otherwise, the current Ethiopian government has detained a very popular singer, Elfinesh Keno because her songs, which praise Oromo culture and heritage, are believed by the government to be seditious.⁷⁰

The EPRDF regime used the 1992 Press Law to restrict press rights in practice and employed legal mechanisms to bankrupt newspapers and to imprison journalists. In October 1997, the independent newspaper *Urjii*, edited by Oromo journalists who regularly reported human rights violations in Oromia, was closed.⁷¹ In fact, after October 1997, not a single private Oromo newspaper or magazine in the Latin alphabet was produced in Ethiopia. Only two Amharic newspapers, the circulation of which was limited to Addis Ababa, dealt with issues relating to the Oromo. Moti Biyya, a political correspondent with *Urjii*, was detained in September 1997, while Garoma Bekele, then the general manager of *Urjii*, Solomon Namarra, the acting editor in chief, and his assistant, Tesfay Dheressa, were taken from their offices and held incommunicado without legal representation or family visitation rights.⁷²

To be sure, the TPLF leaders allow the limited circulation of newspapers in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, “because it is good for the show of democracy. They keep the press for the consumption of the international community.”⁷³ However, 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 in the Latin alphabet 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, which started and ended in 1997 when its editors were detained by the government. Since 2002, there has not been a single newspaper or magazine that has expressed the legitimate political opinions of the Oromo in Ethiopia.

Terrorizing Opposition

One indication of the extent to which the TPLF/EPRDF leaders can go in violating human rights is the bloated size of its security apparatus, which is reportedly larger than that of the former military regime.⁷⁴ Human rights violations in Oromia increased after the OLF, a political organization that had coauthored the Transitional Charter and participated in governing the country, was suddenly forced out of the Transitional Government in 1992. Innocent Oromo were herded into concentration camps where they were tortured and killed on charges of sympathizing with the OLF or reflecting views akin to those of the OLF.⁷⁵ Hundreds of Oromo nationals were detained and told not to attend meetings of the Maccaa-Tuulama Association, the oldest Oromo self-help association. Worse still, in an attack on the very essence of being Oromo, they were warned against singing Oromo songs.⁷⁶ The number of Oromo detainees was so large that expansion of the prisons became a necessity. From 1992 to 1994, there were four major concentration camps in Oromia, namely, Hurso in Harerge, Agarfa in Bale, Blate in Sidamo, and Didessa in Wallaga. The TPLF-dominated government admitted that 22,000 OLF members and supporters were detained in these camps.⁷⁷ However, according to Susan Pollack, a Scottish nurse who conducted fieldwork in Ethiopia, the numbers of detainees ranged from 45,000 to 50,000, “including peasants and farmers, . . . civil servants, and nine doctors [who had no] permission to help the sick. A total of about 3,000 people died from malaria, malnutrition and diarrhea diseases between the four camps during this time [1992–1994].”⁷⁸

On 25 March 1992, in the town of Watar in Harerge province, TPLF/EPRDF soldiers fired, using live ammunition, on about 30,000 peaceful demonstrators, killing 92 people and wounding over 300, most of whom later died in the hospital.⁷⁹ Atrocities were perpetrated in several places in Oromia including the town of Awaday in Harerge and Meta Robii in Shewa. Susan Pollack reported that

[I]n Arsi, in September 1995, in a district called Siree, a military unit of TPLF/EPRDF soldiers went to two villages and indiscriminately burnt houses and killed 70 civilians. A similar incident in the same month occurred in Wabbie, a Sub-District in the

Bale region. Many houses were burnt and many peasants were arrested. . . . The communities were accused of withholding information and protecting the OLF.⁸⁰

In 1996, human rights violations in Ethiopia were widespread, according to the reports of several human rights organizations.⁸¹ The Oromia Support Group reported hundreds of extrajudicial killings and several “disappearances” of civilian opponents of the government, and thousands of civilians imprisoned, tortured, and raped in secret detention centers.⁸² The worst atrocity of 1996 was the killing of more than 1,000 Oromos in Borana. In October and November of that year,

TPLF soldiers never spared even pregnant women or youth; they killed several pregnant women and hundreds of Oromo children between the ages of 12 and 16. . . . a seven-month pregnant woman in Robe, Bale, was arrested and beaten. . . . She miscarried and later died in custody. When relatives went to claim her body, they were told to replace the remains with a living relative. When asked to explain their actions, the TPLF soldiers said she died with OLF objectives still stuck in her brain and we could not get what we wanted from her.⁸³

While human rights organizations reported rampant violations, the report of the U.S. State Department described the situation merely as a flaw in an emergent democratic system. In 1996, the report stated that “The judiciary is weak and overburdened, but showed increased signs of independence.”⁸⁴ What the report did not mention is that courageous judges who tried to show signs of independence were summarily dealt with. For instance, in 1996, 28 Oromo law school graduates and experienced judges who refused to join OPDO were dismissed from their jobs. They included four Federal Supreme Court judges and 24 Oromia Supreme Court and regional high court judges.⁸⁵ The report also claimed that “The Federal government can not yet protect Constitutional rights at the regional level, especially when local authorities are unwilling or unable to do so.”⁸⁶ It failed to mention that regional authorities do not have the power to operate autonomously. Regional and local authorities

who naïvely confronted the TPLF authorities even on minor points were either dismissed from their positions or imprisoned and, in some cases, executed. For instance, OPDO Central Committee members Mokonnen Fite and Bayu Gurmu were killed by government agents in September 1997. While Hassen Ali,⁸⁷ then president of Oromia, and other OPDO Central Committee members met in the palace to discuss the killings of the above-mentioned individuals, Alemayehu Desalegn, OPDO Central Committee member and the head of Oromia Finance, was killed in the palace. His death was explained away as a “suicide.”⁸⁸

According to the Federal Constitution, the Oromia Regional State was supposed to enjoy autonomy in local matters. But federal authorities interfere in all aspects of administration. Hassen Ali states that he “saw and experienced clearly that the Regional Government of Oromia cannot stop the arbitrary arrests, torture, extra-judicial killings and disappearances . . . of innocent people in the face of the ruling party’s police and security forces.”⁸⁹ The rank and file members of OPDO arguably should have been safe from the regime’s persecution. However, in November 1997, a major purge within OPDO resulted in the incarceration of over 20,000 members, some of whom are probably still in detention. In short, it can be established conclusively that the Federal Government did not protect the rights enshrined in its own Constitution.

The repressive practices and the authoritarian disposition of the TPLF leaders were initially hidden from view, owing to their high-sounding rhetoric about respect for human rights and their use of democratic trappings to conceal their undemocratic practices. Most of the killings in Oromia and other parts of Ethiopia took place in rural areas, enabling the perpetrators to hide their atrocities from the international community and human rights organizations. According to one report,

The further one moves away from the capital city . . . the more the torture becomes crude, barbaric, dehumanizing and widespread. There is no rule of law that governs the members of the ruling party in a leadership position. A party officer . . . can do anything . . . against another fellow human being. The soul and body of an individual in a community is totally in the hands of these party

officers to be dealt with in any form as the ruling party officer's desire.⁹⁰

The TPLF government did not admit that its party cadres and military officers violated human rights with impunity. However, the U.S. Department of State's annual report for 2000 states that there were 7,500 detainees, most of whom were suspected OLF supporters or guerrilla fighters.⁹¹ The Ethiopian Human Rights Council also published the names of ten thousand political detainees, none of whom has had their day in court.⁹² These figures presumably did not include Oromo political prisoners, who were held in around 50 secret detention centers scattered all over Oromia.⁹³ In spite of the publicly known facts, the government denied the existence of any political prisoners in Ethiopia, on the basis of a distinction it made between terrorists who had committed specific crimes and political prisoners.

The government insisted that the thousands of prisoners languishing in its jails were not political prisoners but criminals held for their roles in terrorist activities. However, the government's law enforcement rationale does not stand up to close scrutiny. On 8 May 1997, an unarmed man, Assefa Maru, acting chairman of the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) and member of the board of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRC) was shot dead while walking to his office. The government-run media reported "that the police had shot the leader of a notorious terrorist group at his home while he was trying to escape arrest."⁹⁴ Shortly thereafter, an anonymous caller told his office friends "that Assefa Maru had been killed in a car accident and his body could be collected from Menelik II Hospital. EHRC staff saw bullet wounds in his head and chest."⁹⁵ The Ethiopian United Patriotic Front, the organization to which the victim allegedly belonged, was accused of carrying out terrorist bombings in Addis Ababa. Months later, on 8 October 1997, government security men shot dead three unarmed Oromos, namely, Terefe Qumbi, Captain Gudissa Annisa, and Tesfaya Kumsissa. The explanation for their execution was that they were members of "an OLF cell which was responsible for the bombings in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, earlier this year."⁹⁶ Al-Ittihad al Islamiya, a Somali-based Islamic opposition

group, then took responsibility for the bombings. In retaliation, Ethiopian forces attacked Al-Ittihad bases inside Somalia.⁹⁷ Thus, Al-Ittihad was attacked for the same bombings for which Assefa Maru had been shot dead and three alleged OLF members had been killed. Obviously, the term “terrorist” was being used as a “catch all, implicate all” means of reprisal against opponents of the government.⁹⁸

Disturbing Trends

The violations of human rights in Oromia exhibit discernible trends. In the first instance, the TPLF appears determined to destroy all independent Oromo leaders and organizations in an effort to remove any obstacle to its desire to control the resources of Oromia. Hassen Ali describes the situation in Oromia in the following terms:

The TPLF soldiers and its members are law unto themselves. Only what they say and what they want is implemented in Oromia to the general exclusion of Oromo interests or wishes. . . . Although Oromia is autonomous in name, the government soldiers and secret service agents have total power to do whatever they want in Oromia. They imprison, torture, or kill anyone, including OPDO members and our government employees without any due process of law. They have established several secret detention centers, where thousands of innocent people are kept for years without trial or charge. Federal Government soldiers, more appropriately the TPLF soldiers, are in practice above the law in Oromia.⁹⁹

Control of resources is not deemed effective as long as there is a viable opposition. The government attacked the nascent Oromo free press and civil society institutions, considering them the vehicles that nurture opposition. Given the raised hopes of Oromos in 1992, this was a disturbing development. In 1992, there were several magazines and newspapers in the Oromo language. Using its restrictive press law and other legal mechanisms, the government closed down all private Oromo newspapers and magazines. The Oromo Relief Association (ORA), a humanitarian organization established in 1979, was closed and its property

confiscated without compensation and without due process. The goal of the suppression of all independent Oromo organizations and the disappearance of the once vigorous private Oromo newspapers and magazines is to deprive the Oromo of any leadership and any voice in the affairs of their own country. As a result, today the Oromo “are not only oppressed but also handcuffed to move and mind-cuffed to think and speak by a system that best thrives in darkness and misinformation.”¹⁰⁰

A deadly cycle of eliminating all educated Oromo and the educational system that produced them constitutes another disturbing trend. To begin with, only a fraction of the Oromo population is educated. According to government sources, as late as 1995, only 20 percent and 12 percent of the children in Oromia were enrolled in primary and secondary schools, respectively. Out of an estimated population of over 25 million in Oromia, only 0.1 percent received university level education in 1994.¹⁰¹ Oromo students have a limited chance of progressing to the college or university level owing to the poor-quality education in Oromia that fails to equip them well for passing the college entrance examination. The TPLF regime made a conscious decision to leave Oromo children behind, out of the mainstream of modern education. Without education based on science and technology, it is not possible to create a democratic and prosperous society in Oromia. That Oromo students will lag behind their peers elsewhere in the country will have the long-term consequence of weakening Oromia’s capacity to fight against poverty, disease, and ignorance. The future of Oromo children will inevitably be as bleak as that of their forefathers, who lived under a crude and oppressive Ethiopian system.

One would expect that the individual families that try to eke out a miserable existence would be the only safe sector of Oromo society. But they were not spared collective punishment, an even more disturbing development of unpredictable repercussions. 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.¹⁰² 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.¹⁰³

Perhaps an even more ominous aspect of the attacks on Oromo human rights is the extension of the violence against Oromos beyond Ethiopia's borders. According to the Kenyan Human Rights Commission (KHRC), Ethiopian government soldiers carried out raids into Kenya, raids that involved "bombings, murder, rape and plunder of Borana Oromo and assassination of prominent elders suspected of supporting the OLF."¹⁰⁴ One Kenyan police officer gave the following statement to the KHRC:

I have personally been forced to cross the border to negotiate the release of abducted Kenyans which inevitably proves to be very difficult. Once a person is kidnapped or abducted he/she either disappears or we are forced to pay a fine for the release. In most cases we are not given a reason for the abduction but the general belief is that it is because of real or imagined support for the OLF.¹⁰⁵

Hussein Sora, a young Kenyan lawyer who compiled the KHRC report, was found dead after he accused the Ethiopian government of international terrorism. In March 2001, Ethiopian government soldiers reportedly killed 160 Oromo-speaking Kenyan nationals.¹⁰⁶ By its unprecedented action, the TPLF regime has geographically extended the violation of human rights and regionalized the egregious degradation of human life.

Thousands of Oromos fled to neighboring countries to escape the reach of the Ethiopian state. However, TPLF agents pursued Oromo refugees across the border and assassinated them in Djibouti,¹⁰⁷ Somalia, Kenya, the Sudan, and even South Africa. Oromo refugees who escaped the TPLF assassinations were repatriated to Ethiopia and many more died in transit. For instance, on 22 December 2000, 28 Oromo refugees died "from suffocation" or gunshot wounds they sustained as they broke

out of railway cars to escape asphyxiation during their repatriation to Ethiopia from Djibouti.¹⁰⁸ Once in Ethiopia, the repatriated refugees were subjected to long-term detention, torture, or execution.

The most disturbing development is that the TPLF's war on Oromo nationalism was expressed in *Hizbaawi Adera* or *The People's Trust*, the official quarterly of the ruling party. In this publication, the TPLF regime expressed significant fear of "narrow nationalism," which the government asserted was stronger in Oromia than anywhere else in Ethiopia.¹⁰⁹ *Hizbaawi Adera* is replete with references to Oromo intellectuals, businessmen, and women as constituting the problem of narrow nationalism in Oromia.¹¹⁰ All this is designed to demonize Oromo business, cultural, and political leaders, and to prepare a political indictment of the Oromo elite as the enemy of "Revolutionary Democracy." *Hizbaawi Adera* argues that:

Higher echelon intellectuals and big business people are narrow-minded. Their aspiration is to become a ruling class only to serve their own self-interests. They are so greedy that they want to "eat" alone. As they are desperate, they can be violent. So we should always remain vigilant. Unless these narrow nationalists are eliminated, democracy and development cannot be achieved in Ethiopia.¹¹¹

The upshot of *Hizbaawi Adera's* contention is that, in order to destroy Oromo nationalism, it is necessary to isolate, expose, and crush the Oromo intellectuals and wealthy businessmen who nurture it. The murders and disappearances of Oromo intellectuals and the detention of members of the Maccaa-Tuulama Association and the Human Rights League is part of the implementation of this policy.¹¹²

A policy that singles out for destruction the brightest and the best of Oromo society is a precursor to a "genocide-in-the-making." In a four-part critique of *Hizbaawi Adera*, Moti Biyya deciphered the TPLF plan. He wrote as follows:

Who are narrow nationalists? Those who rule by force of arms?
Those who plunder others' property?' Those who imprison, torture

and kill for the purpose of consolidating their ethnic hegemony?’ The real narrow nationalists are the TPLF leaders, who believe that they deserve to rule, they are entitled to rule, they have the right to rule and others have the obligation to be ruled. Those who combine capitalist greed with Stalinist cruelty, Machiavellian intrigue with Marx’s sharp tongue, American diplomacy with Emperor Yohannes’s desire for revenge are appearing in their true color. . . . They are speaking loud and clear about their plan for destroying Oromo intellectuals and rich merchants. The planned destruction will be undertaken in the name of building capitalism.¹¹³

As of 2001, the TPLF government dropped all pretensions to a commitment to building a multinational Ethiopia. It turned against its own surrogate parties, through which it had hoped to reach and placate the various nations within Ethiopia. On 23 January 2001, Kuma Demeksa, the president of Oromia and secretary-general of OPDO, together with Chala Hordofa, Diriba Arkona, and Yasin Hussein, all Central Committee members of OPDO, and several others were suspended from the party and removed from their positions in the Oromia government. Some of the OPDO leaders escaped from Ethiopia to save their lives, including Almaz Mako, the Speaker of the House of Federation and second in line of succession to the presidency of Ethiopia. In her press release on 13 August 2001, Almaz Mako stated:

The EPRDF government has brought untold miseries and sufferings on the Oromo people. [The] OPDO is . . . reduced to a rubber stamp for TPLF rule over Oromia. . . . Oromo resources are mobilized and looted to develop Tigray. . . . The ruling party is categorically rejected by the entire Oromo nation and survives only on the back of its repressive security forces.¹¹⁴

If Oromos in the highest positions of power are not safe, the rank and file cannot expect their rights to be respected. Ominously, once a group of people is made a target of unrestrained abuse and human rights violations, one cannot help but see a looming danger of genocide.

Conclusion

The overthrowing of the Derg in 1991 marked the end of an era. A century of Amhara domination ended, and hopes were raised that a government that respected the rule of law and the human rights of its citizens would be established in Ethiopia. For the first time, a political document, the Transitional Charter, drafted by Ethiopian politicians, declared that “Individual human rights shall be respected fully, and without any limitation whatsoever.”¹¹⁵ The hope raised by this article was quickly dashed. Since 1992, the government of Ethiopia has consistently shown utter disregard for basic human rights. Political rights have been trampled on. There have never been free and fair elections in Ethiopia, and there is a total lack of institutions to make government policies depend on the will of the people. Consequently, today the human rights record of the TPLF regime is said to be worse than that of the previous military regime.¹¹⁶

Despite widespread violations of human rights, the TPLF-dominated Ethiopian government has been adept at concealing its dismal record. Its success has in fact emboldened it to the point of blatantly disregarding the principles of human rights that it had endorsed. It seems that the international community has finally awakened to the abysmal human rights record of the regime, which Western governments had earlier hailed as a model of the emerging good leadership in Africa. Even the U.S. Department of State, which in other instances blamed provincial and local officials and absolved the central government of any measure of accountability, was critical of the government of Meles Zenawi in its *Country Report on Human Rights Practice in Ethiopia for 2001*.¹¹⁷ On 18 September 1997, the European Parliament condemned the Ethiopian government’s human rights record.¹¹⁸ Amnesty International also exposed the tactics of the TPLF regime with regard to freedom of expression.¹¹⁹

Much damage has been done to the spirit, property, and humanity of the Oromo people. Like its predecessors, the present Ethiopian government has consistently denied the Oromos basic civil and political rights and has failed to provide them with equal protection under the law. Furthermore, the TPLF regime has crippled, if not destroyed, all

independent Oromo organizations. Deprived of vigorous democratic leadership and denied freedom of expression in their language, the Oromo have been subjected to relentless attacks on their nationalism and their right to self-rule in their own regional state.

If the TPLF leaders are serious about respecting the human rights of all citizens, they must start by liberating themselves from the mentality of terrorizing the Oromo into submission and desist from using their military muscle to defend their power, destroy rival organizations, and wage war in Oromia. Second, the TPLF leaders should open their minds to the benefits of cooperating with independent Oromo organizations and join hands in building a better future for the peoples of Ethiopia. The regime's popularization of the concept of federalism is commendable, though there has never been a genuine attempt to implement it. The TPLF leaders must realize that federalism is based on "federal principles grown out of the idea that free people can freely enter into lasting yet limited political association to achieve common ends and protect certain rights while preserving their respective integrity."¹²⁰ The TPLF leaders' rhetoric of a "federal republic of Ethiopia" can become a reality only if the Oromo and other peoples in Ethiopia attain their freedom and govern themselves freely and autonomously in their regions without outside interference. Federalism, without the freedom of the federated entities, is a device for the perpetuation of patrimonial rule.

Finally, the TPLF regime's establishment of an independent human rights commission and ombudsman in May 1998 is commendable. But the establishment of such an entity only helps to maintain the façade of a democratic order unless it is allowed to function properly. If the regime is serious about respecting human rights, it must grant legality to the Oromo Human Rights League and allow the Oromia Support Group, Sidama Concern, the Ogaden Somali Human Rights Committee, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch/Africa, and other human rights organizations to operate freely in Ethiopia. It is the only practical way to improve the regime's abysmal human rights record.

Notes

1. This article is culled from several papers I presented at African Studies Association meetings and Oromo Studies Association annual conferences in 1997, 1998, and 1999. I have also drawn heavily on some of my published articles, including “Ethiopia: Missed Opportunities for Peaceful Democratic Process,” in *State Building and Democratization in Africa, Faith, Hope and Realities*, ed. Kidane Mengisteab and Cyril Daddieh (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 233–60.
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3. T. R. H. Davenport, *The Transfer of Power in South Africa* (Claremont, South Africa: David Philip Publishers, 1998), vii.
4. Mohammed Hassen, “The Militarization of the Ethiopian State and the Oromo,” in *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on the Horn of Africa* (New York: Marsden Reproductions, 1990), 98.
5. These include the works produced by Oromo writers, the Oromia Support Group, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch/Africa, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the International Commission of Jurors, the Oromo Human Rights League, the U.S. Department of State country reports on human rights practices in Ethiopia, and several other sources.
6. Alexander De Waal, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia: An Africa Watch Report* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 1.
7. Lord Lytton, *The Stolen Report* (London: McDonald, 1966), 160.
8. Abbas Haji, “Menelik’s Conquest as the Genesis of Ethiopian Crisis: A Case of the Arsi Oromo,” *The Oromo Commentary* 4, no. 2 (1994): 21.
9. Mekuria Bulcha, *The Making of the Oromo Diaspora: A Historical Sociology of Forced Migration* (Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers, 2002), 3.
10. Martial de Salviac, *Un peuple antique au pays de Ménélík: les Galla (dit d'origine Gauloise), grande nation africaine* (Paris: H. Ousdin, 1901), 307.
11. Haji, “Ménélik’s Conquest as the Genesis of Ethiopian Crisis,” 21.
12. Donaldson A. Smith, “Expedition through Somaliland to Lake Rudolf,” *Geographical Journal* 7 (1896): 123–27.
13. De Salviac, *Un peuple antique au pays de Ménélík*, 86–87, 278.
14. Alexander Bulatovich, *Ethiopia through Russian Eyes: Country in Transition, 1896–1898*, trans. and ed. Richard Seltzer (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2000), 68–69.
15. Bairu Tafla, ed., *Asma Giyorgis and His Work: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Sawa* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden GMBH, 1987), 134–35.

16. Karl Knutsson, *Authority and Change: A Study of the Kallu Institution among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia* (Gothenburg, Sweden: Etnografesha Museet, 1967), 147–55.
17. Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analysis and Case Studies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 8.
18. *Ibid.*, 30.
19. *Ibid.*, 28.
20. Addis Hiwet, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution* (London, 1975), 4.
21. Raphael Lemkin, who first coined the term, outlines the salient features of genocide. See Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government Proposals for Redress* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), 92.
22. Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia, 1844–1913* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 73.
23. Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800–1935* (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1968), 75. See also H. Darley, *Slavery and Ivory in Abyssinia* (London: H. F. and G. Witherby, 1926), 197–99, 201.
24. Getahun Delibo, “Emperor Menelik’s Ethiopia, 1865–1916: National Unification or Amhara Communal Domination” (PhD diss., Howard University, 1974) 219.
25. Timothy D. Fernyhough, “Serfs, Slaves and Shefta: Modes of Production in Southern Ethiopia from the Late Nineteenth Century to 1941” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1986), 188.
26. Lāpeso Delébo, *Ya’Ityopyā yagabār šer’eätenā gemer kâpitalizm, 1900–1966* (Addis Ababa: Artistic Press, 1991): 213–14, 219.
27. Abdul Mejid Hussein, “The Political Economy of the Ethiopian Famine,” in *Rehab: Drought, and Famine in Ethiopia*, ed. Abdul Mejid Hussein (London: International African Institute, 1976), 14. See also Baissa Lamu, “Contending Nationalisms in the Ethiopian Empire State and the Oromo Struggle for Self-Determination,” in *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse*, ed. Asafa Jalata (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1998), 86.
28. Fernyhough, “Serfs, Slaves and Shefta,” 181–82; Darley, *Slavery and Ivory in Abyssinia*, 130–31.
29. Mohammed Hassen, “A Short History of Oromo Colonial Experience: Colonial Consolidation and Resistance, 1935–2000, Part Two,” *Journal of Oromo Studies* 7, nos. 1 and 2 (July 2000): 117–18. See also John Markakis and Naga Ayella, eds., *Nationalism and Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 55–60.
30. Donald Donham, “Old Abyssinia and the New Ethiopian Empire: Themes in Social History,” in *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in*

- History and Social Anthropology*, ed. Donald Donham and Wendy James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 13.
31. Teshale Tibebe, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia, 1896–1974* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1995), 18.
 32. Edmond Keller, “Regime Change and Ethno-Regionalism in Ethiopia: The Case of the Oromo,” in *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy*, ed. Asafa Jalata (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1998), 121.
 33. Mekuria Bulcha, “Language, Ethnic Identity and Nationalism in Ethiopia,” *The Oromo Commentary* 3, no. 2 (1993): 9–11.
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 35. Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History, 1570–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), 3.
 36. Bulcha, “Language, Ethnic Identity and Nationalism,” 11.
 37. Quoted in Chalk and Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide*, 9.
 38. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 85.
 39. René Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?* (London: Zed Press, 1981), 110.
 40. For an examination of Ethiopian human rights during the imperial period, see Norman J. Singer, “Ethiopia: Human Rights, 1948–1978,” in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Robert L. Hess (Chicago: Office of Publications Services, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, 1978), 672.
 41. Tadesse Birru was the military officer who provided Nelson Mandela with his first military training in 1962 near Addis Ababa. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston: Little Brown Company, 1994), 362–63.
 42. Mohammed Hassen and Richard Greenfield, “The Oromo Nation and Its Resistance to Amhara Colonial Administrations,” in *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Somali Studies*, ed. Hussein M. Adam and Charles L. Gesheker (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 591.
 43. *Ibid.*, 596.
 44. Jason Clay, Sandra Steingraber, and Peter Niggli, *The Spoils of Famine: Ethiopian Famine Policy and Peasant Agriculture* (Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival, 1988), 115–24.
 45. Hassen and Greenfield, “The Oromo Nation and Its Resistance to Amhara Colonial Administrations,” 596.
 46. According to one source, “an estimated 2 million or 7 percent of the 1974 population [of Ethiopia] were lost during the period 1974–91.” *Federal*

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47. Tecola Hagos, *Democratization in Ethiopia (1991–1994)? A Personal View* (Cambridge, MA: Kherera Publishers, 1995), 97.
 48. Leenco Lata, “The Making and Unmaking of Ethiopia’s Transitional Charter,” in *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopia Discourse*, ed. Asafa Jalata, (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1998), 56.
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 50. “The Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia,” *Negarit Gazetta* (22 July 1991): 1.
 51. William Zartman, “Introduction: Causing the Problem of State Collapse,” in *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. William Zartman (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 5.
 52. Leenco Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization or Disintegration* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1999), 59.
 53. Keller, “Regime Change and Ethno-Regionalism in Ethiopia,” 110, 114.
 54. *Oromo Bulletin: A Communiqué Published by the Oromo Center* (Washington, DC: Oromo Center, 1992), 1–10.
 55. P. McDonald, *Testimony Prepared for Presentation to the House of Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs*, U.S. House of Representatives (Unpublished, 1992), 2–9.
 56. Paulos Milkias, “The Great Purge and Ideological Paradox in Contemporary Ethiopian Politics,” *Horn of Africa*, 19, nos. 1 and 2 (2001): 61–62.
 57. Gilbert Kulick, “Ethiopia’s Hollow Election Observing Forms,” *Foreign Service Journal* 69: 9 (September 1992): 41–45.
 58. Marina Ottaway, “Democratization in Collapsed States,” in *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. William Zartman (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 238–39.
 59. Milkias, “The Great Purge and Ideological Paradox in Contemporary Ethiopian Politics,” 76.
 60. *Ethiopian Herald* (Addis Ababa), 2 May 1998.
 61. Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Report on Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1997), 3.
 62. *Ethiopian Herald* (Addis Ababa), 4 May 1998.
 63. *Amnesty International Report 1997: Ethiopia*. <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aireport/ar97/AFR25.htm>.
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65. Trevor Trueman, "Oromia Support Group Press Release," no. 21, (January–February 1998), 17.
66. Hagos, *Democratization in Ethiopia*, 97.
67. Ottaway, "Democratization in Collapsed States," 235.
68. Mohammed Hassen, "Ethiopia: Missed Opportunities for Peaceful Process," in *State Building and Democratization in Africa: Faith, Hope and Realities*, ed. Kidane Mengisteab and Cyril Daddieh (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 246.
69. George Sorenson, *Democracy and Democratization: Dilemmas in World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993), 12.
70. Hagos, "Democratization in Ethiopia," 135–36.
71. Milkias, "The Great Purge and Ideological Paradox in Contemporary Ethiopian Politics," 55–56.
72. Trueman, "Oromia Support Group Press Release," no. 21, (January–February 1998), 6.
73. *Christian Science Monitor* 23 (April 1998) Section A, 3.
74. It has been reported that "The capital outlay and expenditure for the security of the current Ethiopian government and the leadership is almost double that of the previous government." Tecola Hagos, *Demystifying Political Thought, Power, and Economic Development* (Washington, DC: Khepera Publishers, 1999), 50–51.
75. Mekuria Bulcha, "A Note on the New Reign of Terror in Ethiopia," *The Oromo Commentary* 6, no. 1 (1996): 3. See also MaKau Wa Mutua, *Preface to Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights in Ethiopia: Rhetoric and Practice* (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Human Rights Council, 1995).
76. Trevor Trueman, "Oromia Support Group Press Release," no. 22, (March 1998), 10; Hagos, *Democratization*, 135–36.
77. Susan Pollack, "Ethiopia: Human Tragedy in the Making," *The Oromo Commentary* 5, no. 1 (1996), 12.
78. *Ibid.*
79. *Oromo Bulletin* (1992), 1–2.
80. Pollack, "Ethiopia: Human Tragedy," 10.
81. Examples of extrajudicial killings in Addis Ababa abound, but a few could be cited here to make the point. Ebbisa Addunya, an Oromo nationalist singer, was killed in his house by government security men. Wako Tola, an Oromo nationalist and a teacher at Sanford School, died while in custody on suspicion that he supported the OLF: "Oromia Support Group Press Release" (May–June 1997), 1. *Ethiopian Review* (May–June 1997): 17–18. Haile Kebede, a prominent lawyer and vocal critic of the TPLF/EPRDF regime, was killed in cold blood. *Ethiopian Review* (July–August 1997). On 8 October 1997, Terefe Qumbii, Director of Properties and Services at the

- Oromia High Court, and Captain Gudissa Annisa and Tesfaye Kumsissa were shot in Addis Ababa: “Oromia Support Group Press Release,” no. 20 (November–December 1997), 2.
82. “Oromia Support Group Press Release,” no. 20 (November–December 1997), 2.
83. Asafa Jalata, “U.S. Sponsored Ethiopian Democracy and State Terrorism,” in *Crisis and Terrorism in the Horn of Africa: Autopsy of Democracy, Human Rights and Freedom*, ed. Pietro Toggia et al. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000): 79–80; “Oromia Support Group Press Release,” no. 19 (September 1997), 8.
84. U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practice in Ethiopia for 2000* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 23 February 2001), 1.
85. *Gadado: Publication of Oromo Prisoners of War* 26 (1996), 1.
86. U.S. Department of State, *Country Report 2000*, 1.
87. Hassen Ali was president of Oromia (1992–95) and vice president (1995–98) and Central Committee member of the ruling EPRDF Party. Since the summer of 1998, Hassen Ali has been living in the United States.
88. Hassen Ali, quoted in *Sagalee Haaraa*, no. 28 (May–July 1999), 3.
89. *Ibid.*
90. *For the Record* (published quarterly by the Alliance for Peace, Democracy and Defense of Human Rights in Ethiopia) 2, no. 2 (1996): 7.
91. U.S. Department of State, *Country Report 2000*, 7.
92. *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 April 1998, Section A, 3.
93. Pollack, “Human Tragedy,” 12.
94. Oromia Support Group Press Release (May/June 1997), 6.
95. *Ibid.*
96. “Oromia Support Group Press Release,” no. 20 (November–December 1997), 2.
97. Trevor Trueman and Sue Pollack, “Human Rights Violations in Ethiopia,” in *Oromo Struggle for Self-Determination and International Political Environment: Proceedings of the Oromo Studies Association*, ed. Guluma Gemedda and Bichaka Fayissa (July 1998), 16.
98. *Ibid.*
99. Hassen Ali, quoted in *Sagalee Haaraa* (November 1999), 1–2.
100. Seyoum Hameso, “The Sidama Perspective on the Coalition of the Oppressed Nations,” *Oromo Struggle for Self-Determination and International Political Environment: Proceedings of the Oromo Studies Association*, 39.
101. *Graduation Bulletin Oromo Graduates of Finfinnee University of 1993–1994* (1994), 30.
102. Pollack, “Human Tragedy,” 10.

103. Dechassa Lemessa and Matthew Perault, "Forest Fires in Ethiopia: Reflections on Socio-Economic and Environmental Effects of the Fires in 2000," *Journal of Oromo Studies* 9, nos. 1 and 2 (July 2002): 96–130.
104. *Kenyan Human Rights Commission Report*, quoted in "Oromia Support Group Press Release," (January–February 1997), 2.
105. *Ibid.*
106. *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), 16 February 2001.
107. Bruma Fossati et al., *Documentation: The New Rulers of Ethiopia and the Persecution of the Oromo* (Frankfurt am Main: Evangelischer Pressedientu, 1997), 1–56; *Sagalee Haaraa*, no. 30 (February 2000), 1–3.
108. *Sagalee Haaraa*, no. 37 (July 2002), 8.
109. Narrow nationalism is defined as "all the views and actions of the higher echelon intellectuals and big business people whose ambitions are to monopolize power and impose their will on the people of their own nation/nationality." *Hizbaawi Adera* 4, no. 7 (December 1996–February 1997). I am deeply indebted to Professor Tilahun Gamta for his translation of this issue of *Hizbaawi Adera*.
110. *Hizbaawi Adera* 4, no. 7: 11.
111. *Ibid.*
112. *Sagalee Haaraa*, no. 21 (January–February 1998), 6.
113. Moti Biyya, in *Urjii* (Addis Ababa), 16 July 1997, 22 July 1997, 29 July 1997, and 5 August 1997.
114. Almaz Mako, press release (13 August 2001), 1.
115. The Transitional Charter, appendix in Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads*, 256.
116. Hagos, *Democratization*, 173; MaKau Wa Mutua, *Preface to Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights in Ethiopia*, 7.
117. U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practice in Ethiopia for 2001* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 4 March 2002), 1–2.
118. "European Parliament Condemns Human rights Violations in Ethiopia," unpublished two page statement (18 September 1997), 1-2.
119. Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Journalist in Prison Press Freedom under Attack* (AI Index: AFR 25/10/98, April 1998), 1 and 2. [http://web.amnesty.org/library/pdf/AFR250101998ENGLISH/\\$File/AFR2501098.pdf](http://web.amnesty.org/library/pdf/AFR250101998ENGLISH/$File/AFR2501098.pdf).
120. Daniel Elazar, *Exploring Federalism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 331.