

OROMO TRANSNATIONALISM IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C. METROPOLITAN AREA:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT, CHALLENGES, AND PROSPECTS OF
GAINING AN INSTITUTIONAL FOOTING

By

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ABSTRACT

OROMO TRANSNATIONALISM IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C. METROPOLITAN AREA: AN EXAMINATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT, CHALLENGES, AND PROSPECTS OF GAINING AN INSTITUTIONAL FOOTING

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Due to the global nature of capital flows and advances in communication and transportation technologies, a growing number of immigrants live transnational lives. The ability to maintain a connection to the homeland influences the nature and character of immigrant institutions and identity formation practices in the host country. This dissertation is a historically informed ethnographic account that explores the development, transnational character, and tensions associated with ethnic institution building and discourse production among self-identified Oromos active in ethnic institutions in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

The Oromo, Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, were conquered and incorporated into Ethiopia at the end of the 19th century. Ethiopia established an ethnically based hierarchical system of administration to govern the newly conquered areas where bureaucrats and settlers, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and the school system, spread Ethiopian national culture and disparaged the cultural practices of conquered groups like the Oromo. However, starting in 1963, mass forms of resistance emerged as educated Oromos established the Macha Tulema Self Help Association in order to challenge the cultural domination and ethnic degradation the Oromo had experienced since incorporation. During the same year, Oromo peasants in Bale and the surrounding areas waged what would become a seven year long struggle against the state to end economic exploitation and land alienation. By the end of the 1960s, the Ethiopian government

responded to these movements with persecution which led to the exodus of many Oromos into neighboring countries in the Horn of Africa. However, by the early 1970s, a small number of Oromo students and activists, with the means to travel further afield, took up residence in Western cities like Washington, D.C.

Due to the freedom of speech and association living abroad guaranteed, members of the Oromo diaspora in Washington, D.C., working through ethnic institutions like the Union of Oromos in North America, the Oromo Studies Association, and the Oromo Center, helped to insert the Oromo into the history of the Horn of Africa, developed solutions for how past grievances were to be reconciled, and attempted to chart the political future of the Oromo people. Further, diaspora institutions like the Oromo Church serve as sites where aspects of Oromo culture are enacted, contested, reformulated and passed on from one generation to the next.

Though Oromo ethnic institutions in Washington, D.C. have had some success in establishing an institutional footing in the city, they have experienced challenges. The immigrant experience in a given host country is not monolithic; the city of settlement shapes and constrains immigrant institutional and individual practice. Washington, D.C. has a diverse ethno-racial terrain that has been challenging for the Oromo to navigate. The city has long been a historic site of African American settlement. Further, as a new immigrant gateway city, it is dominated by large numbers of Ethiopian immigrants that organize their increasingly powerful institutions using Ethiopian nationalism. Oromo institutions have had to craft an ethno-national identity for themselves taking into account the city's preexisting ethnic and racial order. This dissertation highlights the complex and novel ways in which the Oromo of Washington, D.C., through the establishment of transnational institutions, helped to create important discursive and institutional spaces of representation for the Oromo in the diaspora and in Ethiopia.

To my family and to all of those that helped and guided me as if they were kin.

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

This dissertation is a historically informed ethnographic account that explores the development, transnational character, and tensions associated with ethnic institution building and discourse production among self-identified Oromos in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Since the early 1970s, Oromo immigrants active in ethnic institutions in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area have played an important role in the transnational struggle to define and exert control over what it means to be an Oromo in Ethiopia and in the diaspora. In order to understand these issues, this dissertation seeks to investigate the following questions:

1. What were the social, cultural, and political factors that contributed to Oromo immigration to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area? Why did the Oromo in the city establish ethnic-specific institutions? What functions do ethnic institutions serve for the Oromo community?
2. In what ways did Oromo immigrants in the United States, particularly those in Washington, D.C., contribute to the academic and political discourse produced about the Oromo?
3. How does place of settlement shape institutional development? In what ways has Washington, D.C. both constrained and provided opportunities for Oromo community organizations, entrepreneurs, and individuals to publically assert Oromo ethnicity in the city?

Exigence

The Oromo are the largest ethnic group in the Horn of Africa. They make up nearly 35% of Ethiopia's population according to the country's latest census in 2007.¹ The Oromo are concentrated in the southern half of Ethiopia and they also reside in northern Kenya (Aguilar 1998). Traditionally, depending on their location, they practiced pastoralism in the lowlands or a mix of animal husbandry and agriculture in the highlands. Though there were some regional and religious differences, many Oromo groups shared a similar origin myth, the *gada* age-grade system of political organization, and a mutually intelligible language.

Starting in the 1970s, due to ethnic persecution in Ethiopia and economic inequality, a number of Oromos fled the country and settled in major cities in Europe, North America, and in the Middle East. I became interested in the Oromo because my father was a member of this early generation of students that immigrated to the United States nearly 40 years ago. My father is an Oromo from Ethiopia and my mother is African American. Though this is the case, I was raised by my mother and had very little contact with my father's side of the family because they all resided in Ethiopia. As a child, Ethiopia did not figure heavily into the early conversations I had with my father. When my father did speak of his homeland, the narratives he shared centered on Ethiopian history, humorous stories about his family, and his childhood antics. During our early exchanges, he simply identified himself as an Ethiopian. He identified in this way for a number of reasons. First, he correctly assumed that during my youth, nationality and race were the limits of my experience with identity in America. In addition, when he left Ethiopia in the 1970s, expressing an Oromo ethnic identity publically was still viewed with disdain by many people in and outside of Ethiopia. Finally, during his early years in the United

¹ *Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census* (2008) Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Population Census Commission. The Oromo percentage of the population could actually be higher, some Oromo activists claim that the census under counted the Oromo.

States, the Ethiopian immigrant community in the Philadelphia contained few Oromos. Because he came to the United States at a relatively young age, he assimilated quickly into the local environment which was populated by African Americans and a small number of Ethiopians from northern ethnic groups.

Though I grew up immersed in African American culture, I longed to know more about my father's heritage. At the age of 13, I began to correspond with my father's family by letter. During our communications, I shared information about myself, they provided basic information about my family there, and we exchanged periodic pleasantries and photographs. Years later, it was likely due to my desire to explore my connections to Africa in more depth that led me to anthropology. As an undergraduate at Pennsylvania State University, I majored in anthropology with a concentration in archaeology and a minor in African studies. While there, I studied with an African historian with a background in the Horn and Central Africa and under her guidance, I took a number of independent study courses to explore my interests in the pre and early history of the Horn of Africa.

One day while talking to my advisor, she asked me about my father's ethnic background. Embarrassed, I admitted that I did not know which ethnic group he came from. My advisor then asked my father's name and home region and replied, "I bet he is an Oromo!" Though I was aware of the Oromo and the other major ethnic groups in the country, I had been so focused on the Ethiopian past that I failed to ask this key question about my own present. The next time I spoke with my father, I asked him about his ethnicity and he affirmed that he was indeed an Oromo. When I asked why he never told me about this part of his identity, he simply replied, "You never asked". Learning about my father's ethnic background anchored the nebulous side of my identity and connected me not just to a place, but to a specific group. On the other hand, I

felt ambivalent about his response because though it was a revelation, it left me with many more questions, the answers to which, I would have to find on my own.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, this episode proved to be a turning point in my life. I shifted my academic focus from Ethiopia's deep past to the nation's modern period. In reading about the conflict associated with ethnicity in Ethiopia, I gained a greater insight into my father's response. I learned that his reply was in part informed by his own historically situated experience as a young man from Ethiopia, of Oromo descent, living in a city which lacked a strong Oromo community until two decades after his arrival. I came to understand that Oromos living in the diaspora are not monolithic and do not speak with one voice, though they often seek to do so; Oromo orientations toward issues of ethnicity vary. In the course of my work, it became apparent that the degree to which people of Oromo heritage identify as Oromos and engage in Oromo specific ethnic activities in the diaspora is situational and varies based on the city of settlement and the concentration of co-ethnics in the city, their region of origin, generation, and religious affiliation among other factors.

As an undergraduate and even early into graduate school, the vast majority of Ethiopians I encountered were not Oromo. When I asked my Ethiopian acquaintances about the Oromo, I was often given one of three responses: some stated they had an Oromo family member or that they had Oromo friends, but had little useful knowledge about the group to share, others were irritated and asked why I was interested in destructive ethnic politics, and still others ignored my questions and changed the subject. As a result, because I had yet to meet many Oromos during my studies, my preliminary investigations into Oromo issues were heavily mediated by print and digital discourse, much of which was produced in the diaspora.

Soon after the turn of the millennium, I travelled to Ethiopia and was finally able to interact with Oromos living in Ethiopia. As a student at Addis Ababa University, I spent most of my time in the capital city. Many of the Oromos I met there were assimilated or behaved as such in the settings in which I encountered them. On the other hand, some of my Oromo classmates were actually conducting research on their own communities and on a number of occasions they explained many important aspects of Oromo history and culture to me over coffee.

For many Oromos living in Ethiopia, discussing ethnicity, in unsanctioned ways, was and still is dangerous. Though the Oromo are the largest ethnic group in the country, they have been a political minority since their incorporation. Starting in the 1970s and continuing up to the present moment, a small subset of the Oromo population has been engaged in a liberation struggle against the Ethiopian government through the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The Ethiopian government has taken strong action against the OLF and Oromos suspected of collaborating with the group are harassed, jailed, and even disappeared. Though Ethiopia practices ethnic federalism and cultural aspects of Oromo identity are given nominal respect, Oromo discourse on ethnicity in the country is circumscribed by the government. As a result, for the duration of my stay in Ethiopia, I observed what I could about ethnic interaction, had informal conversations about ethnicity with members of the major ethnic groups in the country, and gathered hard to find resources related to my interests. Based on my assessment of the control over internal dissent that characterized life in the country and the tensions associated with ethnicity, I decided to focus my dissertation research on Oromo immigrants living in the United States. I just had to find them.

My quest to understand Oromo ethnic identity was a meandering one that led not simply to Ethiopia, but back to the United States and to the heart of anthropological debates about the

role globalization and discourse production play in shaping the identity formation processes of today's immigrants. Upon my return to the United States, I began to search for Oromos to connect with in Philadelphia and discovered that there was, at that time, an Oromo church in the city. The church was small and was comprised mostly of family members and friends. Those in the church told me that if I wanted to study Oromo immigrants, I should look to Washington, D.C. because the Oromo community there was older and larger in size than the one in the Philadelphia area. The Oromos in Washington, D.C. introduced me to a whole new world of Oromo practice that had previously been invisible to me. During my dissertation research, I learned how Oromos in the area tried to establish institutions in the city in order to maintain their ethnic traditions in the diaspora; in addition, I became aware of the important and early contributions Oromos living in Washington, D.C. made to the production of knowledge about the Oromo.

During my research, Oromo active in ethnic institutions stressed the role ethnic persecution and a history of economic, political, and academic exclusion played in the birth of the Oromo diaspora in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Because of ethnic and political persecution in Ethiopia, migration became a survival strategy for dissenting Oromo individuals and political groups. Starting in 1970s, a small group of Oromo activists and academics living abroad became the de-facto public voice of Oromo dissent globally. The institutions the Oromo developed in the diaspora and their associated discourses not only played a role in advocating for the cessation of human rights abuses against Oromos in Ethiopia, they also helped to define the Oromo in novel ways, not then possible in the homeland.

Prior to the birth of Oromo diaspora institutions, much of the material written about the Oromo was written by non-Oromos and was characterized by negative portrayals. Early

academic accounts often depicted the Oromo as newcomers to the nation, as primitives, and as a potentially destabilizing force that in Ethiopia. In Washington, D.C., activist scholars like Sisai Ibssa and his associates played a pioneering role in establishing early ethnic institutions from which Oromo voices challenged academic accounts that had cast them in stereotypical ways since the 16th century. Washington, D.C.'s Oromos also played an important role in advocating for and supporting the development of the Oromo Studies Association. The Oromo Studies Association was founded to provide Oromo academics and observers a forum in which to expand the knowledge available on the Oromo. A major achievement of the Oromo Studies Association has been the establishment of the *Journal of Oromo Studies*. The journal provided Oromo intellectuals a site from which to contest the ways they have been represented within Ethiopian studies; further, the journal gave Oromo academics the ability to publish materials on aspects of Oromo history and culture that had been ignored.

In the diaspora, the Oromo Church has become an important transnational institution. The Oromo Church acts as kind of refuge for newcomers that both facilitates their incorporation into American society and also helps them connect with co-religionists from the home country. Those that become active in the church gain civic skills that can be used to advance and support the Oromo community in the host and the home countries. The church also functions as an agent of socialization and facilitates the production of a Christianized variant of Oromoness or *Oromumma* in the diaspora. It acts as a space where aspects of Oromo culture are enacted, contested, reformulated and passed on from one generation to the next.

Establishing ethnic institutions in Washington, D.C. has been challenging. Though Oromo ethnic institutions in Washington, D.C. have had some success in lobbying on behalf of Oromos in Ethiopia, establishing an institutional footing, and maintaining an Oromo presence in

the city, Oromo institutional practice has also been constrained. Washington, D.C. has a diverse ethno-racial terrain that has been challenging for the Oromo to navigate. The city has long been a historic site of African American settlement. Further, as a new immigrant gateway city, it is dominated by large numbers of Ethiopian immigrants that organize their institutions using Ethiopian nationalism. Unlike their more numerous and visible counterparts in the Twin Cities, Oromo institutions in the city have had to craft an identity for themselves taking into account the city's preexisting ethnic and racial order. In Washington D.C., Ethiopian actors, their discourse about the nation, and their institutions and businesses have become dominant because of their larger numbers, better education, and more plentiful resources. Further, official and unofficial government policies in Ethiopia circumscribe the types of transnational activities in which the Oromo can engage. Asserting an Oromo identity has become a politicized act in Ethiopian and abroad and these tensions inform Oromo ethnic institution building and identity formation in the diaspora.

Dissertation Organization

The homeland and contested notions of history figured heavily into the narratives my participants shared with me about themselves. As a result, in order to capture the profoundly dialogic and transnational texture of the Oromo experience I witnessed, each chapter moves between Washington, D.C., Oromia, the past, and the present. Chapter one serves to contextualize the dissertation. I start the chapter with a discussion of Oromo origins and discuss the popular, yet troublesome, representations of the Oromo that were later critiqued by Oromo academics in the diaspora. Some of the first literatures produced by Oromos living in Washington, D.C. sought to disrupt the hegemony of many of the well worn tropes contained in the popular academic accounts discussed in the section. In this chapter, I also bring together

transnationalism, theories on ethnicity, and a concern with discourse to my exploration of Oromo institution building in the diaspora. At the end of chapter one, I discuss issues of methodology and positionality. Chapter two serves to introduce the reader to the current Oromo community in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area by highlighting the specific ways in which self-identified Oromos in the city live out the tensions and contestations of being Oromo in multicultural Washington, D.C. This chapter acts as a snapshot of inter-ethnic relations in the city. The major ethnic conflicts, whose origin and history will be unpacked in chapter three, will be introduced here. This chapter highlights the complex ways in which race, nation, ethnicity, and class articulate and influence Oromos in the city. I discuss the constraints associated with Oromo transnationalism by looking at the ways in which the creation of Ethiopia, in Washington, D.C., has circumscribed Oromo ethnic place making practices. Chapter three is historical in nature and charts the Ethiopian origin of the ethnic conflicts discussed in the previous chapter. Here, I discuss the social and political climate out of which the Oromo diaspora emerged. The chapter is important because in conducting research on the Oromo, the history of their pre-conquest culture and their post-conquest incorporation figured heavily into their identity narratives. Oftentimes, the Oromo I interviewed (to varying degrees depending on what prompted their migration) link their personal and family histories and life stories to the broader history of Oromo disenfranchisement and the enduring discrimination Oromo faced as political minorities in Ethiopia. Memories of past glories, the subsequent loss of independence, and the exploitation that resulted (from what many deem to be colonization) spawned widespread Oromo resistance starting in the 1963, which ultimately led to persecution and migration. In chapter four, I discuss the formation of Oromo student and academic organizations in the diaspora. Here, I discuss the contributions Oromos in Washington, D.C. made to the birth of Oromo

studies by looking at the ways in Oromo institutions, through their early protest literature, acted as one of the earliest critical voices against Oromo domination and exploitation. I use the Washington, D.C. Oromo contribution to and support for the emic production of knowledge about the Oromo as an entry point into a broader discussion about the essential role that members of the Oromo diaspora more generally played in the establishment Oromo Studies through their founding of institutions like Oromo Studies Association. In chapter five, I discuss the origin, development, and intra and inter ethnic tensions associated with an Oromo Church in Washington, D.C. This chapter highlights the conflict associated with community diversification and immigrant incorporation. I also look at the role the church plays and would like to play in the socialization process of the second generation. I conclude the dissertation with a general discussion of my research findings and my contributions to the literature. I also discuss the study's limitations and future research.

CHAPTER 1

THE OROMO IN ETHIOPIAN STUDIES, THEORY, AND METHOD

By the end of 19th century, the vast majority of the Oromo, in the Horn of Africa, were conquered by what was then Abyssinia; in addition, a smaller number were colonized by the British in Kenya. With the exception of a small assimilated and assimilating Oromo elite, the newly incorporated Oromo became a subordinate ethnic minority in the empire. The southern conquered areas were integrated into the nation using a system of land tenancy whereby the state gave armed settlers from the north grants of land and tribute paying local peasants as payment for their participation in conquest. This system set the stage for economic inequality and ethnic discrimination in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia's control of the conquered areas during the early days of expansion was maintained by way of force. In time, the exploitation and forced assimilation of conquered groups was supported by a set of discourses about difference that justified Ethiopia's practices toward incorporated minorities like the Oromo. Prior to the Ethiopian revolution of 1974, Ethiopia sought to reduce the ethnic diversity that characterized the nation by pursuing an official and unofficial policy of assimilation that privileged the Semitic speaking culture of the Amhara and Tigray core. Paul Silverstein's (2004) discussion of the ways in which French national identity was constructed through its juxtaposition with its colony Algeria can be applied to the ways in which Ethiopia's national image has been constructed relative to its conquered periphery. Those in the conquered areas were forced to assimilate in order become upwardly mobile. Those that did not assimilate or that lacked the opportunity to take on the language and culture of the conquering groups were looked upon with suspicion and remained impoverished and exploited. "Policies of assimilation are thus always balanced by nostalgic practices of

cultural preservation... infranational and national categories of belonging remain in a permanent dialectical relationship” (10). One way to gain insight into this process is to examine the ways in which the nation’s ethnic diversity was represented within the academic literature on Ethiopia. In the section below, I interrogate some of the most popular and widely circulated portrayals of the Oromo within Ethiopian studies in order to highlight the ways in which the nation was constructed through difference.

Ethiopia and the Origin of the Oromo

Disagreements about origins, descent, and classification are at the heart of conflicts over meaning and space that characterized Oromo-Ethiopian relations. Country names have attached genealogies and histories and play a role in informing how the nation is articulated (Slack 1996), the location of its borders, who has the legitimacy to control the state and its resources, and who belongs within its boundaries. All of these factors contribute to Ethiopia’s present conjuncture. The origin and date of the Oromo presence within Ethiopia will be used to highlight the complexity of the intersections and divergences associated with ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia. The conventional view is that the Oromo entered the periphery of Abyssinia’s orbit during the 16th century. Debates about the origin of the Oromo are informed by an account about the Oromo written by an Ethiopian priest named Abba Bahrey during the 16th century. In the *History of the Galla*, Bahrey claimed that the Oromo attacked Bale (an area in southeastern Ethiopia) in 1522; as a result, this date was taken by academics as the date the Oromo entered into Ethiopian history. Oromo historian Mohammed Hassen (1990) states that though Oromo populations began to rapidly expand during 16th century, the Oromo had occupied huge swatches of what is now Ethiopia before their storied migrations of the 16th century.

The confusion about the origin of the Oromo is due in part to the varied ways in which Ethiopia has been imagined and conceptualized historically. Ethiopia is a term derived from the Greek words *aithein* to burn, kindle, shine and *ops* eyes or face which combines to mean the land of the burnt faces.² V.Y. Mudimbe asserts the following about the term Ethiopia:

Ethiopia, on the one hand, referred to any dark skinned person, and then on the other hand, it referred to a specific set of places that at times were named and at times not. This haziness was seized upon by the Abyssinians.... In any case, it is clear that by the first century that continent as a whole have been divided into three main parts by geographers: Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia, the last corresponding more or less to sub-Saharan Africa (1994: 27).

From the beginning of its use, Ethiopia contained within it a duality and ambiguity that at once indicated a named place in Sudan and on the other hand, it was also used by the Greeks to designate any area occupied by dark skinned people in Africa, Arabia or India. According to Ethiopian historian Bahru Zewde:

Abyssinia and Ethiopia have been used interchangeably. The first term was derived from Habashat, the name of one Semitic group that settled in northern Ethiopia in the first millennium BC. The term Habasha [Abyssinia is the European rendering of the term] was most commonly used by Arab writers when they referred to the area...Ethiopians themselves to this day also tend to prefer it [Habasha] in informal references to themselves...Beginning in the fourth century, however, the Aksumite kings began to designate themselves as rulers of Ethiopia. The term thus came to have the regional focus it has kept today (1998:44).

According to Oromo scholar Asafa Jalata, “ancient Ethiopia and the current Abyssinian Empire [contemporary Ethiopia] are not geographically coterminous, but the latter occupies a subset of the area of the former” (2008: 4). By the end of the 19th century, Abyssinia expanded southward and doubled in size. After expansion, Abyssinia made a symbolic move to formally change its name to Ethiopia. This was a crucial act because it lent legitimacy to the empire’s expansion into areas outside of her actual pre-conquest borders; with Abyssinia’s name change, the state linked the Ethiopia of old mentioned in Biblical and Greek sources with Abyssinia in order to justify expansion as simply the reclamation of lost territory. This merging of Abyssinia with

² Oxford English Dictionary Online: <http://www.oed.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/view/Entry/64772>

Ethiopia served to cast the Oromos as newcomers to areas they had either once controlled or to which they were indigenous.

Though the Oromo have resided within Ethiopia's current boundaries prior to 16th century, it is difficult to provide a detailed account of the Oromo past because the Oromo did not have a written language until well into the 20th century. Further, because Ethiopianists were more interested in studying Semitic speaking groups, the Cushitic, Nilotic, and Omotic groups of the country have been understudied by historians and archaeologists. However, there is evidence that the Oromos resided within the central highlands around places like Shawa in the 9th and 10th centuries and by the 14th century they had a presence around Lake Tana (Greenfeild et al 1980). Ethiopian historian Harold Marcus even concedes, "some Oromo may have attained the high plateaus as early as the late thirteenth century" (2002: 35).

In order to reconstruct the past of the Oromo and related peoples, scholars have begun to use oral histories (Demie 1998:161). The many Oromo oral histories claim that the original Oromo homeland was located around the southern highlands, near Bale (Haberland 1963:772). For many Oromo groups, Liban in particular is considered their place of origin. It is from Liban that the Borana Oromo and other Eastern Cushitic speaking groups like the Konso and the Burji etc. separated from one another and spread across the southern half of Ethiopia (Amborn and Schubert 2006). Though the Oromo and related groups lived in the southern highlands near Bale, Cushitic language speakers have resided in Ethiopia for millennia. According to Chris Ehret, a world recognized expert on the early linguist history of East Africa, states that "considerations of linguistic geography indicate that early Cushitic expansions were centered on the northern and eastern sides of highland zone of Ethiopia" (Ehret 1979:162). As a result,

Oromos scholars (Hassen 1990; Jalata 2008; Holcomb and Ibssa 1990) assert they should not be viewed as newcomers, but as people who have a legitimate stake in the nation.

Who are the “Galla”?

The *History of the Galla* was not only used to establish Oromo origins, it also contained core tropes (the Oromo as newcomer, the Oromo as primitive, and the Oromo as destructive force) that subsequently came to typify academic and nonacademic discourse on the Oromo well into the 20th century. Before discussing the *History of the Galla*, an explanation of the term “Galla” is necessary. The word “Galla” was a pejorative terms used to refer to the Oromo in academic, political, and popular discourse up to the early 1970s. The term was associated with savagery, backwardness, heathen religious practices, and foreignness. The Oromo have long identified themselves as Oromo or by regional clan names like the Arsi or Borana Oromo among many others.

The origin of the term is obscure. The word *gal* means to enter in both the Oromo and Somali languages. According to Oromo historian Daniel Ayana, the negative connotation and pejorative sense of the word can be traced to contests over land between neighboring pastoral Oromo and Somali communities that occurred with the spread of Islam. In the past, the Oromos practiced a form of social adoption whereby individuals and even whole communities could be incorporated into an Oromo group. The term *galtu*, in the Borana dialect of the Oromo language refers to “someone who is assimilated or to became a part of another group...Here the meaning of the word *galtu* hinged on inclusivity” (Ayane 2010: 6-7). On the other hand, with the spread of Islam in the region, the Somali began to use the term to refer to Somali unbelievers. Later they applied the term to non-Somali groups like the Oromo and other minorities that had rejected Islam. “Galla” initially designated a more general referent, but in time it came to be associated

with the Oromo. This pejorative sense of the word spread across the landscape into Abyssinia.

According to Jan Hultin, the term “Galla” is intimately tied to ethnic classifications and insider/outsider distinctions.

In this scholarly genre the cultural representations of the Ethiopian self and the Galla other can be read as an expression of a frontier caste ideology (Kopytoff 1997; Triulzi 1994) about the hierarchical arrangements of social roles and categories in the Ethiopian empire. The representations of the ‘Galla’ in the Great Narrative of Ethiopia is part of a generalized and diffuse discourse about the right of northern settlers to rule over Oromo tenants and other ‘invisible’ peoples under Shoaan domination (1996:82).

To be referred to as a “Galla” in Ethiopian society was to face exclusion. The term has a complex and partially obscured history and meaning. What the term signifies varies based on the period of its use, the place of its use, and for and by whom it was used.³

Oromo Portrayals within Ethiopian Studies

The *History of the Galla* has been very influential in Ethiopian studies in part because it was one of the first documents to describe the Oromo in detail. Though the text was mostly concerned with Oromo history and some aspects of Oromo culture, it depicted the Oromos as barbaric, foreign invaders of Abyssinia. The *History of the Galla* was a seminal text that helped to constitute the Oromo. Bahrey asserts the followings “I have begun to write the history of the Galla in order to make known the numbers of their tribe, their readiness to kill people, and the brutality of their manners” (Huntingford & Beckingham 1993: 44). The Oromo are depicted as having a less complex social organization and division of labor than the Abyssinians and hence a

³ Ziltelman (1996) highlights that depending on the context, the terms Oromo and “Galla” can both mean stranger. For instance, Oromo Muslims living in western Ethiopia in towns like Jimma did not want to be called Oromo, but preferred “Galla” to Oromo because the term was associated with traditional Oromo religion. Today being an Oromo is also associated with being different with regard to Ethiopian nationalism. Espousing an Oromo identity casts its adherent as people that reject Ethiopian nationalism and hence they can be viewed as outsiders by many within Ethiopia.

larger portion of the Oromo male population was involved in warfare than in Abyssinia. Further, Bahrey depicts the Oromo as savage warriors and highlights their purported ferocity.

Another early commentator on the Oromo was Manoel de Almeida, a Portuguese monk who visited Ethiopia and catalogued the sights and people he encountered during his stay in the country from 1622 to 1633 (Shinn et al. 2004: 287). Almeida represented the Oromo as a “scourge” and a ruin to the empire. Almeida viewed Oromo pastoralism with disdain because it did not produce agricultural surpluses that could be exploited by Abyssinia and because their mobility was an advantage to them in conflicts with Abyssinia. He claimed the Oromo were like brutal lions and tigers, ever ready to expand into Abyssinian and to consume the nation. A testament to their abilities as vicious warriors was the fact that though their numbers were small and they lacked firepower, they had the skills needed to defeat the larger and better armed Abyssinians. Almeida also alleged that the Oromo practiced infanticide en masse. Further, because Almeida lacked an adequate understanding of Oromo religion, he claimed the Oromo were worse than heathens because they were not overtly religious in ways that he could understand.

Even well into the 20th century, the Oromo were represented in negative ways. In 1960, Edward Ullendorff published *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to its Country and People*. The book was not as holistic as its title suggested in that Ullendorff dedicated most the bulk of its attention to the Semitic speaking ethnic groups in the country. He only briefly and dismissively discussed the Cushitic and Nilotic peoples of Ethiopia. He had this to say about the Oromo:

The Gallas had little to contribute to the Semitized civilization of Ethiopia; they possessed no significant material or intellectual culture, and their social organization differed considerably from that of the population among whom they settled. They were not the only the cause of the depressed state into which the country now sank, but they helped to prolong a situation from

which even a physically and spiritually exhausted Ethiopia might otherwise have been able to recover far more quickly (1965: 73)

Ullendorff conceived of the Oromo as a drain on Ethiopia and viewed them as partly responsible for the country's stagnation and lack of development.

The aforementioned depictions of the Oromo parallel Stuart Hall's work on 'the West and the Rest' (2008). Within many academic texts on Ethiopia, her Semitic speaking core was represented as a stand-in for Western civilization in Africa. Ethiopia is located at the nexus of a number of interlocking discourses on the Orient, the West, and Africa. Orientalism (Said 1978) informed many early accounts of Ethiopia.

A notion prevails of royal houses in Africa being ultimately validated by the natural power and virtue of patrilineal descent from the Near East, and therefore the benign fruit of a political appropriation (for which reads also racial seduction) of the passive primitive by the oriental sophisticate. The writings of novelists and autobiographical travelers most clearly inscribe this eastern-inspired vision of Ethiopia, but it also gives form to scholarly accounts (James 1990: 102).

Ethiopia does not qualify as Western compared to Europe, but on a continuum between the 'West and the Rest' in Africa, she is seen as more Western than her sub-Saharan neighbors by virtue of her Christianity, monarchy, and history of literacy. Ethiopia, like the West, has been constituted in juxtaposition to the 'Rest'/Africa in part due to her own valorization of hybridity via the ethnonym *Habesha*. Ethiopia came to be a system of representations produced out of a conjuncture between discourses associated with the Orient and Africa.

Greater Ethiopia and the Oromo

The Greater Ethiopia thesis, first presented by Donald Levin in his seminal work *Greater Ethiopia the Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (1974), has been a very powerful force within Ethiopian studies and politics. Levine defines Greater Ethiopia as follows:

Greater Ethiopia is a vast ecological area and historical arena in which kindred peoples have shared many traditions and interactions with one another for millennia...The present boundaries of the Ethiopian state roughly circumscribe the area in question, although some of the peoples and Greater Ethiopia now straddle the borders of Sudan, Kenya, Somalia, and French Territory of the Afars and Issas; that state boundaries coincide with ecological and ethnic realities here no more than elsewhere (2).

Levine states that Greater Ethiopia corresponds with modern Ethiopia's national boundaries. His notion of Greater Ethiopia as an enduring and long standing entity has been at the root of many conflicts between Ethiopia and her neighbors concerning issues of irredentism.⁴ Levine assumes that Ethiopia's current boundaries correspond to those of his primordial and mythical Greater Ethiopia. This thesis helped to justify modern Ethiopia's purported 3000 history and at the same time it helped to discredit conquered minority claims of colonization.

Levine's *Greater Ethiopia the Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (1974) was an attempt to insert formerly neglected ethnic groups into Ethiopia's national narrative in order to make the nation appear more inclusive. Levine's inclusion of formerly excluded groups was claimed by the author to be an improvement upon the Semitic-centered scholarship that had characterized much of the literature written on Ethiopia. It is my contention that though he dedicated more space in his account to the Oromo, he systematically constructed the Oromo as an uncivilized other and described the Oromo in ways that reinforce and justify their subordination to the Semitic core. Levine criticized anthropology for its particularism and relativism; however, anthropology was one of the few disciplines that actually studied the Oromo people and privileged Oromo culture as something worthy of study (Hinnant 1972, 1978; Legesse 1973; Lewis 1965).

⁴ Ethiopia has gone to war with Somalia and Eritrea concerning issues of territoriality. Further, the conflicts between the Oromo and Ethiopia are linked to this notion of *Greater Ethiopia* in part because the historical monarchy of Abyssinia conceives of itself as the original occupier of much of the Horn of Africa and the resurrection of the Solomonic dynasty in the reign of Emperor Menelik II was about reclaiming Ethiopia's lost territory on which the Oromo and other conquered groups lived.

Though the Oromo are a part of Levine's Greater Ethiopia, they are represented in negative ways in comparison to the Semitic speaking groups. In talking about Oromo contact with Abyssinia, Levine asserts the following:

The warfare between the Amhara and the Afar and Somali tribesmen under Gran [in the 16th century] was in some respects a clash between similar antagonists. Both were groups of Semitized Ethiopians, and adherents of Semitic religions and followers of political leaders who saw legitimacy through identification with Semitic ancestors. By contrast, the expansion of the Oromo represents a novel element in the politics of the empire –*the assertion of the pagan, purely African* [emphasis mine] (78).

What separates the Oromo from the other groups mentioned is that they were not adherents to a Semitic religion during the 16th century. If the Somali and Afar groups are related to the Oromo, then how are the Oromo more *purely African*? Levine's assertions harkens back to the Semitic-centric school that dominated Ethiopian studies which conceived of Ethiopia as an exceptional place in sub-Saharan African, in part, because its people and traditions were not viewed as fully African. What is left unsaid within a text can be just as important as what is articulated.

[Presuppositions] are a sort of halfway house between presence and absence...the distinction between what is explicit and what is implicit is of considerable importance in socio-cultural analysis. Analysis of implicit content can provide valuable insights into what is common sense. It always gives a way into ideological analysis of texts, for ideologies are generally implicit assumptions...the unsaid of a text, what it takes as a given, is taken as the already said elsewhere, the form in which a text is shaped and penetrated by (ideological) elements from domains prior to textual practice (Fairclough 1995: 6).

Levine need not explicitly call the Oromo primitive, but by juxtaposing the Semitic Amhara, Somali, and Afar with the purely African Oromo, his texts suggests as much. The Oromo of the region are represented as raw (Strauss 1969) and unadulterated Africans, not tempered by the Semitic influences of civilization.

Levine casts the Oromo as divided and lacking national and ethnic sentiment.

The question is whether one can indeed speak of a "Galla nation" as Rochet d'Hericourt and several others after him have done. If by nation one means a sizable group of people who have some sense of belonging to a single societal community by sharing important past experiences

and a common historic destiny, then the Galla do not constitute a nation, nor have they since their appearance as significant actors in the arena of greater Ethiopia during the sixteenth century (135).

In spite of their advantaged position, the Galla never spawned a movement for Oromo nationalism. No one arose to unite the dispersed Galla people's behind a single standard and to assert Galla leadership on behalf of the new Ethiopian empire...The Galla were neither oriented toward political domination nor guided by a conception of a pan-ethnic, let alone multiethnic community. They quickly broke down into tribes and sub-tribe that spent as much times fighting one another as they did others (156).

The aforementioned quotes repeat widely held ideas about the Oromo circulating at the time.

Levine's assertions concerning Oromo ethnicity and nationalism are problematic and flawed.

First, the Oromo speak a mutually intelligible language. Further, if we use Levine's own claim that the Oromo only began to separate from one another in the 16th century, then the various Oromo groups have not been separated long enough from one another to exhibit radical differentiation. In addition, Levine ignored the segmentary lineage system that characterized Cushitic and neighboring Nilotic speaking groups in the region, there is situational fission and fusion among related groups depending on the perceived threat (Lewis 1961; Evan Pritchard 1940). Levine also ignored Oromo attempts at federation during the time of Menelik and during the 20th century (Clay and Holcomb 1986: 17; Keller 1995: 626; Gebissa 2009). Finally, the Oromo have elaborate genealogies that link the various Oromo groups to a common set of ancestors. At the time in which Levine wrote this text, Oromo ethno-nationalism was just emerging and he likely made the aforementioned statement to discredit these rumblings before they manifested themselves within the popular discourse because he could anticipate what might happen to Ethiopia's geographical integrity if the Oromo became politicized.

Harold Marcus and the Oromo

Harold Marcus adopts and slightly modifies the *Greater Ethiopia* thesis in his *A History of Ethiopia* (2002). Popular general histories of this type are important because they are

perspective molding and play a role in shaping our conceptions about the nation. In *A History of Ethiopia*, Marcus highlights that 16th century Abyssinia was a rump state and was a fraction of its former mythical self, “Ethiopia irredenta”; this concept sounds remarkably similar to Levine’s Greater Ethiopia. The Oromo appear in the annals of Ethiopian history first as invaders into peripheral areas formerly controlled by Abyssinia, they then enter Abyssinia proper as guards, and finally they become illegitimate members of the Abyssinian court. In 17th century Abyssinia, the Oromo “represented Ethiopia’s past problem and its future hope” (43). Though this was the case, they were viewed as substandard members of Abyssinian society. “The real actors were the mayors of the palace, often Oromo, who took their place in Abyssinian power structure, vying with more or less pristine descendants of the old order for control over the sovereignty represented in the person of the emperor” (Marcus 2002: 48). Further, Marcus refers to the Oromo members of the Abyssinian aristocracy as parvenus (49) and sycophants (53). The Oromo as stranger trope was dominant in this account.

While Marcus dedicated scores of pages to chronicling the squabbles and intrigues of Abyssinia court life, the conquest of the South (an area actually larger than Abyssinian) was barely mentioned in this text except to say that Oromos actors were key to conquest. Marcus mentioned the role Oromo actors like Gobena played in conquest. Oromo popular resistance, human agency, and the brutality of the manner in which Oromo unrest and resistance were checked received little attention. It took a massive state apparatus and a host of non-Oromo and Oromo actors to expand the boundaries of the Abyssinian empire. Oromos are mentioned as doing the imperial work of conquest while the role of its chief architect, Emperor Menelik II, is not discussed in any detail. Within *A History of Ethiopia*, the Oromo presence was ghettoized and confined to expansion, the Era of Princes, and their role in conquest. Marcus does not

mention the Oromo in any significant way again until the 1990s; as a result, in this account, the Oromo are effectively written out of Ethiopia's 20th century history.

Within Ethiopian studies the Oromo were misrepresented as foreign, violent, non-Christian heathens, and as a kind of pernicious force wedded to destruction. In other instances, they were characterized as a human plague that infected Abyssinia or as an infestation or swarm of insects bent on devouring the empire. The marking of social distance in these accounts appears to be at the heart of these representations. "Ethnic discriminations are elements of more general classifications which identify relations of similarity and difference within the social universe" (Fardon 1990: 171). The aforementioned accounts illustrate an ethnic classificatory scheme which ranked the country's different ethnic groups on a continuum between civilization and barbarism.

Theoretical Considerations

Ethnicity

The politicization of Oromo ethnicity is a recent phenomenon. It appears to be a response to cultural oppression and homogenization, economic inequality, and political marginalization. Oromo ethno-nationalism began as a cultural movement before it became explicitly politicized.

Ethnic and nationalist movements in Northeast Africa have been simultaneously linguistic and literary movements... the alphabetization and modernization of native languages may promote ethnic integration, reinforce ethnic identity, and raise their level of socio-political consciousness...language revival has been a prelude or sometimes parallel to ethnic and nationalist movements (Ali 1996:32).

Prior to the development of Oromo ethno-nationalism, the Oromo and their ethnic traditions had been maligned, ignored, and misunderstood as outlined above. Starting in 1963, the Oromo

started the Macha Tulema Self Help Association was initially a non-political association that counted Oromo cultural and economic uplift as key goals. The Macha Tulema Self Help Association and the Afran Qallo cultural troupe emerged to revive and validate Oromo ethnic traditions.⁵ These cultural movements were viewed with suspicion by the state because they signaled a positive shift in the Oromo orientation about themselves which could, if not stopped, have dire consequences for the system of inequality that had been established in Ethiopia. Oromo exploitation was built on force and legitimized by discourses that deemed Abyssinians as the rightful leaders of the nation and their traditions as best suited in the empire for emulation; until recently, the Oromo had been depicted as lacking traditions sophisticated enough to be used to guide the nation. With the birth of these movements, contest over Oromo ethnicity increasingly came to dominate politics.

Ethnicity is important for our purposes here because it can be viewed as one way in which people link to their past and gain a sense of community. Ethnicity is a concept that I will use throughout this dissertation because it has come to play an important role in the lives of many immigrants living in the United States today; in many cases, it is through ethnic affiliations and ties that immigrants build institutions (Portes et al. 2008) in the United States. For immigrants groups that mobilize around ethnicity, ethnic institutions act as spaces of familiarity in the host country, provide networking opportunities for newcomers, and transmit ethnic traditions from one generation to the next. On the other hand, ethnicity can also evoke an array of negative responses from those within and outside of the community who see other identities as more salient (namely those linked to the nation, religion, race, and class). In the case of

⁵ Afran Qallo was a musical group that started in Harar. When the band developed, it was still illegal to sing in Afaan Oromo ; once the group started to gain popularity, the government began to harass and jail its members. In time the group disbanded. Today's most famous Oromo singer, Ali Birra, was a member of the group. His songs later became the soundtrack of Oromo nationalist sentiment since the 1960s.

Ethiopia, Marxism was a strong force in the country and though the country now espouses democracy, vestiges of the Marxist perspective still influence its politics. According to Eriksen (2002), ethnicity was seen by Marxists as pre-modern and also as a form of false consciousness. Consequently, among some Ethiopians, organizing around ethnicity may be viewed as unproductive in eliminating an ethnic group's exploitation because it can limit their ability to link with other oppressed non-ethnics (Kebede 2003). For nationalists, strong forms of ethnic identification are seen as divisive and a hindrance to national unity; further, ethnic mobilizations could also lead to national disintegration (Hobsbawm 1990).⁶

Conceptually, ethnicity is a slippery term that is very problematic and does not lend itself to a single definition (Banks 1996). Any definition of ethnicity would privilege some features of this complex phenomena and ignore other aspects (Calhoun 1993). Most definitions of ethnicity fall on a continuum between the primordialist and instrumentalist perspectives.

Instrumentalists view ethnicity as a construction. They see ethnicity as a product of modernity, fabricated and constructed at will by its participants, especially elite ethnic actors (Banks 1996). With the crisis of representation in anthropology and the problematization of reductive and essentialist thinking in the academy more generally, primordialist positions are no longer popular and are seen as reductive and even dangerous. The irony is that many of the ethnic groups anthropologists study, groups like the Oromo, hold a notion of who they are that is closer to the primordial notion of ethnicity (Jalata 1998; Stack and Hebron 1999; Smith 1991).

In this study, ethnicity is conceived of as a social reality in the sense that it both constrains and provided opportunities for those who believe in and/or are circumscribed by its

⁶ National disintegration is a real threat to Ethiopia and this has been the case for much of the country's modern history. Ironically, Ethiopia is one of the few nations to have adopted ethnic federalism where ethnic minorities, in theory, have the constitutional right to secession.

classificatory power. Which aspects of an ethnic group's characteristics that become dominant are the result of history, forgetting, place, and tensions within and outside of any particular ethnic community. Thus, any expression of ethnicity will privilege certain discourses and subgroups at the expense of other groups and positions. In today's ethnically federated Ethiopia, being identified as a member of a particular ethnic group or identifying with a particular group has real consequences.

In the Oromo case, I agree with Brackette Williams that ethnicity is contested and layered. "It is the ambiguity of what ethnicity means that invests it with such power...Ethnic groups in a society do not exist as an isomorph, each structurally similar, instead there are overlapping sets, groups which encompass other groupings" (cited in Banks 1996: 44). Immigrants hailing from Ethiopia, residing in the Washington, D.C. area, are from an array of ethnic, class, and religious backgrounds and this complexity makes determining who is an Oromo a complex, situational affair. The Oromo have been and continue to be subject to an array of classification schemes that are both etic and emic. What it means to be an Oromo and how ethnicity has been understood in the region has changed through Ethiopia's major regimes. Ethnicity is also a relational concept in multicultural places like Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Transnationalism

New African Diaspora

The Oromo, along with the newest wave of African immigrants to the United States, represent the new African diaspora. The new African diaspora refers to Africans that immigrated to the United States after 1965. The new African diaspora is not the product of forced migration

associated with the Atlantic Slave trade. The identity formation projects of the American contingent of the Oromo diaspora are complex because they are interpolated by an array of racial discourses associated with the Black Atlantic and the nationalist sentiments of the new African diaspora. Within the literature on globalization, transnationalism, and migration, sub-Saharan African transnational practices are only now being researched (Arthur 2000; Stoller 2001; Gordon 1998; Takyi 2002; Konadu-Agyemang et al. 2006; Copeland-Carson 2004; Addis 2007). Prior to the turn of the millennium, there was little detailed research on how African immigrants, as members of the new African diaspora, adjusted to and developed a sense of community within the United States. One of the main reasons for the dearth was because their numbers were relatively small until fairly recently. In the 19th century, African immigration to the United States was greatly reduced due to the 1808 Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves which banned the importation of new slaves into the United States essentially halting the flow of Africans into the country. Another key reason for the lack of African immigration to the United States was racism. According to Konadu-Agyemang and Takyi (2006) “the same racism that pervaded the socio-political environment of the time, and turned American citizens of African descent into third class citizen, may have also prevented the US government from opening its doors to people of color” (3). Less than 50,000 Africans migrated to the United States from 1861-1961. Further, it was only within the last two decades that African immigrants, particularly the Oromo, began to increase. Finally, because race was and still is privileged within the United States, little attention was paid to the intra-racial distinctions until the number of foreign born Blacks from Africa reached a critical and visible mass starting in the 1990s. I am interested in understanding how the Oromo, as members of this new African diaspora, utilize and resist both Ethiopian and American racial classificatory schemes in their identity narratives.

Oromo Transnationalism

Relative to their size, the Oromo are a terribly understudied group; the Oromo diaspora in the United States, in particular, has received very little scholarly attention. Only a handful academic material has been published on the Oromo diaspora's characteristics, its history, the intra-ethnic and interethnic tensions that plague the group, and its ethnic institutions. John Sorenson (1996) wrote about Oromo identity formation in the diaspora. Mekuria Bulcha (2002) published *The Making of Oromo Diaspora: A Historical Sociology of Forced Migration* where he focused on the pre and early modern Oromo diaspora and the Arab slave trade. At the end of the text, he also provides important information concerning the origin of the current Oromo diaspora in the United States. In *The History of Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in America, 1900-2000*, Solomon Getahun (2006) devotes a section to the Oromo. There have also been a few dissertations written about Oromo immigrants. Lorraine Herbst (2004) wrote about the Oromo in Minnesota and their internet activity, Tinsae Gemechu (2013) focused on cultural capital and Oromo immigrants in Minnesota, and Jennifer Lancaster (2013) wrote about the Oromo church in Pennsylvania. This study attempts to insert the Oromo living in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan areas into the literature on transnationalism. In order to understand the lived experience of transnational immigrants and the ways in which they negotiate their identities today, we need to pay more attention to groups like the Oromo. Oromo immigrants are interpolated by a variety of identity narratives and economic constraints and in looking at the characteristics and tensions associated with the development of ethnic institutions ethnically and racially diverse cities like Washington, D.C. this study seeks to shed light on complexity of identity formation today where assimilation or cultural maintenance are no longer the only options for immigrant populations.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, assimilation was the dominant mode of incorporation available to most immigrants. Today, however, due to the global nature of capital flows, advances in communication and transportation technologies, and the de-centering of dominant nationalisms, a growing number of immigrants live transnational lives. Transmigrants are immigrants that live between the spaces of the homeland and the host country either physically or in their imaginings. According to Faist (2010), both the terms diaspora and transnationalism refer “to cross-border processes”. Diasporas are often associated with the forced population movements of religious or national group from a real or imagined homeland. Diaspora groups often remain distinct in some fashion in the host country. “Transnationalism is often used both more narrowly—to refer to migrants’ durable ties across countries—and, more widely, to capture not only communities, but all sorts of social formations, such as transnationally active networks, groups and organizations” (10). The term diaspora then refers to communities and groups while transnationalism describes processes (2010: 13)

The ability of today’s immigrants to maintain a connection to both the home and host countries deeply impacts the types of communities and institutions they develop in the host country. The subset of the Oromo immigrant population I studied did not simply maintain and assert an Ethiopian identity upon their arrival to the United States. They were engaged in ethnic-specific Oromo institutions in the Washington D.C. that privileged their ethnic identity over their national identity. Oromo immigrant ethnic based institutions are transnational in their orientation, goals, and reach. First, through the staging and sponsorship of cultural events they attempt to recreate the homeland in the host country and act as agents of socialization passing Oromo traditions from the first to the second generation. Further, because of continued government persecution of the Oromos in Ethiopia, refugee flows, family reunifications, the

Diversity Visa lottery program, and the presence of students, tourists, and artists, all play a role in continually fertilizing the Oromo diaspora in the United States altering its composition, concerns, and traditions linking it to the home country. Second, Oromo institutions advocate for Oromos living in Ethiopia by producing globally circulating discourses on Oromo issues.

In Ethiopia, press, internet, and even charitable and social organizations are heavily monitored and controlled. Dissent and any activity that can be viewed as ethno-nationalist by the Ethiopian government can be met with persecution and censure. Individuals suspected of these prohibited activities either flee the country or are rendered silent by their apprehension by state authorities. Once in exile, persecuted individuals tell their stories and it is through this process that campaigns are developed in the diaspora to combat the salient issues impacting Oromos in the homeland. Until very recently, due to the explosion of social media, diaspora texts were often the sole example of the Oromo position on social, political, or cultural issue. As a result there was a continual call for Oromo organizations like the Oromo Studies Association, the Oromo Church, and Oromo community and political organization to bring atrocities committed against the Oromo in Ethiopia to the attention of the international community or to lobby host country governments to intervene in homeland conflicts. Finally, the skills and the knowledge the Oromo community organizations gain through their advocacy work on behalf of Oromos in the homeland simultaneously integrates Oromo immigrants into American society by providing them with civic skills that can be used to advance and support Oromo communities in the host country.

Transnationalism, Mass Media, and Identity

Traditionally face-to-face communication was the key route through which an individual became a social and cultural member of a community. However, face-to-face communication is

no longer the only route through which communication occurs, mass mediated forms of communication abound. The emergence of mass mediated forms of communication, have progressively changed identity formation processes globally (Mcluhan 1967 ; Anderson 1983; Gergen 1991; Thompson 1990). Mass media discourses are very important to transnational immigrant populations. Advances in communication technologies enable immigrants to maintain transnational connections between the host and home countries in ways and frequencies never before possible (Glick-Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc 1994; Appadurai 1996) experientially changing the way one learns how to be a member of one's group. In many cases, mass forms of communications mediate the identities of many immigrants and their contact with homeland culture by remotely linking immigrants to the symbolic systems of the home country thereby enabling migrants to remotely be a part of a collectivity that is dispersed through space and partially deterritorialized.

Discourse and the Identisphere

Conflict over how the past has been represented has been a key area of concern for Oromos active in ethnic specific institutions in the diaspora. Since the establishment of Oromo institutions in the early 1970s, there was a strong desire for the past to be corrected and a need for the yoke of non-Oromo versions of the past to be cast off. Contestations over the past are at the heart of ethno-political conflicts raging in Ethiopia today. Historical narratives have been used by the Ethiopian government to sanction state expansion and the conquest of southern people like the Oromo. One of the first things Oromo diaspora organizations did soon after their founding was to set about the task of engaging in and supporting those that were involved in revising, rewriting, and extending the history produced about the Oromo. Oromo ethnic institutions sought to subvert hegemonic notions of Ethiopia that had rendered them abject.

Though diaspora scholars were not able to participate in the Oromo struggle on the ground in Ethiopia, they contributed to the Oromo struggle for equality by writing Oromo history and challenging dominant histories within Ethiopian studies. They expressed their agency through discourse. “Discourse can be viewed as a social practice and there are dialectical relationships between discourse and the situation, institutions, and social structure in which they are embedded. Identities are constructed, maintained and dismantled through discourse” (Wodak 2009: 7). The Oromo discourse producers in the diaspora were agents of change because their critiques helped to denaturalize and challenge popular notions of Ethiopia that had rendered them subject people. In time, the influence of these accounts brought about a change in how the Oromo conceptualized themselves and what they expected from the society in which they were the majority.

We cannot understand identity formation today without investigating the role that mass mediated discourses play in this process. Arjun Appadurai (1996: 5) and his insistence on the centrality of the media to the articulation of national, transnational, and local processes is important. Further, he also points to the significance of the imagination in the production of culture and identity in the contemporary age (1996). As a result, members of the Oromo diaspora are not just bystanders and consumers of identity narratives derived from Ethiopia, they are also producers of Oromo-specific narratives (especially historical and political discourses) that circulate within the diaspora, but also back to Oromo areas initially in print form and through video cassettes, DVDs, and CDs and more recently through social media, YouTube, internet news sites, and blogs. Oromo identity has a transnational character not just for Oromo immigrants, but also for Oromos living in Ethiopia.

The Oromo immigrants active in ethnic institutions in Washington, D.C. have contributed to the identity formation practices of Oromos in the diaspora and in Ethiopia through their contribution to the Oromo identisphere. The term identisphere is a term I use here to represent a contested discursive sphere of identity articulation. It is a concept that brings together the conflict associated with three concepts that are at the heart of this dissertation: ideas, identity, and sphere. Over the last fifty years, the Oromo in Ethiopia and in the diaspora have been involved in a protracted struggle over *ideas* about the nature of the state and their position within it, contests about the nature and legitimacy of their *identity*, and fights to gain a position and *sphere* of influence over their own affairs. I am fundamentally interested in trying to understand the development, influences, and the constraints that characterize Oromo diaspora identity discourse and its quest for control over meaning. The identisphere concept is influenced by Appadurai's notion of "scapes" which attempt to provide us with a sense of the flow of irregular "not objectively given relations" between people, finance, ideas, media, and technologies in the age of globalization (1996: 33). The concept transnational social field is also important. The transnational social field represents "a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 9). Finally, my identisphere concept is informed by Laclau and Mouffe's notion of discourse which can be understood as "a differential ensemble of signifying sequences in which meaning is constantly renegotiated" (Torfing 1999: 85). Central to this concept of discourse is conflict; as a result, identities are relational and defined through difference and antagonism. Identisphere is a concept that brings discourse, space, and power together in my discussion of Oromo identity.

Prior to the 1960s, the Oromo lacked the power and means to produce popular academic accounts about themselves. It was in part through their use of discourse that members of the Oromo diaspora were able to disrupt and envision alternatives to both the hegemonic discourses that characterized the Oromo for centuries and the discriminatory practices that turned the Oromo into political minorities after Ethiopian conquest at the end of the 19th century. This account of Oromo institution building has been informed by the critical discourses analysis (CDA). Critical discourse analysis concerns “itself with the relations power and inequality within language” (Blossaert and Bulcaen 2000:1). Further, ideology, inequality, and power are key topics of analysis. The purpose of CDA, according to Wodak, helps us “analyze opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control of manifestations of language” (1995:204). Starting in the 1960s, the Oromo identisphere developed that sought to challenge the hegemonic and demeaning portrayals that had long characterized the group. Further, through organizations like the Oromo Studies Association Oromo academics and scholars created an alternative image of the Oromo, their history, and culture from an Oromo perspective.

Methods

Research Site

The Washington, D.C. metropolitan area is home to the largest numbers of Ethiopians, in general, residing in the United States. The exact number of Oromos living in the Washington, D.C. area is unclear because of the nature of the relationship between ethnicity and nation in this environment. The Oromo have only recently come to the United States in large numbers (since the 1990's). Doing research in Washington, D.C. afforded me the opportunity to investigate both

intra-ethnic and interethnic relations. Though Minneapolis has a larger self-identified Oromo population, the Oromo residing in Washington, D.C. live in a more ethnically diverse environment and investigating their community organizations in Washington afforded me the opportunity to investigate the ways in which the Oromo define themselves in a very diverse sphere as opposed to the more homogeneous environment of Minneapolis.

Though the diaspora has had some success in articulating, defining, lobbying, and maintaining Oromo identity in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, the cultural and political landscape of this U.S. city is very different from Ethiopia and it provides both opportunities for and barriers to the public expression of Oromo ethnic identity and the perpetuation of Oromo specific interest in the city. During the course of my research, I soon realized that place of settlement was very important for immigrants because it dictated and confined the types of representations and networks an ethnic community could establish. Many immigrants in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and other new gateway cities (Singer 2003) no longer live in traditional ethnic enclaves; and as a result, it takes tremendous effort to establish and maintain an ethnic community for today's immigrants. Based on my research, it appears that the Oromo ethnic community consists of a system of interrelated ethnic-specific institutions and relationships spread across the landscape of the region along with the discourses they produce. The most dominant institutions being the Oromo church, community centers, political organizations, and academic associations. Upon their arrival to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, Oromos, as latecomers to the region compared to other Ethiopians and African Americans, have had to craft a discourse about themselves within the constraints of preexisting racial, ethnic, and class-based discourses and legal and economic arrangements that characterize the area. They are currently in search of a footing in the nation's capital.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term footing has a host of interesting definitions the most relevant of which will be discussed below. In a literal sense, a footing can be defined as a “mark or impression left by the foot; a footprint, or footprints collectively; a trace, track, trail”. Thus a footing can be understood as evidence of a person’s or group’s presence in a place. It can be temporary as is the case with a footprint or it can have a degree of permanency as is implied in the notion of footing as a well worn path or trail. In a figurative sense, footing can be viewed as a “secure position; established place; foothold.” Having a footing entails the acknowledgement of one presence within an order. A footing can also be a set of “conditions and arrangements... on which an institution, etc. is established ...The ‘terms’ on which a person stands in intercourse with another; degree of intimacy or favour; relative status (as an equal, superior, or inferior)”.⁷ Contained within this definition of footing is the notion of a hierarchical ordering of institutions and people under a given set condition. Oromo ethnic institutions in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, since their founding, have attempted to gain a footing, through their advocacy, cultural practice, and consciousness raising activities, to make an impression and path in a multicultural environment where preexisting discourses and institutions associated Ethiopian nationalism and African American notions of race dominate the landscape. This process has been made difficult because the Oromo have had to craft a message about their identities using ethnicity, a concept less understood than the privileged concepts of race and nation.

Participants

How Oromo immigrants understand and express their ethnicity identity is varied and only a minority feel the need to articulate their ethnic identity publically or to associate with other

⁷ <http://www.oed.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/view/Entry/72708?redirectedFrom=footing&&pr>

Oromos via ethnic institutions. Oromo immigrants living in the United States do not all behave or think in the same manner. The Oromo community is divided by religion, region, dialect (to a lesser degree), and political orientation. There are no official numbers to determine how many Oromos are actually in the city. When I asked those I studied how many Oromos there were in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, I was told that nearly a fourth to a third likely have Oromo heritage which would include self identified Oromos, assimilated Oromos, and Oromos of mixed heritage etc. Of these, a smaller minority, a couple of thousand may self-identify as Oromo if asked, and an even smaller number, 300 to 500, are active in Oromo activities like the Oromo church, weddings, cultural events, and political meetings . In order to understand the dissonance between those who are ethnically Oromo and those who publicly assert an Oromo identity, one needs to understand the history and the nature of Oromo institutions and politics in Ethiopia and in the United States.

Ethiopia has a history of violence against its political rivals and it silences anyone who says, produces, or disseminates anything anti-government or anything that can be read as such. As a result, the Oromo and the Ethiopian population at large have learned to keep their ethnic identities and their honest feelings about political matters secret or at least private. As a result of this legacy, only a fraction of the Oromos in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area are involved in Oromo-specific activity. Asserting one's ethnic identity has become a politicized act in Ethiopian and in the Washington D.C. area that could have serious consequences. Some people avoid involvement with ethnic politics in the diaspora for fear that their family back home may become targets of persecution. Pictures and videos from diaspora events often appear on YouTube, Facebook, or on organizational websites and individuals can be easily identified. In addition, many of the Oromos in Washington, D.C. are from Addis Ababa and to a lesser degree

Wellega. Those from Addis Ababa tend to be more assimilated than those farther from the capital. In addition, Oromos in multi-ethnic marriages may shy away from Oromo activities because they do not want to alienate their partners. Finally, many of the organizations are divided by political orientation and even self-identified Oromos that hold strong nationalist sentiments can become fatigued and retreat from participating in ethnic organizations.

Interviews

Over the period of 2.5 years (2005-2008), I conducted open-ended semi-structured interviews with Oromos between the ages 18-65 who self-identified as Oromo living in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area on their views of Oromo identity, life in America, and ways in which, if at all, they connect to home. I also made inquiries into the types of media they consumed and their attitudes toward Oromo, Ethiopian, and American identity discourses. In addition, I asked question about how the various regimes they lived under, in Ethiopia, articulated/represented and practiced Ethiopian nationalism and how the Oromo were impacted by these different manifestations. Many of those that I interviewed were educated elites with a long history of political activism. I conducted interviews with community leaders, discourse producers, artists, and working class members of the diaspora.

Positionality

In addition to the positionality issues discussed in the introduction, gender was also important. Because of the Oromo's notorious kindness to guests and because I was educated, I was treated with a great deal of respect and in formal environments, treated like the other males in the group. In less formal environments and around everyday people, I did however experience what many female anthropologists alluded to i.e., being treated like a daughter or a junior member of the group in need of schooling. In addition, because I was part Oromo, I was seen in

a liminal way, as both an outsider and an insider (Abu-Lughod 1991, 1993). Also of interest, is the fact that I became a mother during my early days in the field. This truly helped my efforts in that the Oromo now saw me with a family and not simply as a detached observer; I was seen as an adult woman by other Oromo women. Unlike during my pre-dissertation days, the Oromo women who used to look at me with suspicion became more comfortable with my presence.

Conclusion

In observing the Oromo in Washington D.C., I was exposed to the contemporary ways in which ethnicity manifests itself in a transnational context. This account only begins to scratch the surface of a very complex and understudied community. In the chapters that follow, I seek to provide a glimpse into the history, the social tensions, economic, and political constraints that have informed the ways in which Oromos in the Washington, D.C. areas have attempted to gain recognition for themselves and Oromo issues more broadly.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHALLENGES OF A NESTED DIASPORA

The Washington, D.C. metropolitan area boasts the highest number of Ethiopian immigrants in the country. To many unfamiliar with the history of Ethiopia and its diversity, the group appears homogenous. This belies the reality of the heterogeneity that characterizes Ethiopia and her various diasporas, many of which are conflict generated (Lyons 2007). The Oromo have been migrating to the United States for more than four decades; as a result, today, large numbers of Oromos reside in many major American cities most notably the Twin Cities, Atlanta, and the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. In addition, outside of the United States, there are large Oromo communities in Canada, Europe, and Australia. Though this is the case, we cannot assume that Oromo immigrants have a monolithic experience in the diaspora or even within the same country. The specific city in which an immigrant population settles plays an important role in informing and shaping the character of the institutions they develop. Each city of settlement has a unique history, preexisting sets of ethnic and racial communities, and a specific economic environment immigrants enter into and have to navigate as part of the identity formation and community building process.

For post-1965 immigrants, advances in communication and transportation technologies, the civil rights movements and the subsequent multiculturalism that followed have opened the terrain of identification available for today's immigrants; as a result, assimilation is no longer the dominant mode of immigrant incorporation in the United States. Further, for the Oromo, national identity is not the only identity around which they build community. Ethnicity also plays an important role in the lives of Oromo immigrants today; in many cases, it is through ethnic affiliations and ties that immigrants build institutions. In their reconstitution of home in

the Washington, D.C. metropolitan areas, Oromos have been successful in establishing some Oromo-specific institutions namely: the Oromo Church, the Oromo Community Organization, the Oromo Center, and a number of social, sports and political organizations. Further, members of national organizations like the International Oromo Youth Association and followers of the new Oromo First movement also have members and supporters in the city. Though this is the case, the Oromo encounter many obstacles to ethnic community building, namely low levels of economic development and cultural recognition in the District of Columbia and its environs. In this chapter, I seek to highlight the key economic, social, and political features of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area that inform and structure the environment in which Oromos build institutions and identities.

The Importance of Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C. is also an emerging immigrant gateway city for African immigrants. Africans make up 14 percent of immigrants in the Washington area, compared to just 4 percent of immigrants in the U.S. more generally (Brooking 2010). Ethiopians are the largest African immigrant group in the area. The exact number of Ethiopians in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area is difficult to determine, estimates of its size vary widely. According to the 2009 American Community Survey, there were 148, 221 Ethiopians in the country and of these 31,249 Ethiopians were living in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. These numbers greatly underestimate the population. The unofficial numbers include both the foreign-born and their children. According to Ethiopian community organizations, the Ethiopian population is estimated to total anywhere from 250,000 to 500,000 people living District and surrounding counties (Lyons 2007: 592). It is even more difficult to determine what percentage of the Ethiopian population is Oromo. This is in part due to the complex nature of immigrant

identification practices. Immigrants from Ethiopia with Oromo heritage (meaning one or both parents are Oromo) choose to identify in a variety of ways depending on who is counting and the questions asked. “No circle is totally closed, individuals operate within nested hierarchies of identity that allow [or force] them to locate themselves in different communities at different times” (Brettell 1988: 859). Oromo community organization estimates that there are at least 10,000 to 12,000 Oromos in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.

Why study Oromo transnationalism in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area? The Minneapolis and St. Paul areas are often said, by those in the community, to have the largest Oromo population in the United States. Oromo immigrants in the Twin Cities were one of the earliest African populations to migrate to Minnesota and because the region was not very ethnically or racially diverse, they became a very visible group. Further, the Oromos there have been able to use this visibility to carve out a niche of recognition in Minnesota. On the other hand, Oromos living in Washington, D.C. lack the kind of visibility and collective power that characterize Oromo populations living in the Minnesota. Some of the causes for this invisibility will be the subject of this chapter. Washington, D.C. was selected as a research site because it was an early place of Oromo settlement, other scholars have not studied Oromos in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, the city is racially and ethnically diverse, and finally, the city closely mirrors Ethiopia in important ways.

On different occasions, two of my participants discussed the similarities between Washington, D.C. and Ethiopia. One of the students that I met at a protest march shared the following information about the differences he noticed between how Oromos behave in Washington, D.C. compared to how they act in Minnesota.

D.C. is like a mirror of Ethiopia. People cannot be themselves here they are always a little afraid. In Minneapolis, it is a totally different world...people do not have to hide or stay in the background like in D.C. In Minnesota, Oromos can be bold. D.C. is different...the Habesha here are just like their brothers in Ethiopia. They control things in this city. They have the business and they can intimidate the Oromo here and report their activities back home. The Oromo here are not as visible compared to Minnesota (Dandi, an Oromo college student).

During an interview with Boran, a twenty something with big dreams of success, discussed the discomfort feels in the city.

The Oromo people in the D.C. areas up to until about until 5-10 years ago came from Oromia a long time ago. They have been here for some time and they are established and educated. In Minneapolis, only a few people are established in this way. The quality of the people here and there are different. The people that like Minneapolis go there because there are more Oromos and they feel more comfortable. There are a lot of Amhara here so there are more challenges.

The Washington D.C. metropolitan area is a place of tremendous diversity and conflicts abound concerning, how people and groups are to be defined, resource allocated, and the delineation of space. As a result, the Oromo are interpolated and circumscribed by a number of different identity discourses and communities. The Oromo represent what I call a “nested diaspora”. This concept is influenced by Brettell’s (1988) position on the situatedness of ethnicity and the notion of nested identities (Herb and Kaplan 1999). A brief description of the ethnic landscape is necessary in order to illustrate the complexity that characterizes the region. Washington, D.C. metropolitan area is home to a historic African American population that mobilizes around a politics of racial equality and it is also the home of the largest Ethiopian immigrants population in the country. All of these factors shape the Oromo expressions of identity in the city. In Washington, D.C., the Oromo are an ethnic minority, nested in a national minority, that is then nested inside a racial minority. This nesting makes crafting a message about who the Oromo are challenging. The Oromo diaspora, in this area, are an important population to investigate if we want to understand the complexity of identity formation projects among African diaspora populations residing in the United States today.

How did the Oromo Diaspora Emerge?

The Oromo diaspora emerged in the 1970s as the fallout of conflicts associated with the articulation of an ethnic versus national identity in Ethiopia that began in the early 1960s.

Though Oromos figured nominally in the Ethiopian migrations to the United States prior to early 1970s, they were likely from elite families or were students and their numbers were small.

Prior to the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act, the small group of Ethiopians that resided in the United States were from the upper classes and most likely from Shewa (Getahun 2007).

They were most often, the sons and relations of the ruling class. In fact, the history of migration informs us that it is usually a more affluent class that first migrates to foreign lands. These Ethiopians were sent to America for education by the Imperial Ethiopian Government, by their families and as a result of scholarship granted by the American government and agencies. A few Ethiopians who had distinguished themselves in academia were also given this opportunity (Getahun 2007:41).

Eritreans and a small number of Oromo from Shewa and Wellega were also part of this group.

Those from Wellega were either a part of the ruling classes, assimilated, or were bright students who excelled academically (Wagaw 1990). In addition to the student population that comprised the bulk of the population until the mid-1970s, during the aftermath of the Ethiopian revolution of 1974, many diplomats, cabinet ministers, high-ranking military officials, and other government functionaries also fled to the United States. As a result, the foundation or core group living in Washington was elite and highly educated compared to majority that remained in Ethiopia.

Starting in the 1970s, more Oromos began to flee Ethiopia for a host of reasons, some Oromos left Ethiopia as a result of their involvement with the Ethiopian student and other political movements. Further, the Socialist Derg regime that controlled Ethiopia for 17 year targeted suspected Oromo Liberation Front militants and even Oromo Protestants for

persecution. The vast majority of the refugees from this group remained in the Horn of Africa, because they lacked the funds needed to travel to the West. It was not until the 1990s that less affluent Oromos began migrate to the United States in large numbers.

Dula, an Oromo civil servant, provided me with some perspective about the current refugee crisis in Ethiopia and the parts of the country from which many are derived.

Refugees are coming from the eastern part of Ethiopia... mostly Arsi, Bale, and Borana. Refugees are mostly the Muslims, not the Christians. The eastern part of Ethiopia has a serious problem with the government, they arrest students, teachers, any important person. The government is in fear of the OLF movement in the area and the relatives of OLF members are arrested and the people run away. Most of them are in Kenya now. The refugee population is not as educated as the asylees.

Of the total numbers of asylees, only a small number of people were suspected of OLF membership. Any Oromo who does not join OPDO [Oromo People's Democratic Organization an ethnic based political party with connections to the government] are harassed, they are with face imprisonment and when they get a chance to come to the United States they do....The people are suffering, they are fired from their jobs, they [police or security forces] follow them and harass them and when these Oromos get the chance, they come to America. Many people are tortured and persecuted and they run away from that city.

Today the Oromo at all class positions are being persecuted; the government harasses and jails the less educated fighters in the east and their families. Educated Oromo in the cities that refuse to join the government sponsored Oromo political party are targeted as members of the OLF.

Oromo Transnationalism, Social and Financial Capital, and the Politics of Stalled Growth

In the section that follows, I compare the Oromo diaspora's economic activities in the District with those of other Ethiopian immigrant groups in terms of the Oromo capacity to develop and expand their ethnic presence in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and their ability to positively impact and act as partners in the economic development of Oromia. The transnational literature focuses its attention on the role the diaspora plays in the home country,

but less research has been conducted on the immigrant entrepreneurial activity in the host country that facilitates transnational activity (Chacko and Price 2009). This chapter seeks to provide insights into the complex interplay between the economic, social, and political constraints that inform Oromo transnationalism in the city.

Washington, D.C. is home to an array of Ethiopian restaurants and other Ethiopian businesses. These spaces are not neutral and they can be sites of conflict and boundary demarcation. Though Oromo immigrants patronize these spaces for necessary products or a meal, many view them as *Habesha* spaces. At this juncture, let us discuss the term *Habesha* before we return to our discussion of *Habesha* spaces. The term *Habesha* is an ethnonym that in its widest sense has come to mean Ethiopian. More specifically however, the term relates to being a member of the Semitic speaking groups of the country. To be *Habesha*, is connected to being seen as a legitimate part of the Abyssinian core. Mohammad (2006) argues that *Habesha* is an identity that when used in the United States, serves to mark *Habesha* people as unique, exceptional, and racially ambiguous. It is a way for them to inhabit a liminal space between racial categories of classification. A large number of Oromos in the city and globally identify, at least part of the time, with being a *Habesha* or as an Ethiopian and frequently adopt a *Habesha* identity in their interactions with non-Oromos from Ethiopia. Though this is the case, my research was conducted among a subset of Oromos with a strong sense of ethnic identity; people who self-identify as Oromo and generally reject the designation *Habesha*. Some of my participants had conflicts with other Ethiopians about espousing an Oromo identity rather than a *Habesha* one. When an Ethiopian meets another person that they think is from Ethiopia, the first thing asked is, “Are you *Habesha*?” which is akin to saying, “Are you Ethiopian?” Many Oromos relayed to me the tension they encounter when they do not answer in the expected way,

which is in the affirmative. If they say they are Oromo, they are dismissed as ethnocentric and engaging inappropriate identity politics. Many Oromos do not reveal their ethnicity upon first meeting someone. A large number, even some self-described “Oromo nationalists,” simply concede that they are from Ethiopia out of the need to avoid unpleasant contestation or for the sake of peace. There are many situations where they are required to code switch. There is one caveat, among the second generation and young Oromo immigrants who do not speak Amharic well or at all and who have been reared with a strong Oromo identity, they do not code switch. They consider themselves to be “*Oromo First*” and they speak to other non-Oromos from Ethiopia in English.

The Oromos I studied viewed *Habesha* spaces as sites where they had to turn down or dampen their Oromo identity upon entry. Many people of Oromo heritage in Washington, D.C. situationally identify as a *Habesha* in order to progress through an interaction in a *Habesha* space without conflict.

Ethiopian immigrants have developed ethnic and social commerscapes which are ethnic business areas that serve the dual purposes as commercial areas and sites of social interaction between co-ethnics. These ethno-commerce-scapes are marked and serve as representations about Ethiopia and Ethiopian culture to one another and to foreign patrons and passersby. They help frame the debates about Ethiopian identity (Chako 2009).

Habesha commercial spaces present a glorified and romantic image of what it means to be Ethiopian: Orthodox Christian symbols, Ethiopian flags, and Amharic place names. They present a simplified view of the country, an uncomplicated gist, an example of sound-bite culture. Like the food served in Ethiopian restaurants, these *Habesha* spaces attempt to reduce the country to its least common denominators, its essence. Boran narrates an experience he had in a *Habesha* space.

The other day I was at an Ethiopian restaurant and I bought an instrumental CD, and I asked

why there was no Oromo music on display? They said that if there was, people would think it was political. For me it is political because they neglected it!

The exchange illustrated that even in the diaspora and in a music shop, Oromo artists are still ignored. This example highlights that in some *Habesha* spaces even publically showcasing Oromo musicians could be read as a political statement.

Though the Oromo and other southern groups are the country's majority populations, they rarely appear at the forefront in *Habesha* spaces, they materialize in the background in the form of an occasional poster on the wall or as background music. Ethiopia, like many ethnically diverse nations, attempted to create one nation by spreading empire through a national culture. Wherever one finds the nation-state concept, the dominant ethnic group(s) practices, religion, language, and ideals are often comparable with that of the nation (Smith 2009). National identity, being *Habesha*, became an unmarked and natural category. Being an Oromo became deviant and taking on an Oromo identity was and still can be seen as an act of defiance.

For some Oromos, being Ethiopian or *Habesha* is not their dominant identity. For self-identified Oromos, ethnicity plays an important role in their lives. Though Oromos own businesses in the area, they rarely use comparable ethno-national naming and adornment strategies utilized by other Ethiopian immigrants. They either use *Habesha* representations or they open a non-ethnic based business. For Oromos, asserting one's ethnic identity, in unsanctioned ways, has historically been seen as a political act and it is still viewed as such by Ethiopians even in the diaspora. Oromo entrepreneurs rarely assert an Oromo identity publically because this act has the potential to impact their profits and reputations in the home and host countries. By asserting an Oromo identity, Oromo proprietors are guaranteed little patronage by non-Oromos from Ethiopia and designated as political agitators. To my knowledge, there was only one Oromo business in the D.C. metropolitan area that used Oromo in its title and it has

since changed its name and format. Jabessa, a longtime resident of the area told me about the way an Oromo business owner tried to subvert this unspoken rule by naming the building using a term present in both languages.

There are no specific Oromo restaurants in Washington, D.C., a few Oromos own restaurants, but they can't name them an Oromo name. If a restaurant owner named the restaurant something that indicated an association with the Oromo, Ethiopian people would not come. Actually, people dislike anything with an Oromo name and this is not new. If you have a business patronized by foreigners, there is no problem naming it something from the Oromo language, but if you expect to serve people from Ethiopia, the name has to be Amharic! There is an eatery that whose name can be found in the language of both Afaan Oromo and in Amharic. Many times Ethiopian people passing almost crash their cars trying to read the name of the place as it is spelled the Oromo way. I have witnessed a Habesha park his car, drink coffee, and then ask to speak to the owner. He then alerted the owner that the name of the shop is spelled wrong and advised it be spelled correctly. The owner spelled the name in the way that an Oromo would use Qubee [the Oromo alphabet]. The owner listened to the complaint, but kept the sign.

The example above is an important one as it illustrates the complex maneuvering that Oromos must engage in concerning the choice of what to name their own establishments. If they seek success here, as in Ethiopia, some level of assimilation is required if they open an ethnic based business. Even outside of Ethiopia, when it comes to the issue of naming, using an Oromo name will bring about discrimination.

Boran grew up in Ethiopia and was fairly assimilated before coming to the United States so in his early interactions in *Habesha* spaces he attempted to find ways to connect. He had to learn that there would be no give and take or negotiation and little inclusion of Oromo concerns in certain *Habesha* spaces.

I listen to Ethiopian radio so that I can keep up with what is going on and what is being said. There was an incident when I went to the Ethiopian radio stations to advertise the Oromo soccer tournament and an Oromo performance. Most of the Ethiopians did not want to hear this; they always ask why do the Oromo want to do their own thing? When we gave the flyer out, people were so nice, but when they read the fliers we were handing out their face changed. We have our own tournament to bring Oromos together from all walks of life ...to strengthen our bonds

The story above highlights that even in the diaspora Oromo identity assertions are questions and dismissed.

Dula discussed non-ethnic based business with me and relayed that there are some Oromo business owners in the city. Though this is the case their numbers are small in comparison to the other groups. In addition, because their numbers are small they do not have role models.

There are a number of Oromo who have gas stations, 7-11 and super markets and restaurants. There are not many compared to the Amhara and Tigrayans, but there are some. The Habesha are more business oriented than the Oromo. Most people who become rich are those people who start working in a gas station or in a supermarket, or a taxi drivers finally becomes a shop owner. Number one, it is a matter of culture, secondly it is a matter of support also. Getting support by working under those people who already started businesses maybe one of the elements. They are helping each other... If you are a country man and your friend has a shop you can meet with him and he push you and motivate you. You can get a loan to start a business.

According to Dula, it is class and networks that play a role in business growth and expansion. Being tied to others who are successful is important.

Though Oromos are constrained by hegemonic discourses in their interactions with non-Oromos from Ethiopia, they have been able to develop Oromo social institutions in the area: the Oromo Churches, The Oromo Center, The Oromo Community Organization, and political organizations like the Oromo Liberation Front. It is in these non-commercial ethnic institutions that the Oromo do adopt ethnic titles. Their membership is relatively small compared to the multi-ethnic “Ethiopian” organizations. Oromo organizations are seen as separatist and ethnicity is viewed as a destructive force among Ethiopians of the dominant groups. As a result, they have faced a tremendous amount of difficulty gaining a footing in the nation’s capital. In the sections below, I provide the contours of the ethnic, racial, and economic terrain in which the Oromos attempt to gain access to as residents of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

The Ethiopian Community and Transcultural Capital in the Nation’s Capital

Upon their arrival to a new country, immigrant populations often attempt to carve out a socio-cultural and economic space for themselves in the host country. Immigrant civic activism and economic activity concerned with the home country or the ethnic community was previously

viewed as a barrier to integration into the host country. Scholars like Triandafyllidou (2008) highlight how instead of halting integration, this activity can act as a platform for immigrants to gain access to the host country especially in a climate characterized by a concern with the global economy. “The bi-focal attachment to the country of origin and the country of settlement gives rise to transcultural narratives that immigrant activists adopt to make sense of themselves and of their civic activism in the country of settlement” (Triandafyllidou 2008: 94). Being an immigrant or a foreigner may have initially been a disadvantage, but today, being able to link America with a place like Ethiopia in a sophisticated narrative becomes an asset, especially as the immigrant group begins to grow and form a political and economic block in a particular location. Transcultural capital then “involves the strategic use of knowledge, skills, and networks acquired by migrants through connections with their country and cultures of origin which are made active at their new places of residence” (Triandafyllidou 2008: 94). Ethiopians have been very successful in carving a space for themselves in the nation’s capital using transcultural capital.

The immigrants from Ethiopia are now influential, there are many thousands of Ethiopian Americans around and particularly they are influential in the District of Columbia. The taxi drivers and business owners are influential in politics today. Amharic is important today. In D.C., people have the right to get a translator when they go get social services. They are powerful at the district level, not the national level. There are many lobbies here. They have access to the mayor’s office and they try to lobby for their community. There are many rich people who have big parking companies, restaurants, small supermarkets around, and video shops are many here... It is just like mercato [large open air market] in Ethiopia, you can find anything you want. Culturally, you can find food and , clothes... you don’t feel like you are in a foreign land in Washington, D.C. Businesses are growing here (Dula, Oromo civil servant in his 50).

Dula’s comments illustrate that Ethiopians, from the Semitic speaking groups, have been able to use their links to the homeland to enrich themselves in the United States. It is through their business acumen and presence that they have become significant actors able to garner the attention of the city’s political leaders. The Oromo, on the other hand, are constrained because they have many fewer businesses and they are effectively blocked from connecting economically

to Ethiopia outside of remittances as will be discussed later in the chapter. In the section below, I will highlight the ways and degrees to which Ethiopians have been able to use their transcultural capital to mark certain areas of Washington, D.C. as Ethiopian spaces even in the face of opposition, which indicates their growing power.

U-Street Development

Ethiopian immigrants, during the 1980s began to make inroads into the Adams Morgan section of the city. This ethnic enclave hosted restaurants, beauty salons, groceries, and coffee shops. However, starting in the late 1990s, Ethiopian business owners in this increasingly trendy area, began to experience huge rent increases. Many Ethiopians who lacked the funds to keep up with the climbing rents, sought a more affordable section of the city to occupy. The U street corridor was designated as an opportune location due to its low real estate costs (Mohammed 2006). However, U street was a historically important area for African Americans. It used to be called Black Broadway. Starting in the 1960s though, the area began to decline due to desegregation, the riots that occurred in the 1960s after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, and the influx of drugs in the 1980s. Starting in the late 1990s, the city was eager to gentrify the Shaw neighborhood and supported the move of Ethiopian businesses into the U street corridor with the hope that the neighborhood could be improved.

The area improved markedly because of Ethiopian and other investments. There were serious discussions of naming a certain section of the U street corridor “Little Ethiopia.” The prospect, however, caused outrage with some segments of the African American community who felt that Ethiopians were attempting to erase their legacy. Many African American residents of the Shaw neighborhood had little problem with the development of the area, but took offense to the newcomers attempts to rename the space. Further, the U street corridor was already

recognized by the National Parks Service as a historic place of African American cultural heritage. Instead of settling into the neighborhood and seeking bonds with those already there, some African Americans felt that the Ethiopian immigrants sought to remake U street without them. African Americans in the area were angered that people who made up only a small portion of the neighborhood demographically, who had been in the country less than thirty years, and in the neighborhood less than 10 years were attempting to replace the heritage of the those that built many of the buildings these new businesses would occupy. This was very unsettling to many African Americans and a bespoke kind of arrogance from their perspective.

The Oromo reaction to this renaming controversy in D.C. is very revealing. The Oromo had a long experience with Ethiopian conquest and re-appropriation in Ethiopia. The vast majority of Oromo place names have been replaced by Amharic ones. If African Americans minorities with a long history of protest and more resources faced difficulty blocking the engine of Ethiopian progress in Washington, D.C., then how do groups like the Oromo fare in this environment when they have less financial power and little name recognition? Non-Oromo immigrants from Ethiopia arrived in the U.S. prior to many Oromos and many were from more privileged backgrounds. They had more capital to start businesses, were more educated, and by coming first, they could write others in and out of history in the ways that benefited their group in their interaction with Americans.

The process of the minority modeling of the Ethiopian and Eritrean communities in Adams Morgan, Shaw, and the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area is heavily stage-managed with retooled scripts and a fresh cast of actors. This dramaturgy of racing identity (both in the sense of body politic and athletic competitions) often gets shrouded with a discourse of fear and mythical virtue that contrasts a “successful” group against a pathologically inveterate, dangerous “under class” (Mohammed 2006: 101).

Ethiopian immigrants sought to push the campaign for “Little Ethiopia” forward with the help of then Ward 1 council man Jim Graham. Due to Councilman Graham’s support of the Ethiopian

community, he is viewed as the unofficial mayor of “Little Ethiopia,” he traveled to Ethiopia with the financial support of Ethiopian business owners, and also helped to get the Language Access Act of 2004 passed which recognized Amharic as one of the District’s six official languages. In addition, one of his chief aids, Tony Lonza, was charged with taking a bribe to influence taxi cab legislation in the district on behalf of Ethiopian taxi drivers. He was also the only non-Ethiopian recognized at the Ethiopian Millennium celebration for his contribution to the Ethiopian community in 2007. The Oromo active in ethnic institutions have no such political support, in part because their numbers are small, they lack adequate funds, and they fail to rally behind *Habesha* expressions of ethnicity. Ethiopians have become an important economic bloc in the District and have come to wield a tremendous amount of power compared to the Oromo.

Language Access Act of 2004

The DC Language Access Act of 2004 is a law that was enacted by Mayor Anthony A. Williams on April 21, 2004 administered through the District’s Office of Human Rights. The act was developed to give Limited English Proficient (LEP) and Non-English Proficient (NEP) resident’s access to the District’s programs, services, and information. Currently, six languages are recognized and Amharic is now one of the recognized languages. The languages recognized by the Language Access Act were determined based on data from the 2000 Census, the Brookings Institute reports, D.C. public schools and other government agencies that service LEP and NEP populations.⁸ Dozens of government agencies in the District offer LEP and NEP residents most documents in the approved languages. Residents that do not speak one of these six languages are given translation services over the phone while at the government agency, but non-approved languages are not given official status. Afaan Oromo is not recognized in the

⁸ Personal communication with the District’s Office of Human Rights. This agency is responsible for monitoring whether organizations are properly administering the language act.

District of Columbia at large. Further, every two years each of the government agencies prepares a language access plan/survey to evaluate its language needs. They do outreach with the community to determine their future language needs. It is here that each agency has the ability to translate documents into the language of any new population that arrives in the district in large numbers. In order to be recognized as an official language in the city, there needs to be “3% or 500 individuals with the populations served or encountered or likely to be served or encountered by a covered entity.” The Oromo population is large enough to be counted, but they do not have official status due to issues connected with perceived ethnicity. Oromo immigrants, in their intake procedure at various government agencies are usually asked about their nation of origin, not ethnicity and so they become invisible.

Remittances

In addition to economically investing in Washington, D.C, Ethiopia immigrants have been able to mobilize, in a number of ways, to assist those in the homeland. At this time, the most important way immigrants have helped Ethiopia has been through remittances. Remittances are important because they have a large and direct effect on the financial wellbeing of relatives in the home country. During the 2009/10 fiscal year the World Bank reported that \$387 million dollars was remitted to Ethiopia, while the figure for officially recorded remittance inflows reported by the National Bank of Ethiopia was more than \$600 million during the same period. If we combine the official figures with the unofficial remittance estimates, the numbers could be as high as in the range of \$1 billion to \$2 billion annually (World Bank report by Geda and Irving 2011).

Most of the country’s remittances come from the United States and because of the Washington area’s high number of Ethiopian immigrants, it is likely that much of the money

remitted to Ethiopia flows from this region. Though Oromo immigrants likely figure in these numbers, it is difficult to determine how much money Oromos send back to the Ethiopia because the information gathered does not take ethnicity into account. However, in 2010 the World Bank conducted the *Future of African Remittances: National Surveys*. These instruments attempted to illustrate the characteristics of remittance recipients and remitters.⁹ Though the survey data was not as comprehensive as it could have been at the regional level, it did provide some preliminary information about Oromo remittance practices where little had been present before. Nearly a third of those selected for the general survey were from Oromia. Further, roughly 30% of those from Oromia, with relatives abroad, received remittances. Nearly two thirds received between \$50 and \$250 each time they were sent money.¹⁰ Remittances are important for Oromo recipients especially when we consider that GDP for Ethiopia is \$454.¹¹ Remittances are extremely important to families in Ethiopia and have a poverty-alleviating effect if they are received by societal members at the lower end of income ladder. It is through remittances that Oromos are able to directly improve the lives of their relatives. It is one of the few ways that the Oromo can actually legally support relatives living in Ethiopia. On the other hand, remittances though they help families, they can lead to dependency.

People survive back there because we are here!!! There is a huge link between us and them. Without immigrant groups, the people would not survive, that is why people want to come here. On the other hand, there are some families who do not need the money and we send it anyway. They spend it on whatever. Even the poorer kids are starting not to value money (Boran).

¹⁰ These figures do not included the Oromo who may live in Addis Ababa. Though the information is not fully complete, it does give us a preliminary glimpse into the nature of remittance flows in Oromia.

¹¹ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

Amina, a vibrant woman in her late 30s, works in the hospitality industry. She has lived abroad for more than half of her life. At times she is gets frustrated about her life. She states she never really had a life or was free from stress because there is always someone calling.

I have lived outside the country in different countries for many years before I actually arrived in the United States. I have been supporting my family since I was a teenager. I have not had a life of my own because my life has been dedicated to sending money back home. I bought every major item that they need like refrigerators, DVD players, TVs, computers and have paid the school fees of a number of different family members. There is no health insurance as we know it here and you have to pay for everything. When someone in the family is ill you have to pay their bills or pay for their medicine. I send anywhere from \$200 -\$500 on average and sometimes more. For instance, if there is a holiday, I also have to send them money as a gift so they can buy a sheep for the house. Since I have been here, I only went back one time and I had to bring many items with me and you always forget something. Further, people also ask you to take things with you because if you send money in the mail it will not arrive or if you send electronics you have to pay taxes on the item because they make you open your package at the post office so they can assess tax... so people rather send highly taxed items via suitcase, not mail. They took everything the last time I went. I even left one of my suitcases because people need everything or they act like they do. The funny thing is that had I not sent money to them, I could have been well into paying for a house or purchased a number of new cars by now. I gave up my life for them, they are so ungrateful and when I sent money sometimes they did not even say thank you.

A common thread about remittances is connected to the issue of value. I was told by many of my participants that the people back home think that you can “pick money from a tree”. They do not realize how hard it is to make a living in the United States. Many participants were upset that those on the receiving end of remittances were not more grateful. Though remittances aid families in Ethiopia and can lift them out of poverty they are a financial burden to those that live in the United States.

Diaspora for Development

In addition to the indirect economic development function that remittances play, many nations around the world are seeking to formally harness the economic power of their diasporas for economic development. Nation-states, international economic institutions, and NGOs are no

longer the only actors involved in achieving a nation's development goals, the diaspora is now seen as a stakeholder as well.

A country's diaspora is of supreme importance to many low income nations. Ethiopia, in particular, has some of the most developed diaspora engagement policies in Sub-Saharan Africa; its policies have been influenced by the Indian diaspora engagement model (Kuschminder and Siegel 2010: 5). To involve its diaspora in the nation building process, Ethiopia established the Diaspora Engagement Affairs General Directorate. The aim of the directorate is to “serve as a liaison between different federal Ministries, regional Diaspora coordinating offices and Ethiopians in Diaspora; encourage the active involvement of the Ethiopians in Diaspora in socio-economic activities of the country; Mobilize the Ethiopian community abroad for a sustained and organized image building” (2011).

The Ethiopian government seeks to achieve the aforementioned goals using a host of policy initiatives. In 2011, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Diaspora Engagement Affairs General Directorate produced the *Basic Information for Ethiopian in the Diaspora Guide*.

This guide outlines policies and other basic information needed to assist possible diaspora investors in the investment process. They have issued the Ethiopian Origin Identity Card (Yellow Card), though it does not allow dual citizenship, it gives expatriates the ability to benefit from many rights enjoyed by Ethiopian citizens with the exception of voting and running for office. They also offer investment and import incentives which give Ethiopian investors living abroad tax holidays and the government legally considers diaspora investors like domestic investors. The government also started, in partnership with the UN and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Transfer of Knowledge and Skills Programme. This program was established to promote capacity building in Ethiopia. Highly skilled and educated

professional visit Ethiopia and share their expertise with various government agencies and organizations. This program aims both to facilitate capacity building in the country and allows the diaspora to contribute their knowledge and skills to the nation building process.

The Transfer of Knowledge and Skills Programme stands out because it has the potential to be a very important initiative for the diaspora. In one of their initiatives, Ethiopia and non-Ethiopian Ear, Nose, and Throat health practitioners were sent to Ethiopia to undertake various procedures difficult to obtain in the country. The team was sent to Addis Ababa and to Mekele. Though 36 percent of the country's inhabitants live in the Oromia region none of its cities were selected for care. Though Addis Ababa is technically physically a part of Oromia, it is viewed as a separate political entity. Addis Ababa is an understandable destination because it is the capital city. On the other hand, the Tigray province of which Mekele is a part, only contains 5.9 percent of the population. This region was selected because the former head of state and many of people his administration were from that region.

In terms of diaspora investment, 90 percent of the monies invested in the country by the diaspora have gone to the Addis Ababa area leaving the other areas neglected by diaspora efforts. The remaining investment has gone to the home region of the investor which is less likely to be Oromo. I asked Dula about the challenges that Oromos face in seeking to invest in Ethiopia and he gave this very telling account.

There is a big difference. I think the Oromo people, even the rich Oromo people can't go back and start a business unless he is from the OPDO. Politics plays a big role, if you take a Tigrayan, no problem for him, he can go and start a business. But for Oromos it is very tough. Because even the process is very long and you have to cut through all these obstacles, corruption obstacles and finally maybe you ended up losing your money trying to invest in Oromia. Another issue, there is senior control over Oromo development. They do not allow Oromos to become business owners in Ethiopia, even if you have a shop they will harass you unless you become an OPDO member. They will say you are an OLF members and you are running OLF money here. It is difficult for them to work in Ethiopia. Even if they are OPDO sometimes they don't even trust them.

The Oromo, as was discussed in chapter 1, are viewed as a kind of perpetual outsider, they are seen as lacking a deep connection to the foundational culture and as a result, they continually have to prove their loyalty. One of the most popular ways to prove your ties to the state is to join the government sanctioned OPDO organization. Oromo immigrants have a difficult time investing in Ethiopia because the Ethiopian government views any Oromo institutions or diaspora investors as possible covers for seditious activity. Because the Oromo are such a large group they have to be monitored and controlled.

As Oromos, they want to peel them down to the base. It is very difficult for them to start businesses, but remittance wise, of course Oromos are helping their families living back home that has a big impact on people living over there. But investment wise, no, they don't allow, they only let Tigrayans invest in the Oromo region and use the resources of the Oromo. If you go to the Oromo areas all of the investors are Amhara and Tigrayan. It is difficult for the Oromos to get loans from the bank, they do not get equal access to the resources to get a grant to start a business. It is very tough.

The Oromos are the largest population in the country. Everybody is in fear of the Oromo and they don't want them to become powerful so all these conditions are not good for the Oromo diaspora to fully to participate in investment. Of course, individuals can participate as others do. Among the Tigrayans everyone is building a school for their village and for their community and they contribute money. Our problem is that we are divided and even if we were not divided the government will not allow major participation from foreign Oromo for fear they may support militants. Every action, even good intentioned ones are interpreted into politics and think that, "Oh, you are trying to organize people there" So it is very, very tough for them. Sometimes they confiscate an Oromo man's property and put him in prison or push him to leave the country. Just being an Oromo is a crime (Dula).

The Oromo view the discrimination they face, with regard to investment, as a case of pouring old wine into new bottles. Since incorporation, the Oromo areas have been the breadbasket of the country and Oromo resources have been controlled by outsiders. In order to maintain this unequal set of economic relations the Oromo must be controlled. The government is very fearful of an Oromo uprising or an increase in support for the OLF. So they limit the potential threat of foreign support for the organization and make investment difficult for many people except for a few well connected individuals.

In 2009 the Ethiopian government enacted the Charities and Societies Proclamation Law with the hope of regulating the activities of both Ethiopian and foreign civil society organizations. This law defines all organizations receiving more than 10% of their funding from foreign sources as ‘foreign NGOs’ and banned them from carrying out any political or human rights activities in the country. Organizations that engage strictly in the economic sphere are allowed to operate in the country. This law is a harsh and the direct response to the unwanted participation of the Ethiopian diaspora communities in the politics of the country. Many Ethiopian charities and advocacy groups are dependent on foreign sources of income and are unlikely to be able to raise enough funds to achieve their various missions without support from abroad. Many provisions of this new policy have the potential to “severely weaken the work of independent civil society organizations, particularly human rights defenders and advocates of democratic governance” (Mulat, Hopkins, and Noble 2009: 1) Ironically, Ethiopians living abroad that fund NGOs will be considered foreign, but those that do business in the country are viewed legally as local investors. Under this law, “the advancement of human and democratic rights; the promotion of equality of nations and nationalities and peoples and that of gender and religion, the promotion of the rights of disabled and children’s rights, the promotion of conflict resolution or reconciliation and the promotion of the efficiency of the justice and law enforcement services” should be left to Ethiopian Charities and Societies.

Oromo activity in Ethiopia had already been severely curtailed prior to 2009 because of the regime’s ongoing conflict with the Oromo Liberation Front. Any person or institution suspected of supporting the OLF could potentially endure criminal punishment. As a result, non-government voluntary associations and charities in Oromia are very limited. It was virtually impossible, prior to the Charities and Societies law for independent Oromo charitable and

development organizations to operate in the country without governmental suspicion. As a result, many Oromo organizations conduct their activities almost solely outside of the country. As a result, Oromo organizations are left to focus most of their activity on refugees in surrounding countries in the Horn of Africa or consciousness raising activities and lobbying in the diaspora. As was the case with an organization like the Oromo Relief Association though, work done in diaspora could have the potential to change the lives of people in Oromia.

Ethnicity and Commerce in the Diaspora

When Oromos arrive, they start at the low level of strata of America because they do not have money and even if they have money then can't bring the money here..., most start making \$7.00 and \$7.55 [per hour]... The problem with the business here is that they are exploiters, they exploit new arrivals. They don't pay them a good salary. They don't treat them as a laborer, they don't give them benefits. Because when they come they do not have a job directly they then run to them [Ethiopian networks]. You know this butcher house? They work 12 hours, but they don't pay them for two hours. They pay them only for 10 hours for that time they pay them \$50.00 for 12 hours, which is nonsense... 5-0. They give them food, food is nothing! If you go to the restaurants also, the young girls are simply getting tips, tips only, they don't pay them money most of them, the majority of them do not even pay a single coin they just allow them to work to collect tips. That's very tough, they do not have insurance (Ibssa).

Housing is a problem for the vast majority of newcomers, especially in a place like Washington, D.C. Immigrants cannot afford housing and they live in groups. Many newcomers are very poor and live from hand to mouth, so they cannot change their life immediately.

Additionally, the burden of remittances on the less educated limits the time they can dedicate to education and civic activities.

The problem many Oromos face are economic ones, some of them are illiterate, some from Harar and Bale ...they were farmers back home... for those people it is tough to integrate them. Some are going to school and get good training and finally get a job as a nurse, a pharmacist and, and a teacher, but the ones that remain here are the taxi driver. Even nowadays even when some graduated from college and university, they ended up with debt and because they could not find a job in their specialization. This is not specific to Oromos, this problem occurs with many asylee groups. A few are successful, but frustration and depression impact the asylees and refugees. Divorce is frequent due to the economic situation (Dula).

It is usually the large mature communities and or wealthy members of the community that can fund projects and mobilize for political and development projects. They have the capital to invest locally and abroad.

Recently Tigrayans... it just like in Ethiopia, some when they arrive, they buy 7-11s, some are buying gas stations, and even some start shops and supermarkets, grabbing money from the people of Ethiopia. Even class wise, Tigrayans are better off nowadays in the area. This is a new development; when I came some year back, I did not see asylees starting businesses just on their arrival. I did not see any green card holders and DV card holders starting business here in America. This is new within the last 5 years. Not all of them, some start immediately buying a house, even before we people that have been here for 10 years buying a house. Some pay in cash, I do not know.

In recent years Dula believes that the Tigrayans, due to their close ties to government, have reaped many of the benefits of Ethiopia's growth in the post-socialist period. Increasingly, unlike their predecessors, many arrive with money to start a business. Many Oromos and others in the diaspora think this is due to corruption. Some in the diaspora argue that the Oromo have links to the government as well. The Oromos I spoke with stated that these linkages have not translated into any material gains; they concede that though there have been Oromo presidents, they have not wielded any real power to change the institutionalized discrimination the Oromo experience. The position of president is ceremonial. Presidential duties include: the granting of pardons, military titles, awards and metals and reviewing the qualifications of ambassadors and on occasion appointing them. The president also opens the annual joint session of the legislative branches of government. In the post-Derg era, the president serves as a symbolic figurehead used to appease the Oromo and provide symbolic integration.

The Oromo Center

There are two major Oromo community centers in the area. I conducted my work with Oromo that frequented the Oromo Center. The Oromo Center is a small building in the

Northwestern part of Washington, D.C. It is located on a small block that contains businesses that appear to be in constant flux. The street is busy and parking on the block can be difficult. The building that houses the center is non-descript except for a small sign that says Oromo Center in both English and in Afaan Oromo. Over the years, Oromos community leaders and members have renovated the center, at times, using their own money. On the ground floor there is a small café, upstairs there are meeting and office spaces, and in the basement there is a pool table and an open room where additional tables are set up for card games or to discuss current events. The Oromo Center is active mostly on the weekends where people keep weekly appointments. It is through these weekly appointments that Oromo keep in touch with friends and news. During the occasions that I visited, on any given Friday, in the span of a few hours, anywhere from 25 to 50 people may come in and out staying for varying amounts of time. The center at times hosts talks by Oromo scholars, community meetings, and small gatherings. Those in attendance range in age generally from early to mid 20s into 60s. On occasion, children accompany their parents and the from time to time, some students also drop in for a visit. The community is open to all and when the other center, Oromo Community Center, has a function they are likely to advertise at the Oromo Center and people from that group will support them depending on the nature of the event.

To procure and renovate this space was quite an undertaking for this segment of the Oromo community. I was told by a long time community member the following challenges the Oromo center faced in trying to establish an Oromo archive, library or what was often referred to as the “Oromo Information Center.” Finding a home for such an archive and cultural center was a driving interest of Sisai Ibssa who was instrumental in establishing the Oromo Center:

It was the hope that the Oromo Center, if established permanently, could provide a place for locating materials and information about Oromo history and culture. Sisai was in conversation with OSA and the general community for many years concerning the establishment of an

information center or library.

Sisai gave up on OSA as being the institution to erect the Oromo Information Center, though on the face of it, they would have been in the best position to do so as a scholarly association. But even OSA did not have a stable physical office space. OSA's address changes with each treasurer. The Oromo materials important to scholars required a permanent home. He and his colleagues decided that an information center should be set up in America for security reasons. Scholars in Oromia advocated this so that the information would not be destroyed. They wanted Oromos to build their own traditions, and without knowledge that project is hard. Oromo are not allowed to do it there in Ethiopia and they are not equipped to do it here because they lack resources and experience.

It [the Oromo Center] was not supposed to be just a community center; it was established for the promotion of Oromo information. Most community centers do not have a library component and that is something that was envisioned for this center. The purchase of this place was the culmination of 10 years of effort. There had been a long-standing effort to build an Oromo House supported by a wide range of members from the Oromo community in general. Finally the supporters of the Oromo Center decided that they needed to proceed and began to negotiate in 2003-2004. To purchase a building in D.C. that was owned by an Oromo community group was a defining moment in April 2005. Sisai was the driving force behind making that happen in order to have a library. He personally collected books and thought about linking the Oromo Information Center to other collections. He also dedicated all of his books to the center.

He wanted to establish an Oromo Information Center that was independent and accessible to all Oromo groups. Many want to keep the Information Center separate from the Oromo Center once it is fully established. Sisai worked hard to link with all Oromo groups and even helped to found a political group that was an assemblage of the major Oromo groups active in Ethiopia and the diaspora. It did not work out, but he was a long-time proponent of unity among the different Oromo groups. Whatever the fate of the people, the community needs a nonpartisan center that is connected both to Oromia and America to house information.

The Oromo Center is one of the handful of Oromo spaces in the metropolitan area. Though this is the case, it is mostly patronized by a small segment of the Oromo population. The Oromo Center like many other communities are diversified and one's place or origin or networks influence the composition a group's membership. This Center houses some of the earliest members of the diaspora in the Washington, D.C. area.

Ethiopian Nationalism and the Millennium Celebrations: Nation, Ethnicity and Race the Reinscription of Time in Washington, D.C.

The Ethiopian Millennium celebrations that took place in the city in 2007 will be the subject of the rest of the chapter in order to illuminate the ways in which Ethiopian nationalism

spills outside of its national boundaries and inserts itself in the heart of America. Ethiopian nationalism is coming to exert a great deal of power in the Washington, D.C. and its environs. I included this section in order to give the reader insight into the nature of the environment Oromos encounter in the establishment of Oromo institutions in the capital by highlighting the discourses and practices around which they have to maneuver in their attempts to create a footing in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

On September 12, 2007, the Ethiopian community in Washington, D.C. celebrated the turn of the millennium based on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's calendar. This time was characterized by contemplation about Ethiopia's past and an anticipation of a new age, analogous to what we experienced in the United States in 1999 leading up to Y2K. The Ethiopian Millennium was represented, by Ethiopian community organizers, as an important moment in history around which Ethiopians could unify with members of the old and new African diasporas and enter a new age of progress. The discourses associated with the Ethiopian millennial new year can be conceived of as a reshuffling of key Ethiopian national themes that serve to reinscribe time as a means to affirm Ethiopian hegemony transnationally. I include a detailed discussion of this event because it illustrates the ways in which members of the Ethiopian diaspora used their capital, networks, certain interpretations of history to posit a role for themselves not just as leaders of the Ethiopian community in the United States vis-à-vis groups like the Oromo, but for the African diaspora more broadly by virtue of the fact that they have a written calendar and many other African groups do not. The calendar can be understood as a proxy for civilization. The Ethiopian Millennium was read by ethnically conscious Oromos as a *Habesha* event created to celebrate the very elements of Ethiopian nationalism in the diaspora that many Oromo had tried to escape with migration. The Ethiopian Millennium in D.C. and the

events surrounding it provide an opportunity to examine the polysemic quality of discourses and discursive events. They also highlight the over-determined quality associated with commemorative events. Though this celebration is not explicitly concerned with the Oromo, but an understanding of the events associated with the Ethiopian Millennium highlight the complex and repackaged iterations of Ethiopian nationalisms Oromos are exposed to and circumscribed by in the United States.

I attended three different millennial events: the “Ethiopian Millennium Conference: Reflections on the Past, Present Challenges, and Light into the Future” (Sept 8-9) at Howard University, the Ethiopian New Year Celebration on the Mall (September 11), and a wreath laying ceremony by the grandson of Emperor Haile Selassie, Prince Ermias Sahle-Selassie, at the African American Civil War Memorial located in the U street area (September 12). In addition, the speech given by Prince Ermias Sahle-Selassie at the New Bethel Baptist Church following the wreath laying ceremony will also be discussed. This section is important because it encapsulates the tensions associated with race, place, and nation within transnational contexts.

By the middle of the summer of 2007, there was a tremendous amount of anticipation and excitement surrounding the coming Ethiopian Millennium. Every Ethiopian business that I entered and most publications contained reference to September’s millennium celebration. There were both official and unofficial celebrations. A Committee for the Celebration of the Ethiopian Millennium was established to ensure that the New Year received proper commemoration and they organized number of events leading up to September 12, 2007. The committee organized an international IT two-day symposium at the World Bank , a musical gala, a theatrical show, an art exhibit, and, on the day of the millennium, a March For Democracy was also organized to highlight the community’s goal to enter the new millennium dedicated to democracy, peace, and

unity. There were so many events being advertised that no one person could attend them all. As such, businesses and promoters capitalized on the buzz surrounding the millennium and added some reference to the millennium onto as many events and items as possible to turn a profit. Excitement was in the air as people prepared themselves for a week of celebration and commemoration of all things Ethiopian. I would venture to say that the Ethiopian Millennium was one of the most important events in the history of the Ethiopian diaspora in the Washington, D.C. area because it was used to highlight the Ethiopian presence in the city.

Members of the Oromo community I spoke with, on the other hand, were not excited about the host of millennium events slated to occur in early September 2007. Some of those with whom I spoke informed me that they would not be participating in any of the Ethiopian Millennium events because they were not Ethiopian and did not want to partake in the Ethiopian nationalism that would likely be on display. Lutheran Oromos declared that they did not follow the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's calendar and according to the Western calendar they adhered to, the millennium started seven years prior. Muslim Oromos gave a similar response. Oromo activists were even more critical of the events and felt dismayed at the growth and power of the Ethiopian lobby in the city that could pull something off of this magnitude. Further, the messages of hope and change associated with the Ethiopian millennial discourse was viewed as absurd and lacking true commitment to change. There was no need to celebrate Ethiopia or her history, as far as they were concerned, as long as the Oromo were exposed to exploitation and brutality at the hands of the state. On the other hand, there were other Oromos who were Orthodox Christians who were prepared to celebrate the Ethiopian Millennium. Further, there were a number of young Oromo people that were not interested in attending formal ceremonies, but looked forward to the host of parties that would be exploding all around the city; they simply

sought to socialize. There was no single view of the Millennium within the Oromo community at large; their views were varied with those active in ethnic institutions seeing the events in more negative terms.

The Ethiopian Millennium Celebration on the Mall

Of the many events that I could have attended, I decided to attend the climax event: the countdown to the start of the New Year. As is typically the case in Washington, D.C., parking near the National Mall was difficult to obtain and I had to park blocks away and walk to the event. This evening, however, I did not mind as it gave me the opportunity to observe the people on the street, most of whom were Ethiopians. This was a reversal of the typical composition of people who normally occupy this space. There are usually only a small number of Ethiopians on the Mall and in the museum district during the day; they occupy the periphery, operating food carts, souvenir stands, or appear driving taxis. The bulk of those that inhabit these spaces during the day are American and international tourists and civil servants. On this evening, however, the Ethiopians were the majority. They converged on the Mall in a variety of group configurations: there were couples, small families, females groups of teen girls, as well as co-ed groups. As I entered the Mall area, the magnitude of the event set in. It was estimated that at least 30,000 people attended the event. Prior to this event, I had never been in a crowd of this size in an urban setting. I was amazed that members of the Ethiopian community were able to secure the Mall for such an event, at night, on September 11. This feat indicates that they are an emerging force in the city.

The majority of those in attendance appeared to be young people; those under 30 likely made up 60% of the crowd, while those over thirty years of age made up the other 40%. I was

surprised to see so many children in attendance and many stayed until midnight; parents felt their children should witness this once in a lifetime cultural event, so they allowed them to stay up late just this once. The people were dressed mostly in Western clothes with a minority of people wearing traditional attire. There were a number of people carrying flags, scarves, and wearing T-shirts with Ethiopian themes emblazoned on them. The energy on the Mall was festive and people broke out in dance throughout the night as they were entertained until the countdown to the New Millennium. There were a number of speakers and musical acts that performed at the event. One memorable act was a hip hop group from Georgia called the Burnt Faces which simply means Ethiopian. The group was comprised of Ethio-American youths and they performed songs mostly in English with a sprinkling of Amharic for effect. One song that moved the crowd was “Andenet Ethiopia”. He linked Ethiopia to Africa in this song and affirmed unity in a community split by conflict. An African band with members from Mali, Cameroon and America also performed. There was a representative from Shashemene, Ethiopia that spoke at the event as well. In the Shashemene area of Ethiopia, Rastafarians were granted a place to settle. This representative wanted to show solidarity with Ethiopians in the diaspora in their celebration of the Ethiopian Millennium. He was followed by a reggae band that closed their set with a Bob Marley song. Ironically, there were not any Ethiopian bands playing during the last few hours of the celebrations and they simply played Ethiopian CDs between acts. The New Year’s fire was also kindled as well. Following the countdown, the crowd began to disperse. Afterward, there were parties all around the city and popular restaurants like *Dukem* held extended hours to take advantage of the crowds and the festive mood.

The Prince and the African American Civil War Memorial

The next morning, I attended an event that I was alerted to the previous night by a local activist I met on the Mall. Though I knew very little about the event, it turned out to be an important transnational affair. This millennial event was a memorial organized by the Crown Council at the African American Civil War Memorial on 10th and U streets. The focal point of the memorial was a 10 foot bronze statue entitled the *Spirit of Freedom*. The monument was encircled by a low stone wall inscribed with the names of 200,000 African American men that fought in the Civil War. The organizers of the event placed photos of notable people and events of cooperation between Ethiopians and African Americans around the memorial. The event was only attended by a small number of people, some of those that attended saw that a crowd of Ethiopians had formed and wanted to see what was astir. After some time passed, a middle aged man of medium height and of slim frame dressed in traditional attire with western touches walked up to the monument with a very small entourage in tow. I asked a fellow onlooker who he was and was told that he was Emperor Haile Selassie's grandson Prince Ermias Sahle-Selassie. A local D.C. official also arrived and spoke about Ethiopia's contribution to the city and his relationship with Ethiopian merchants in the area. The prince spoke of his respect for the African American community and the sacrifices they made to make America a better place which by extension helped Ethiopian immigrants; as a result, on behalf of the Ethiopian community of Washington, D.C. he presented the African American community a Millennial gift, a wreath.

Shortly after the wreath giving ceremony Prince Ermias Sahle-Selassie addressed the nearby New Bethel Baptist Church. The speech attempted to repackage Ethiopian nationalism for a new audience where Ethiopian exceptionalism and a concern with history were both privileged; further, the speech positioned Ethiopians as model minorities and future leaders of

Africa and the diaspora. Prince Ermias started his speech by stating that African Americans and Ethiopians should use the Ethiopian Millennium as an opportunity to unite and advance into a new age. In so doing, the Ethiopian Millennial New Year could be used as the occasion to let go of the past (possible animosity) and move forward. The Prince, as a stand in for the Ethiopian community, initially adopted a deferential position vis-à-vis African Americans and Africans on the continent. He expressed gratitude toward African American Civil Rights leaders and the contribution of African Americans to Ethiopia's fight against Italy. He also recognized Ethiopian and African leaders that fought for independence on the continent.

The speech then shifted in its tone and attention. Prince Ermias focused the next section of his remarks on Ethiopia's pasts. "We Ethiopians are proud of our ancient history and distinct culture that has been preserved unbroken since pre-biblical times until the modern age". With this statement he attempted to justify the importance of the Ethiopian Millennium and implies that Ethiopia has an unbroken history since time immemorial and she hence should be preserved as a nation.

Ethiopian civilization is a world treasure of great importance, as it is the root of Judeo-Christian civilization, as well as the fabric of Muslim society. Thus, as we celebrate the new Millennium, let us pledge to always uphold and preserve this ancient heritage that has been the beacon of hope and a bridge of peaceful coexistence for African people.

Finally, the prince informed the audience that the local government and the African Union both recognized the Ethiopia's Millennium as the African Millennium by virtue of her ancient traditions, important connections to the Abrahamic faiths, and her role as a beacon of African independence.

The event at the African American Civil War Memorial was a display of respect and show of appreciation by the Ethiopian community to the African American community for its

historic support during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the Civil Rights movement. The wreath and the photos illustrating cooperation were an act of reconciliation. This act was used by the Ethiopian community to smooth over tensions between themselves and the African American community in the exact zone in which the ruptures between the two groups had occurred on U street over race and issues of space. The wreath laying event and the speech given by Prince Ermias Sahle-Selassie were part of a concerted effort by Ethiopian organizations in the city to position Ethiopians as model minorities and leaders of the black community in and outside of America.

The Ethiopian Millennium though is offered as a site of compromise, it can also be read as the reinscription of Ethiopian nationalism transnationally. The Prince's speech coupled with the proclamation issued by the Mayor's Office stating that September 12, 2007 would be celebrated as Ethiopian Millennium Day in the District of Columbia, the African Union's recognition of the Ethiopian Millennium as a unique event on the African continent, and the UN General Assembly's recognition of September 12, 2007 to September 11, 2008 as the year commemorating the Ethiopian Millennium all played a role in legitimizing Ethiopia's notion of time. Obscure events of this type do not gain international visibility without a strong lobby. Its significance is not given and recognition of this type has to be constructed. Through the Ethiopian Millennium, Ethiopians in and outside of Africa attempted to institute their notion of time transnationally for people of African descent. Ethiopia was deemed the leader of the new age not by virtue of her technological advancement, economic success or because of her democratic traditions, it was because of her exceptionalism, i.e., pre-modern literacy, surviving calendar, and her connections to the Middle East that makes her civilization, including her notion of time, a model for Oromo, Africans, and African Americans to follow. It is an external

imposition whereby people of African descent become subordinate players in the historical narrative led by Ethiopia.

Conclusion

For the Oromos I worked with, these celebrations represented manifestations of the growth and reinscription of Ethiopian nationalism in the diaspora. Oromo and even certain impoverished African Americans have difficulty in contests with Ethiopian over space and time within the District. Ethiopian's exceptionalism, though problematized by Oromo, Eritrean, and Somali groups, is still hegemonic. In this way, in Washington D.C., Ethiopian actors and their discourse about the nation have become dominant because of their larger numbers, better education, and more plentiful resources. Ethiopians have been able to control and police the discourse on the nation more than Oromo actors that advocate their position using an ethnic frame that is less understood than that of the nation in America.

CHAPTER 3

THE OROMO IN ETHIOPIA: MEMORIES OF CONQUEST, INCORPERATION, AND RESISTANCE

I live about an hour away from Washington, D.C. and on my usual trips to the city for interviews or to attend cultural events, I am usually fairly relaxed. Today I felt a little nervous because I was on my way to attend my first Oromo political protest march. The march was to begin at the State Department and end at the Capital Building. The march was staged by an Oromo youth organization to protest Ethiopian military involvement in Somalia. As I crossed the street to approach the march site, I saw a group of approximately 25 young people ranging in age from late elementary to college aged congregating on a large median at an intersection. Three girls dressed in traditional Oromo clothes, from various parts of Oromia, were holding a large banner emblazoned with the sponsoring group's name. Others in the group were either wearing western clothes or t-shirts adorned with organizational logos. Some of the student protesters carried hand written signs that read "Stop Killing Oromo Students", "We March 4 Peace", "Honk to Free Oromia", "Democracy Yes, Killing No", "Immediate Sanctions Against the Meles Regime", and "Ethiopia out of Oromia".

As I passed the protesters on the median, I saw a larger crowd of approximately 150 to 200 people congregating on the sidewalk on the other side of the street. There appeared to be equal numbers of students and adults. As I entered the crowd, I began to exchanging greetings with people I knew. Though the march took place in Washington, D.C. only and a little over half the participants were local, there were participants from Pennsylvania, New York, and I was told that 40-50 people came from Minnesota. Further, the march was also multi-religious with both Muslims and Christians standing in unity against the repression of Oromo students and refugees

in Somalia. This was not just a male affair, I estimate that a third of those in attendance were female with many of them college aged or younger.

After a brief period of socializing, the march began. We marched at a moderate pace and in no time the silence faded and the crowd became enlivened as Oromos men of strong voice and rhythmic speech took turns shouting protest phrases in English. Some of the student staged a reenactment of a walk captured refugees might experience. There was a group of 6 students, three male and 3 female, all bound together by a rope tied about their necks. They also walked with their hands cross behind them to symbolize being handcuffed. The three males were dressed in different costumes: a lab coat, a cap and gown, and a pair of scrubs respectively. The females were all dressed in tee-shirts splattered with blood and they all had gauze wrapped around their head to indicate a head injury. The group was lead by a man, in a military costume two held an improvised whip in one hand and a stick in another. He periodically pretended to hit the prisoners along the march. This sight caught the attention of many American bystanders. Other protesters held professionally produced sign with the pictures of Oromos students that had been injured or killed to highlight the plight of students in Oromia with the captions, “THIS IS A REAL AFRICAN TRAGEDY!!! WHERE IS THE REAL AMERICAN MEDIA???”

It was a crowded day on Constitution Avenue and many people witnessed the protest. Further, as we got closer to the Washington monument the protesting students engaged people passing by on the road in conversation about Oromo issues and they passed out fliers. The aim of the protest march was to bring awareness to the latest Oromo cause that had been ignored by the American media. Ethiopia’s military action in Somalia had received attention in the media, but the alternative reading the Oromo offered had only been reported in specialized media organs or by human rights organizations. Ethiopia has tight control of its media and even blocks the

internet. According to the Reporters without Borders press freedom index (2013), Ethiopia scored 137 out of 179 countries. The Anti-Terrorism Law of 2009 has been used by the government to silence journalists, activists, and students. Using this legislation, the government can detain its journalists, critics, and activists that produce material deemed anti-government.

Marches of this type happen frequently and at times, they are coordinated globally so that those in Sweden, Minnesota, Washington, in Australia all come together with one voice to express dismay at the latest atrocity committed against the Oromo in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa broadly. Ethiopia's reach extends beyond its borders and Oromo refugees in Kenya, Somalia, and even in Egypt are often captured brought back to Ethiopia where they are imprisoned. Today's tensions are linked to the past and Oromos at this march view this latest atrocity as one in a more than a century's long history of violence and exploitation. This march in and of itself is unlikely to change Ethiopian policy, but it is an act of resistance and education in the host country. Oromos living in the diaspora speak for those who do not have the ability to publicize their concerns and abuse. The march is one part of the diaspora's ongoing campaign to push the United States to intervene in the region with a consideration of Oromo issues.

This protest was symbolically rich and illustrated the complexity of the interplay between the Oromo diaspora, discourses of resistance, and ethnic conflict with deep historical roots in the Horn of Africa. It was a discursive event staged in a global field of signification and contestation. To illustrate, Oromo college students from Minnesota staged a rally in Washington, D.C. attended by Oromos from around the country to protest Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia that less were less about Ethiopia's participation in the global fight to curb Islamic extremism and more about combating Oromo dissent in eastern Oromia.

Many of the young people involved in organizing the march were from families with members that had experienced persecution. The same forces and conflicts that caused many of their parents to flee still operate on the Oromo people. As a result, it is through a history of persecution and memories of resistance that these students connect to their Oromo identity. “Moreover, memory and identity depend upon each other since not only is identity rooted in memory, but also what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity (Gillis 1994b: 3). Both the Ethiopian government’s actions in Somalia and the staging of this march in D.C. represent competing forms of transpolitical activity (Silverstein 2004). Transpolitical activity spills out of its national containers and becomes deterritorialized and seeks to extend its territoriality and subsume other people and jurisdictions under its control. Paul Silverstein’s *Algeria in France* is a book that traces the role that the colonization of Algeria and the transnational flow of people and discourses played in constituting both French national identity and notions of Algeria in France. It is the position of many Oromo academics (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990; Keller 1991), activists and lay people that Ethiopia too was constituted through her colonial encounter with her southern neighbors, namely the Oromo. The history of this process is central to any understanding of Oromo identity today. The ethnic power differentials present within Washington, D.C. discussed in Chapter two have their roots in the Ethiopian conquest and incorporation of the Oromo.

Oromo memories of conquest and resistance were deeply felt by those I interviewed. The founding of the modern nation of Ethiopia, like many other nations, was fraught with violence.

There are no identities, national or otherwise that are not constituted and challenged in time and with histories, but nations have a special place in the history of memory and identity and in the history of their relations. Memory and the nation have a peculiar synergy. Even when other identities compete with or supplant the national in postmodernity, they draw on-and are increasingly nostalgic for – the uniquely powerful forms of memory generated in the crucible of the nation-state. (Olick 2003: 2).

For the Oromo, the violence that led to the birth of modern Ethiopia, their loss of autonomy, and the disenfranchisement that ensued were difficult memories to forget. This crucible of the nation-state did indeed forge resistance. Even memories of failed earlier resistance can be both “bitter and energizing” and can be the fodder for future resistance (Tareke 1991:158). This chapter on the history of the conquest of Oromo areas and Oromo resistance will serve to contextualize the current Oromo identity practices and narratives that will be the subject of the rest of this dissertation. In this chapter, I outline those aspects of Oromo the historical past that inform the memories, identity formation, and resistance practices of the Oromo diaspora today. In this chapter, I seek to highlight those elements of the Oromo past that were repeatedly discussed at Oromo academic conferences, community meetings, and in private conversations about the Oromo.

The Oromo Prior to Conquest

Prior to Abyssinian conquest of Oromo lands during the 19th century, the Oromo lived under three general political arrangements: the traditional *gada* system, within Oromo kingdoms in the south-west, or as part of Abyssinia proper. In the section that follows, I provide a brief description of the various Oromo communities of the region prior to conquest in order to highlight the ways in which the pre-conquest social arrangements and interactions shaped the later forms of incorporation and resistance that occurred in different Oromo populations. The Oromo communities are discussed in the order of their proximity to Abyssinia with those more distant from Abyssinia being discussed first.

The Gada System

Prior to conquest, the Oromo lived under a system of governance called the *gada*. The term is difficult to define in a singular way. According to Mohammed Hassen (1994), the word *gada* is derived from term *gaddisa* which means shelter or shade. Within this conception the terms can mean to take shelter or shade from the sun or to provide someone shelter or protection (9-10). “The term gada cannot be given a univocal interpretation. It stands for several related ideas. It is first of all the concept standing for the whole way of life. More specifically it refers to any period of eight years during which any class stays in power” (Legesse 1973: 8). In traditional Oromo society, male members of the Oromo society were divided into age-grades based on eight year cycles. At the age of 40, each class took a leadership role in the society. This system was democratic and contained checks and balances to ensure that power was centralized (Legesse 1973).

The Gibe States of Southwest Ethiopia

As the Oromo expanded into more productive areas, the democratic *gada* system gave way to Oromo monarchies. Oromo monarchies emerged in areas around the Gibe river located in southwestern Ethiopia. There were a number of factors that lead to the decline of the gada system and the emergence of Oromo kingdoms (also known as the Gibe states) during the 18th century. First, the Oromo shifted from a subsistence pattern dominated by pastoralism to one characterized by mixed agriculture, which spawned population increases and gradually changed the land holding patterns of the people. Further, built into the *gada* system was an expansionary logic. This expansion into new environments brought about changes within Oromo society (Ta’a 1986: 48). The *gada* system, rested on three offices, the father of the law, the father of war, and the high priest. However, with expansion into new agriculturally rich territories, the office of the *Abba Dula* (father of war) began to dominate the others (Hassen 1990: 93). Instead of the

expanded land being divided up within the society as had typically been the case, the *Abba Dulas* began to take the land for themselves and this increased surplus and led to stratification.

The Gibe states were also located near key sites on trade routes that connected the South to the Red Sea coast trade (Hassen 1990: 103). They traded agricultural products, forest products like coffee, civet, honey etc., and slaves. In addition, the region was also plentiful in precious metals. Many of the products that originated from this region were highly sought luxury products that fetched a high price within Abyssinia and in the Middle East. Oromo kingship emerged in response to economic and political change the Oromo experienced with expansion.

The Oromo in Abyssinia: from Heathens, to Guards, to “Kings”

The Oromo were not a literate people and as a result, the only detailed accounts of the early period of Oromo-Abyssinian contact can be distilled from Abyssinian chronicles, court histories, and foreign accounts. Starting in the 17th century a subset of Oromos began to enter the annals of Ethiopian court history. They entered the record initially as soldier in the employ of king Susenyos (1607 -1632) as he was one of the first Abyssinian monarch's to use the Oromo in the service of the empire (Pankhurst 2001:125). In time, Oromos began to integrate into northern Abyssinian towns and the military.

The marriage of Gondarine kings and princes to Oromo women, or the recruitment of Oromo fighters to Gondar armies did not lead to Oromo integration into Abyssinian state. In general the Kings brought Oromo fighters to Gondar during a period when they were desperately in need of Oromo assistance for their own survival and not as a programme of Oromo integration into Amhara-Tigrayan societies. As Abir has pointed out, the consequence of Oromo presence in Gondar was increased ethnic hatred and hostility against them, culminating in the assassination of Iyo'as in 1769 (Bulcha 2011: 124).

By the 17th the Yejju Oromos through Iyoas (1755-1769) entered into the Abyssinian monarchy and in time dominated it for near a century. The period that roughly corresponding to Oromo control of the throne, from the 1770s to 1855, came to be known as the *Era of Princes* or the *Zamana Masafent* (Zewde 1998). This period was viewed as a dark period of Ethiopian history because the *Zamana Masafent* was associated with the control of Abyssinia by outsiders, disorder, and regionalism.

The Conquest of the Oromo

The creation of what would come to be known as Ethiopia out of Abyssinia's conquest of scores of independent kingdoms, sultanates, and independent communities was a process that started with the ejection of the Oromo from control of the throne in the north 1855. Firearms signaled a shift in the balance of power between competing groups in the region. Prior to the penetration of firearms, Oromos and Abyssinians had been relatively equally matched militarily, but with the Abyssinia monopoly over firearms, they were able tipped the balance of power in their favor. The symbolic, political, and economic control of the Oromo was necessary in order for expand southward and gain more territories and resources.

Collapse of the Oromo Monarchy

During the *Zamana Masafent (Era of Princes)*, Abyssinia was divided into regions controlled by provincial leaders or princes beholden to an Oromo ruler through Abyssinian proxies. The Oromo in power at the time caused extreme symbolic anxiety in Abyssinia because they flouted the traditional order (the Oromo in power were former Muslims and of impure lineage). By the middle of the 19th century, Abyssinia was poised for change. Emperor Tewodros II (r. 1855- 1868), formerly known as Kassa, felt that he had a mandate from God to unite the kingdom and he gathered forces from around the empire to rid the kingdom of the

Oromo presence(Holcomb and Ibssa 1990: 82). Emperor Tewodors wrested control from Oromo elements, crowned himself emperor in 1855, and began the unification process. But it would be a prince from Shewa that completed the process and birth a new nation.

If Northern Abyssinia was credited with ushering in Abyssinian control of the empire, it was out of the southern Abyssinian province of Shewa that the germ of the new nation would emerge. During the *Zamana Masafent* period, Shewa was a relatively stable and prosperous province due to its remote location and its proximity to southern trade routes. Menelik was the first Abyssinian leader able to exert sustained control over his southern neighbors due to his monopoly over firearms. Because of this, Menelik's home region of Shewa, would later become the center of the new empire. Menelik's drive to expand was motivated primarily by economic considerations. Further, in order for Abyssinian control to be recognized by Europeans in the newly conquered areas, he had to station representatives of the Abyssinia in the areas it conquered (Bulcha 2002:53). Menelik, thus participated in the scramble for Africa by way of his southern military campaigns of conquest of the Oromo and other southern peoples. He was viewed as a minor and dependent colonial power by the French and the British (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990).

Menelik's conquest of the Oromo in Shewa, the western Gibe States, and the Leeqa Oromo occurred through the assistance of an adept Oromo general named Gobena Dache. Some of the Gibe States and members of the Leeqa Oromo fiercely resisted conquest, but in time, they were forced to submit due to their lack of firearms. On the other hand, there were Oromos that entered into peaceful agreements with Abyssinia in order to avoid bloodshed. For instance, King Moroda Bakare of Leeqa Nekemte knew he did not have sufficient arms to defeat Menelik and submitted to Abyssinia by way of an arrangement that he entered into with Menelik's general

Gobena. The arrangement stipulated that his region would be left in peace and that no outsider would administer his territory. In addition, the largest Gibe state of Jimma and Leeqa Qellem also submitted peacefully in exchange for a measure of autonomy. Oromos living in Nekemte and Jimma experienced conquest, but its effects were more indirect. Though the Oromo leaders and their functionaries, as agents of Abyssinia, extracted heavy tribute from the people in their jurisdiction, residents of these areas escaped the violence and apartheid like conditions that characterized Oromo -Habesha relations during the early years of conquest. By the 1930s, even these areas would be more formerly integrated with Ethiopia and lose their semi-autonomous status.

Menelik and the Arsi Oromo

During the period of conquest, only a fraction of the Oromo population, lived under Abyssinia or within Oromo monarchies, the vast majority of Oromos lived under the *gada* system and the Arsi were one example. The Arsi Oromo in the eastern part of Ethiopia, were at the time of conquest, one of the most numerous Oromo groups. Menelik waged *zemechas* or military campaigns against the Arsi starting in 1880s. The Arsi resisted conquest from the very beginning and were a formidable obstacle to Menelik's southward expansion. He waged a number of unsuccessful military campaigns in the area. Though the Arsi were not armed with modern weaponry, they were able to amass huge fighting forces against invasion. Unlike their western Oromo kin who had abandoned the *gada* system and were characterized by frequent infighting, the Arsi lived under the *gada* system and it provided a vehicle through which Oromo groups could unify against a common foreign threat (Hajji 1995:12).

It was not until the Battle of Azule in 1886 that Menelik's forces emerged victorious over the Arsi. Even after this battle and the huge numbers of casualties suffered on the Arsi side, many of its fighters still resisted submission. During the period of weakness that followed the battle, the Arsi were called to Anole for a meeting where they thought that Abyssinia was to offer an agreement of peace to end the fighting between the two groups. Instead, upon their arrival at Anole, Menelik's general Ras Darghe cut off the right hand of men and the right breast of women who came to the supposedly peaceful meeting unarmed and defenseless. This tactic was seen as an incomprehensible and heinous act that sent shockwaves through the community. In order to halt the mutilation of innocents, some Arsi rebel leaders began to grudgingly submit to Abyssinia (Haji 1995: 11). The loss of independence that conquest and mutilation signaled for the Arsi was a wound that is still deeply felt a century later among the Arsi Oromo and other Oromo groups. Even today, when this episode is mentioned at Oromo gathering, it brings tears to the eyes of those in attendance, both males and females. Ras Darghe, the architect of the mutilation campaigns in Arsi, became a hero to the settlers in the region.

It was not surprising when they named hotels, elementary schools and the only high school in Asalla after him. Undoubtedly for the Arsi, giving Darghe's name to the only high school in their region until 1974, even though they were not its beneficiary, was an insult to their ancestors who had been mowed down at Azule and mutilated at Anole and to their collective memories in general. One of Arsi's pressing demands after the Revolution of 1974 was understandably the disappearance of Ras Darghe's name as well as other foreign names from public buildings, schools, places, and towns in their territory.

Though the Arsi submitted to Abyssinia, they never viewed conquest as legitimate. Further, because they were Muslim, they were discriminated against, and received little benefits from Abyssinia in the form of roads, school, and hospital services. Further, they were not integrated into the state apparatus in ways that Oromo groups in the center or west were. Decades later, they were active participants in the Macha Tulema Self Help Association, the Bale Rebellion, and the Oromo Liberation Front and other dissident organizations.

Ethiopia's Policies of Incorporation

The Economy of Conquest: Soldiers, Settlers, and Peasant Interaction in the New Ethiopia

Though the vast majority of those living in the Abyssinian core and the newly conquered periphery were poor agriculturalists, those living in the fertile South were disenfranchised and subjected to exploitative national policies that were, in part, ethnic in nature. In the newly acquired areas, the conquered people and their lands came to take on the quality of imperial property in which both the Emperors Menelik and Haile Selassie could distribute as they saw fit. Though the southern peoples like the Oromo represented a numerical majority in the new nation, two thirds of the conquered territories were allocated for state, settlers, and church use, while only a third of the newly acquired lands were set aside for indigenous use (Getahun Delibo 1974: 198-199). Many of conquered areas were incorporated economically into Ethiopia using the *neftenya-gabbar* system of land tenancy whereby the state, in order to expand into and subdue the conquered regions, gave armed settlers from the north grants of land and local peasants to work them. In Amharic, the word *neft* means gun and by extension, *neftenya* means rifleman. In common parlance in the South, it became a synonym for a foreign occupier. The term *gabbar* is the Amharic word for serf or tenant. There was a similar system of tribute extraction in place in the Abyssinian north, but in the South, it took on new dimensions. In the South, however, in lieu of familial, ethnic, and religious ties, force became the vehicle through which compliance was established (Markakis and Nega 1986: 23). In the early days of conquest, settlers did not want land if it did not also come with gabbars or tenants. One of the benefits and lures of joining a campaign to risk one's life to fight and occupy the South was the promise of a life ease that followed victory.

The number of gabbars (indigenous clients) allotted a northern neftenya (ordinarily a soldier, but sometimes a civilian) depended upon the latter's rank, length of service, and general merit. Numbers ranged from several hundred for a high official like a shambal (garrison commander) to a dozen or less for a newly recruited soldier. Each gabbar paid tax to the neftenya in services and in kind, and such expropriation met the government salary owed the settler. In return, the neftenya fulfilled obligations to the state: defense of the area and supervision of his gabbars. (McClellan 1984: 662).

Nearly half of all the southern peoples of the empire were *gabbars*. The settler, with many *gabbars*, lived a life of ease relative to his *gabbars* and even some of his northern counterparts.

The *gabbars* provided for many of the needs of the settlers.

He 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 (Hassen 1999:139).

The *gabbar* and his family were required to allocate a significant amount of time and kind to settler households which lead to their own impoverishment. They lacked the freedom of mobility and frequently had to ask permission to travel, and many were even required to travel with their patrons. Many lacked firearms, social capital, and education and hence were beholden to *neftenya* demands. Some Oromos did attempt to flee service or regain a measure control over their destiny. Daniel a highly educated and well travelled Oromo man in forties shared a story about the way in which his father resisted the *neftenya-gabbar* system.

My dad was a soldier and worked for various landlords at the time. My dad gave service to a landlord and after his service the landlord would write him a letter that he would carry saying that he could work for x, y and z landlord. They [a group of gabbars] would move from place to place working for various landlords and doing whatever needed done. One day, my father and his friends were concerned about this paper that they were carrying around and asked a friend who could read to tell them what it said and found out that this paper was about service. His dad and friends threw the letter away and his father said “God if you give me children, I will educate them”. All of his children did receive an education, so as not to be easily manipulated and so that they could improve their lives.

Because very few Oromo in the country were educated during the early decades of conquest, they were often cheated and at times manipulated. Those *gabbars* that could send their children to school did so with the hope that they would have a better fate.

Though the majority of the territories and people incorporated into the Ethiopian empire were incorporated through the *neftenya-gabbar* system, there were exceptions. For instance, in Wellega and Jimma, Ethiopia practiced indirect rule. Local Oromo leaders became government agents in charge of coordinating tax collection that they would then transfer to the capital. In these arrangements, Oromo leaders were not totally autonomous; they were not in full control of their finances. Leaders from the center were sent to these regions to monitor the delivery of tributes and local markets (Ta'a 1986). In addition to indirect rule, the lowlands were administered differently as well. The lowlands were not as suitable for agriculture and required a different mode of resource extraction. The state's physical presence in the extreme periphery was lighter. Subject peoples in these areas received few benefits from being a part of Ethiopia. The Borana Oromo were raided, taxed, and constrained by new national boundaries where there had once been only traditional routes and arrangements among neighboring pastoralist (Edwards 1982: 5-6).

The Cultural Assimilation the Oromo and the Politics of Ethnicity

The key issues that the Ethiopian rulers since Menelik have had to grapple with concerned "how to keep together and control" (Eide 2000: 15). As was stated above, the expanding settlers lacked legitimacy in the South and controlled the local people through force. During the first generation of conquest, Ethiopia did very little to fully integrate its new members into Ethiopia beyond the economic integration via the *neftenya-gabbar* system. Both Emperors Menelik and later Haile Selassie did not have the will or the capacity to assimilate millions of

southern peoples into the new nation . Further, the too rapid assimilation of southerners and the equal distribution of resources in the conquered areas would have ameliorated the benefits of settling in the South for northerners and there would not have been an incentive to become partners in expansion or take the risk of settling in hostile environments.

The State controlled and maintained order in the South via the *ketemas* or garrison towns that dotted the southern landscape represented the crystallization of exclusion and unequal relationships between the settlers and the indigenous people. The soldiers, settlers and their families, the church and its officials, and smaller minority of local people, acted as agents of the state and inhabited these garrison towns. The indigenous people tended to live in villages or on plots of land away from or surrounding the towns.

In the south, the contrast between the indigenous population and the agents of the state (most of whom were foreign to them and who resided in or around *ketemas*) were sharp. This in large measure inhibited the development of a sense of national identification with the Ethiopian state among the people of the newly conquered areas (Keller 1988: 39).

Further, settler population preferred to live in garrison towns rather than on the same land as their *gabbars* due to issues of safety. These garrison towns contained schools, hospitals and clinics, electricity, shops, and the postal service. The conquered people resided outside of the towns and lacked access to facilities they actually paid for through their labor and tribute. Even by the 1970s, many of the Ethiopia's towns were dominated by the Amhara and their descendants (Bulcha 1988: 46). To illustrate, in a study on the ethnic and religious composition of the nation's towns, published on the eve of the Ethiopian revolution, Cooper and Hovarth uncovered that many towns were still dominated by orthodox Christian many of whom were of northern extraction (1973: 228). Further, even in areas dominated by Muslims, for example in Arsi, Bale, and even Harage the pattern remained (Fayissa 1992: 2).

The Role of the Church in the Integration of the Periphery

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) was one of the most important representations of Amhara culture in the South. The church was a partner in the enterprise of conquest; it legitimized expansion by claiming that in acquiring the southern territories, Ethiopia had simply reached its biblical dimensions that had been formerly ceded to Muslims and the Oromo over the centuries. Initially, churches were mostly established in the new territories to serve the needs of the settlers and to conduct baptism and burial rites. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church did not always convert local people, even its own *gabbars*, in part because it understood that Christianity had the potential to subvert the *neftenya-gabbar* system on which its privilege was built. When the church did convert people it did so en masse not so much to simply spread the faith, but to gain tithe payers. The church also banned local practices like the pilgrimage to Abba Mudda and the thanksgiving festival called *Errecha*. They often also built churches on traditional Oromo religious sites. Many Oromo pastoralists converted to Islam because the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's calendar and its huge number of Fast days was not suited to a people that lived off of animals. The church was seen as a partner in conquest and illegitimate by many of the conquered people; as a result, many converted to Islam and Protestantism to gain a measure of distance from the institution.

Schools as Agents of Socialization the Role of Language

Abyssinian schools were touted as symbols of progress and civilization. In a multi-ethnic nation like Ethiopia, school became dispensaries for Ethiopian nationalism among both the dominant and minority groups alike. Prior to the 20th century, education in Ethiopia was religious. However, starting in the 20th century, the government attempted to increase the number of people it educated in modern schools, though this was the case, vast majority of the Oromo lacked access to either a religious or modern education. Even when schools were opened

in Oromo areas, they were established for settlers and a small minority of local elites. During the Italian occupation of the 1930s, the *neftenya gabbar* system was dismantled and the various communities in the country were allowed to educate their children in local languages. This was seen by many subject peoples in the empire as a positive step and bolstered their confidence and hope for equitable treatment. When Emperor Haile Selassie returned from exile, he returned to a more diversified country where minorities like the gabbars and Muslims had experienced a life with relatively less discrimination. Haile Selassie attempted to assimilate his disparate subjects by instituting a more formal policy of Amharization to check the advances that peripheral groups has experienced during occupation and create a more homogenous population. In addition to the spread of the church, Ethiopia attempted to assimilate its diverse population through a formal language policy. Amharic, the language of the dominant group, was selected to foster nation building and integration. When Amharic was declared the official language in 1943, the public use of Afaan Oromo for educational, religious, economic, and legal use was banned (Bulcha 1997:335).

Oromo students found it difficult to complete school in part because Amharic language was not their first language. Even when schools were present in Oromo area, the dropout rate was high. The inequality of the education system coupled with the nation's language policies served to greatly curtail the life chances of groups like the Oromo. To illustrate, according to Balsvik, very few student completed the 12th grade and sat for the School Leaving Certificate Exam. Of those that sat for the exam, 60% were Amharic native speakers and 80% of them failed the exam between the years between 1967 and 1969 (1985: 7-8). It can be assumed that the success rates was even lower among the Oromos, as second language speakers of Amharic.

Ethnic discrimination in Ethiopian schools was rampant. Those that did get the

opportunity to go to school faced an environment hostile to their presence. One of my participants, Jabessa, shared a story about the ways in which he was treated the first time he went to elementary school.

[Prior to moving to Addis Ababa from an Oromo dominated area] I did not know the difference, between me and them, I mean being an Oromo. I did not know before, people treating you like you are foolish, ignorant, and like a criminal. I learned the second day when I was in school. Because of my language, everyone laughed at me. It was discouraging, so I ran away and went back to my family.

Many students were not able to withstand the teasing that at times followed entry into school.

Jabessa decided that he would return to school and not let anything deter him from getting an education. After returning to school the hurdles remained.

I came back to school and after returning, all of the school had to participate in mass exercises like marching. I did not know about this marching sport, marching left and right. Since I did not know the language, when the sports teacher told 200 hundred students to march left and right, I did whatever I wanted because I did not know left and right in his language. Anyone could see that I was not going with the group. The teacher then stopped the exercise and placed me in front of two hundred students, even now, I feel pain... he then whipped me on this leg and still there is a scar. And then blood came from my left leg and then he said, "Now I am going to change our drill from left and right". Then he told me to march this way, "the one with blood, the one without blood. The one with blood, the one without blood!" Then I did it just because I wanted to learn. Whenever I passed, he told the students, when I made a mistake to laugh at me...200 people in the field roaring, can you believe it! This is the kind of humiliation I never seen in my life. I did not want to go back to the countryside...so whatever the costs, I said I will do it, I had to go to school.

Jabessa story is an example of the humiliation he faced as an Oromo child in school. His story was a harsh version of the numerous stories I heard concerning the ethnic discrimination Oromos experienced in school during the Selassie period. According to Hussein, nonnative speakers of the dominant language were "often exposed to a harsh pedagogy that ignored their needs and often discriminated against them in the classroom" (Hussein 2008: 38) . The classroom became a mirror of wider social relations. To illustrate, Mr. Jabbessa also told a story about his mastery

of Amharic:

I want to share one last story about my educational experience as a child. It is about Amharic, the language, I learned from them. As the time passed, I learned the language very well. One day I got a 100 on my Amharic exam. The class was very large and the teacher could not connect the names to the faces. He went around the room and criticized the class saying, “Only one person got a 100 out of fifty people!” He said a lot of things and criticized the whole class and repeating that only one person got a 100. He said, “Jabbessa come and stand up”. When I stood and he realized that it was me, he said, “Oh, No, No, No!”...Implying that Oromos have no right to get a 100 and he took one point away and gave me a 99! This is my experience of being Oromo within the system at Addis Ababa.

Jabbessa’s experience in the classroom as an ethnic minority highlights the ways in which the unassimilated and assimilating conquered groups were treated within Ethiopian school environment. Oromo children, in an integrated environment, learned to hide their identities or face humiliation and taunts not simply from other children, but also from authority figures like teachers.

In some areas, Oromo parents would send their children to the Orthodox priests for Amharic instruction. Baru, a middle aged Oromo with a background in the arts and media, shared his experience with Orthodox education.

During the Haile Selassie regime, I remember being sent to school to be taught by a priest. During that time, they either came from Gojjam or Gondar. I could not speak Afaan Oromo with my friends at school, if someone were to hear you speaking in the Oromo language in school, you would be whipped 20 to 40 times. In my high school, many of the Oromo students could not speak Amharic well. We looked down on ourselves and felt very insecure. Many students did not speak for fear that they would be laughed at by the Amhara in the class. Even in the south, the schools were dominated by the Amhara.

Buli, a lively and animated Oromo in his 40s discussed how he felt when he first went to school.

When I was small, I was literally a cow boy. I mean... I use to take care of animals. In time, I did get the chance to go to school. When I got there, I sat in class and did not understand anything...this troubled me a lot. The Amharic language sounded so strange to me. The people seemed to be speaking in chirping sounds, the only thing I could relate it to was the sounds bird made. I was a silly kid and thought it sounded like a kind of bird language. I prayed about it so I could understand. In time I improved so much that in time I forgot my mother language Oromo. Later, when I got to the diaspora and began to interact with Oromos, I was ashamed that I had to address an Oromo meeting in Amharic because I did forgot much of my own language. I vowed

from that day that this would never happen again and I ended up learning to speak my mother tongue fluently outside of Ethiopia.

To speak Amharic fluently and without an accent was a marker of civilization. If you wanted any kind of government job or a job in an urban center from the position of guard, to cook, to secretary, you had to speak Amharic. If you lacked the ability to speak Amharic well you would likely remain in the fields. Though many now use their Oromo names, a few admitted that they used to be called by Amharic names in the past. Until recently, Oromo parents of all classes, even farmers that lacked formal education, often gave their children Amharic names with the hope that this would improve their life chances. In some cases, this worked and some Oromos became masters at hiding their identity. In other situations, an Amharic named was not enough to save a child from teasing if they spoke Amharic in school with a strong accent. I was told stories about the ways in which some Oromos, in order to gain acceptance, rejected all things Oromo. They tried to escape being seen as “backward”. Tola, a much respected Oromo elder in his 60s shared his insights about the Oromo predicament under Selassie.

The Oromo people started to lose their culture and identity and language and were forced to learn Amharic in school. Every book was printed in Amharic and the Oromo language faded and they gradually lost their culture. In school, they had to change their names to survive in school and to get jobs. They thought that if I have an Amhara name they will think I am an Amhara or at the very least that I rejected the Oromo culture... During Haile Selassie it (colonization and empire building) was with political ideology. He opened schools and everything was in Amharic. We were forced to learn. They built Coptic churches, they [Oromos] were forced to go to church even though they did not understand the language... This is how they gradually changed people.

For others, coming of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s things began to change due to the movements for ethnic pride and social movements being waged at the time.

When I got to Addis, I was surprised and wondered why people did not speak Oromo. Most people [Oromos] wanted to act like Amharas and I always wanted people to know that I was an Oromo. The called themselves Oromos while Amharas called them Gallas. By the time I got to high school, my boyfriend and I would speak Afaan Oromo and people would look like you dress like this [modern/western not in traditional clothes] and you still speak that language. By this time, some of us were starting to resist the tendency to be ashamed and I was one of them (

Miriam, Oromo Woman)

Politics and Diversity Participation

Historically, Abyssinia vacillated between periods of centralization and decentralization. Menelik, in order to administer his expanded empire, was content to rule through indirect means; Haile Selassie on the other hand, in order to modernize the nation he had to bureaucratize the administration of the state and reduce the power of regional figures that tended to use their position in a patrimonial fashion; these traditional regional elites siphoned off necessary monies that could be used to develop the state.

His basic strategy has been to extend central control gradually over the periphery, while allowing only very few and weak channels from the periphery to the centre, to replace the military ones which he destroyed. The methods are familiar. Improved communications, a regular standing army in place of provincial levies, closer administrative supervision, and the shuffling of appointments, were all used to reduce governors increasingly to dependence on the throne (Clapham 1975: 75).

He banned political parties in order to limit any group from gaining popular support to challenge the emperor and his policies. The governors and sub-regional and district leaders were usually appointed by the Emperor. His goal was to create staff of western education loyal bureaucrats that he appointed to replace the old provincial military leadership that had been administering the provinces. In this environment of nepotism and cronyism, the descendants of the conquered people played only a nominal role in higher level politics. One of my informants discussed his experiences under Haile Selassie.

If we look to the Oromos getting positions even though some were educated, they could not get a good position because the Amharas should be at the top to give orders and the Oromo have to be at the bottom. They could be a school teacher or an office worker, but not in a top position. Oromos were in the military, but when they recruited for the Air Force [the most prestigious branch of the military] they recruit mostly from the Amharas, they have the position to command. Oromos can only be policemen and militias, only taking orders. The Oromo name worked against you during those days. During Haile Selassie's time there was education, for instance, getting a scholarship, they won't get it. But if you look at the population, the Oromos are larger, but the Amharas still got it (Oromo elder in his 60s).

Oromo Resistance to Incorporation

During the early days of conquest due the Oromo lack of firearms, many Oromo communities eventually submitted to Abyssinia rule. “In an environment in which might was right, conquered peoples tended to acquiesce in Ethiopian authority rather than to accept it because they considered it legitimate” (Keller 1988: 39). The Oromo and other conquered groups did resist ill treatment and exploitation, but it was periodic and occurred at the level of the individual or on a small scale. In this section that follows, three important pre-revolutionary episodes of Oromo resistance will be discussed as they all emerged to grapple with the tensions associated with different aspects of conquest and incorporation Oromo experienced in different parts of the empire.

Western Oromo Confederation

Starting in the 1930s, Emperor Selassie ended the quasi-independent status of the Oromo territories of Jimma and Nekemte and their traditional leaders were replaced by Abyssinians from the center. This loss of face, power, and status deeply impacted the former rulers and left them with a memory disenfranchisement. As a result, “when Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, the disposed hereditary rulers felt that their time had come to settle scores. They defected to the Italian side in the hope regaining their former positions” (Gebissa 2002: 97). Ezekiel Gebissa’s groundbreaking work on the little researched Western Oromo Confederation (WOC) informs our discussions on the complexities of resistance practices among the Oromo leaders in Nekemte. The possibility of a historically substantiated Oromo identity has been challenged by a number of scholars in Ethiopian studies (Levine 1974, Marcus 2002, Gebre-Kidan 2005). Oromo nationalism is often seen as a novel creation crafted by Oromo elites during the 1960s. The

Oromo were not considered a nation because nationalism was the purview of modernity or at least an outgrowth of empires, not decentralized societies like those that characterized traditional Oromo communities.

Initially the Italians were only able control the northern part of the country and the capital city leaving Oromo areas like Nekemte self-governing for a period. It was during this power vacuum that the Oromo devised a plan for independence. Oromos leaders in the area devised a plan for confederation which was an “attempt by Oromos in Western Abyssinia to establish an independent Oromo government under the mandate of the League of Nations” (Gebissa 2009: 96). Nekemte became an important site of resistance due to its relatively remote location. Ironically, though it is an Oromo area, it afforded both Oromo nationalist and Ethiopian patriots alike a location from which they could launch their resistance movements against colonialism and reassert their respective nationalisms. The Ethiopian patriotic military group known as the Black Lions used Nekemte as their home base; in fact, their founding conference took place in Nekemte. The Italian conquest of the south and western portions of the country required the Italians to travel during the rainy season and instead of launching a full assault they decided to send an Italian delegation to a town near Nekemte called Bonayya under the auspices of peace. Members of the WOC planned to receive the delegation peacefully and feign submission until they were able to secure a mandate through the League of Nations via a British representative. The Oromo plan was made difficult because just prior to the Italian delagation’s arrival hundreds of soldiers arrived in the area to train to fight against the Italians (11). Their arrival forecasted the clash between Oromo and Ethiopian interests in Nekemte. Habte Mariam had to juggle his desire for Oromo independence, to stave off Italian advances, and content with patriotic demands for support and revenge against the Italians. Habte Mariam

did not plan to harm the Italians, but when the Abyssinian soldiers found out about the Italian delegation and massacred the group. This incident also effectively eliminated the possibility of Oromo independence because it brought about Italian retaliation. Though the British received the WOC's request to the League of Nations they delayed submitting it due to their alliance to another European power (113).

The Oromos that submitted without resistance are often viewed as being traders or seen as being complicit with domination, but this is only half of the story. What the WOC illustrates is that even among those Oromos that experienced a less severe form conquest, the desire for independence remained. The emergence of the WOC illustrates the complexity of submission and the partial nature of hegemony. The Western Oromo Confederation and the events that surrounded its emergence and dissolution highlight the complex political and discursive environment that the Oromos have historically inhabited. Further, it illustrates the transnational nature of seemingly local events. The WOC highlights the many ways in which resistance should be understood. Resistance can be overt and take the form of out-right rebellion, but it can also include everyday forms of resistance like "foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth" (Scott 1985: 29). The binary distinction between rebellion and submission or acquiescence is too simplistic and we need to understand how the various forms of resistance work with one another. In the Oromo context, overt and covert forms of resistance aided one another. A lack of overt resistance should not always be read as false consciousness or as the acceptance domination. Scott's notion of hidden scripts is instructive here. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, Scott highlights the ways in what he calls public and hidden transcripts, emerge out of the exchanges between the dominant and subordinate groups in a given society.

If subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant is the public transcript. I shall use the term hidden transcript to characterize the discourse that takes place "offstage," beyond direct observation by power holders. The hidden transcript is thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript (Scott 1990: 4-5).

Open rebellion expresses, publicizes, and depends on long-nurtured hidden transcripts. The emergence of the Western Oromo Confederation illustrates the complex relationship between explicit forms of resistance and Scott's notion of hidden transcripts. The fact that Oromo complicity was followed by rebellion makes that simple binary between the two problematic.

Macha Tulema Self Help Association

In 1963, Oromos in the center of the country engaged in a form of cultural resistance through an organization called the Macha Tulema Self-Help Association (MTSHA). Though the organization started in the capital city, within a few short years, the MTSHA had offices all over the country. In fact, it was the first Oromo organization of the modern period to cut across class, regional, and religious lines. It was reformist in nature and its founders promoted cultural nationalism and self-help (Hassen 2000: 126). The MTSHA organization sought to build coalitions with other minorities in an attempt to improve the lives of the conquered peoples by revalorizing their disparaged identities. They also sought to build roads, clinics, and schools by foster unity. Due to conquest and the banning of the *gada* system and pilgrims, intra-ethnic communication and interaction was reduced and Oromo communities became isolated from one another compared to the pre-conquest period where there was more interaction.

The association exploded the myth of Oromo disunity and embarked on coordinated and united activities, which alarmed the government. They even went beyond religious taboo when Muslims ate meat slaughtered by Christians and the Christians ate Muslim meat. This was an unheard-of event in Ethiopia, and outraged the Amhara ruling elites (Hassen 1998: 206).

The Arsi participated in large numbers though on the surface they were seen as different from the founders. The success of the organization showed that the Oromo did indeed have corporate feelings and viewed themselves as a national group.

Another interesting aspect of the MTSHA was that it contained heretofore assimilated Oromos that were high ranking members of the military, police, and even the royal family. This revealed that even assimilated Oromos were indeed ready to embrace aspects of their Oromo identity during the 1960. These high-ranking officials raised the profile of the organization and transformed it into promising agent of change. For example, General Tadesse Birru, the man who became the leader of the MTSHA demonstrates the ethnic awakening that occurred during this period. General Tadesse Birru was a high ranking military officer of Oromo extraction that had passed as an Amhara. When the MTSHA began he initially declined the invitation to join the association because he associated it with tribal politics. He soon had a life changing experience that caused a reversal of his former position. In addition to his military duties, General Tadesse Birru was also in charge of a literacy campaign. During a meeting with the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Aklilu Habte Wolde, who assumed he was an Amhara, reprimanded him for his dedication to the campaign:

Taddesse! After you have started leading the literacy campaign, you talk a lot about learning. It is good to say learn. However, you must know whom we have to teach. We are leading the country by leaving behind the Oromo at least by a century. If you think you can educate them, they are an ocean and can engulf you (Zoga 1993: 25).

Prior to this encounter, General Tadesse Birru, because of his success, believed that Ethiopia did not discriminate against her people based on ethnicity. It became clear to him that assimilation was only open for a small number of formerly conquered people, many of whom were originally from elite families. Habte Wolde's comment shone a light on the discrimination that many Oromo faced. This was the first time he explicitly heard the hidden transcripts of the powerful

which were made visible through the encounter with the prime minister. He soon joined the MTSHA and the organization became radicalized. The MTSHA was dissolved after its plot to assassinate the Emperor was discovered by the government. Though the organization was banned, some of its members went underground. The sparks that the MTSHA had caused among the Oromo lit the flames of more radical forms of resistance that emerged in the 1970s with the establishments of the organizations like the Oromo Liberation Front.

Bale Peasant Rebellion

The Bale Peasant rebellion took place from 1963 to 1970 in the eastern part of Ethiopia. This rebellion was the first time in modern Ethiopian history that the Oromo were able to conduct a protracted and highly coordinated rebellion against the state (Bulcha 1988). “The uprising was set off by a potent combination of grievances stemming from misdistribution of political and administrative powers, land alienation, taxation, ethnic hostility, religious discrimination, and ecological imbalance. Its primary goals were the retention or repossession of land and the reassertion of ethno cultural identities” (Tareke 1991: 125). Due to the way in which the area was incorporated, the people of Bale never accepted colonization and viewed occupation as illegitimate. Further, those in Bale and neighboring areas were not assimilated like Oromos closer to the center and they were discriminated against due to their ethnic and religious identities. As was discussed above there was no high ranking government official with roots to this area. The people were locked out of participation. A participant in the rebellion spoke of his experiences:

[There were two different kinds of experiences the Oromo people had before the rebellion]. Prior to conquest, the Oromo had their own way of governance. First, they had the democratic gada system which regulated all aspects of Oromo society it had laws to protect the life of humans, the environment, plants, and animals. It had laws that ruled how people should live together, marry, and how to transfer power. The second way of life occurred when the oppressor came. They replaced our laws with those that did not care for humans or their animals. They brought about the selling and killing of people at will. Further, the things that the Oromo produced could be

taken away at any time. It is this second way of life that gave birth to the rebellion. By the end of 19th century the Oromo lands were occupied, though this was the case, there was often resistance.

For instance, one example occurred in the 1930s when the Italians occupied Ethiopia. During this period, the people had a break from oppression for five years. They experienced a different kind of life where they could actually live. They were able to think and get their hands on weapons to prevent the Habeshas from totally controlling their lives. When the British came to drag out the Italians and to bring back the old regime, the people were ready to fight back at this time. An example of this occurred when the Italians left and Haile Selassie was brought back. There was a battle [between the Oromo and the imperial forces]. At this battle, the Oromo defeated Selassie's army and there were many casualties from the Selassie side.

After that battle, the enemy came back with a stronger force, dividing the Oromo and buying people. They took 130 leaders to a place called Goba. They took them to the Ganale prison in Goba where they were assassinated. There were some who were not captured, but their property was confiscated. Eleven years after this battle, the people again organized in Anole which is located in a place called Hangetu. They fought the Habeshas army and the battle went on for two weeks. The military was sent in from all directions aid with the fight and cut the people off and everyone there perished (fighter in the Bale rebellion).

The true local roots of rebellion were confirmed by its links with earlier resistance in the area. Earlier resistance cannot be explained merely by the fundamental incompatibility of a pre feudal democratic social system with an imposed mode of production; it also involved the particular extractive and repressive features of the new system. Anti-conquest resistance are very much a part of the Bale oral tradition, and the memories are both bitter and energizing. More important than the story of the resistance itself is the fact that those who nursed this long tradition of opposition to the states were essentially the same people- the peasants (Tareke 1991: 158).

The participant's recollections of past conflicts that occurred prior to his birth illustrates that Bale was not simply a onetime reaction or the brain-child of Somalia irredentism of the 1960s, agitated from the outside as it was characterized by the Selassie regime; the Bale rebellion had its roots in the local history of resistance.

The Bale peasant revolt was a multiethnic collaboration of sorts between the Somali and the Oromo. Though the groups were distantly related, they were also distinct. The two were connected by their adherence to Islam, and their experience of exploitation at the hands of Ethiopia. However, the Somali component had a pan-Somali orientation and wanted to reconnect Bale with the newly independent Somali. The Oromo, on the other hand, wanted

independence from both the Ethiopians and the Somali. The rebels were able to control much of the Bale province, by blocking roads, and cutting supply lines.

The people in the region were rebelling against land confiscation and evictions. So many Oromos were being evicted all around the region, this was a pressing concern effecting many people. When the news spread that the Oromo had successfully organized themselves to protect their life and property, people in other areas were inspired. They began to think, if the people around Liban Borana and Bale did it, why don't we try? This began to be replicated again and again. People started thinking change could be possible. People were always resistant in Bale because they never really accepted the situation of conquest.

What made the people in this area strong was the culture at the time. Their view was such that they believed it was better to perish than to accept oppression in their own land. Bravery was admired within Oromo society and this was an influential force. Many aspects of traditional culture survived in Meda Walabu it was not diluted, [as a result they were able to use elements of it to their advantage in their fight against the state]. Historically, the Oromo have connections to other Oromos all over region and can call on one another for help through traditional relationships that could not be easily infiltrated by outsiders. This is what helped the people of the Bale Rebellion (fighter in Bale Rebellion).

It was only with the help of military assistance from American and England and regime change in Somalia that cut arms and support for the rebels that forced to the rebels to negotiate with the Ethiopian government (Bulcha 1988).

Ethnicity and Nationalism as Excess Memory

Both the MTSHA and the Bale rebellion began in 1963. This period should be understood as the watershed period of Oromo nationalism because it is out of these two movements that Oromo nationalism began to take shape and become publically articulated. Oromo nationalist sentiments did occur before this period as was illustrated by the WOC and the pre-1963 battles waged between those in Bale and state. Though this was the case, resistance was sporadic, not terribly coordinated, and difficult to sustain. Peasants and minorities living under repressive regimes express agency individually by using tactics to resist disrespect and exploitation and to valorize their culture.

One way to understand the emergence of Oromo nationalist sentiment and resistance in 1963 would be to compare it to water. One assumption of modern states with a purported veil of democracy and multiculturalism, is that the identity of majority and minority populations sufficiently overlap. Dominant groups often attempt to hide or excise the excess, this remainder. “Hegemony is concerned with policing of boundaries and attempting to fix meaning and reduce alternative understandings of an issue. The proliferation of struggle presents itself, first of all, as a ‘surplus’ of the social vis-à-vis the rational and organized structures of society-that is, of the social ‘order’” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:1). But it is often the memories of oppressed groups that help keep hegemony from being complete. Memories often contain the seeds of resistance. Protests about injustice is a way to acknowledge what was done communally and commemoration is a way of claiming that the past that has something to offer the present, be it a warning or a model. Memory then mediates between the past and the present and we can only bring the past to the present by actively remembering it. The information presented in this chapter acts as a brief history of the Oromo and their resistance. In this chapter, I attempted to provide the snapshots of the history often repeated at Oromo rallies, in books, blogs, and on radio programs and at conferences. It is this history, a history of their own making that the people never want to forget. You cannot understand the Oromo today without understanding the history of their resistance and the way in which they remember it. History of failed and successful resistance stimulates the Oromo to continue to advocate for a path that will someday lead to equality.

CHAPTER 4

THE BIRTH OF OROMO STUDIES AND THE ROLE OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

Introduction

Oromo studies grew out of Oromo attempts to create a set of discourses about themselves that emphasized aspects of their culture and history they deemed important; Oromo studies also sought to act as a critical counterweight to what Oromo intellectuals saw as the excesses of Ethiopian nationalism that had trickled down into the representations of the Oromo within Ethiopian studies. Oromo activists and scholars attempted to interrogate and make visible the taken for granted assumptions and presuppositions that created a set of discourses that helped to construct Ethiopia, Ethiopians, and the Oromo in ways they felt were inaccurate and partial. Due to the suppression that followed Oromo political and socio-cultural resistance in the 1960s, a number of Oromo activists and scholars were forced into exile. By the 1970s, because dissent became increasingly difficult to wage in Ethiopia, it was the Oromo living in the diaspora, particularly those living in the Washington, D.C. area that had the freedom of speech and support needed to critique Ethiopian nationalism and the traditional positionality of the Oromo within Ethiopian studies.

In this chapter, I discuss the formation of Oromo student and academic organizations in the diaspora. I pay special attention to the contributions Oromos in Washington, D.C. made to the birth of Oromo studies by looking at the ways in Oromos in Washington, D.C., through their early protest literature, acted as one of the earliest critical voices against Oromo domination and exploitation. I use the Washington, D.C. Oromo contribution to and support for the emic production of knowledge about the Oromo as an entry point into a broader discussion about the

essential role that members of the Oromo diaspora more generally played in the establishment of Oromo Studies through their founding of institutions like Oromo Studies Association.

Charting the emergence of an academic field of inquiry is a difficult task and no single account can adequately construct a definitive or comprehensive account of this process; as a result, in this chapter, I seek to highlight the contributions that Oromo scholar activists living in Washington, D.C. made to the birth of Oromo studies. Their stories are important because they provide a glimpse into the important role Washington, D.C. Oromos (as one of the earliest diaspora communities in the U.S.) played in the crystallization and institutionalization phase of Oromo studies during its early years. Further, little has been written specifically about the development and character of Oromo studies save for a few accounts (Pankhurst 1976; Baxter 1984; Jalata 1996; Sorenson 1996; Gebissa 2009). Though these accounts chart the general trajectory of Oromo studies and its major debates, they lack ethnographic detail because they are not situated in a particular place.

The birth of Oromo studies is situated at the juncture between history, ethnonationalism, and discourse. Scholarship, as we will see, is not divorced from the power relations in which it is embedded and it is used by both dominated and dominant groups to advance their position. The early phase of Oromo studies cannot be divorced from the concurrent rise of Oromo ethnonationalism. My discussion of the discursive climate out of which Oromo studies emerged is informed by the ethno-symbolic approach to nationalism elaborated by Anthony Smith. This approach is an:

[e]nquiry into the successive social and cultural self-images and sense of identity, the ideological conflicts and the social changes of a culturally defined population in a given area and/or polity. These self-images, identities, conflicts and changes stem from the interplay of competing cultural and political projects of the different classes, religious confessions and ethnic groups within a given area and population and/or polity, as well as the political impact of external collectivities and events, especially, but by no means exclusively, in the modern era of nationalism (2009: 39).

In addition, the chapter is also informed by critical discourse analysis (CDA). “CDA’s aim is to try to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use” (Wodak 1999: 8). I use the chapter as a transitional device to move our discussion from a concern with Oromo history and subjection within Ethiopian studies to a space where Oromo discursive forms of agency in the diaspora are highlighted.

Ethnicity in Ethiopia

The depictions of the Oromo as the binary opposite of the Abyssinian was a practice through which the nation could more positively imagine itself and onto which it could cast its fears. This process helped to create a discourse about the Oromo that was powerful, partial, ethnocentric, and dismissive. The representations of Ethiopian exceptionalism (Jalata 2009) within Ethiopian studies became an order of discourse which served to legitimize Ethiopia, its associated nationalism, and the exploitation of peripheral groups. According to many within Oromo studies (Baxter 1978; Holcomb and Ibsaa 1990; Jalata 1993; Hultin 1996; Bulcha 1997; Hassen 2002) one cannot understand Ethiopian nationalism and the reactions it evoked from its periphery without looking at the history of the role ethnicity played in informing the relationship(s) between majority and minority populations in the country.

In a very basic sense ethnicity can be seen as an abstraction used to refer to people who see themselves as a community or as a group distinct from other groups. Ethnicity is constructed through social contact and practice (Eriksen 2002) and what I call the taxonomic valuations of the other. Implicit within Ethiopian representations about the nation and its various ethnic groups was a system of classification and ranking where the nation’s major ethnic groups were

hierarchically ordered based on their closeness to some fictive national ideal. There is a connection here between ethnicity and nationalism. Though for analytical clarity the two have been separated in analysis, there is considerable overlap between the two types of phenomena. In many cases, nationalism has an ethnic component because the dominant ethnic groups' practices, religion, and language often become the substance out of which a nation's nationalism is derived. Thus, national identity becomes an un-marked and natural category for those in power, while those remote or with few connections to the dominant ethnic group are depicted as deviant.

Anthony Smith's approach to the study of nationalism is useful here as it provides insights into Ethiopian nationalism and its impact on peripheral groups like the Oromo. To Smith, the "ethno-symbolists consider the cultural elements of symbol, myth, memory, value, ritual and tradition to be crucial to any analysis of ethnicity, nations and nationalisms" (2009: 25). The ethno-symbolic approach agrees with the modernist perspective that nations are active constructions subject to history, but they disagree with the idea that they are simply elite projects or that they lack cultural registers from prior to the 19th century. It then becomes important to trace the themes and tropes characteristic of a particular country's nationalism historically and how the nation managed its ethnic diversity.

Though Ethiopia currently espouses a policy of ethnic federalism, the public articulation of ethnicity was initially received with hostility by many Ethiopian politicians and academics. Ethiopian nationalists often claimed that ethnicity either did not exist or was not deeply felt by the nation's various groups until the 1960s and 1970s where its introduction was viewed as a foreign import or as a tactic used by ethnic elites to capture state power. However ethnicity and cultural difference have been at the forefront of how Abyssinia and later Ethiopia defined itself

vis-à-vis other groups in the area (Baxter 1978). Prior to 1991, to be an Ethiopian effectively meant to practice an identity that was connected to old Abyssinia, it was to either be or act as a *Habesha* (to speak Amharic, practice Orthodox Christianity, and adhere to Abyssinian cultural norms). Oromo culture in particular was attacked by the state because with conquest, in order for settler minorities from the north to control their numerically superior subjects, they had to seek non-violent means to manage the conquered peoples of the south. Ethiopian nationalism developed as an ideology to support the unequal state of affairs expressed through demeaning the culture of the conquered groups and legally banning their expressions publically.

Influences

The emergence of an Oromo response and counterweight to ways in which they had been characterized within Ethiopian studies and politics, brought about conflict and rupture. Starting in the 1960s, and progressively gaining momentum thereafter, Oromo voices from many sectors began to reject the ways in which they had been represented discursively and politically within Ethiopian society. As was mentioned in chapter 3, the Oromo established the Macha Tulema Self Help Association (MTSHA) to revalorize Oromo culture and to engage in economic development. The Bale rebellion on the other hand, was a violent reaction to the ways that the Oromo in the southeast had been exploited economically since their incorporation. In addition to these two movements, the Oromo were also influenced by the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM). Starting in the 1960s, Oromo activists and intellectuals entered into a cacophonous and competitive terrain of dissent with actors from the Ethiopian Student Movement, the Eritrean and Somali liberation struggles, and global anti-colonial and civil rights discourse. They were influenced by all of these forces and they in turn influenced the identity movements roaring in Ethiopia. Ethiopia represented a contested terrain (Gebissa 2009) in which the Oromo, for the

first time, were able to articulate the history and character of their relationship to Ethiopia. The nature of the influences, development, and character of Oromo discourse on dissent will be the focus of the rest of the chapter.

The Coup of 1960

Coup d'états are not unique in Ethiopian history, in fact, Haile Selassie came to power as a result of a coup (Holcomb and Ibsaa 1990: 169). However, the 1960 coup was unique because it was staged not simply to seize power from Emperor Haile Selassie; its aim was to change the economic policy of the country in favor of the more equitable distribution of the country's resources to its peasants (Clapham 1968). The coup ultimately failed because its leader did not secure the support of the army or the church. It did, however, resonate with a segment of the military, the students, and intellectuals who sought modernization at an increased pace. The students were the only people in the society that publically supported the coup. The coup of 1960 was important because it cracked the veneer of the regime's legitimacy and showed the limitations of its power.

Ethiopian Student Movement

The coup of 1960, which led to one of the nation's first student protests, can be viewed as a turning point in Ethiopian history marking the beginning of the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM). According to intellectual historian Bahru Zewde's *Documenting the Ethiopian Student Movement: An Exercise in Oral History*, "if there is one single factor that explains the direction Ethiopian history has taken in the last four decades or so, it is the role of the intelligentsia" (2010: 2). The ESM was the first successful movement of its kind to create a sustained protest and academically informed critical discourse against what it considered to be an exploitative and

stagnant regime. The tsunami-like waves of change that engulfed the nation that led to the 1974 revolution started as ripples that manifested within the ESM in the early 1960s. A testament to its importance is that nearly fifty years later, the ideologies, strategies, and discourses that emerged from it still inform politics today.

The militant student agitation, in both its internal and external dimensions, was the single most important factor behind the demise of the imperial regime; the radicalization of the Darg, including its fateful adoption of Marxist-Leninist ideology...the Eritrean liberation movement developed in constant interaction--at both the ideological and organization levels--with the student movement and the leftist movements that grew out of it; some of the major ethno-nationalist organizations, notably the OLF, in part got not only their ideological inspiration, but also their leadership from the movement (Zewde 2010:2).

Though Zewde rightly points out the influence the ESM had on Oromo political discourse and the OLF leadership, he appears to dismiss the role exploitation and discrimination played in fomenting ethno-nationalism. Further, he also downplays the dialogic and intertextual ways in which Oromos through the MTSHA and the Bale rebellion also influenced the ideologies and practices of the ESM.

During the early days of the ESM the students initially advocated for land reform and development. Political parties were banned in the country and student calls for the smallest of reforms went unanswered as the regime was accustomed to deference not compromise and dissent. The increasingly strong hand the emperor used against the students forced them to become more strident in their demands, protests, and rhetoric. They shifted from an approach where reform was advocated to one where regime change became the goal. The ESM became Marxist in orientation starting in the later part of the 1960s. With this shift of focus, the national question and issues of ethnicity came to the fore. The national question ultimately divided the Ethiopian student movement into three general groups:

- 1) There were students that supported Emperor Haile Selassie and wanted him to remain in power.

- 2) Other students endorsed the idea that Ethiopia housed a number of nations and that these nations should be respected and supported. It was believed that if economic inequalities were resolved then the ethnic issues would dissipate as aberrations of class inequality.
- 3) The last group was more radical in its orientation and supported self-determination up to and including secession, at least for Eritrea.

The murder of key student leader Tilahun Gizaw in 1969 was a turning point within the ESM. After Gizaw's death participation in the movement had dire consequences. "By 1970, the theoretical and ideological struggle both within the student movement and against the Ethiopian government had to take place outside the country. The overseas wing of the ESM was well prepared to take on the task as repression increasingly crippled the ESM [within Ethiopia] (Tiruneh 1990: 84). The government's increased repression caused a mass exodus of students from the country. Ethiopian students that had arrived in the United States after the crackdown had been radicalized as they were aware that the movement had to shift its approach. Regime change became the goal, political parties needed to be formed, and a radical subset felt armed struggle should be utilized to achieve this goal.

The Emergence of the Oromo Diaspora

By the 1970s, a small minority of Oromo students and activists began to flee the country due to Ethiopia's crackdown on the student, ethnic, and regional movements. For a subset of the Oromo, class and ethnicity were inextricably linked in Ethiopia because ethnicity was used as a litmus test for inclusion within the country's institutions. The Eritrean right to self-determination was seen as a colonial case and grudgingly accepted by some radical elements within the ESM, but Oromo incorporation was not theorized as being colonial in nature and therefore Oromo self-determination was not accepted by the ESM. Oromo areas were the breadbasket of the country and source of the nation's main workforce; as a result, it was unfathomable, for many in

the ESM to entertain Oromo self-determination up to and including secession because without the Oromo labor and lands, the nation would cease to function.

Mekuria Bulcha aptly summarizes the political dilemmas Oromo experienced during the 1970s:

Different views were entertained concerning the future of their nation. These views basically suggested two options: struggle for partnership in a reformed Ethiopia or creation of an independent Oromo state. In the beginning, the first option attracted more adherents than the second. With some of the foremost Marxist intellectuals in Ethiopia such as Haile Fida and Abdullahi Yousouf as their de facto leaders, the majority of Oromo elites sought a solution to the national question within the framework of the Ethiopian state and gave their support to the military regime. Using multi-ethnic political organizations such as the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON) as a platform, their ambitions were to de-Amharise the Ethiopian state through working within it and reviving it. The MEISON project became a political fiasco. Working from within an Ethiopian organization to improve the Oromo status within the framework of the Ethiopian state proved to be at least as dangerous as propagating the idea of a free Oromo state. Both Haile Fida and Abdullahi Yousouf and many of their followers were executed by the very same regime that they advised and the military rulers they tutored (Bulcha 2002: 17-18).

As a result, many Oromo withdraw from Ethiopian organizations and began to advocate for an independent state as their relationship with Ethiopian political institutions proved problematic.

Oromo in Washington, D.C.

Ethiopia, under Haile Selassie and especially during the subsequent Derg regime, dealt with dissent by way of force. As a result, by the early 1970s, a number of conflict-generated diasporas began to emerge in sites like Washington, D.C. (Lyons 2007). During this period, a small, but vocal subset of the Oromo diaspora, following those in Ethiopia, began to reject representations that had cast them as the objects of history. Though Oromo protest literature began appearing in Ethiopia at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, it was largely through diaspora media organs located in the Horn of Africa, in Europe, and in cities like Washington, D.C. that the Oromo became subjects of their own making. They created their own ethnic-specific institutions where their concerns were central. Not all of the Oromo immigrants living

in the nation's capital were engaged in these practices, but this is an account of the early actors, institutions, and discourses that played a role in the birth of Oromo studies.

The Early Years

According to early Oromo settlers to the Washington, D.C. area, the 1970s were a remarkable and exciting time to be in the United States. Most of the Oromo that had come to the United States during this time came as students. Those with whom I spoke ranged in political involvement. Some were not active politically before arriving, as they were young, while others were part of the ESM back home and also joined here, and still others were involved in American politics.

Ahmed and Oromo man in his 60s, was an early member of the Oromo diaspora and in the quote below he shares information about his pre-migration perspective and influences.

I went to a government high school and then came here for college. My family paid my way, they wanted to send me outside the country for school for a number of reasons: first, there was one major university/university system in Ethiopia at that time and it could not accommodate all of the nation's high school graduates. Second, at that time, there was a lot of student agitation and the classes would be interrupted for one or even two semesters. Finally, I always wanted to study abroad. I applied first as a tourist and then applied to attend school once I got here. I attended an historically black college in Baltimore. I wanted to go to an African American School, and it was also cheaper. Because of my upbringing, I was always politically oriented and I wanted to understand and experience African American culture. While in Ethiopia I read about Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. In my circle, we would read books about America and watch international movies. We also liked African American artists like James Brown, Aretha Franklin and Etta James; it was hip to have their albums. Some of us were very much exposed to American culture prior to coming to the United States. The era when I came was an interesting one. The anti-war movement was still raging. It was a good generation to be in.

Since he had some exposure to American popular culture, I asked him what surprised him, or what were some features of American life that he did not anticipate and he remarked:

I cherished being self-reliant; one does not have to be dependent here. Living here as a student by myself taught me to be independent. Also there were fewer social hang-ups here than in Ethiopia. As long as you survive and pay your bills, you can do any kind of work. There are no status issues here. In Ethiopia family background and status can be deterministic and this has definitely been the case for many Oromo (Ahmed).

Tola came to the United States in the early 1970s and he, like Ahmed, was from a well to do family. Though he schooled in the Midwest when he arrived in the United States, he was in communication with Oromos in Washington, D.C. and visited. He later came to settle in the city and became one of the community's most active members.

I attended the American school [in Ethiopia] for about 8 years and graduated high school in 1972. I did not want to go to school in Ethiopia as I had been already primed to go to school in America. At that time, Addis Ababa University was viewed as a third-rate university that was always shut down and our parents did not want us to go there. I ended up going to school here in the Midwest where I was recruited as an athlete in 1973. Before starting college, I kicked around the U.S. for about 6 months. When I came here, there were no real obstacles because I had gone to an American school and learned the language. The only thing I had to adjust to was the cold weather in the Midwest! I will say the change that I experienced when I came was that I became more politicized (Tola).

During the early 1970s the Oromo community was not differentiated from the Ethiopian community and even the Ethiopian community was small. Prior to the establishment of Oromo-specific organizations, the actual ethnic diversity that comprised the Ethiopian diaspora had been suppressed. For instance, though The Ethiopian Student Union of North America (ESUNA) was an ethnically diverse organization that did contain Oromo members. Within this organization, ethnic discrimination in Ethiopia was viewed to result from issues associated with class. It is in part this lack of visibility and concern for Oromo issues in many Ethiopian institutions that led to the emergence of Oromo specific organizations and discourses in the Washington, D.C. area. The Oromo desire to associate and organize in their own organization also came from the fact that they wanted to define themselves and be free to express themselves in ways that were not possible in multi-ethnic organizations. The diaspora provide a space of freedom not yet possible under the repressive conditions that characterized Ethiopia in the early 1970s.

Much of the early work produced in the diaspora was supported or developed by Oromo activist and scholar Sisai Ibssa and his associates. Sisai spent the bulk of his life dedicated to

building Oromo institutions and advancing Oromo concerns. Sisai Ibssa was a intelligent, bold, and charismatic founding member of the Oromo diaspora in Washington, D.C. When he arrived in the United States in 1967, he had hopes of continuing his education in physics. However, soon after his arrival, Sisai abandoned his interest in the hard sciences and became active in the politics that engulfed the United States at that time (i.e the anti-war movement and the Black Panther party). In addition to these pursuits, he joined the Ethiopian Student Union of North America (ESUNA) and became an active member and a staunch Marxist.

Lubee Birru, an elder of the Washington, D.C. community and a relative of Sisai, came to the United States escaping threats to his life for his active role in MTSOA.

Prior to coming to the United States I had been a part of the MTSOA. I joined the association as a high school student. A relative introduced me to the organization in Addis Ababa. On the first day I attended a meeting, I became a member. Collecting money became my job and many people came to know me as the boy who collects money from everyone. There was a small book where everyone had to sign every 15 days... you had to pay \$2.00 which was not a lot then.

Then when Macha Tulema was attacked by the government, the government did not know about all the students in high school active in the association. The government only put a fraction of the main movers of the organization in jail. Some of the members stopped participating out of fear, but many of us said we had to continue their work and went underground. So in order to communicate with one another about 30 of us young people made a volleyball team, Macha on one side, Tulema on the other. In this way the government would not know about our behavior. We dance there, we play volley ball, we mixed Muslim and Christian both, we eat at the same table and the same meat, nothing is taboo between us. Before there was a separation between Muslims and Christians even though they were both Oromo. After this, we started to invite one another to each other's home and we become one.

Lubee recounts the changes he saw in Sisai upon his arrival to the United States:

On my first day here when Sisai came to pick me up from the airport, I was met by this guy with a beard! When Sisai lived in Ethiopia he was clean shaven and he used to be well dressed. Here he dressed plainly in jeans and he did not wear a necktie. Next, he took me to his place and when I went into his house there was not a chair or a sofa in the place... he had become a Marxist ! He introduced me to his friends and every one of them had a bush. They were wondering about the MTSOA, they had all heard the news about the organization, but for the first time they could hear from someone actually involved in the organization.

Sisai persuaded Lubee to join ESUNA in the early 1970s. As a member of ESUNA, he frequently challenged the organization's positions and addressed Oromo issues during its meetings. He often met opposition because ESUNA advocated the resolution of ethnic issues by way of resolving class inequalities.

I came here in the early 1970s. I was not initially a part of the ESUNA. I had connections to the underground groups that emerged out of the MTSHA in Ethiopia. I was imprisoned in Ethiopia and upon my release, I was told that it would be a good idea if I left the country and I did. I had a mission when I came here, I was told by my underground organization to go organize Oromos abroad. I told Sisai of my desire and he said, "You have to go to the river to capture fish, don't expect the river to carry fish and bring them to your home. Go to where you can find Oromos. They are in Ethiopian student organizations you can find them there". At that time, Sisai was a Marxist and politically active in the ESM and I was not... even though he did not accept my ideas one hundred percent he did not try to stop me from what I was doing. I joined the ESUNA because of him. Every time there was a book assigned, I tried to link the reading to the Oromo cause. Some of them were angry with me. So though I did not catch many fish initially, with time, a group formed around me and they were happy when I asked these questions, some were Amhara even, many Oromos and other ethnic groups. Sometimes they laughed and they were happy because I would ask the leaders questions that they were afraid to ask. They were behind me, whether I was wrong or right, they wanted me to keep challenging them.

This lack of an Oromo voice was not relegated just to the political sphere, even socially, Oromos attending ethnically mixed social events would speak Amharic and not regularly display elements of their Oromo identity publically. It was in the early 1970s that things began to change. Lubee recounts one occasion where the Oromos at a gathering exhibited their ethnic identity publically.

One day I attended an ESUNA gathering at the house of Ali [an Oromo]. Though Ali was not a part of ESUNA he had attended one of their recent protests against the regime and because he had a big place, he let them use his house for one of their parties. People were dancing Amharic style and doing different dances and then when an Oromo song came on, I just got up and started dancing. Ali looked at me and he came. Then the other guys that we did not know joined in, most of them Muslims from around Shagar, I think. I was from a different part of the country, but when we danced, our dances were the same even though we did not all know each other. There was a unity in style which showed the similarities across the vast area that is Oromia. I felt like I was back home...it was a great feeling to link with the past in that way and to show our own style of dancing.

To reiterate, though the Oromo were the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, they lacked a popular political organization that dealt specifically with ethnic inequality until the birth of the Oromo

Libration Front in 1974. There were Oromo leaders within the ESM and later the Derg, but they were used to legitimize the Derg's program and were killed once they were no longer useful. Though they were leaders they did not advocate for ethnicity. Even in the diaspora, radical Ethiopian organizations at the time, dismissed ethnic concerns as "narrow nationalism" and they were not supported. After the MTSHA's leadership was rounded up in Ethiopia and the Bale rebellion quelled, Oromo actors became targets and many went underground and started to organize not for reform, but separation.

Activist, scholar of the Oromo, and close friend of Sisai Ibssa, Bonnie Holcomb discusses the concurrence of events that brought about a shift in Ibssa's perspective on Oromo issues:

Sisai's outspoken defense within ESUNA of Eritrea's colonial status, the growing number of Oromo and Somali members bringing diversity into ESUNA, increasing news about the activities of the Macha Tulama Association, plus Lubee Birru's arrival in the United States with intimate accounts of his own experiences of capture and mistreatment by Ethiopian authorities-compelled Sisai to direct his attention toward the particular case of the Oromo of Ethiopia (Holcomb 2011: 8-9).

At this point, Sisai began to look at the Oromo question as a colonial question that could not be resolved by reform. "Reforming or takeover of the empire was no longer the ultimate goal nor would it serve as an effective long term strategy...instead he began to advocate for the emergence of an independent Oromo state" (Holcomb 2011:9).

In the 2011 issue of the *Journal of Oromo Studies* dedicated to the memory of Sisai Ibssa, Lubee Biru narrates an important turning point that led to the development of Oromo specific institutions in the nation's capital. A confrontation occurred between the Oromo and other elements of ESUNA over issues of Ethiopian history and the Oromo at the 1973 ESUNA Annual Congress. Prior to the meeting, there was a paper distributed that was to be discussed at the Congress. During a question and answer period about the paper, Sisai expressed concerns about

the text and offered a suggestion that foreshadowed the rift that would later emerge between some Oromos and ESUNA.

I have no question, but I have a suggestion. Check your papers from page one to fifteen. It tells us about 3000 years of the civilization of Abyssinia and the development of Abyssinian churches and the legend of the history of the Queen of Sheba with King Solomon, etc. Since non-Abyssinians are not a part of this historical background, and since the Oromo people have no share of your 3000 years, I as one Oromo suggest the following: Let us start from page sixteen and cancel or tear away pages one through fifteen...I raised my hand, and the chairperson recognized me. I said, "I support Sisai's suggestion, because if we start from page sixteen we will discuss how emperor Yohannes the IV and King Menilek colonized the Oromo, Somali, Afar, Kaficho and other people, and we will learn how empress Zewditu and Haile Selassie inherited the colonial empire and maintained it for the benefit of Abyssinian settlers (2011: 73).

Those in attendance were at silenced and stunned at Sisai's comments because he had been a Marxist and had not publically advocated an Oromo position before that period. After the initial shock wore off, the room erupted in conversation. Some said the union should discuss and vote on its position on the Oromo and the colonial question. Others bemoaned what would happen if these issues were considered seriously. Finally, it was decided that the issue should be studied, papers drafted about the topic, and those in attendance agreed to postpone a vote on the issue until a later date (Holcomb 2011: 72-75). Needless to say, the next year the Ethiopian revolution occurred and other pressing issues took precedence. Lube saw this act as revelation of the turning point in Ibsaa's perspective. The reactions he witnessed from many of the non-Oromo ESUNA members to his suggestion strengthened his resolve to bring Oromo issues into the political sphere. In light of the organization's strong anti-imperialist and anti-feudal stance, he saw there was an inconsistency in how the Oromo and the national question were considered. This event as well as those mentioned above by Holcomb, prompted Sisai and other Oromos in the area to reevaluate their participation in multi-ethnic groups like ESUNA. It was soon after this period that the Oromo in D.C. began to establish their own ethnic-based associations.

Oromo Organizations in the Diaspora

I told some Oromos I knew that I was planning to have an Oromo organization and arranged with various Oromos to talk about the idea. Three of us were charged with contacting all the Oromos we could find in Washington, D.C. area. We did not know their political activities, they were hidden everywhere, there were about 30 of them. Somehow we contacted them and sent them a letter to have a meeting. We asked the Oromo girls to cook for us. It was a good day sometime in September of 1974. We already drafted our constitution; after everyone ate we started our business. We said we wanted to organize the Oromo and start our own organization. We asked, “Are you willing? With your support we will start our own organization?” Everybody raised their hand said yes. Some remarked that it was time. Only one person opposed, because he was a diehard Marxist. We tried to convince him ...we had enough, there were 27 people, we agreed with a big majority. As for the dissenter, we assigned three people to go to his home and convince him. We gave everyone a copy of the draft constitution and we told them to come to another meeting the next day to amend the constitution. The next morning, only 15 people came, this is the Oromo sickness. Every 15 days or so the size of the meeting would decline. The final day when we amended the constitution and declared our organization established we were 7 people and that was 1974. After our organization, started, we began to have communication as an organization, not as individuals. We start our organization, the Union of Oromo Students in North America Tokkuma Oromo [Oromo United]. Little by little our number increased. We created our stamp, we made an album for our organization. We also produced a journal through which we discussed our issues (Lubee).

The creation of Oromo institutions caused tensions between them and other Ethiopian groups.

The presence of Oromo institutions, media organs, and cultural events brought about a variety of responses from the Ethiopian community, many of them negative. The quotes below point to some of the sources of conflict between Oromos and other groups. Long time community member “Ahmed” discusses how he came to be a part of Oromo organizations in the city.

When I came to the United States, I was initially a part of ESUNA, but I split with them because they did not respect our issues. They wanted to tell us how we should identify, to define us. They wanted to bury Oromo culture. After a while, I decided to leave and we created our own organization.

One of the founding members of the Tokkumma Oromo, *Lubee* had this to say about the early days of activism and the organizational relationship Tokkumma Oromo had with *ESUNA*.

They did not like it, our organization, but we had exchanged solidarity with Ethiopian students. We wanted recognition. At first, they were forced to recognize us because they did not want to lose some active Oromo members like Sisai, who had been a pillar in their organization ...therefore they supported our organization for one year. After that they no longer wanted to support us. They came by about 100 to one of our meetings and all of them walked out. We had done nothing... after they walked out that that was our last communication with them.

Later Sisai wrote them a letter said where he said something like “without any fear, without any regret, I fought the Haile Selassie government through ESUNA. Now, I see that I can more contribute if I work with the Oromo student organization. Therefore, I appreciate working with you up to now, but now I belong to the Oromo student organization”. They lost Sisai and he was one of the main organizers of ESUNA in the area. After that, they [ESUNA] split into more factions.

Tola, a long-time activist and observer of Oromo affairs had this to say about the birth of Oromo Studies.

When you bring up Oromo issues they say you are a “narrow nationalist.” When the revolution came, some students went home to organize and be a part of the revolution ...many were killed. As the revolution progressed, the national question became a large issue. In 1975, the Oromo split from ESUNA and created the Oromo Student Union of North America. In 1975, we had a national congress here at Howard University. The Ethiopians said you will not have a conference here and they surrounded the hall...they heckled and intimidate us. We had to call the police. I was not living in D.C. at time, but I had come for the conference where I witnessed this episode.

As illustrated in the quotes above, the emergence of Oromo voices and perspectives were viewed with disdain and fear by many Ethiopian nationalist organizations in part because they sought to disrupt the hegemonic images of Ethiopia that played a role in what they deemed to be Abyssinian privilege. By the 1970s, grand historical narratives began to lose their salience and authority. In talking about Oromo issues with non-Oromos and even some assimilated Oromos, the common theme that many of the conversations shared was a sense of anger at Oromo nationalist and fear about the future. Oromo ethnic nationalism was viewed as new, artificial, and lacking a true base in the community. Oromo compliance and silence in organizations like ESUNA did not always indicate Oromo agreement. Being a subordinate member of a group or afraid of the consequences of discussing aberrant ideas can also lead to silence. But there is another side, to subjection.

In one sense of subject, one is referring to someone who is under the jurisdiction of a political authority, and hence passive and shaped: but the subject of a sentence, for instance, is usually the active one, the 'doer', the one causally implicated in action. Social subjects are constrained to operate within the subject positions set up in discourse types, as I have indicated, and are in that sense passive; but it is only through being so constrained that they are made able to act as social agents. As I said earlier, being constrained is a precondition for being enabled (Fairclough 39).

The subjection that Oromos experienced within multi-cultural organizations did indeed lead to Oromo agency, especially in the diaspora. The earliest Oromo organization established in Washington, D.C. was called Tookuma Oromo Organization in North America (TOONA) in 1974. The constitution stated the following:

We the Oromos of America conscious of the brutal double- oppression and double -exploitation to which the Oromo is subjugated, recognize that such oppression and exploitation are unleashed by feudalism and imperialism, the twin enemies of the Ethiopian masses, are convinced of the necessity and urgency of Anti-feudal and anti-imperialist revolution in Ethiopia. We are confident that the Oromo nation and all other oppressed nationalities and classes in Ethiopia will themselves smash feudalism and imperialism. We are aware of our historic responsibility to the oppressed Ethiopian masses in general, and the double-oppressed Oromo people in particular. We hereby form Tokkuma Oromo Organization in North America (TOONA) to mobilize our forces to serve the cause of liberation of our oppressed masses.

TOONA became one of the major institutions in the United States espousing an Oromo point of view on events taking place in Ethiopia in the 1970s. They had the freedom to assert and circulate Oromo perspectives in ways not possible in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, individuals and organizations espousing a concern with ethnicity were persecuted and banned by the Derg because, as a socialist regime, ethnicity was a kind of false consciousness, a kind of “narrow nationalism” that could lead to a legitimacy crisis and state collapse. Further, like religious institutions, ethnic organizations were viewed with suspicion because they could garner support that might compete allegiance to the Derg (Eide 2000).

It was the students that had the ability, knowledge, and drive to wage exposés and educational campaigns against the regime. Organizations like TOONA and ESUNA were left leaning and sought the elimination of feudalism and imperialism both of which had disproportionately impacted Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group, the Oromo, and rendered them subject people in Ethiopia. Oromos living in the diaspora were unable to fight for the Oromo militarily, but they used the freedom of expression and association that living abroad provided

them to publically articulate the origin and the nature of the Oromo struggle with Ethiopia.

TOONA, like ESUNA, was an organization that was political in nature and one of its key roles was education via its meetings and publications. Article 5 of the TOONA constitution under the Rights and Duties of Chapters section reads as follows:

Chapters shall conduct political education programs and other organizational activities such as working with anti-feudal and anti imperialist organizations in their respective localities.

The chapters of the organizations were loosely organized and dedicated to politicizing and spreading the Oromo perspective across the landscape of North America. They sought to educate the Oromo people living in the diaspora some of whom had a lived experience of discrimination, but lacked the language to verbalize their experiences. The organization also attracted assimilated Oromos seeking their roots in the diaspora where assimilation was no longer a necessary requirement for social acceptance and upward mobility. In the early days, there were no Oromo community centers, there was only UOSNA. So in addition to its consciousness raising and advocacy work, it also hosted community events and cultural functions because showcasing Oromo culture was a political act that had been persecuted in Ethiopia and discouraged in the United States.¹² TOONA also established study groups, produced publications, and in time it acted a contact point for those Oromos seeking information about refugees and the Oromo liberation struggle being waged in Ethiopia.

Early Diaspora Publications

Pamphlets and short publications were the key route through which Oromo students articulated their views against the Emperor and later the Derg regime. The tone of the pamphlets was strong and searing. The texts produced during the 1970s and early 1980s though they were

¹² Many Oromo singers and poets were jailed simply for performing cultural songs and poems. Oromo singers and poets in particular were viewed as performing pieces that could rouse ethnic sentiment and memories of a golden age for which to fight.

called journals by the Oromo organizations could instead be conceived of as the “literature” or organs of the USONA. According to Obboletti, a long time community member active in the production of knowledge about the Oromo since the 1970s, a distinction needs to be made between early diaspora literature and more the formal publications like the *Journal of Oromo Studies*.

It was a self-produced publication that served as a means of education and mass communication, but was not yet peer reviewed or otherwise administered according to common interpretation of the term “journal”. To be fair, the Oromo literature [in the early days] was on a par with the ESM literature that was produced in the same period. The latter had more money so it looked slicker, but some of the same people produced the content anonymously. It was considered ego-centric to put one’s own name on the writing. Partly that view came because the material served as a summary of some of the group discussions and therefore was a collective product.

The early diaspora literature was produced by students and activists and was often the result of discussions and debates on key issues impacting the Oromo at the time. In being produced collectively these publications represented the organization’s collective position on a topic, not that of an individual; in addition, anonymity was important during the 1970s and early 1980s due to the strong persecution meted out on dissenters and their families during this period.

Tiruneh’s general comments about the literature produced by the ESM also apply to the Oromo student literature as well.

Pamphlets were at this juncture a vital instrument for fighting the old regime, for agitating the broad masses for political ends, and for preparing all sectors of the oppressed masses for the forthcoming revolution...The nature of the propaganda was intentional, meant to raise the level of political consciousness of the population at large (Tiruneh 1990: 70-71).

Oromo protest literature of this type attempted to change public opinion. Much of it has only survived in private collections. In a future study, I hope to provide a detailed analysis of some of these early Oromo pamphlets. In the following section, some of the major themes characteristic of this early protest literature will be discussed.

Waldaansso

In 1975, TOONA produced its first publication, *Sagalee Oromo*, Voice of the Oromo. The first issue was dedicated to the life and contributions of General Tadesse Birru, the famed leader of the Macha Tulema Self Help Association discussed in chapter 3. TOONA soon changed its name to Union of Oromo Students of North America (UOSNA). Starting in 1976, USONA started a publication called *Waldaansso* (Struggle); *Waldaansso* was published in Washington, D.C. and was circulated nationally. According to one of its editors, Jimma Tufa, in a paper given at the Oromo Studies Association:

Waldaansso became our collective and authoritative means of mass communication, an anthology of our stories and it transformed our discourse of the events of our youth with a sense of mission, purpose and power. The continuing struggle and suffering of the Oromo nation underlined our assessments by sifting through the past lies of ghost history of the Ethiopian empire. It exposed the complex, often violent struggle of the Oromo society against the Abyssinian colonialism as well as defined ourselves in the face of political, cultural and economic intrusion from the Abyssinian colonizers. It explained and enunciated our political lines and shaped our doctrine. We were mindful of the oppressive realities of Abyssinian colonizers, the profound and dreadful social and material bases of Oromo society and the abysmal political and individual rights of the subject peoples in the Empire, and *Waldaansso* was the vehicle to articulate our understanding of the issues and views of those years. It was noteworthy not only for exposing the defect of the Abyssinian system of governance; but it did also publish general political and ideological commentaries on the crucial issues with global themes (2006: 101).

With publications like *Waldaansso*, the Oromo diaspora in Washington, D.C. played an important role in articulating a political discourse about the Oromo prior to the establishment of the Oromo Studies Association and *The Journal of Oromo Studies*. The tone and style of argument advanced in this publication was largely polemic in nature. In *Waldaansso*, Oromo contributors attempted to demonstrate and publicize the colonial nature of the Oromo and Abyssinian encounter. In articulating and establishing the colonial thesis, *Waldaansso* sought to provide the justification needed to legitimize the creation of an independent Oromo state. From the perspective of UOSNA, Oromo independence meant secession. In arguing this position, the

Oromo had to first problematize what they deemed to be the myth of Ethiopia's 3000 year old history. A concern with history has been a hallmark of Oromo studies which first started in agitation/propaganda papers like the *Voice Against Tyranny* (1971) and later in publications like *Waldaansso*.

Many of the articles in *Waldaansso* highlighted that Ethiopian history, as constructed by scholars within Ethiopian studies, helped to legitimize the colonization of Oromo areas and the exploitation of the Oromo because it omitted the history of the conquered groups incorporated in the empire. The Oromo used publications like *Waldaansso* to argue that Ethiopia's current borders only emerged during the 19th century and though the traditions endorsed by Ethiopian nationalism predate the 19th century, the new nation was comprised of disparate elements many of which were exploited and maligned because they lacked a connection to the core ideology of Ethiopian nationalism. Contributors to the *Waldaansso* also wanted to give attention to aspects of Oromo history that had been left out of mainstream Ethiopian historical accounts, namely the nature of Oromo conquest and incorporation. These aspects of the past were written out of formal histories and survive only in the memories of the oppressed. The appearance of ignored aspects of Oromo history, within Oromo discourse during the 1970s and 1980s, was deemed illegitimate within Ethiopianist discourse or regarded as constructed purely for political purposes. When the conquest of the South was discussed in mainstream academic accounts, Oromo figures that facilitated conquest were often mentioned; Abyssinia's role in conquest was omitted altogether or not discussed in any detail which represented conquest as something that Oromos contributed to while the monarchs and settlers role in conquest is underreported. Protest literatures produced by Oromos in Washington D.C. were some of the first accounts that brought attention to the ethnic nature of the exploitation Southern farmers experienced living

under the *neftenya-gabbar* system of land tenancy which was later taken up by scholars in a more academic fashion. Waldaansso then acted as a source of inspiration for later Oromo scholars.

An article entitled *Analysis of Colonial Processes and Colonial Policy of Menelik II in Oromia* (1979) argued the following:

From Theoderos through the present Mengistu government including the impotent and die hard supporters of the state have been romanticizing the history of the nation and the nationality that are presently occupying the area known as Ethiopia... The hegemony of the Amhara state has survived as the Abyssinian colonialism extended its colonial grip of the colonized territory. The major factor, however, to its survival is the launching of [the] “Unite Ethiopia” program in the mind of the educated elite. It (the state) has made sure that in every school of all grades and kind the “existence of independence” and “United Ethiopia” for 3,000 years (Waldaansso 1979).

In talking about Ethiopia after 1897 and Menelik’s role in the Scramble for Africa the following is articulated:

It is hereafter that the Abyssinian Empire started its full scale of war of aggression with the help of its counter partner (Europeans) into the Oromia territory, annexing Oromo territory one after another. Even though the objective was economic, in general Menelik's rationale for conquest and expansion was as he put it, “If powers at a distance come forward to partition Africa, I do not intend to be and indifferent spectator.” Whereas his other objective was: “if God gives me life and strength to reestablish the ancient frontier of Ethiopia to Khartoum and as far as lake Nyanza with all its Gallas”. However, the interesting part of his letters is his consciousness of the continental scramble in which he knowingly participated, proving his colonial ambitions without a doubt (Waldaansso 1979:19).

Emperor Menelik II in his own words claimed to participate in the Scramble for Africa and can be considered a colonial power, the only one in Sub-Saharan Africa. There was an economic drive behind his efforts to colonize Oromia. As mentioned earlier, all the conquered territories of the Oromo, Afar, Somali, and Walyta and many others, were overtaken by Abyssinia with the help of capitalist Europe and settled by Menelik’s soldiers, which led to colonial rule. Thus, the indigenous people were condemned to servitude (1979: 25). In time, the Oromo began to resist oppression. “ ‘Ethiopia’ is the history of resistance. The response to this colonialism the Oromo

people have created a proud heritage and sacrifice; it is through resistance against the Abyssinians the Oromos have undergone a profound and dialectical transformation” (1979).

This publication could be viewed as an example of Oromo resistance in that it was established to resist a state of affairs in Ethiopia that constrained Oromo action for nearly a century.

“Resistance is then seen as the breaking of conventions, of stable discursive practice, in acts of ‘creativity’ (Fairclough and Kress 1993 :4). The journal *Waldaansso* was not an academic publication, rather it reflected and produced a discourse of struggle and protest against prevailing hegemonic representations that had been constitutive of the Oromo.

Kindling Point

In addition to *Waldaansso*, the Oromos in the Washington, D.C. area also created other types of informal discourses about the Oromo and their relationship to Ethiopia. Beginning in 1984 a publication called *The Kindling Point*, whose authorship was anonymous, began circulation. Later, it was revealed that Sisai Ibsaa and Bonnie Holcomb were responsible for its production. Holcomb wrote about the matter as follows:

It was an occasional paper, distributed hand to hand as a kind of blog before its time, which served as a running commentary on the challenges faced by Oromo desiring freedom. Sisai and I decided to write together, using the pen name H.Q. Loltu and making a pact that neither of us would reveal his identity until death took one of us. At his funeral, I confirmed that it was our challenge, our frustration and our genuine delight to create Loltu (2011:20).

Kindling Point addressed many contested issues within the Ethiopian diaspora. It was written from the first person point of view, as such, the abstract and intense contestations represented in its issues were personified in the ideas and tone of the publication’s main character, Loltu.

Kindling Point was unique for its time because through Loltu, the Oromo struggle came to life.

Loltu’s emotional responses to Ethiopian policies, his connection to his origins, and desire for a

free Oromia were acceptable as he is to be seen as real person free from the constraints of academic discourse.

In the first issue of *Kindling Point*, Loltu, gave a firsthand account of his life and how he came to understand who he was as an Oromo. This fictitious character was an amalgam of the Oromo experience. The Loltu used sensitive cultural registers in order to gain support for the positions outlined in the paper. For example, Loltu uses the government's plan to resettle northern famine victims in the southern part of the country as a means to underscore the ways Oromo areas had been typically represented as free lands and hence acceptable for settlement by outside groups.

“The South” they are speaking of is my homeland. It is not some empty dumping ground. It is a fertile area, full of rivers, good soil, and millions of people, it is known to the Oromo as Oromia”. The “South” is a named space called Oromia, full of a distinct group that speaks its own language.

Loltu experienced assimilation in his early life: his name was changed, he was baptized as a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and spoke Amharic. A change occurred when he encountered Protestant Oromos unashamed of their language. This caused him to become cognizant of his Oromo identity. The church provided an alternative way to achieve upward mobility. For many years, the Oromos remained silent about their experience and prayed for change. Though the Bible advocates peace, scriptural support for self-defense can also be found in the Bible as well. The government's resettlement plans are akin to colonization. And Unlike before Loltu asserts that now is the time for Oromos to fight against this incursion.

The third and fourth issues of *Kindling Point* entitled “On the Meaning of Ethiopian” and “ On the Power of Phrases” respectively are important because they illustrate the ways in which language and power have been linked in the naming strategies employed by the state and later

Oromo nationalist. The debates about naming publicized here are still raging in the diaspora and Ethiopia nearly 30 years later.¹³ In *On the Power of Phrases*, Loltu recounts an encounter he had with an Oromo nationalist that acted as a kindling point which was the spark that led to a change in how he identified himself. Prior to the encounter, Loltu explained that he credited himself with being sophisticated and educated and as such, he considered himself an Ethiopian. The Oromo nationalist called him a colonial subject, a designation that he resisted. He countered and stated that he was a free man. The nationalist retorted:

You are not even free to tell people who you really are. If you say 'Oromo', what do you think will happen? Abyssinians will be insulted because you have rejected the label that they forced on your parents and on you... You have so far to go that you would rather live with the illusion that you are a free man. You only got where you are today by giving up everything your people stand for including democracy when you began to climb the ladder to success. Almost everything you are proud of about Ethiopia has been taken from Oromia and used by others.

In this issue, Ethiopian identity is problematized. Educated Oromos in the past had balked at the term “Galla” because it indicated backwardness and they shied away from using the term Oromo because by the 1970s it indicated a politicized identity and people were afraid of being branded a “ ‘rebel,’ ‘separatist,’ or ‘terrorist’ ”. Oromo nationalism helped Oromos disregard old terms and at the same time reconceptualize their identities. As the months passed Loltu came to the following conclusions:

Then it became clear to me that everything that was truly Oromo to start with (including myself) and everything that Oromos have produced has been taken away from the people and renamed and nationalized with the brand “Ethiopian.” What Oromos have is not ours, because we do not control it. This is why even the most privileged Oromo individuals (maybe especially the privileged individuals) have a hard time answering a simple question like who we are and where we come from. Had our nation been free, a participating partner with the others in the community of nations, we would not have that trouble identifying ourselves.

¹³ The Oromo First Movement which was a speaking tour around North America that discussed Oromo identity. The movement was spearheaded by Jawar Mohamed. The Oromo First Movement spoke to packed houses in countless cities on Oromo issues and still drew the ire of Ethiopian nationalist that had problems with the privileging of ethnic over national identity by Oromo ethno-nationalist.

Loltu later came to conceive of Ethiopia as a term of domination that was only maintained with help of foreign assistance. For the educated minority of conquered people, to be called a Galla was so shameful that they distanced themselves from it and accepted and desired being Ethiopian because of the ways in which uneducated Oromo peasants and unassimilated Oromos were treated within Ethiopia. In the diaspora, some were able to free themselves from the negativity associated with how they had been conceptualized by outsiders and think a new about their condition and its origin. Loltu asserts the following:

Now I understand that the term “Ethiopian” is merely a label, a patent registered with the international community by Abyssinian plunderers who coveted the sources of wealth in the Oromo lands to the east and south of them and conspired to seize them... The term “Ethiopian” only took on its current meaning when the Europeans assisted the Abyssinians to possess Oromo lands with arms and advisors and modern equipment. International help is and has always been an essential ingredient in the very definition of “Ethiopia”. Without international aid “Ethiopia” as a unit has no meaning, “Ethiopia” has only held together over time because of outside aid... Without the assistance of the international community, the effort cannot be successful and the emptiness of the term “Ethiopian” will be exposed.

Kindling Point issue 4 entitled the “The Power of Phrases”, is a continuation of the previous issue, here Loltu muses on the power of language and the inter ethnic conflict he experienced resulting from identifying as Oromo rather than as an Ethiopian. He starts with a discussion of pejorative term Galla and how it and the rifle were used to maintain settler dominance of the conquered people.

Any son of a slave (“Galla”) who went to school had to prove how deserving he was to be going in to the armed stronghold, the town, which was really foreign territory to him, and to be learning the language of the conquerors... [h]e was told that it was the greatest African empire on the earth. He had to memorize the genealogy of its conquering generals and kings. He learned that the “Gallas” had been horrible savages and ruthless killers who were sent out on bloodthirsty missions and carried home the genitals of their victims... It was the job of all educated “Gallas” to help replace those pagan traditions with Amhara culture and substitute this primitive language with Amharic. I was one of these educated. It was our privilege to be a part of this civilizing process. It seems amazing now, but many of us accepted the assignment. School children like myself became ashamed to admit that we had anything to do with these horrible “Galla” people. Most of us accepted Amharic names and tried to pass for Abyssinian.

He discusses the difficulty educated members of the Oromo had with issues of liberation and for them it was a mental one not simply about a physical struggle.

Our battles do not take place on the battlefields; the ammunition that disables us is words. For us, a single phrase can be more powerful than a bullet...A phrase or a label can silence a person completely. It can make him impotent. Our conquerors built up a huge arsenal of potent phrases to use against us every time we showed an interest, sympathy or pride in our own tradition... Then I think of the times that I was silenced by a single word or phrase, it amazes me, All someone had to do was suggest that I might be a “separatist,” or an “extremist,” and I shut my mouth. I was simply terrified of being “misunderstood” and losing my “friends,” ...For me to decide to call myself an Oromo and to insist that all others call me an Oromo was my moment of truth. You may think that it is just a small thing. But for me it was war. It was easier for me with strangers met at parties. When I decided to draw a line for my old school friends and Ethiopian social acquaintances ... I knew I had reached a point of no return. It took me a long time to work up the courage.

Issues of naming and history were some of the first problems that were addressed by the Oromo in the diaspora. They were later elaborated upon in greater detail by Oromo experts in language, history and politics, but some of the early inspiration came through papers like *Kindling Point*.

The publication addressed issues of importance to the Oromo for two decades and made an important contribution to Oromo discourse in the diaspora. It caused many controversies in the diaspora and provided a means to discuss the issues of the day more freely than was common in more formal publications.

1984 as a Watershed Year: Oromo Studies Begins to Crystallize

Starting in 1984, two events catapulted the Oromo perspective to new heights. As the Oromo diaspora began to mature, become more diversified, and as the Oromo condition in Ethiopia and the Horn began to deteriorate, Oromo discursive practice became more formal and academic. The Oromo had to craft more elaborate and informed critiques about their case and they sought to take their message to a wider audience. Washington, D.C., due to its location as the seat of government in the United States and the fact that it housed the largest number of people from The Horn of Africa, gave it a special position as a launch site for a number of

Oromo firsts. Oromo activist Sisai Ibssa, his associates, and noted Eritrean scholar Bereket Habte Selassie worked together to organize an ad hoc committee known as the *Committee to Organize a Horn of Africa Conference* (COHAC) to arrange a conference on the Horn of Africa.

The conference was co-sponsored by my department, the African Studies Department of Howard University and the Institute of Policy Studies, where, at the time I was an Associate Fellow. It was a well attended three-day conference that involved presentations by scholars and activists concerned with the Horn of Africa. The main liberation movements- the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF-were represented by official delegates). There was also a special session devoted to invited delegates of the governments of the region, including the Ethiopian government, represented by ambassadors. The Ethiopian Embassy in Washington, however, declined the invitation. Indeed, after the conference, the Ethiopian Charge d' Affairs wrote a stinging letter to the president of Howard University, complaining that the university opened its doors and made its facilities available to terrorists and trouble makers. The Academic Vice President called me the following day to say that the response he gave the embassy was that there is in America such a thing as the First Amendment right; and that was the end of the matter as far as he was concerned (Selassie 2011: 162).

According to Selassie, this conference was a historic event because it was the first time such a diverse and representative sample of the important challengers to Ethiopia's policies had all sat down to discuss the state of the Horn of Africa. The Oromo actors played a major role in the conference. Sisai Ibssa, in particular, was instrumental in organizing the events and adeptly anticipated and navigated the possible conflicts between the perspectives of the various groups in attendance through his expert skills in facilitation.

The degree of his involvement and contribution to the success of COHAC was shown by the massive attendance of Oromo residents of the Washington DC area as well as others who came from as far as Minnesota. To Ethiopians who believed that there was no such thing as an Oromo movement, the massive presence of the Oromo at that conference, with the logo of the wide sycamore(odaa) tree, the symbol of Oromo democracy, visible everywhere in the hall, was incontrovertible evidence (Selassie 2011: 163).

This conference was a multicultural and multinational transnational event. It is here that the Oromos were able to articulate their position in a contested environment. Not only did Oromos speak at this event, they also displayed symbols ethnic symbols like a flags and icons to differentiate themselves from others and to illustrate their presence and distinctiveness.

In addition, during the same year, Oromo organized the first panel on Oromo issues at the African Studies Association conference. Having an all Oromo panel gave the Oromo the ability to publicize their cause which had been, prior to panel, invisible to academics outside of the Horn of Africa. It also provided a space to present papers free of obstruction from other Ethiopians. The success of the panel prompted the Oromo scholars the next year to organize an entire conference dedicated to advancing Oromo issues. The precursor to the Oromo Studies Association conference was a conference held in 1985 called *The Future of the Oromo Nation and The Role of The Educated Oromos* which took place in Washington, D.C.

The Oromo Studies Association

The Oromo Studies Association (OSA) was founded in 1986 to provide Oromo academics and observers a forum in which to expand the knowledge available about the Oromo. Diasporan intellectuals desired to establish their own association in order to correct misrepresentations, to fill in gaps in the historical record about the Oromo, and to legitimize the study of the Oromo people.

The aim was and is to valorize what was denigrated. The engagement is not a revivalist project to restore, for example the *gada* system with all its ‘roots and branches,’ to essentialise Oromo culture and society, or to romanticize its pre-conquest history, as some critiques of Oromo scholarship have argued. The aim was to correct a distorted image (Bulcha 2002: 197).

Prior to the establishment of OSA, the Oromo, as the largest ethnic group in the Horn of Africa, were understudied relative to their size in the region. It was only starting in the 1970s that the term “Galla” began to fall into disuse. The majority of those that had written about the Oromo were Western scholars in anthropology, religious studies, and linguistics. In 1978, British anthropologist, Paul Baxter wrote a piece called “Ethiopia’s Unacknowledged Problem: the Oromo” which called attention to the Oromo situation in Ethiopia as a neglected issue and

deserving of academic study. Five years later, in 1984, Baxter wrote a piece entitled the “*State of Oromo Studies*” which was an important document that outlined the contours of the field just prior to the establishment of the OSA. “In 1984 it was not difficult to compile a comprehensive list of publications because Oromo studies was a small field; most students of Oromo kept in touch with one another and the published output was not large” (Baxter 1998: 37). Information on Oromo identity did not begin to appear until the mid-1980s. During the Derg period, publications about the Oromo were either “studies of localized traditional cultures and histories or concerned with establishing the historical and theoretical justice of the Oromo cause” (1998: 39). Western scholars produced studies on small Oromo groups like the Borana residing in the periphery, while diaspora work was of the later type. As such *Kindling Point* was one of the early papers to deal with issues of Oromo identity.

Further, because of the strongly nationalist policies of the Derg regime and its tight control over its people, it would have been impossible to establish such an organization in Ethiopia without being persecuted for either speaking out against the government or for being a “narrow nationalist”. To illustrate the complexity of the Ethiopian problem and the lack of a voice that intellectuals, even from dominant groups, had during the 1980s political scientist Forrest Colburn who spent his sabbatical teaching at Addis Ababa had the following to say about the University climate.

Part of the explanation [for the apathy of the intellectuals] is that there are seemingly no channels direct or indirect, for participation. The government is centralized, rigidly hierarchical, secretive, and suspicious. And with the government exercising complete control over publications, there are not even forums for airing views. Perhaps the only opportunity a scholar has for influencing government policy is to study a technical or mundane issue, write a report with oblique criticism and recommendations buried in a tiring discussion, and hope that some foreigner in an international organization will read it and use the data or ideas to brow beat the government (1989: 141).

Further, Colburn quoted the University's policy on academic freedom which was amended during the Derg to state that there is academic freedom in the nation's universities as long as what is discussed and published is in line with Marxist Leninism; as a result, the Oromo concern with ethnic equality was not something that would be supported in the country. Further, students graduating from the university were placed in positions by the state and could not easily choose their future positions. Memories of the red Terror also haunted many during the Derg keeping a tight rein on the country's intellectuals and activists thus leaving those in the diaspora to be the voice dissent for those forced into silence.

Oromo academics presented their work on the Oromo at discipline based and area studies conferences in Europe and North America. Oromos also occasionally presented papers at Ethiopian conferences. Presentations that could be read as nationalist or "political" would not be accepted for inclusion. Oromo scholarship was often criticized as being politicized and partial. However, the emergence of the Oromo Studies Association occurred at the same time when anthropologist began to question the authority of their own representations, the power inequalities inherent in their work, and the situated and partial nature of all knowledge production (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and (Clifford 1986). Oromo critiques of history were emancipatory for them because they helped to do "denaturalize powerful ideas and institutions" and paved the way for the production of alternative visions of reality (Hale 103). Oromo actors, like their Ethiopianist counterparts, illustrated that "knowledge is produced through a dialogue among politically situated actors" (Hale 100). To many Oromos, they were being evaluated based on double standard. From their perspective, Ethiopian scholarship was nationalist and yet it was given respectability and legitimized.

According to the Mission Statement of the Oromo Studies Association it was established to fill in knowledge gaps about the Oromo.

- OSA is an academic non-profit association dedicated to the study of the Oromo.
- OSA is a multidisciplinary organization, with a focus on Oromo history and culture.
- The association was founded by academics that felt the scholarship on the Oromo was inadequate.

The objectives of OSA were to promote formal scholarship on the Oromo people, to act as a community of support for Oromo academics, and to fundraise to support Oromo scholarship. It was through its conferences, journals, and proceedings that Oromo scholars disseminate information about the Oromo. Oromo studies does not stand outside of the conflicts of meaning and representation raging in Ethiopia, it positioned itself at the heart of these contestations at the outset.

Scholars have been aiming at exposing the crude nature, inner workings, and consequences of the Abyssinian colonialism, its ideological underpinnings, and the mechanisms with which the Abyssinian elite and their foreign supporters have distorted Oromo history and undermined Oromo civilization.

The Oromo Studies Association advocates a position against colonization and ideologies that support the exploitation of the Oromo.

The early contribution of the Oromo Studies Association (OSA) to the study of the Oromo was its annual conference. The first annual conference was a two day event that took place in Washington, D.C. in 1986. The Oromo Studies Association's annual conference represents an *Oromo space* where Oromo academics and scholars of the Oromo, from around the globe, presented papers about Oromo history, culture, politics, and the Oromo struggle. As the community matured, diversified, became more accomplished, and educated there was a need to engage in a struggle for representation from many vantage positions. OSA was envisioned as a

formal academic institution birthed to legitimize and deal with neglected aspects of Oromo life and history. Though this was the case, from its very inception, OSA made a conscious decision to allow both academic and non-academic voices to be heard at the annual conference. The voices of activists, traditional philosophers, former prisoners, and journalist were welcomed and respected because they linked the diaspora to the homeland and kept the audience abreast of current events. The audience then and now is comprised of both academics from around the country and lay people in the host city that attend to support the association, to learn new information about the Oromo, and to socialize.

The location of the annual conference rotates, most often between Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, and Atlanta, though conferences have also been held in Toronto and Seattle. All of these areas have high concentrations of Oromo people, but only a subset attend the conference. The percentage of the Oromo population attending the annual conference has declined in recent years. This is in part due to community growth and diversification. In the recent past, the annual soccer tournament, OSA's annual conference, political meetings, and the Oromo church conference were organized to take place at staggered intervals during a two week period in the same host city. It was presumed that this form of scheduling would be cost efficient and would ensure that all events would be well attended and that families would not have to choose between events. Further, this period in late summer was highly anticipated by Oromo families as a time to connect with friends and relatives. Every member of the family had activities to look forward to enjoying. However, organizers were disappointed that scheduling conflicts emerged, venues were too remote to encourage easy transition, many individuals and families did not have enough vacation time to stay for all events and ultimately some organizers did not consult with the others before announcing upcoming venue plans, forcing conflict over the process. As a result, event

organizers have largely abandoned the effort to coordinate scheduling of events. They now have different needs and no longer have to work together to gain numbers. Further, political differences have split the community.

Though fewer people attended the OSA conference in Minneapolis in 2012 than in the past, the 2013 event in Washington, D.C. drew record crowds causing the need for overflow and turning attendees away. As an observer of the event for nearly a decade, it is my view that there is a large core of committed people that faithfully attend OSA's annual conference every year. It is this group of scholars, activists, politicians, and lay people interested in Oromo issues that are the heart of OSA and have worked for decades to support the association. Those that attend the annual conference have typically been over the age of 40 and the prolific Oromo scholars that produced the bulks of the diaspora literature on the Oromo are now in their late 50s and early 60s. More than 80% of the attendees are male. From my perspective as an outside observer, one of the problems OSA faces concerns the future contribution of members of the second generation to the organization. There are many Oromo scholars in Ethiopia and newcomers making contributions to Oromo studies. Though second-generation Oromos speak the language, attend Oromo churches and organizations, marry Oromos and even visit the homeland, they have been slow to enter Oromo studies for a number of reasons. First, the vast majority of the Oromo diaspora only started migrating after 1991, as a result, the community is still relatively young and many are just now entering the university. Those that do attend college tend to gravitate toward the sciences as they are more lucrative areas of study than the social sciences and the humanities. Second, many of them lack the experiences that led to their parent's migration and as such, they are less committed to Oromo issues than their parents. Finally, the youths I spoke with felt their views were ignored by older academics and politicians. On a positive note, during the 2013

annual conference, a number of young people were elected into leadership positions in the association. It remains to be seen how the second generation will participate in the future of OSA (Levitt 2009).

I have attended the Oromo Studies Association conference for nearly a decade and it is at this conference that I have witnessed Oromo people become invigorated. When the conference is held in Washington, D.C., the Howard University's Blackburn Center is transformed into an Oromo space as hundreds of Oromo scholars, activists, and community members converge on the building. Upon entering the hall attendees are greeted by Oromo students from the local high schools and colleges manning the registration table. Students are enlisted to give them a sense of duty and also to socialize them in an academic environment where. The Red Sea Press usually has a table set up selling book related to the Oromo and the Horn of Africa. Further, other tables are set up to sell books produced by Oromo scholars, activists, and community members that were either self produced or produced by small presses. One must set aside money to support the latest titles. In this way, even non-academics that attend OSA often have libraries on the Oromo. Often they know or are friends with the authors. There is an open and free air about the place and status differences between scholars and non-scholars are not marked. Lay people often make up the bulk of those in attendance. In addition to knowledge production, these two days out of the year the Oromo and their concerns can be central and they can feel a sense of belonging. The conference is academic, but it has an activist bent. Many of its speakers refer to the ongoing plight of Oromos in Ethiopia and of refugees. In addition, every year the Oromo Support Group, a organization dedicated to monitoring the human rights crisis in Oromia and in the Horn, details that years abuses and victims. He also collects donations after the presentation to support

refugees. Those in attendance can be starved for news and OSA provides a space in which to be updated on issues impacting Oromos in Ethiopia and in the diaspora.

OSA Organizational Features and Challenges

The Oromo Studies Association is one of the oldest, most prestigious, and globally recognized Oromo organizations in the world. Oromo living in the diaspora were able to establish ethnic-based associations of this type before they could found them in Ethiopia. The main tasks of the Oromo Studies Association is to put on the mid-year and annual conferences and to publish the *Journal of Oromo Studies*. In addition, because of OSA's name recognition and the academic expertise of its leadership and members, it is often called upon by Oromo globally to support various Oromo causes and to speak in an informed fashion on pressing issues impacting the Oromo community. The president of the association is often a full-time faculty member and upon election, he must write petition letters, plan two conferences, speak at other conferences and community events, produce newsletters, and monitor the production and distribution of the *Journal of Oromo Studies*.

Financially the organization is supported by its membership dues and conference fees; as a result, its annual working budget is terribly small. From this budget, OSA must fund *The Journal of Oromo Studies* which often takes up a significant share of its budget. In addition, it also pays to bring keynote and other speakers to its annual conference. In addition, the organization must fund the duplication of conference proceedings. Further, it is also on occasion offers a small scholarship.

The *Journal of Oromo Studies* is important because it is one of the key sites through which academic information about the Oromo is disseminated. OSA also has a website through which all its members can communicate messages. As such, OSA can also act as a clearing

house of current events and important issues impacting the Oromo community globally. The Oromo Studies Association is often the Oromos institution through which to articulate academically informed critiques of issues impacting the Oromo community globally. They helped bring Western attention to the pollution of Ethiopia's Qoka lake, informed people about the plight of Oromo refugees in Yemen and Libya, hosted conference panels on the land grab issue in Ethiopia which is impacting thousands of Oromo farmers. Oromo issues are often nested within other issues and the ethnic component is not elucidated in the popular media. It is through the informed critiques Oromo issues are often nested within other issues and as such the ethnic component is often not reported and obscured in the popular news. OSA is often called upon by the Oromo community to unpack the complexity and ethnic component of many of the crises impacting Ethiopia and the Horn more broadly.

Due to the host of official and unofficial demands placed on the association, it faces a number of challenges. The Oromo Studies Association is a fully volunteer organization and it does not have the funds to hire an employee to handle many of the labor intensive mundane administrative tasks that take up a tremendous amount of the presidents and executive committees time and attention like dealing with membership issues, working on the journal circulation, and keeping track of and responding to email. OSA is a multi-disciplinary association and though there are likely hundreds of Oromo PhD holders in the United States, only a very small group are explicitly publish on Oromo issues or are involved with ethnic specific diaspora activities; as a result, the pool from which to draw candidates for the presidency is very small. Some people have served as president twice since the establishment of the association. Because of the extreme workload involved and the social tensions associated with leadership it can be difficult to find people even run for election. OSA's address changing every

two year with the treasurer and this is problematic. Finally, the association does not have a permanent office. Its shifts every two years with the treasurer and this obviously leads to communication problems between OSA and outside individuals and institutions. Though this is the case, due to the penetration of information technology being itinerant is becoming less of a problem.

The symbol of the association is the *odaa* or the sycamore tree. “The *odaa* tree remains a resonant symbol of Oromo unity even today. First adopted as an organizational logo by the pan-Oromo Macha Tulema Association in 1963 (MTA, 1965; Bulcha, 1997), the *odaa* tree has ever since been used by Oromo political organizations as a national symbol which arouses a feeling of belongingness and unity among Oromo people” (Bulcha 2011: 435). The *odaa* tree is significant because traditionally the gada assemblies and various rituals would take place under the *odaa* tree. The *odaa* tree symbolizes unity, dialogue and Oromo traditions. The Oromo Studies Association chose this symbol because it hoped to, like the tree, provide a venue through which dialogue, education, and knowledge could be shared and community issues resolved. The Oromo community within the diaspora is religiously, regionally and politically diverse and in this climate deciding on where to host the annual conference or especially who should be the keynote speaker at the annual conference are processes fraught with difficulty. OSA is an academic and non partisan organization and often tries to bridge the gap between different constituent forces in the community; it invites all side to participate in academic debates about pressing issues within the Oromo community and tries to foster unity in problem solving. Unity and peace are highly valued within this community and the Oromo spend huge amounts of time discussing unity and peace and even dedicate panels to these issues at the Oromo Studies Association.

The Journal of Oromo Studies

In 1993, six years after OSA held its first annual conference, the association was able to advance its cause with the establishment of the *Journal of Oromo Studies* (JOS). the *Journal of Oromo Studies* afforded Oromo scholars a space in which to advance their scholarship on Oromo unbound by the constraints of Ethiopian studies. The Editor's note of the first issue of the *Journal Oromo Studies* highlights OSA's vision for the advancement of Oromo studies. It provides insights into the contest out of which the journal was founded. Three propositions are discussed:

- The *Journal of Oromo Studies* is the realization of the Oromo Studies Association's dream of having a formal media organ from which to "promote and facilitate" the rigorous analysis of issue that pertain to the Oromo.
- The Oromo Studies Association seeks to establish itself as an umbrella organization to support other more specialized Oromo academic associations and journals. They hope to unite Oromo discourse producers under one organization to support the production of information about the Oromo.
- The Oromo Studies Association hopes that the information produced by journal could be used to inform policy decisions that pertain to the Oromo. In this way, Oromo and non-Oromo intellectuals can play a role in informing policy matters.

(Editor's Note 1993:i)

The Journal of Oromo Studies became a transnational organ of discourse production about the Oromo with content derived from Oromo and non-Oromos around the world. The discourse contained within the *Journal of Oromo Studies* played an important role in shaping the perspective of Oromos in and out of Ethiopia and it was through this scholarship that some change was instituted. As Wodak (2009) highlights, the publication of the *Journal of Oromo*

Studies did not just play a role in informing Oromo identity narratives, it also influenced how non-Oromos from Ethiopia conceive of their identity and produced discourse. “Discourse can be viewed as a social practice and there are dialectical relationship between discourse and the situation, institutions, and social structure in which they are embedded. Identities are constructed maintained and dismantled through discourse” (Wodak 2009: 7).

Contests over the Past: Oromo and the Importance of History

The 1990s marked a productive period for Oromo studies as the field grew and became more diversified. It was during this period that diaspora intellectuals became key actors in the field and produced the vast majority of academic materials being published on the Oromo at the time. In addition to the establishment of the *Journal of Oromo Studies* in 1993, two seminal works were published about the Oromo that garnered international attention and criticism: Mohammed Hassen’s *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570–1860* and Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa’s *The Invention of Ethiopia* both published in 1990. These two texts were seminal in that they offered a critique of the ways Ethiopia and the Oromo had been represented and exposed a broader set of readers to the Oromo and ethnicity in the Horn of Africa. At the heart of both of these texts was a concern with history and both texts offered an alternative conception of the past, informed by a concern with inequality.

Within Ethiopia, history has become a contested terrain (Gebissa 2009). In the past, history was often used to legitimize the nation and its activities. Traditionally within Abyssinian society and during the pre-war period, local historians were court historians or chroniclers supported by particular rulers. These scholars owed their allegiance to the state because it had financially supported their education. Early chroniclers, in particular, sought to “emphasize

recovering epic stories, foundation myth, and sacred texts for the purpose of state building and strengthening the nation” (Gebissa 2009: 1). These historians were not concerned with objectivity and they often produced biased and distorted accounts about the events that transpired and varied communities they encountered.

If the Ethiopian Student Movement played a role in decentering the nation and its sovereign with its searing critiques of the Selassie regime, then the 1974 revolution brought about a major shift of focus within Ethiopian studies. “With the declaration of socialism as the new ideology of the state, scholars felt safe to employ such analytical concepts as class struggle... Many scholars turned to the production of knowledge about the activities and experiences of previously ignored classes, ethnic groups, and marginalized segments of Ethiopian society” (Gebissa 2009:3). After the revolution the Oromo and other southern groups became the focus of history as Oromo students and scholars began to conduct research on the Oromo using oral history.

In and outside of Ethiopia, history been both an important and contentious subject. Ethiopians are very proud of their history and during the modern era, history triumphed over other modes of conceptualizing the past because it carried with it notions of legitimacy (Nandy 1995: 46).. “This dominance is derived from the links that history has established with the modern nation-state, the secular worldview, and in recent years development” (Nandy 1995: 44). According to Calhoun, nationalism has a complex relationship to history. “The discipline of modern history is deeply shaped by the tradition of producing national histories designed to give readers and students a sense of collective identity” (1993:22).

Ethiopia’s recent history has been mired in conflict and in discussing the past, questions concerning human rights violations, justice, and collective responsibility have become

paramount (Huyssen 2000: 25). Ethiopia, and many other nations, have “ the unprecedented task of securing legitimacy and the future of the emergent polity by finding ways to commemorate the past wrong” (Huyssen 2000: 26). With the demise of the Derg and Ethiopia’s adoption of ethnic federalism, debates over the past have taken center stage in academic and political debates on the Horn of Africa. There have been tensions concerning the entry of Oromo voices into Ethiopian history.

National cohesion, in other words, requires a sense of collective awareness and identity endorsed through common historical experience. Unofficial memory is often seen as a binary opposite to national or official memory, but it remains a somewhat unambiguous and dangerous term. If official memory is linked to national memory, then unofficial must be equally applicable to anything that is not state-structured. This is, of course, is not the case, as many groups and individuals regard their own individual, local or communal heritages to be just as valid and ‘official’ as that of the state or other officially sanctioned forms of remembering (McDowell 2008: 41).

Because the Oromo were traditionally an oral society, primarily rural, and many lacked formal education, the past was encapsulated in the memory of the people. History became a hegemonic category, it “banished, from our consciousness, other ways of seeing the past” (1995: 54). It is this insertion of Oromo memories of the past into their academic accounts that have been problematic and lead Ethiopianists to invalidate and dismiss some Oromo academic and political claims. The Ethiopian knowledge elites have treated the Oromo as historical objects or have ignored them because of their subordination and powerlessness. Current publications on Oromo cultural and social history challenge a top-down paradigm of historiography and make the Oromo, subjects rather than objects of history (Jalata 1998:254). Laclau and Mouffe are informative here and though the following quote refers to conflicts in Western societies, nation’s like Ethiopia are mired in similar struggles over the past, ethnicity, and issues of legitimacy.

The proliferation of struggle presents itself, first of all, as a ‘surplus’ of the social vis-à-vis the rational and organized structures of society-that is, of the social ‘order’. Numerous voices, deriving especially from liberal-conservative camps, have insistently argued that Western

societies face a crisis of governability and a threat of dissolution at the hands of the egalitarian danger... Thus, the wealth and plurality of contemporary social struggles has given rise to a theoretical crisis... Our aim has been to focus on certain discursive categories which, at first sight, appeared to be privileged condensation-points for many aspects of the crisis; and to unravel the possible meaning of a history in the various facets of this multiple refraction (1985: 1-2).

In the preface of *The Invention of Ethiopia*, Holcomb and Ibssa discuss why Ethiopian history has taken up a significant portion of most accounts on Ethiopia.

We were not able to say what we wanted to say without turning to history... Finally, at one conference a commentator asked the crucial question, 'Why is it that yours and every other paper I have heard about Ethiopia has an enormous historical introduction going back to Emperor Menilek and beyond? We can't ever seem to do without that!' All those attending the session concurred that, yes all the papers had this component, and no one could do without it. Yet the histories of Ethiopia that were available did not prepare one for understanding current dynamics. When we began to work on this book length piece, we discovered that the historical issue was again a central one. Different features of the history of Ethiopia had to be emphasized in order to explain the roots of conflicts raging in the Horn. The commentator had fingered an important issue. The history of Ethiopia as it has been written by Ethiopianists up to the present has been written from the perspective which does not include the background to what is going on in the empire now (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990: xiv - xv).

These conflicts over the past could not be ignored and more than 20 years later this feature is common in most accounts on Ethiopia and the Oromo that I have read to date. They will be with us in the future as well.

Further Holcomb and Ibssa assert the following:

There is a clear reason why people hark back to the period of Menelik when they are trying to cover an issue of current importance. It is not a matter of fashion, or obsession with history per se. It is because the Ethiopian empire was created during that period... The fundamental societal arrangements fixed at that time remain intact despite claims to "modernization and to "socialism." The roots of the current conflicts lie in the past (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990: xv).

The task taken up in this book is to demonstrate that Ethiopia is indeed a colonial empire. Since the histories of Ethiopia that are currently available have been written from the point of view that Ethiopian constitutes unique case of an ancient nation that valiantly staved off European colonial aggression to survive into the present day intact, the position offered here runs counter to 'received wisdom' (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990: 11).

Holcomb and Ibssa were both working out of Washington, D.C. and this book developed and expanded the colonial thesis first articulated in a rudimentary form in Oromo diaspora organs like *Waldaansso* and *Kindling Point*. Holcomb and Ibssa's aim was to problematize Ethiopian

history by highlighting the omitted linkages between Abyssinia's transformation into Ethiopia with its participation in the Scramble for Africa. Further, Abyssinia used its purported links to the past as a form of social capital to connect it to Europeans in order to acquire arms to ensure its dominant position in the region relative rival groups like the Oromo. They highlight that appearance of Ethiopia as we know it and the successful conquest of the Oromo and other groups in the region was not based on Ethiopian exceptionalism, but historical conjunctures that they outline in their text and Ethiopian access to firearms. According to Holcomb and Ibssa, Ethiopia's independence could, in part, be viewed as resolution to international conflict between colonial powers. The French and the British wanted to connect their colonies and facilitate the extraction of colonial resources through the establishment of perpendicular railway system. The British wanted to create a north-south railway and the French desired a line that would connect her colonies from west to east. Their visions clashed in the Horn of Africa. So as to avoid a war between the two parties both agree to recognize Abyssinia as independent.

Mohammed Hassen's *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570–1860* was and continues to be a landmark text in Oromo studies. It was the first history of the Oromo written in the modern era. Though it dealt chiefly with the emergence and character of the Gibe states in south western Ethiopia, at the start of the text, Hassen outlines his position on elements of Oromo history that had been misunderstood. According to Hassen, though the Oromo are the largest group in the Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa and “careful examination of the sources on Ethiopia reveals that much has been written on the Oromo by anthropologists, while history has been totally neglected” (xi). Further, he challenged 16th century as the origin of the Oromo presence within Ethiopia. He asserted that there is evidence that Oromos likely inhabited areas just south

of Shewa by the 14th century thus he called into question the view that Oromos were newcomers to the region.

So far there is no coherent work which deals with Oromo migration to and settlement of the Gibe states. The present study has been undertaken with a view to filling this gap... Since the time of Abba Bahrey, the purported brutality of Oromo manners has been magnified and embroidered with grotesque distortion of history which depicts the Oromo as barbarian hordes who brought darkness and ignorance in their train. In such writings, the Oromo were never cited as creators of an original culture, or as having their own religious and democratic political institutions which flowered in patterns of their making and nourished their spiritual wellbeing. On the contrary, unsubstantiated myth and untruths were created and the Oromo were arbitrarily degraded to a lower stage of material culture, as people who needed the civilizing mission of their Abyssinian neighbors. Consequently, the ruling class systematically depicted the Oromo as people without history, and belittled their way of life, and their religious and political institutions (Hassen 1990: 2).

I believe that a true knowledge of the history of the various Ethiopian peoples will create confidence and trust among the peoples of that country. Therefore, it is with this goal in mind that I endeavor to write an objective history of the Oromo of the Gibe region, but from an Oromo point of view, though I do not neglect the history of the other people with whom the Oromo interacted. Above all, it is a history whose unexpressed message stresses the importance of the need to build bridges of understanding and tolerance between the various peoples of Ethiopia (Hassen 1990: 3).

In the post-1991 period, revisionist history produced by the diaspora was blamed for providing the ideological justification for the secession of Eritrea. With the secession of Eritrea, there was a new policing of what was deemed legitimate scholarship within Ethiopian studies as many feared the potential power new voices might have in shaping the geography and political configuration of Ethiopia. Oromo scholarship was viewed as a threat. The Oromo were understood as having spilled out of their discursive place.

Concluding on the Nature of Hegemony

Thus far, this dissertation has focused a great deal of its attention on the past because in my interactions with the Oromo in the diaspora there was a preoccupation with the past, a desire for the past to be corrected, and a need for the yoke of non-Oromo versions of the past to be cast

off. Oromos of the diaspora are, like many other social collectivities, engaged in a continual state of becoming constrained by the historical, cultural, political, and economic conditions of the societies in which they reside. Through this project, I was able sketch the emergence of an Oromo-specific voice expressed through the public articulation of Oromo perspectives and by way of the establishment of Oromo institutions.

It has been through the establishment of Oromo discourses and institutions that Oromo went from being largely obscure actors in the Horn of Africa in the 1970s to being at the center of debates about the future of the Ethiopian nation today. With the birth of Oromo studies and Oromo resistance, former positions have been changed or modified which illustrates the power that diaspora actors have gained through their use of discourse. A telling turn of events, discussed below links the past and the present, this chapter and last, and discourse and power. Ezekiel Gebissa, former student of Harold Marcus, in the preface of a book entitled *Contested Terrain, Essays on Oromo Studies and Ethiopianist Discourse and Politically Engaged Scholarship*, highlights how the text came to be published. *Contested Terrain* grew out of an issue of the journal *Northeast African Studies* of which Dr. Harold Marcus was the editor. Because he had criticized Mohammed Hassen's work, Harold Marcus had become the personification of anti- Oromo sentiment within Ethiopian studies.

At Michigan State University, Marcus and I continued to debate the legitimacy of Oromo studies in graduate seminars and in private conversations. He always stressed that he was not anti-Oromo, citing that he was the only American scholar of Ethiopian studies who had trained several Oromo historians. Marcus's claim was uncontestable, but one cannot help but wonder about his vociferous and unrelenting attack on a fine piece of scholarship on the Oromo written by an Oromo scholar. In one conversation, the explanation surfaced when Marcus blurted out his opposition to Oromo studies was not based on his doubts about the legitimacy of the field, but that it emanated from the disastrous consequences it might portend for a country he spent a life time studying. Marcus feared that Oromo studies would fuel a resurgent Oromo nationalism which might lead to state collapse in Ethiopia. 'Why do you want to destroy this country?' he once retorted, 'why don't you take it over?' He proposed that Oromo scholars should work to

prevent, rather than replicate, the tragedies then unfolding in Somalia and Liberia (Gebissa 2009:viii).

With time and repeated discussions, they both came to agree that if the nation collapsed, it would not be due to Oromo scholarship. In the summer of 2002, Marcus surprisingly attended the OSA annual conference and after observing the conference he and decided to dedicate an issue of the journal *Northeast African Studies* to Oromo scholarship.

Donald Levine has also had to contend with Oromo voices as well. In 2007, he published an article on Oromo narratives in *the Journal of Oromo Studies* and also attended the 25th anniversary of the Oromo Studies Associated where he discussed the same topic. In light of Ethiopia's current ethnic conflicts, he had modified his public position on the Oromo. Instead of adhering to the position outlined in *Greater Ethiopia*, that the Oromo lacked an exportable culture, he stated that the elements of the Oromo democratic gada system could be used to negotiate the future of Ethiopia. These two examples illustrate that discourse can produce change and it has largely been through the contribution of diaspora actors that the concessions mentioned above have been achieved.

CHAPTER 5

THE OROMO CHURCH, ITS ORIGIN, AND EXPRESSION IN A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT

Psalm 118: 14-25

14. The LORD is my strength and my defense;
he has become my salvation.
15. Shouts of joy and victory
resound in the tents of the righteous:
“The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!”
16. The LORD’s right hand is lifted high;
the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!”
17. I will not die but live,
and will proclaim what the LORD has done.
18. The LORD has chastened me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.
19. Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.
20. This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.
21. I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.
22. **The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;**
23. the LORD has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
24. The LORD has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad!

The Church as Entryway into the Oromo Community

Though Ethiopian institutions were more visible on the landscape, it was initially fairly difficult to locate Oromo community organizations because I was not reared among the Oromo and did not have many contacts within the community at the start of my investigation of the Oromo diaspora. During my pre-dissertation research years, my search to gain entry into the Oromo community led me to the *Oromo Studies Association*. This organization was public and advertised itself as academic association dedicated to the advancement of the study of the Oromo. At the *Oromo Studies Association*, I spoke to a number of people in attendance about my interest in the Oromo diaspora. When I inquired about where to locate Oromos in my

research area, which at the time was Philadelphia, I was directed to the Oromo Church there.

Though the Oromo are more likely to be Muslim than any other faith, Oromo Protestants have played an unusually important role in Oromo nationalism relative to their size. Oromo Muslims and Oromo members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) do not worship as an ethnic community, these religious institutions tend to be multicultural and usually privilege the religious or national community of believers respectively. Oromo Protestants on the other hand, are unique in that in addition to supporting the advancement of the gospel, they also are concerned with social justice. This in part due to the fact that the faith penetrated the periphery first in Ethiopia.

Introduction

The emergence of the Oromo church in Ethiopia and in the United States cogently illustrates the global nature of religious interaction, practice, and issues of globalization (Featherstone, Lash, and Robertson 1995) that characterize immigrant religious institutions today. The Protestant Church has played an important, but under studied role in the history of Oromo nationalism. Though the protestant church is of foreign origin, upon its entry into Oromo country, converts in southern Ethiopia transformed it into a tool to suit local needs. The Protestant Church was one of the few institutions that provided the Oromo with links to the outside world and it was precisely these same linkages that were used by a small, but important minority of Oromos Protestants to catapult themselves both spiritually and politically out of oppression. The Oromo engagement with the Protestant Church can be understood of as an example of *transnationalism from below*, where the practices, activities, and the discourses of non-elites have become important and spawned the flow of people, ideas, and institutions (Guarnizo and Smiths 1998). Indeed, as mentioned in Psalm 118:22, it has been through the

efforts of former/freed slaves like Onesimos Nesib, assistant Aster Ganno, and other members of his language team (those cast away as abject) that an alternative education and vision of the world came into fruition for the Oromo soon after its conquest by Ethiopia. Evangelical schools became the cornerstone or foundation on which literacy in Oromo areas was built because the Protestant presence provided a platform for people living in Oromo areas to be educated and obtain positions of authority; further, the Protestant Church system provided those within it an alternative route for recognition than was possible by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church that did not involve total assimilation of Oromo traditions to gain success. As the church grew and matured, the Oromo Evangelical movement served as a vehicle through which Oromo issues could be first expressed and then globalized.

In the popular imagination of many in Western societies, the bible and religion is often viewed as a conservative force and at times repressive, but it can also have liberating effects. In Latin America, liberation theology became a popular tool for the disenfranchised to counter oppression. It provided them a discourse and moral ground from which to seek redress and reprieve from dominant oppressive forces. Further, in the African context, it was the mission educated critics of colonialism that later became the leaders of many independent African nations in post-colonial period (Berman 1974 check source). Even within North America, it was Protestants like the Lutheran turned Quaker Francis Daniel Pastorius in 1688 that wrote the first anti-slavery position paper produced within North America called *1688 Germantown Quaker Petition Against Slavery* (Brown 1988). Quakers sought to actualize the Christian principles of equality and righteousness through their anti-slave stance.¹⁴ Since the 1960s, the Evangelical wing of the Lutheran Church in particular has supported many minority social movements. In

¹⁴ Though a Lutheran wrote this tract, Lutherans were on both side of the slavery debate depending on where they lived. Some were actively anti slavery, others were not. Quakers on the other hand were anti-slavery in the 17th century.

Ethiopia, the Oromo too used the Bible and its promises to envision and create a space for the expression of equality within Ethiopia. In fact, because of the translation of the Bible into the Afaan Oromo language, the Oromo became one of the first groups in Ethiopia to have access to the Bible in their own vernacular language and this had a deep impact on Oromo consciousness. There were Amharic translations of the Bible also produced by Protestant missionaries, but they were not as widely used in Ethiopia as the Oromo versions were in Oromo areas during the early 20th century. Prior to introduction of the Protestant faith, those adherents to Ethiopian Orthodoxy or Islam learned about their religions through the proxy languages Ge'ez and Arabic respectively.

Oromo institutions created in the diaspora have been at the forefront of the construction of Oromo identity in the Washington, D.C. Cultural events like weddings, funerals, and births allow the diaspora to engage in Oromo culture, but these festivals are intermittent and inconsistent. Oromo institutions like the Oromo Church on the other hand, act as physical manifestations of Oromoness on the landscape in that it is consistent and provides regular opportunities for Oromos to associate with one another and to actively create a sense of home and support in a transnational context. In this chapter, the emergence of the Oromo church in Ethiopia, its effects on Oromo nationalism, and its appearance within the Washington, D.C. and Baltimore areas will be discussed. In addition, the chapter will highlight two major conflicts that plague ethnic churches: *fights of fission* and *fights for integration*.

Protestants in Ethiopia

A discussion of Oromo nationalism would be incomplete without mentioning the key role the Protestant faith played in the development of this movement. The Protestant church has been extremely influential among the Oromo starting soon after they were integrated within Ethiopia.

In many other African nations, missionaries proceeded colonial forces and worked with them to dismantle the local culture. In the case of the Protestant presence within Ethiopia, their entry into the country took on a complex character which on the one hand could be described as both destructive and also consolidating; the Protestant presence in Ethiopia cannot be viewed in a black-white or using a good-bad dichotomy as it relates to the Oromo case. Unlike elsewhere in Africa where Protestant missionaries entered with representatives of the state and were seen as appendages of colonization, in Ethiopia, they entered as minorities themselves disconnected from the center in Ethiopia, viewed with suspicion by those in power, but finally allowed entry because they had skills the new nation needed. Interestingly among the Oromo, it was former Oromo slaves converted in Eritrea that brought the gospel to the people for the first time.

The evangelical Christians came to Africa to teach the gospel. The Oromo are different from other Africans because when the gospel came it came through our people (Onosmos Nesib). They also helped him open a school, a clinic. The gospel was preached by locals from the outset.” The preached and prayed according to Oromo traditions (Oromo Pastor).

They had to navigate a very complex terrain and served multiple masters in Ethiopia. Yes, the colonization of Ethiopia’s neighbors provided the context in which European missionaries were present in the area, but the various Emperors of Ethiopia, as an independent and non-colonized political entity, controlled the groups to which Protestants had access and proscribed the kind of activities in which they could engage. Unlike the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), they were not viewed as partners in conquest by the Oromo. In fact, over time, their development work especially in the area of education, though initially conservative, became a counter-weight to Ethiopian colonialism.

Protestant Evangelism in Abyssinia

Though foreign missionaries had been banned in Ethiopia for more than a century (Crummey 1972), by the 19th century Abyssinia began to ease her restrictions on missionaries because they needed technological assistance to modernize and develop the country. Ethiopian leaders held ambivalent feelings about the foreign missionaries: on the one hand, they were eager to utilize their expertise in medicine and education (Zewde 2002). Conversely, members of the EOC were suspicious of foreigners and resented the Protestants for trying to convert people that were already believers. Early on the Protestants missionaries had a dual mission strategy, they wanted to revive the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and also to convert the Oromo. In the end the EOC rejected them and protestant missionaries focused their energies on the Oromo (Gurmessa 2009).

The Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM) in particular sought to establish a mission station in East Africa with the expressed interest of converting the Oromo areas just outside of Abyssinian control. The production of the Oromo Bible and the spread of Protestantism was a transnational affair that started in Eritrea, with financial and logistical assistance from the Swedes, undertaken by Oromos with the aid of Evangelical leaning members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Oromo educator, translator, and evangelist Onesimos Nesib is a pinnacle figure in Oromo literacy and Lutheran Evangelism whose contribution to Oromo studies deserves mention in this account as I am interested in language and discourse. He and those trained by him in Eritrea and in western Oromia, were viewed as the cornerstones of what would later become the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) in 1958/9. Some even see him as the first Oromo convert (Aren 1978).

Onesimos Nesib, birth name Hikaa Awajii, was born in Illubabor around the middle of the 1800s (between 1850-1855) (Diga 1999). Near the age of five, he was abducted by slave

raiders and though he was not sold abroad, he spent his childhood enslaved under a number of masters. At the age of 16, his freedom was bought by a Swiss Explorer named Werner Munzinger and he was left in the care of the SEM. He initially worked as a servant, but the missionaries soon realized that he was very intelligent enrolled him in the SEM mission school they had established. The mission school trained many freed slaves to work as future evangelists in their home regions. He was a member of the school's first class that started in 1871 (Dalhberg 1932). In 1872, he was baptized and given the name Onesimos which meant beneficial or profitable. He was named after a fugitive slave Paul converted to Christianity. He lived up to his name and did prove to be quite beneficial to the faith in general and the Oromo in particular. Some even say that his baptism could be viewed as the start of the EECMY. Between 1876-1881 he migrated to Sweden and was enrolled in the Johannlund Mission Institute where he received his teaching diploma; Onesimos was the first recorded Oromo in Scandinavia (Diga 1999: 12-13).

As a result of conquest slaves flooded the coastal markets for export for to Arabia and beyond. Some of these slaves were manumitted and the Swedish Evangelical Mission school began to grow. In addition to teaching and growing the numbers of protestants in Eritrea, Onesimos embarked on another more discursive venture to reach the Oromo with the gospel that would have momentous consequences whose reverberations are felt even today. While awaiting an opportunity to spread the gospel among the Oromo, Onesimos decided to begin to translate the Bible and other religious and educational materials into the Afaan Oromo language. The SEM started a printing press at Munkullo in 1886 in fact "[t]he first book to go through the new press was Onesimos's translation of the '100 songs and Psalms' " (Diga 1999: 24). He understood that in order to reach the people they had to understand what was being taught. A

deeper connection could be had to the word if the people could be taught to read the bible in their own language. Translation fostered a *glocalization* of Protestant Christianity.

Onesimos Nesib's life was a testament to the power that the religion and education could have for marginalized people. While the SEM waited for Abyssinian xenophobia to ebb and to for Emperor Menelik to approve their passage through Abyssinian territory, Onesimos and a number of other former slaves turned scholars set out to do the pioneering work in Oromo literacy. It would not be an understatement to assert that the efforts of Onesimos and his team gave birth to Oromo literacy (Bulcha 1997: 329). Though Europeans had produced works in and about the Oromo language before this period, it would be Nesib's translation of the Bible and his educational materials in Afaan Oromo that would be widely circulated by evangelists in Wellega. Ironically, the start of Nesib's translation work began around the time when Menelik was consolidating the empire making firm the boundaries of his expanded empire. Portions of the Old Testament and the entire New Testament had been translated prior to Onesimos translation(Gurmessa 2009: 152). His contribution was that he translated both the New and Old testaments and also production an Oromo dictionary, a spelling book, and a number of other religious materials (Bulcha 1995). The Oromo translation of the bible greatly aided in the conversion process. The fact that Oromos were involved in the process was important because they brought special cultural knowledge to the translation (Gebissa 2013:32) that resonated with the people.

The Arrival of Protestants in the Oromo Areas

The arrival of Protestants in Oromo areas is indicative of the complex terrain the Oromos were interacting within historically and experientially at the edge of conquest; the people situationally and at times simultaneously identified with the Abyssinian, the Oromo, and

Protestant cultures. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus church grew to become a religious force within Ethiopia and in particular among the Oromo living in the southern and western parts of Ethiopia. The religion is still growing rapidly today. According to the 2007 Census, Protestant represented 18.6 percent of the population. In the Oromia region, the majority of the people, 12.8 million, practice Islam, followed by Orthodox Christianity at 8.2 million, and finally Protestantism at 4.7 million. Though Islam and the Orthodox faith are more numerous in general, in certain districts, Protestants are the majority. The majority of Ethiopia's Protestants live in rural areas (2007 Census: 329). Throughout parts of Wallaga, Protestants outnumber Muslims and members of the EOC. Many members of the Oromo Churches in Washington, D.C. are from Wellega. Many Oromo scholars and activists also came from Wellega. The fact that Onosemos settled in Wellega with his vernacular bible made this site important for the protestant faith in Ethiopia (Gebissa 2013). This is not accidental, because of Protestant concern with literacy and education they understood issues of equality and through their participation in the church, they learned civic skills that could be used for the purposes of activism. During the first quarter of the 20th century and even later, in a country where the vast majority of its inhabitants were illiterate, evangelical Protestants were some of the most educated people in Ethiopian society. Further, those that learned to read and preach were able to later foster a love of learning among their children some of whom were able to travel abroad to study.

Oromo Protestants in the Diaspora

In addition to the positive esteem, education, and ability to spread the spiritual message of uplift, there has been a negative side to being a popular or outspoken Oromo Protestant within Ethiopia, persecution. With recognition and experience abroad, a subset of Oromo Protestants became targets of persecution by the government. During the Haile Selassie period, it was

illegal to preach publically in the Oromo language though many Oromos did so. Protestantism was looked down upon by many Ethiopian elites who saw it as a foreign invasion that had the potential to divide the Ethiopian population. Preaching a message of equality was a dangerous message to local landlords and garnered attention from the Ethiopian government officials and the clergy.

Protestants were persecuted for a number of different reasons under each administration. During Emperor Selassie's exile, they persecuted simply because they were not Catholic and did not have a sense of loyalty to Italy. Upon Haile Selassie's return, he supported missionary activity in general and especially in the "open areas" occupied by the conquered peoples, but Protestants working in areas dominated by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church were persecuted. Provincial leaders and landlords were less tolerant of Protestants in "open areas" and they were mistreated and were not allowed to bury their dead in local cemeteries, they were denied and blocked from certain jobs, and they were ridiculed by many members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

During the Derg period, the persecution of Protestants and any of its enemies was ratcheted up to horrific levels. On the surface, the Derg gave lip service to religious tolerance. There were many commonalities between the messages of the Socialist regime and that of Protestants within the Ethiopian context. Within Ethiopia, the Protestants worked not among the elites, but among the down trodden and exploited classes to provide education, skills, and esteem. Outside of Ethiopia though, theoretically, Protestantism was associated with capitalism and it from this lens that the Derg judged Protestants. Because the Derg was a socialist government with very nationalist sentiments, it viewed missionaries as anti-revolutionary, alien, and exploitative of the oppressed. The Derg and its supporters resented the support garnered by

the Protestant church in Oromo areas and sought to reduce its power and to supplant it with socialism (Eide 2000). They nationalized and confiscated church buildings, schools, and enterprises.

Religious leaders from the Orthodox, Muslim, and Protestant faiths that did not side with the Derg or that spoke out against its harsh behaviors, were incarcerated or killed. For example, the General Secretary of the EECMY, Qes Gudina Tumsa, was jailed multiple times because he was a high profile intelligent Oromo Protestant that refused to lie and side with a regime whose political philosophy which he publically asserted was not in line with God's law (Gudina Tumsa Foundation 2003). He was among a number of religious leaders killed by the government in 1979. To the Oromo in general and Protestants in particular, Gudina Tumsa would be considered a figure parallel to Dr. Martin King.

Even those that did not speak out against the Derg publically were targets for persecution. Officials within the EECMY hierarchy or charismatic pastors, were also targets of arrest, without justification, they were simply picked up by government officials and taken to jail. Many languished in prison for years without trial. "In January 1980, the Derg considered the finding of a committee established to study the developing 'Oromo nationalist movement'. The decision was to reduce the influence of Oromo nationals in government offices and eliminate opposition to the regime from Oromo homelands" (Eide 2000:186). The government suspected links between the Church and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The Derg assumed the churches were separatist in orientation and they were also criticized because of financial support they received from abroad. These rumors were used as justification for the closing of churches and the imprisonment of church leadership which weakened the power of the Oromo in the Western part of the country which contained some of the region's most educated Oromo.

Today, Protestants ministers that have not sided with the government or those with a sizable following often catch the attention of the current government and its security forces. The current government continues the persecution of Protestants and Muslims because they are viewed as being sympathetic of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The current government, has attempted to suppress the potential power of educated Oromo, activists, and even pastors to enact change by silencing them by curbing press freedom and clamping down on the ability of charitable organization to function in the country. Any person suspected of having any links to the OLF become targets for harassment, detention, and disappearance. Pastors, because they are preaching in Afaan Oromo and have the ability to mobilize people around a spiritual goal, are seen as threatening to the established order.

The Oromo Church in America

A history of church service, persecution, and education combine and acted as push factors for transnational migration among the first generation of Oromo pastors living in America. The Oromo pastors I worked with displayed some common features: they grew up under Emperor Haile Selassie when Oromo culture was demeaned. As adult men, they experienced persecution and were jailed during by the Derg, and they all were educated or had schooled abroad. The pastors I spoke with were persecuted for their religious beliefs and because they were Oromo. The Pastor of the Washington D.C. church shared his experience of imprisonment:

I was an evangelist in Ethiopia and was imprisoned for five years by the Derg. I got out and then got my first 1st degree and gave service for 5 years. The lord provided us with a huge congregation after 5 years and finally I got a scholarship to come to America.

The pastor of the Baltimore church wrote of his persecution in one of his memoirs:

I was arrested from my home at Mendi town by the Military Government of Ethiopia and was put in prison for no reason. I was in custody for four months until May 1986. I was interrogated and was tortured for what I did not do, and had no idea about it at all. Even though, my wife was

working for Mendi district and earning some money, my family members were in a financial difficulty, because my income was blocked immediately for the political matter. Later on I came to know that it was just because of my faith and ministry among the Oromo people They tried to convince me that I was involved in politics, which was not true. By the help of God, I was freed on May 28, 1986, and came home. There were 63 people, who were arrested with me at the same time, from the same place of Mendi town. God is good, that all of us could come home finally, and started doing our duties. God was helping me and the others in this horrible place so that nothing could have harmed us. Let the name of the Lord be glorified forever and ever (17).

Another Oromo pastor shared a similar story about his religious persecution:

I came in the 70's for educational purpose. I later went back to Ethiopia and worked for the church. The church I worked for was closed by the communist government and I was imprisoned. Even after I got out of prison, I was suspected of being a spy because I had schooled in America and had been allied with the church for such a long time.

The aforementioned pastors were all fathers and husbands and they feared further persecution and for the lives and welfare of their families. When an opportunity to leave Ethiopia arose, they fled. Pastor Duke stated:

Now, I am graduated, and received my Master's Degree, but no way to go back to Ethiopia, due to the political situation in the country concerning Oromo elites. Then, I decided to stay and apply for an asylum to the American Government INS. This was a tough decision in my life, but God was good to us and he took control in everything we did, and he fulfilled all our concerns, and he gave us power and courage to go through every temptation. In June 2001, I decided to stay in the States rather than going to Ethiopia and be put in prison for life long, who knows (25.)

Pastor Dinagede:

I came here, to the U.S. in August 1992 for a M.A. degree in Theology on a scholarship from the Swedish Evangelical Mission. The Evangelical Lutheran church from back home (Mekane Yesus) sponsored my education. I attended the Lutheran Evangelical Seminary in Philadelphia.

Pastor Dinagde could not remain at the *Lutheran Evangelical Seminary* in Philadelphia. His program was supposed to be three years, but he was only able to complete two years due to lack of financial support because his scholarship was cut due to lack of funds. I asked him why his benefactors stopped. He stated that it was just because he was an Oromo and that the political climate of the time impacted him. During this time, popular or well know Oromos from a

variety of fields were subject to suspicion and retributions like what he suffered.¹⁵

As I began to learn more about the community, I became aware that the Oromo Protestant Churches in the Mid-Atlantic share many linkages. Ironically, though the Philadelphia and Lancaster areas housed many fewer Oromos than Washington, D.C., it was one of the first Oromo congregations in the Mid-Atlantic and even predates the Oromo congregation in Washington. Further, the now retired pastor of the Oromo church in Washington, D.C. schooled and preached in Philadelphia prior to coming to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. During his time in Philadelphia, he was a part of the small bible study group that grew into what would become the Oromo church there.

I came here simply for study, but beginning by the second year (in July 1993), I decided to give service in Afaan Oromo to our people who were there in Philadelphia...The members of the church came together and in 1994 they began the church with approximately 20-25 people. They were the ones that asked me to evangelize among them. We started a formal church in September 1994 in Summit Presbyterian Church.

During his time at seminary he could not afford to pay the rent. He prayed about what he should do with the congregation and about his life. He had come to Virginia in 1992 or 1993 to preach. He had presented a sermon there two or three times which allowed him to have an acquaintance with the pastor there. He called the pastor to see if the pastor could find him a room. He actually got a parish house. He was allowed to live in the parish house in Virginia. At that time, there was no Oromo congregation in Washington D.C.

I was happy to have a place with three bedrooms. On top of that the Lord provided me with pocket money for transportation to commute weekly to Pennsylvania from Virginia to teach...Peace Lutheran church became a center for Oromo ministry in my life.

¹⁵ After the Derg was successfully ousted, all of those that participated in were to form a coalition government to rule the country. Though this was the case it soon became clear that the Tigreans would really be in charge and that they would use the other fronts participation in the transitional government to garner support from the nations disparate constituencies. Once the Oromo realized that this would be the case they withdrew from the government. Once consequence of this move was that they were viewed henceforth as terrorist. Anyone suspected of being a member of the OLF or being affiliated with the OLF will be subject to prosecution. The government still utilizes this policy even today, mostly on innocent people as a deterrent.

He stayed at *Peace Lutheran Church* in Virginia for 18 months (until April 1996).

Then, I do not know exactly...a person gave me a call and someone wanted a baptism for his twin daughters in 1993 at Grace Lutheran Church [I conducted it and] then I travelled back to Philadelphia. In 1994 a group of Oromo Christians were looking for an Oromo Church in D.C. because they heard that the Oromos in Philadelphia had a church. An Oromo young lady from Minneapolis hearing of this went to Philadelphia and then to D.C. I encouraged the lady to start the Church on her own. She wanted me to help her because she knew that men were more respected than women in their culture when it came to the church. She stated that even if you cannot be the pastor at this Church, at least help us on the first day of the Church. She asked the Reformation Lutheran Church for permission to hold services and on May 22, 1995. The Oromo church in D.C. had its first service. There were very few people in the beginning. I encouraged them and preached on the first day. After three weeks, the Church asked me to give them more time. They stated that there are people in Philadelphia who could run the service there, they were a more mature church there [He had been working with the Philadelphia church for 10 months] and they [the D.C. Church] needed him more. They suggested that I preach in Philadelphia once a month and still conduct the pastoral services like baptisms, wedding, and funerals and work in Washington three weeks out of the month. But, I could not agree until I talked with the Lord and consulted the congregation there. The people in Philadelphia agreed and I started to split my time 25/75 between Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. In time, another pastor took over for me in Philadelphia.

In addition during the same year in August 1995, we had the first Oromo Evangelical Church Conference. Members from 3 congregations (Minneapolis, Toronto, and Philadelphia) came together and it was hosted by the Philadelphia Church. Seventy people attended the conference. The D.C. church was very tiny and they sent 2 or 3 people to observe.

Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Church

Upon my arrival in D.C. at the start of 2005, I began to attend the *Grace Oromo Mission* located at *Grace Lutheran Church*. The Oromo Church was Lutheran in denomination and of moderate size. It had a kind of quiet, subdued beauty and was decorated throughout with stained glass and dark wood. Another feature that stood out about the site was its very lofty ceilings which opened up the space and added to the sacred feel of the place. Though the sanctuary was not very large, the building and the grounds were spacious. It had offices, meeting space downstairs, and an commercial kitchen. Further, it had living quarters that at the time in which I started attending, housed an Oromo pastor from Ethiopia. The Oromos did not own the building, they simply were allowed to utilize the space on Sunday afternoons after the English service had commenced and when they needed it for other church functions. There were two Oromo pastors

that ran the service. One was fulltime and the other worked a normal full-time job.

On the first day that I arrived at the church, a friendly woman in her late 30s welcomed me and introduced me to the congregation after service. On the Sundays that I viewed, the church was usually more than half-filled. The people were welcoming and friendly. They also answered any questions I had about the service and at time provided some interpretation, everyone I sat next to always was provided me with commentary, as I was an outsider. The church was quite organized and often passed out hymns and an order of service program in the Afaan Oromo language. They had a large choir that was dynamic and added a great deal of energy and spirit to the worship service. The choir was mostly female, but there were male members. Females also participated in fervent and impassioned prayers. In addition, they had a Women's Committee that served bread and refreshments after service. The church appeared to have more female members than males, but the difference in number was not drastic. The services usually lasted about 2 hours, not including refreshments. There were also many children in attendance of all ages (from birth to high school age). Small children were passed from hand to hand if they were babies. At times, people would also have birthday parties at the church for their children because it was easier having it at the church than to try to get the group together on another day, the church was the hub of the protestant children. Also, the children were allowed to run free and to make noise during the service and I found this to be a detour from what was expected in American churches where noise during the service was not desirable. Many newly built churches have quiet rooms wired with a sound system and television equipment so parents of young children can view the service even when they have to console a crying, fussy or active child. Nominal and age appropriate noise among the children was acceptable at the Oromo service.

A Brief History Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Church of Washington, DC

As stated above, the *Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Church of Washington, D.C.* (OELC) formally known as the *Grace Oromo Mission* began in 1995 and continues as a church today. Throughout its nearly twenty year long history, it has seen a numbers of changes to its location, the size of its membership, and its status. The church is very interesting in this regard, because it has increased its membership through these challenges. In the section below, I would like to discuss the history of the OELC and provide a glimpse into its character as a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ECLA).

From May of 1995 to April of 2007 the Oromo congregation was known as the *Grace Oromo Mission*. In November of 2002, the Grace Oromo Mission split due to internal conflicts and the *Oromo Christian Fellowship (OCF)* was created. In April of 2007 *Grace Oromo Mission* became the *Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Church of Washington, DC*. In October of 2008, the OELC and 78 members of the OCF agreed to reconcile and reunite into one congregation. In October of 2009, the *Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Church of Washington, DC* became a formal congregation recognized by the ECLA's Washington Synod.

The church is rapidly growing; it has more than 300 baptized members with an average attendance of about 170 members. According its former Pastor Waaqtolaa Dinagdee, the mission of the church during its founding was as follows:

To support social causes, like Oromo refugees and asylees in the city, to help refugees and asylees in the rehabilitation process. Above all, the Washington Oromo church became a center for Oromo refugees and Asylees in this area because we got massive support from the Grace Lutheran Church... like rooms for refugees and an office. They opened a Refugee and immigration Office at the church whose goal was to assist newcomers with the immigration and asylum process. Further, Lutheran Social Services in Washington D.C. was more active in this region than in any other region of the United States so people also came to live here. Immigration offices, rooms for asylees, and active government offices were all attractive to Oromos coming to the country. Hundreds of Oromos from Nairobi, Egypt, Sudan, and Djibouti and from other states in the U.S. came to D.C. These services gave the Oromo church wonderful fame among Oromos in America.

I asked the pastor in what ways have the Oromo presence in America impacted the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA)?

We applied for membership to the Washington Synod and were granted membership. Further, we applied to the national Lutheran Church “to get proper and urgent assistance for our ministry” among refugees. At that time the Lutheran Church did not have ministries among refugees and asylees and our application for help moved the church to this ministry to act. The church became aware of the need to act in this area. So they decided to give service to specific ethnics/nationals. Prior to the Oromo application, they were only giving service in English and Spanish. The Oromos were the first Africans to get ethnic language service. They had service for African Americans, but we were different and fresh. We still have our language, culture, and connections.

Eventually, the pastor of the Oromo Church in Atlanta at that time became the director for the African National Ministries at the headquarters of ELCA. Within the ELCA, they developed the African descent ministries which were comprised of African nationals, African Americans, and Afro-Caribbeans. The Oromo church in Minneapolis became the largest refugee congregation in the ELCA.

In its budget proposal for the fiscal year 2009, OELC mentioned that though it was a growing church and had many victories, it faced many challenges. One of its challenges relate to staffing.

The church has one full time pastor and volunteer church members who provide vital services as needed. The challenge we are facing is an acute need for an assistant pastor or an outreach coordinator to adequately provide much needed gospel services to this population. This is an emerging and fast growing congregation with changes in demography (2nd generation) members with multifaceted needs. Accordingly, we are tasked to find a part-time youth pastor who may provide much needed service to the youth population. To reach this population, additional staffing is required. The congregation has to work on the financial requirements needed to hire one outreach coordinator and a part-time/fee for service youth pastor to accommodate these needs (ECLA minutes 2008).

Another challenge that OELC faces is connected to building costs. “The major challenge in terms of resources is the building and worship facility expense. Due to the heavy weight, the church is bearing in terms of expense for the church building, the financial resources of the church would continue to be heavily drained”. In 2009, the Oromo Church had a short period when it left *Grace Lutheran Church* and had to pay upwards of \$3000 per month to rent the facility along with \$75.00 per hour for special event activities. This was a drain on a church that already struggled financially. High rents are one of the problems OELC faced due to being

located in the nation's capital. Starting in the mid-2000s D.C. began to lose some of its immigrants to nearby suburbs and other American cities with a lower cost of living because renting in the Washington, was too expensive for struggling newcomers. Though this is the case, the Washington, D.C. area still likely has the second largest Oromo population in the nation after Minneapolis/St. Paul.

As one of the largest Oromo speaking congregations in the nation, it continues to stretch its services to non- Lutheran Oromos in need of ministry. Additionally the mere fact that our church is in Washington DC the political capital of the nation calls on us to have a prophetic voice on the behalf of our oppressed people in Ethiopia. All of these factors are giving us a huge potential mission locally and back in Oromia (OELC 2009 Budget Report).

The Oromo Mission also shares an important partnership with other diaspora churches through its membership in the United Oromo Evangelical Churches (UOEC). In addition to securing the legal registration in the nation's capital, the Oromo Mission hosts the international office for the UOEC (Grace Lutheran Church Oromo Mission Brochure).

Conflict of Fissure and Conflict of Fusion

Fissure in an Oromo Diaspora Church

Protestant churches often have to contend with internal conflicts (Commaroff and Commaroff 1985). The Grace Oromo Mission in Washington, D.C. experienced a conflict of fissure less than a decade after its founding. I define a *conflict of fissure* to be a disagreement or conflict that leads to the dissolution of a group. Conflicts *of fission* can occur in churches of any size and even in seemingly homogeneous ethnic-based churches. In 2002, the *Grace Oromo Mission* split into two churches. The dissenting group became the *Oromo Christian Fellowship* and they relocated to another site in Maryland. This rift occurred due to differences of opinion concerning the role of Christ in the church and personal conflicts; however, the idea of fission or the split itself, not its origin, was the cause for concern for the congregation and viewed with disdain by Oromos in the Washington metropolitan areas and around the country. It is understood that conflict will happen, but because of the traditional

Conflicts of fissure are dangerous not just to those directly involved; they impact the reputation of a church and can even damage its standing in the community. I asked an Oromo middle aged man with whom I was acquainted why, given the fact according that according to his estimates that a third to a fourth of the population is Oromo, do more Oromo not participate in Oromo community activities at larger numbers and he gave the following reply:

The people do not go to the Oromo community or Amhara community and they have their own small groups. Even the church, they do not agree they are divided. The Oromo church was strong when I came... now it is divided into 4 or 5 groups. There are differences between the Wellega, they divided on the local level. The same is true of the Amahar and the Tigreans all have a number of different churches. Ethnicity and even below that is important. They divide themselves at the regional level. ...The churches separate once a disagreement happen. One guy can lead a group and separate and start a group somewhere else. Among Wellega there are differences, most Protestants are from the west they are divided. Nekemte people are divided between Nekemte people Dembi Dollo and Gimbe. When I came there were two churches then thing just mushroomed.

A newly arrived young pastor said the following about church divisions:

Within the Oromo church many of divisions are over political matters because most of the members are politically active. Politics are at time intertwined with religion. The church is ecclesiastically tied with politics. Why is this so? Well, this is an ethnic church and it was organized to serve immigrants who fled political persecution. ...Why do churches split? The current divisions relate to personality. This happened during an election, there was a process to elect new elders. There was a quarrel among the elders and the leadership about who should take over and why. This spilled over into the congregation. A group separated and started their own congregation. There are also quarrels about how a group should worship.

The Oromo have value negotiation, deliberation, conflict resolution which all have their origin in their traditional system of governance, the *gada* system of democracy, where difficulties and disagreements are settled through group negotiation and discussion. The concept of “peace” or *nagaa*, has a very important place within Oromo cosmology in both the pre-and-post Christian periods. *Nagaa* means “peace, wellbeing, health, to be fine or well” (Muudee 1995: 535-536; Yigazu, Zorac and Barna 1996: 328). In Oromo society, people greet one another with a variant of the term peace and use it to say goodbye when they depart. The idea of health or wellbeing is associated with peace. For the Oromo, peace, especially within one’s

family and community, is a necessity and of the utmost importance. A lack of peace then is indicative of ill health for the community. Peace is connected with the Oromo concept of unity or *tokkummaa*. In the church too, forgiveness and reconciliation are important ideals. As a result, this conflict cast a negative shadow on the church when viewed from the outside.

Those on both sides of the conflict wrote incendiary remarks about one another and in face-to-face interactions they engaged in heated debates which ultimately lead to fission. As a result of the split and the vulnerabilities it exposed, a reconciliation committee emerged to facilitate respect and unity between the two parties, as is the Oromo way. The *United Oromo Evangelical Churches* (UOEC) organization was the body tasked with facilitating reconciliation. A reconciliation and peace committee met in Washington, D.C. in July of 2004 to search for a solution to the split and resulting tension between those involved. People from around the globe attended this meeting, it was a transnational affair. They talked to the two sides jointly and separately. Both groups expressed “a great willingness and desire to make peace and reconciliation with each other”.¹⁶ The effected parties came together and signed an agreement of peace and agreed to start the process of reconciliation with the awareness that it might take time. They agreed to let go of any animosity and ill will they harbored, to renounce negative communication and they agreed to work to build unity. The road to reconciliation was slow and though the two sides agreed to cease hostilities, the two churches remained separate entities. Another breakthrough came in October 2007 when both congregations attended a conference and agreed to work on uniting the congregations once again. This event was a joyous occasion. In October of 2008, 78 members of the OCF unified with OELC and the church was able to reestablish a degree of *tokkumma* or unity again. According to an UOEC Church news update, the event was a joyous and long overdue occasion.

¹⁶ UOEC Reconciliatory Agreement Draft July 15, 2004.

The Oromo Christian community in Washington, DC is declaring to the world that the old gloomy days of misunderstandings, dissension, mistrust, division, and conflict are gone once for all and the church is working to expand the Kingdom of God in the spirit of unity. Right now the Oromo Christian community and other friends of the church around the Washington, DC metro area are celebrating the victory over negativity and division. The entire Oromo Christian community in Diaspora and in the homeland is also celebrating the great news. Thanks be to God! (UOEC Church Update October 23, 2008).

As an outsider, I found this protracted struggle for peace to be quite interesting as it illustrated that the people involved truly valued unity and disliked conflict. To have insurmountable discord between family and friends, especially in the church which was supposed to have a monopoly on forgiveness was viewed in very negative terms in the community and had to be rectified. This reunification helped to restore the *nagaa, peace*, or homeostasis that space of health for people within and outside the church.

Conflicts of Fusion: a Flight from Grace

In addition to conflicts that lead to fission, the Oromo Church in Washington, D.C. was also impacted by a *conflict of fusion*. A conflict of fusion occurs when one groups attempts to force another group to merge with it and become one. To illustrate, prior to April of 2007, the Oromo congregation under study spent the bulk of their time as an auxiliary of *Grace Lutheran Church*. The relationship between the two was complex and not clearly spelled out. Though this was the case, the following is what was agreed upon by the two parties: the *Grace Oromo Mission* was a part of *Grace Lutheran Church* in a federal sense. Confirmed members of the *Grace Oromo Mission* were considered full voting members of *Grace Lutheran Church*. Though this was the case, the *Grace Oromo Mission* controlled its finances, had its own constitution, bylaws, and *Board of Elders*. They were a part of *Grace Lutheran Church*, but had their own service and controlled their own internal affairs as long as they were consistent with those of *Grace Lutheran Church*. Based on my readings of the archives, major tension began to surface starting after a new pastor was hired in 2006, it was during this period that the *Grace Oromo*

Mission began to experience a *conflict of fusion* between itself and *Grace Lutheran Church* that in the end caused a flight from Grace in a literal sense; spiritually, from the Oromo perspective, it became a flight from leadership that lacked grace.

Starting in 2006, the new senior pastor of *Grace Lutheran Church* and the president of the church wanted the *Grace Lutheran Church* to move in a different direction than it had in the past. With respect to the Oromo, the senior pastor expressed his desire to unify the two congregations and to have a single worship service that was “multicultural” and in English. Because the Oromo had been a relatively independent unit of the church for more than a decade, it did not wish to dissolve itself to unite or fuse formally with Grace Lutheran Church and cease to exist. They viewed the suggestion as destructive to all the work that they had done. Further, it would be a one-way compromise in the minds of first generation Oromos. Fusion would bolster the Grace Lutheran Church’s profile, but supplant the power that the *Grace Oromo Mission* had amassed as a group. When the Oromo rejected the suggestion of the senior pastor, it appeared they became out of line with the tacit new mission of *Grace Lutheran Church* and problems began to emerge. They were effectively forced out of the church via bureaucratic procedures concerning building use. The language used by the *Grace Lutheran Church* in its correspondence with and their actions toward the Oromo, according to the Oromo and the Bishop’s representative, lacked diplomacy. Starting in the fall of 2006, there was a targeted move to eliminate the growing Oromo presence in the church and the possibility of the church being invaded by them in the future.

In a memo entitled the “Use of Grace Church Building/Grounds” sent to “All members of the Grace Church, including the Oromo” the president of the Church stated that because the church was “run-down” and “over-run” and because they were facing rising cost of

“maintenance, staff and utilities”, they would have to “re-assess the stewardship of its building, grounds, and parking lot-how they are used, by whom, and for what purpose”. As a result, effective October 2, 2006 the use of the premises would only be available on an advance-request-preapproved basis only. Though the letter is addressed to the entire congregation, the remainder of the letter was directed specifically to the *Grace Oromo Mission*. “Without exception, no member of Grace will have unauthorized use of the church property, nor will any member of the Oromo congregation have unauthorized access to the church property except for meetings with the pastors and on Sunday ...between the hours 12:30 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.”

The Oromo responded that these policies would effectively reduce their church to a bare bones institution. The *Grace Oromo Mission* was lively and holistic, it had a number of choirs which needed rehearsal time, they conducted regular premarital and post-marital counseling and helped families mediate in at time impromptu conflicts etc. all of which would be suspended given the conditions that the Oromo were given in the aforementioned memo. The Oromo resented being depicted as a danger and a threat to the building. The effects of the building policy changes on the Oromo Mission were not discussed with the pastors beforehand and they were given in a top down fashion. The Oromos were saddened that Grace would not let things play out according to procedure and that they would have to pay a fee for service for every activity by the hour after more than 10 years of interaction.

The Oromo requested that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America investigate the matter. In the course of the mediations, by the early part of 2007, *Grace Lutheran Church* decided that in order to solve its problems, it should terminate its relationship with the Oromo affective April 2007 and the Oromo were given less than a year to find another place to worship. This would not be an easy task because the move was not planned and the Oromo congregation

was large and bureaucratic issues had to be worked out. The mediator from the synod stated the stance taken by Grace showed a lack of grace to a relationship that had been forged over a 10 year period. All the while, the Oromo expressed a willing attempt to resolve any problems that *Grace Lutheran Church* had with them concerning building use. They did not want to lose their home. The position Grace took eliminated conversation and the Oromo had little bargaining power concerning their position at the church. *Grace Lutheran Church* suggested that the *Oromo Mission* become independent. The Oromo church's independent position was hastened and they had to apply to become an independent entity by a deadline that they did not set, they were effectively forced because of the events at *Grace Lutheran Church* to become an independent church. The Oromo leadership was outraged that as refugees, they were treated so unfairly by a church whose mission was supposedly grace. Effective April 1, 2007 Church rent for the facility was to increase by more than 400 percent, but with negotiation and intervention from the synod over this issue, this rent issue was dropped. Increasing the rent was a scare tactic used to force the Oromo out since they did not want to merge. In the end, the Oromo had to leave *Grace Lutheran Church* and find another Church in which to worship. After some years passed and a change in the administration, the Oromo were able to return to *Grace Lutheran Church*, but when they returned they did so as a fully independent and recognized congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

Much of the conflict described above stemmed from competing views of multiculturalism and immigrant incorporation. The conflicts on issues of assimilation, as a mode of incorporation, have a long old history in this country. At the height of immigration to the United States during the second half of the 19th and into the early part of the 20th centuries similar issues about the position of new immigrants in established congregations were raging among Lutherans

and in the country at large. In Baltimore, Gerry Rickel, the former pastor of the aptly named, Baltimore-based *Second English Lutheran Church*, discussed some of these issues with me in an interview on immigration and the Lutheran Church. The Oromo Church in Baltimore debuted as a formal congregation at this church.

The Second English Lutheran Church was founded in 1841. The immigrants came for a variety of reasons mostly though because they wanted a new start. Most of the early Lutherans were Germans and Scandinavians. As time went on, the denominations decreased distance, doctrine, and languages that separated them... To start an English church was a bold move because everyone was German. But as the congregations began to mature, English became more dominant. Initially it was a struggle to incorporate and merge the different groups.

Further, during the height of immigrant flows to the country, new immigrants changed the demographics of the church.

As existing congregations coped with changes, immigrants created their own ethnic congregations, and denominational politics faced new demands and shifting balances of power. However, these changes affected Catholics and Protestants differently: the Catholic Church, being a universal church, had to contain the diversity, while Protestantism fragmented further as it catered to it (Lawson 1999: 23).

This process of language change and the incorporation of newcomers is a typical process that has occurred in many churches across the country. The process has usually been gradual, but in the case of the then *Oromo Mission* at *Grace Lutheran Church*, when a new pastor came to power in 2006, he and his supporters in the Church attempted to hasten the assimilation process of the Oromo, not by asking them to do more joint services, but to effectively dissolve their ethnic church and to blend into the existing congregation immediately. This of course was not acceptable to the Oromo as they had endured previous attacks to their cultural identity in Ethiopia. I would like to quote the Pastor Waaqtolla Dinagdee at length on the controversy and the nature of Oromo worship in the diaspora.

Why did you switch church buildings?

The new pastor of Grace Lutheran Church presented to the Oromos the idea of a “multicultural” church. We studied the idea and decided to grow our own Oromo specific congregation. The

pastor wanted us to abandon our church, to dissolve it and become American...English. He was just like the Ethiopians. I understood multicultural to mean abandon ourselves.

Is a Mission Church is the same as saying Ethnic Church?

The point was that we had discussions at all levels private, synod, church-wide and in the end, his true intentions became known, he wanted to destroy our church. The people at the national level advised him to let us have a separate service, but he refused intentionally to consider our identity; therefore, he created terms from his own understanding ... He wanted us to worship in the 'Lutheran Tradition' ... He was not in line with the ELCA. He created lots of things to destroy us. He even stated that the Oromos were planning to take over the building ... this was not our idea. He is not driven by evangelism; he is driven by his own mission. He was not following ELCA policy.

In what way, beyond language, is the Oromo Church different?

We use different theological elaboration. We try to elaborate the same theological terms, but from our African point of view. For us, Africans, and for Oromos marriage is very important. To our life marriage is not constitutional....For us, marriage is the center of our community. For us, marriage is not only sexual life, marriage has great value. It determines your identity. For example a man or lady who is divorced does not have a great respect in our community. Before marriage, we discuss with the extended families. Then we explain the bible, we hang on our tradition. This is a tradition that resonates with the bible. But here in America, marriage is constitutional. Marriage is a concept of legislators. They discuss it and they will be married.

Our worship is different. When we worship, we worship in a spiritual way. Spiritual worship is not academic, worship you can make by reading hymns. In America, you have Lutheran hymns; our hymns are local and go with our own issues, it connects and activates the work of GOD today. For example, Lutheran hymns speak about the mightiness of GOD and the suffering of the Lutherans at that time (these are translated into our language as well). The central point of our hymn is spiritual meaning; it speaks to my heart, the place of Christ in my whole life. There is a mysterious communication to my heart. A person who writes does not just sit and write a song after reading the bible. Our song writers write out of our historical circumstances, social circumstances, and individual circumstances ...Of course it also has our traditional music style. Oromos are wonderful composers in our country; they bring messages (regarding beautiful girls, the land, or food). The mysterious divine work of Christ put to rhythm or hymn and the message grabs me (you). This is the point where the Holy Spirit lifts up the spirit of the congregation. It is not academic it is spiritual. It is based on some biblical ideals so worship connects me to the past, present, and future. I am connected to Paul, Abraham and David, and to Oromos and the future. When it is academic we study what Luther wrote and its meaning.

Churches today have parishioners from around the globe and for Main Line churches like the Lutherans, they have been steadily losing American members for the past 30 years. What has saved many of these churches has been immigrants. Immigrants are the future of the Lutheran church and as a result, they have invested heavily in supporting congregations in places like Oromia and immigrant congregations in the United States. These *conflicts of fission and fusion*

necessarily occur as radically different cultures and interpretations of the religions interact with one another in the same spiritual space. Competing congregations wrestle with one another even within the church for support and vie for membership and funding.

An Oromo Church is Born

In addition to attending the Oromo Church in Washington, D.C. I was also able to witness firsthand the development of an Oromo church in Baltimore. In the summer of 2005, a member of the then *Grace Oromo Mission* informed me that a new Oromo church was to going to be established in my area. I attended this first meeting of the church with my son. The home that was to host the "church" until a formal building was found, was actually an apartment in a suburb of Baltimore that was located about 25 minutes away from my home. I contacted the hostess and was given the address and directions. The apartment was in a lower-middle class suburb of Baltimore city and it was well maintained. It was decorated in a conservative style reminiscent of the homes I had seen in Ethiopia: there was a large plush sofa, substantial curtains, a large TV, and a few decorations from "back home" on the wall (painting and baskets etc). Though this space was to host an Oromo service, save the few cultural items on the wall, it was not terribly nationalist in its decoration.

The hostess was a working mother and lived with another family member. She appeared to be in her mid-thirties. She was of moderate build and liked to dress in a western style. She would not be what I would consider matronly and if I saw her on the street, I would not have thought her to be religious. She was not particularly reserved, spoke freely, and was very welcoming. We clicked immediately as she was not much older than me and we both had children.

The inaugural service was attended by members from the then *Grace Oromo Mission*

including the pastor and other members. Further, a few locals from Baltimore also attended along with some relatives of the hostess. The service was joyous and those in attendance were happy to be growing the Oromo Church, to be expanding it into yet another city.

After the first Sunday, there was a consistent 5 to 7 people that would attend every week. Members of the D.C. church would also take turns visiting the Baltimore congregation from time to time to provide it with support. During many of my visits, the service would be led by the hostess and everyone would pitch in and help when needed or when they felt the spirit to do so. There were usually 2 men and about 4 to 6 women in attendance. The church served a socializing and spiritual function because unlike Washington D.C., Baltimore has many fewer Oromos and it was unlikely that you would encounter another Oromo between church sessions. In Washington D.C., in the course of one's day you would likely to interact with someone from "back home".

After a few months of attending the home-based Oromo bible study, I was notified that we would be moving into a formal church in September, but the date kept being postponed. After some time, the *Grace Oromo Mission* in Washington, D.C. was able to make an arrangement with the *Second English Lutheran Church* in Baltimore to allow the Oromos to use their church and this was the beginning of the formal *Oromo Lutheran Church of Baltimore*. When I asked the hostess about the pastor and who it was to be she said that she did not know and that "GOD is the one who will provide one for us. It could be you, it could be me, I do not know, all we can do is pray and ask him to bring us someone". I asked would it be acceptable for a woman be chosen. She said, "Yes! Why not?" The church eventually got a pastor. The Baltimore pastor was actually an assistant to the pastor at the *Grace Oromo Mission*, Pastor Duke. Pastor Duke worked full-time and ministered part-time in Baltimore for a number of years. In September of 2008, he became the full-time pastor of the church.

The supervising pastor of *Second English Lutheran Church* at the time, Gerry Rickel, called me and told me that on November 19th, 2005 the church would have its inaugural service. He suggested that I attend because the church was my church too since I had come from the start. I then spoke with the hostess about the event and she relayed to me that she was stressed about the opening of the church and had lots to do to prepare. I asked her if I could bring something and she said the pastor was bringing the food, but that I could bring a side dish, maybe potato salad. I informed her that I did not know how to make potato salad and she was quite surprised because I was an American. I told her that I could make an Oromo dish of lentils. She replied in a surprised joking tone, “Really!” Needless to say, I talked with her and she adopted a curious wait and taste attitude. She made the traditional bread that must accompany every gathering and collards. She wanted an American dish because she wanted the people to have something that was not too spicy, but the pastor said not to worry, “the people who are non-Oromo are our guest and they are there to experience our culture”.

When my family arrived at the Second English Lutheran Church, I noticed that the building was very large. As we pulled into the parking lot, the Baltimore contingent was also arriving. We were all a few minutes late. By the time we arrived, the members of the sister church from Washington, D.C. were already there. It appeared that the congregation in D.C. held a joint service with us that day in a show of support. There were more than 70 people in attendance. The choir from Grace came and sang.

The actual sanctuary was very different from the church in Washington. The church in Washington, D.C. sat on a little hill or was slightly elevated a bit. It was housed in a slightly smaller building and the sanctuary was radically different. In Washington, the sanctuary was longer and narrower. The architecture was beautiful and the wood aspects were dominant. The

ceilings were high and the beams were polished and exposed. It had a grounded feel. The church in Baltimore, on the other hand, was almost the exact opposite. It was bigger, the architecture was simple, and what was noteworthy was not the wood, but its use of paint. While in D.C. there was a definite connection to the earth via the strong wood influence, this church was simpler on purpose, by design. It felt bright and used two colors: sky blue and an off white. Its designers wanted to make its worshipers feel as if they were in the clouds, in heaven. The most dominant feature was a large painting of a Jesus figure on the wall.

Afterward, we went to the basement to have refreshments. The food was arranged in the buffet style fashion that is typical of most Oromo functions. There was *itto*, hot beef stew, a plain curry like meat dish, greens, and cabbage. There was also salad, the lentils that I made, and the hostess's yeast bread, *budeena/injera*, soda, and coffee. There seemed to be just enough food. There were lots of children in attendance, maybe 15. The fellowship was one where there was a good deal of mixing between everyone, as all of the people there were family, good friends, or were familiar with one another. The community is closely knit with many of the congregants coming from Wellega and to a lesser degree Shewa.

Challenges of a New Church

In the early days of the Baltimore church, I attempted to attend service as regularly as possible. Each week, the hostess of the church would call me to confirm that I was coming or pressure me into coming if on the rare occasion I had a prior engagement or something pressing to do that would keep me from attending. Because the group was so small, every person's presence was meaningful. There was a need to grow the church. There are not as many Oromos living in Baltimore as there are in Washington and the Oromos are spread widely across the landscape, there are no ethnic enclaves as was the case with immigrant communities that came to

the country during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Those Oromos living in Baltimore not affiliated with the sister churches in Pennsylvania or in Washington, D.C. may not know about the existence the Oromo Church here until they are in the city for some time.

Unlike in the home based bible study where service was natural and flowed according to traditional rhythms and gave itself to improvisation, the service at *Second English Lutheran Church*, when the supervising pastor was in attendance, was a little more formal. I did get to witness an occasion where he was absent and the service was less tense and more relaxed. On this particular day, a youth pastor played the guitar and later ministered on Isaiah. The hostess and others prayed and those in attendance helped with service.

American Perspective on the Oromo Church

Conflicts of fusion or demands for the “full integration” that the Oromo experienced in 2006 and 2007 at *Grace Lutheran Church*, were not present in the Baltimore church during its founding. The then Pastor of the *Second English Lutheran Church*, Gerry Rickel, was more open in his orientation toward ethnicity. Pastor Rickel stated that:

Now you have two groups within the faith, the conservatives and the evangelicals. Evangelicals have more freedom of interpretation. They ordain women. They are more open-minded and confession is important. At the center of our faith is the good news of Jesus Christ. This church does not go out conducting missionary work. The philosophy has changed. We support seminaries where pastors can be trained. We train the pastors here, by letting them come here for a year. It is not a top down approach. We are not the teachers. Missionaries today are more likely to teach people to fish, farming, or to dig wells. We should not be the “Great White Hope”. Our mission is to be a host to the Oromo. We provide a home for the Oromo so that they could worship in their own language because we are all immigrants. Lutherans came over in the 1700s to 1900s in boats. What provided the mission work for the church then was brining immigrants over to the United States.

Established Lutheran Churches started to decline by the time new immigrants from Africa and Asia began to arrive in this country. “Most of these folks did not have the natural patterns we were used to. The dynamics have changed. God brought the nations here so that we can go and baptize”. I asked the pastor how these new churches are formed and he stated that in

an ethnic-specific church, there is a pastor called a mission developer. The aim of the pastor would be to go door to door, or to reach out into the community to gain members for the new church. Prior to the Oromos coming to *Grace Lutheran Church* in Washington, D.C. it was in decline. When the Oromos came, things changed. Grace provided the Oromo a place to worship together. “We hope that the Oromos in Baltimore will revitalize our church in the same ways they did in Washington”. *Second English Lutheran Church* was chosen because it is in the West Baltimore area and many Oromos live on the Western side of the Baltimore city and county; as a result, it was viewed as a good site.

I am a mission minded pastor. I took this project on because I wanted a challenge and as a result, I was asked to be the supervisor of the new Oromo church...This is a fledgling church that is still not totally acculturated with American Lutheranism, so they need support. Second English handles the finances, secured a phone and provide an office for the church. The Oromo pastor, meets with me on Saturdays for one hour. The Oromo pastor is an experienced leader and has worked for the Mekane Yesus church in Ethiopia. We got a grant to support his work three days here and he works his lay job 4 days a week...On a good Sunday, we have 15 people, though I wish there was more growth.

Though this is the case, Pastor Rickel mused:

A gift for the Oromo is a place to worship and for us to be hospitable to this people in exile. I want this place to be a model of the multiculturalism that we will see in heaven. The Oromo are a gift to us now.

The Future

As Oromo churches mature, a key issue that they will have to grapple with relates to the question of the youth and the future of the Oromo Church in America. The ELCA would like Oromos churches to give more attention to the needs of the youth and to find a way to teach them the gospel in their first language, English. The ELCA has a vested interest in capturing this group because it is indeed their future. In Washington, D.C., they have suggested *adding* an English service for the young people in addition to the usual Afaan Oromo service. If the Oromo want to survive into the next generation as a diaspora church, they have to find a way to address

the issue of how to incorporate the 1.5 and second generations into church. Having the service in Afaan Oromo is important to first generation migrants because language is a key marker of identity and they want to maintain this aspect of their identity. The subset of Oromo Protestants I studied, value their language and prefer to go to an Oromo ethnic-based church rather than one that is more multicultural where the language of worship is Amharic or English. The parents in the churches in the Mid-Atlantic see the Oromo Church as a vehicle through and a space in which *Oromumaa* or Oromoness can be passed on, albeit in a modified form.

Conclusion

Oromos in and near the periphery of what is now Ethiopia that practiced their traditional religion were viewed with disdain, seen as foreign, and subject to enslavement. It is from this subset of formally enslaved people in exile that the Protestant church grew in the Horn of Africa. The church emerged in a transnational context. Those that were rejected became the cornerstone of the church in Ethiopia. In the United States too, Main Line churches that were in decline were revitalized in part due to exiles and immigrant populations coming from the periphery. Just as was the case in earlier generations, conflicts of fission and conflicts of fusion or integration still plague the churches today. The fate of ethnic churches in the diaspora will be determined by the ways in which Oromos of the second and third generation connect to the homeland

CONCLUSION

Findings

Since the 1970s, thousands of Oromos have migrated from Ethiopia to United States with large numbers settling in the Twin Cities and in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area respectively. Though there has been some research on Oromos living in Minnesota (Herbts 2004; Halcon et al. 2004; Getahun 2006; Belvins 2007; Gemechu 2013), little research has been conducted on Oromos living in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area; those scholars that do discuss the Oromo in the city only briefly mention group in their accounts (Baxter, Hultin, and Triulzi 1996; Sorenson 1996; Jalata 1998; Bulcha 2002). It is my contention that the key reason for the absence of research on Oromos living in Washington, D.C. is connected to the complex ways in which Ethiopian nationalism and American notions of race in the city have obscured Oromo ethnicity and made it difficult topic to investigate. This historically informed ethnographic account explored the development, transnational character, and tensions associated with ethnic institution building and discourse production among self-identified Oromos in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. For the past four decades, Oromo immigrants, active in ethnic institutions in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, have played an important role in the transnational struggle to establish an institutional footing in Washington, D.C. and to define and exert control over what it means to be an Oromo in Ethiopia and in the diaspora.

Ethnic discrimination and persecution and economic inequality were the key factors that spawned the birth of the Oromo diaspora in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The ethnic exploitation Oromos experienced in Ethiopia was rooted in the Abyssinian conquest of the Oromo during the 19th century. Many of the Oromo areas were incorporated into the empire using the *neftenya-gabbar* system of tenancy whereby the state, in order to expand into and

subdue the south, gave armed settlers from the north grants of land and local peasants to work the land as payment for their participation in its military campaigns. The settlers were vehicles of the state; it was through their presence and cultural expressions that national culture was propagated (Bulcha 2002:78). The Oromo that lived under this system were forced to assimilate. The public expression of Oromo language was banned and Oromo traditions were disparaged as primitive. Though this was the case, the state lacked the will and the capacity to truly assimilate the majority of Oromo beyond mass religious conversion and the enforcement of its Amharic language policy. The ethnic based exploitation the Oromo and other incorporate groups experienced was sanctioned officially and unofficially.

However, by the 1960s, African independence movements, the civil rights struggle in the United States, criticisms of capitalism, and the Ethiopian Student Movement all helped to inform and give the Oromo the discursive tools needed to first problematize and then protest the economic inequality and the cultural domination they had experienced since incorporation. Starting in 1963, the Oromo established the Matcha Tulema Self Help Association (MTSHA) to revalorize Oromo culture and to engage in economic development. Further, the Bale rebellion also began in 1963 and was a violent reaction to the ways Oromo in the southeast had been exploited economically since their incorporation. After the MTSHA's leadership was rounded up in Ethiopia and the Bale rebellion quelled, Oromo dissidents became targets of the state.

Starting in the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, the government ratcheted up its crackdown on the ESM, regional opposition in Eritrea, and Oromo ethnic dissent. This crackdown caused the exodus of many people from the region including many Oromos. By the 1970s, the students that arrived in the United States at the time were more militant than their predecessors because they had experienced government oppression first hand. Though

clandestine Oromo protest literature began appearing in Ethiopia during the late 1960s, it was largely through diaspora media organs located in the Horn of Africa, in Europe, and in cities like Washington, D.C. that the Oromo began to reject the representations that had cast them as the objects of history to in order to become subjects of their own making.

According to early Oromo settlers to the Washington DC area, living in the diaspora provided the Oromo the space in which to separate without fear of reprisal. Oromo scholars and activists living abroad used the freedom of speech and association guaranteed them in the West to develop institutions from which to criticize Ethiopian scholarship and politics and they produced information about Oromo history, culture and politics. Due to the ethnic discrimination and persecution meted out against dissent in Ethiopia, it would not be an exaggeration to assert that the Oromo diaspora, through its ethnic institutions, came to act as the voice of Oromo dissent globally.

Washington, D.C. Student and Community Organizations

Prior to the establishment of Oromo ethnic institutions in Washington, the expression of ethnic diversity was suppressed because Ethiopian immigrants were few in number and because their student organizations in the city were Marxist in orientation. For instance, though the Ethiopian Student Union of North America (ESUNA) was an ethnically diverse organization that contained Oromo members, they did not support ethnic identification as the organization assumed the nation's ethnic problems would be resolved by eliminating class differences in Ethiopia. It was in part this lack of an appreciation for the ways in which ethnicity had been wedded to class and the suppression of Oromo concerns that led to the emergence of the first Oromo specific student organization in the nation's capital.

In Washington D.C., scholar activists like Sisai Ibssa and Lube Birru played a pioneering role in establishing early Oromo institutions in the diaspora: Tokkummaa Oromo Organization in North America (TOONA) was established in 1974, but soon after it became the Union of Oromo Students in North America (UOSNA). As the students began to mature, the organization again morphed to the Union of Oromo in North America (UONA). The group sought to educate Oromos living in the diaspora some of whom had experience discrimination, but lacked the language to verbalize their perspective. In addition to dissidents, the organization also attracted assimilated Oromos seeking their roots. During the early days, there was not an Oromo community center, as such, UOSNA and then UONA acted as a multipurpose institution that served a variety of functions for the Oromo diaspora in the city: it hosted community events and cultural functions, established study groups, produced publications, and it acted a contact point for information about the Oromo struggle being waged in Ethiopia. UOSNA publications were influential in that they provided some of the earliest critiques of Ethiopian history and nationalism. Oromos in Washington, D.C. also played a role in the establishment of the Oromo Studies Association and later, the Oromo Center.

The Oromo Studies Association

As the Oromo community matured and became more accomplished and educated, there was a need to engage in a struggle for representation from many vantage positions. The Oromo Studies Association was envisioned as a formal academic institution birthed to legitimize and study neglected aspects of Oromo life and history. The Oromo Studies Association was founded in 1986 to provide Oromo academics and observers a forum in which to expand the knowledge available about the Oromo. The objectives of the association were to promote the formal scholarship on the Oromo people, to act as a community of support for Oromo academics, and to

fundraise to support Oromo scholarship. The Oromo Study Association also established the *Journal of Oromo Studies* which became a transnational organ of discourse production about the Oromo. In this way, Oromo intellectuals, both in the diaspora and in Ethiopia, came to play a role in problematizing and contesting representation about the Oromo found within Ethiopian studies. The discourse contained within the *Journal of Oromo Studies* played an important role in shaping the perspectives of Oromos in and out of Ethiopia and it was the scholarship it supported some change was instituted.

The Oromo Church

The community of self-identified Oromos began to increase in the post-1991 period in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. One important Oromo organization that emerged after this period was the Oromo church. Though the Protestant church is of foreign origin, upon its entry into Oromo country, converts in southern Ethiopia transformed it into a tool to suit local needs. The Protestant Church was one of the few institutions that provided the Oromo with links to the outside world and it was precisely these linkages that were used by a small, but important minority of Oromos Protestants to catapult themselves both spiritually and politically out of oppression. The Oromo engagement with the Protestant Church can be understood of as an example of *transnationalism from below*, where the practices, activities, and the discourses of non-elites become important and spawned the flow of both people, ideas, and institutions (Guarnizo and Smiths 1998). Indeed, it has been through the efforts of former slaves like Onesimos Nesib, his assistant Aster Ganno, and other members of his language team that an alternative education and vision of the world came into existence. As the Oromo church grew and matured, the Oromo Evangelical movement served as a vehicle through which Oromo issues

could be first expressed and then globalized when the churches became established in the diaspora.

A history of church service, persecution, and education combine and acted as push factors that led to the flight Oromo pastors that landed in the Washington, D.C. area. The Oromo church in Washington is a transnational institution for local Oromos. It provides an opportunity for regular interaction with co-ethnics in diaspora, it acts as a site through which to help the homeland through mission work, and also serves to socialize the youth. The Oromo church also helps integrate the Oromo into the host society as it provided them with civic skills needed to navigate the host society. Further, Oromo members helped to grow and revitalize dying churches in the United States and help to educate non-Oromos about Oromo issues in the host country.

Oromo Ethnic Community Characteristics

Oromo Ethnic institutions in the diaspora have three characteristics that were particularly marked. They are relatively small in size and only involved a fraction of the Oromo population in the city, they were divided by political and regional conflict, and their development is hampered due to issues of class, the strength of Ethiopian nationalism in the city, and the fact that they mobilize using ethnicity which is not readily understood or supported within the United States where race and nation are more easily understood. First, how Oromos immigrants identify is situational and varied. Only a small minority feel the need to articulate their identity publically or to associate with other Oromos in formal institutions. Asserting one's Oromo identity publically or through patronizing Oromo institutions has become a politicized act in Ethiopian and abroad. Fears of persecution and loss of ties to other Ethiopian groups play a role in limiting the number of Oromos that actually participate within Oromo ethnic institutions in the city. Oromo organizations in the U.S. have a political character. They are dominated by Oromos from a certain region and are mostly Protestant, though most of the Oromo community is Muslim

or Orthodox Christian. Those who simply want to be a cultural Oromo may feel uneasy about going to Oromo specific activities that may have a regional, religious, or political focus.

Though Oromo ethnic institutions in Washington, D.C. have had some success in lobbying for Oromo issues within Ethiopia, establishing institutions, and maintaining an Oromo identity in the city, Oromo institutional practice has also been constrained. The city has long been a historic site of African American settlement; further, it is dominated by large numbers of Ethiopian immigrants that organize their institutions using Ethiopian nationalism. Unlike their more numerous and visible counterparts in the Twin Cities, Oromo institutions in the District have had to craft an identity for themselves taking into account the city's preexisting ethnic and racial order. In Washington, D.C., Ethiopian actors, their discourse about the nation, and their institutions and businesses have become hegemonic because of larger, more educated, and affluent population. Oromos tend to be less affluent than their other ethnic groups from the region. As such, class plays an important role in shaping Oromo activity in the district.

Some non-Oromo immigrants from Ethiopia, in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, can use ethnic based ties or networks in the homeland to start ethnic based business that facilitate vertical integration or upward mobility in the host. This option is not possible for Oromo immigrants because the presence of an Oromo ethnic based business in the city would cause conflict and not be lucrative. There is not one kind of transnationalism. In addition, the Ethiopian nation-state is still a very powerful force that had the power to control the ways Oromo immigrants connect with the home country. Outside of remittances, Oromo individuals and organization are rarely able contribute to the financial development of the homeland because of the government's policies on charities and its suspicion of Oromo diaspora links to governmental opponents. Race, ethnicity, and class all inform the kind of transnational community that

emerges. Ethnically conscious Oromos in the Nation's capital have a different social field. Ethiopians have been able to control and police the discourse on the nation more than Oromo actors that advocate their position using an ethnic frame that is less understood than that of the nation in America.

Contributions

The Oromo are an understudied group. Other than a small number of dissertations on Oromo immigrants, there are only two book length texts that focus on Oromo immigrants. Mekuria Bulcha's *The Making of the Oromo Diaspora* examines Oromo forced migration starting with the Arab slave trade up to the 1980s. Greg Gow's ethnography, *The Oromo in Exile* is the only text of its type that addresses the everyday lived experience of Oromo immigrants and it is set in Australia. Solomon Getahun dedicates a section of his book *The History of Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in America, 1900-2000* to the Oromo in America. This dissertation is the only study to extensively examine Oromo immigrants in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Advances in communication and transportation technologies have decreased the distance between the host and home country in the minds of today's immigrants and impacted identity formation processes globally in profound. This project challenges the assumption that the diaspora is simply a site of mimesis, in the Oromo case, the diaspora has been productive. The Oromo diaspora, through its production of positive discourse about the Oromo and its critiques of Ethiopian history and nationalism, it has played a major role in shaping how Oromos globally came to see themselves and how they have crafted notions of ethnicity since the 1970s. The

authenticity of home versus the in authenticity of the diaspora is increasingly becoming less valid as the inputs into the identity formation process are global in circulation.

The ground breaking work by Mary Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities* (2001) highlighted the ways in which some black immigrants from the Caribbean opt out of racial stereotypes by highlighting national identity in the United States. Since *Black Identities*, the accounts that deal with race and African immigrant focuses heavily on the ways in which African and Caribbean immigrants privilege national identities over racial ones. Less work has been done on the ways in which the nested and situational quality of ethnic ties express themselves among African immigrants. I hope this work will contribute to our understanding of the ways Oromos in the U.S. problematize both our notions of both race and nation.

Study Limitations

This study was not as comprehensive as it could have been which was in part due to the nature of study. The vast majority of those I studied were educated middle-aged first generation Oromo males. The voices of Muslims, women, and members of the second generation lacked equal representation in this account as institutions in Washington, D.C. were dominated by Protestant males from the central and western parts of the Ethiopia. The city of settlement and the nature of the background of those that settled within it influence the institutional make up of the city. Minnesota and its institutions are dominated by Muslim voices because the population that came settled there were predominantly Muslim refugees from the east. In Washington, D.C. the composition of the Oromo immigrant population were likely asylum seeker, educated, older, and likely to come from Shewa or Wellega. Though there are many Muslims in the city, I

focused on institutions that happened to contain more Christians. In the future project, I will seek to conduct a study among Muslim Oromos in the city, for this study, they were more difficult to locate.

Due to the nature of the research, very few first generation Oromo immigrant women were producing public information about the Oromo. Women were traditionally relegated to domestic spaces among the Oromo; they were not fully integrated into the male dominated political arena in the modern period. First generation immigrant women acted more as consumers of discourse about the Oromo rather than as producers. In the future, I seek to study how Oromo identity is produced and reinforced or recreated among Oromo women in diaspora. This would be the complement to the work done in this dissertation on the public articulation of Oromo identity discourses. Women play an active role in the everyday perpetuation of *Oromumma* (Oromoness) especially among diaspora children.¹⁷ Oromo women were very important in the community and they played more of a supporting role in public. Many Oromo activities (church services, weddings, community gatherings, rallies, and academic meetings) could not be reproduced without the work of Oromo women. An interesting caveat to the aforementioned state of affairs is that second generation women are very active. This group is only now beginning to reach adulthood. They are now beginning to contribute to the public discourse about the Oromo diaspora. They are leaders of student organizations, producers of web material, and involved in human rights organizations. This dissertation laid the historical, theoretical foundations, and ethnographic foundation for a larger and more comprehensive future project that I hope to produce one day on Oromo transnationalism.

¹⁷ The nation is often represented as female. Further, women are at times depicted in traditional ways and may have more pressure to behave in traditional ways (**find the site in Anthropology of Media text**). Greg Gow also mentions the importance of women in the creation of the Oromo in Melbourne Australia in his work (2002).

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