

The Quest for
Democracy,
Self-Determination,
and Just Peace in
Oromia and Ethiopia

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By

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PREFACE

Writing about the Oromo national struggle and its demands for self-determination, egalitarian democracy, and just peace is complex. The Oromo, the largest national group in the Ethiopian Empire and the Horn of Africa has been facing state terrorism, genocide, and gross human rights violations for about one century and a half. The Ethiopian colonial state has imposed these tragedies on the Oromo nation even though it was a free and sovereign that enjoyed Oromo democracy known as the *gadaa/siiqqee* system before its colonization by the alliance of Ethiopian colonialism and European imperialism.

This alliance also produced an Oromo collaborative class that has recently become the most dangerous enemy for the Oromo people. This collaborative class has exchanged Oromo freedom, culture, and history for its class interest and tries to Ethiopianize the Oromo people so that they stop fighting for their national self-determination and democracy. Currently, the Abiy Ahmed government represents this dangerous class and the descendants of the colonizers who have collaborated with this government to maintain the interest of the settler colonial state of Ethiopia.

Pioneering Oromo nationalists imagined the freedom that Oromo society enjoyed when they were free and sovereign under the *gadaa* republic before colonization. They were angry and disappointed because the Ethiopian state terrorized, dehumanized, and exploited Oromo society. The Ahmara-Tigray colonial ruling class and their Oromo collaborators have imposed on Oromo society poverty, underdevelopment, and perpetual ignorance. To liberate the Oromo nation, these nationalists were determined and ready to die for freedom while engaging in the Oromo liberation struggle. Consequently, most Oromo pioneering nationalists had perished in Oromia jungles and Ethiopian and Somali prisons.

These nationalists facilitated the development of Oromo nationalism or national *Oromummaa* by resuscitating the Oromo language, Oromo national culture, national history, and the collective Oromo national identity. As a result, today, millions of Oromo nationalists are engaging in Oromo political and armed struggle in Oromia and Diaspora. While identifying the external and internal obstacles to the development of Oromo nationalism, this book sheds some light on the complex problems of the Oromo national movement.

One of the awful tragedies of the Oromo struggle is that some of the Oromo nationalists who have done everything to liberate the Oromo nation are still suffering in prisons or engaging in a protracted armed struggle. The Ethiopian colonial state has been assassinating Oromo, who it suspects that they are nationalists or sympathize with or support them. The colonial executors have thrown their corpses on the streets or in forests.

At the same time, the Ethiopianized Oromos are enjoying luxurious lifestyles while dominating, exploiting, and terrorizing Oromo society. Unfortunately, because of the lack of understanding of these complex problems, some Oromo political and military leaders and Oromo nationalists have been unable to follow in the footsteps of Baro Tumsa, who established a democratic model of organizing and leading the Oromo nation. Baro was the central figure who initiated the formation of the Oromo Liberation Front.

The Quest for Democracy, Self-Determination, and Just Peace in Oromia and Ethiopia also identifies and explains the central problems of the Oromo national movement and charts a clear political roadmap. Even though the Oromo movement has achieved some substantive victories, it is far from recreating an Oromia democratic state. Achieving the main political objectives of the Oromo nation requires the building of Oromo national identity and organizational capacity to challenge and overcome localized and Ethiopianized identities, which are significant obstacles to the Oromo liberation struggle.

Asafa Jalata
Knoxville,
March 2025

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Oromo were removed from human history and suffered from the darkness of ignorance and poverty after they were colonized during the last decades of the nineteenth century by Menelik, who Britain, France, and Italy supported. Big powers, such as Britain, the U.S., the former U.S.S.R., China, and the imperial interstate system, have supported successive Ethiopian colonial governments. For almost one century and a half, the Oromo people have been terrorized and lost their human, cultural, economic, and social rights that are recognized by the principles of the United Nations.

To overcome all these challenges, Oromo nationalists started to get organized and struggle to achieve democracy, national self-determination, peace, and sustainable development. I have published several scholarly articles and books on the issues of Oromo nationalism, which I call *Oromummaa* and the Oromo national movement. *The Quest for Democracy, Self-Determination, and Just Peace in Oromia and Ethiopia* further builds on these works and goes beyond their depth and quality. As the Oromo national movement develops, its mystery and complexity are revealed.

Theoretical Novelty in the Oromo Movement

Employing a social-constructionist model of making societies (Roy, 2001) and critical comparative political, economic, and sociocultural approaches are necessary to demonstrate the deficiencies of dominant social theories and systems of knowledge production. Social theories, as all forms of knowledge, are socially constructed. Hence, rejecting the essentialist theoretical perspective that assumes that “things are the way they are by nature” (Roy, 2001: 8) is essential in the Oromo national movement. Since the beginning of the modern age, the dominant class and groups and their intellectual supporters have utilized liberal Enlightenment’s claim to universality as the ideology of promoting human equality to overthrow the feudal order. Yet, later, liberal Enlightenment philosophers and other scholars “naturalized” the capitalist order and its associates, thus impeding,

if not undercutting entirely, the project of emancipating ordinary people to defend positions of power and influence through the creation and perpetuation of private property via dispossession and exploitation.

Mainstream scholars constructed theories, concepts, and ideologies of race and racism and further consolidated gender and class hierarchies to facilitate and intensify the ongoing accumulation of capital and wealth (Jalata, 2012 [2001]). However, historical evidence shows an extensive period when racial and class categories and gender hierarchies did not exist, and all human groups were non-hierarchical and non-exploitative (Trigger, 2006: 21-28). Elites began to construct and maintain social hierarchies of gender, class, and race/ethno-nation through the invention and establishment of institutions: “What becomes socially constructed is disproportionately the result of dominant institutions in society. Institutions are groups of organizations, categories, and ways of doing things that do something important in society” (Roy, 2001: 22).

Hence, it ought to be the purpose of our analytical tools, concepts, and categories to enable us to demystify ideological constructions of social, political, cultural, and economic forms that naturalize inequalities in a society, as well as all those theoretical paradigms and methodologies that, either by default or intent, legitimate and perpetuate forms of injustice and exploitation that benefit the wealthy, powerful racial/ethnonational groups, patriarchy, and dominant classes, and to focus on the development of an emancipatory project for humanity as a whole. My research and methodological stance confirm the need for scientific methods to be enlarged toward demystification to overcome the pitfalls of traditional research methods and theoretical approaches that justify the destruction of the Oromo epistemology, original culture, and institutions. Every society has its unique epistemology, culture, institutions, and civilization. This shows that the world is epistemologically diverse and culturally plural.

Colonized peoples, such as the Oromo, had epistemologies that helped them produce and disseminate their cultural-centric knowledge and wisdom before their colonial domination and subjugation. So, the Oromo had their unique epistemology and cultural expertise manifested mainly through their democratic governance called the *gadaa/siqqee* system, their Indigenous religion known as *Waaqeffannaa*, their practices of farming, cattle herding, environmental protection, and their techniques of military organization and warfare for self-defense before they were colonized. Since colonization, the Oromo have been prevented from freely developing the cultural, political, military, religious, and educational institutions they used to produce and disseminate their authentic knowledge. All colonialists sought to destroy “every remnant of alternative ways of knowing and living to obliterate

collective identities and memories and to impose a new order” (Smith, 1999: 69).

Colonialism and imperialism oppose the plurality of cultures and diversity of knowledge. Modern sciences are the tool of colonial and imperial institutions (Santos, 2007: xix). The suppression of indigenous knowledge is a form of “epistemicide ... the other side of genocide” (Santos, 2007: xix). Mainstream scholars call the modern sciences, both natural and social sciences, universalistic; I call these kinds of sciences knowledge for domination and exploitation. Some scholars call such sciences colonial knowledge that must be decolonized (Smith, 1999). Mainstream academic, religious, and other institutions have promoted the knowledge for domination and corrupted the minds of the colonized in general and that of the educated elites in particular. According to Linda T. Smith (1999:23), “The reach of imperialism into ‘our heads’ challenges those who belong to colonized communities to understand how this occurred partly because we perceive a need to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity.”

Until the intellectuals of the colonized communities develop critical knowledge for human liberation by decolonizing their minds and the modern sciences, which help perpetuate domination and exploitation, there cannot be true human liberation because mainstream knowledge cannot facilitate human freedom and justice. Realizing this reality, Audre Lorde (1979: 98-101) states, “*The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house*” (emphasis in the original). Counter-hegemonic interpretive and political frames, indigenous theories, and forms of knowledge (instead, modes of knowing) highlight the fallacies of hegemonic theories and knowledge that naturalize, rationalize, justify, and promote social hierarchies in the name of scientific rigor.

Scientific knowledge – including social-scientific knowledge – is not value-neutral but based on standards that are (or reflect) social constructions, and it frequently enforces and perpetuates related perspectives that result from and inform the socio-historical context that generates and sustains those standards. Third World Network (1993: 485) states,

Scientists are firmly committed to beliefs and particular cultural ethos, which compel them to convert diversity and complexity into uniformity. In addition to this belief system and cultural ethos – which manifest themselves in the propositions scientists embrace – science has its own power structure, reward systems, and peer groups. All of these [factors] combine to ensure that [mainstream] science is closely correlated with the existing, dominant, and unjust political, economic, and social order of the world.

Mainstream and oppositional critical social theories and knowledge embody Euro- and North America-centric and other dominant perspectives and notions, constituting their horizon of concern and inquiry (Harding, 1993: 2).

Consequently, in modernity, progress, civilization, and cultural universalism, dominant theories and scholarship have suppressed, implicitly, and explicitly distorted Indigenous peoples' cultures, traditions, and knowledge (McGregor, 2004). These dominant theories and knowledge have presented the destructive capacities of more than five hundred years of global capitalism and colonialism as beneficial to indigenous peoples. As D. McGovern (1999: 27) observes, Indigenous

Knowledge systems have been represented by adjectives such as 'primitive,' 'unscientific,' and 'backward.' In contrast, the '[dominant] system' is assumed to be uniquely 'scientific and universal' and superior to local forms of knowledge.... The modern knowledge system 'is merely the globalized version of a very local and parochial tradition' arising with 'commercial capitalism' and a set of values based on power.'

Hegemonic theories, scholarship, and the ruling ideas have ignored that the colonized peoples have been "a data mine for social theory" (Connell, 2007: 369) and the source of objective knowledge production.

The hegemonic and state-centric knowledge limits our understanding of humanity by ignoring the geo-cultures of indigenous and other subaltern groups. Of course, there have been critical and leftist scholars who have labored to expose the exploitative and oppressive aspects of global capitalism by focusing on hierarchies based on gender, class, and race/ethno-nation. However, due to the confining horizon of their thinking, their limited knowledge of Indigenous societies, and their propensity toward versions of evolutionary and modernist thinking, most critical scholars have glossed over the problem of indigenous peoples like that of the Oromo.

Furthermore, except in a few instances, their works on indigenous peoples have been contradictory, incomplete, or distorted. Because of the rejection or neglect of multicultural knowledge and wisdom and the tradition of abyssal thinking (Santos 2007), the dominant theoretical and intellectual knowledge from right and left has been prone to disregarding the humanity of Indigenous peoples. To a greater or lesser extent, these philosophical traditions have tended to see indigenous peoples as organized socially in forms that are unable to withstand the onslaught of the process of modernization.

Mainstream political and social theories and approaches to social research have supported or promoted colonial and neo-colonial agendas,

explicitly or implicitly, or have neglected to engage in the requisite critical reflexivity, thus promulgating suppositions about indigenous peoples that originated in ideological definitions of societal reality. “If the success of these sciences required the military and political defeat of non-Western peoples,” Sandra Harding (1993: 8) writes, “we are entitled to skepticism about claims that the history of these sciences is unmitigated the history of human progress; progress for some has been at the expense of disempowerment, impoverishment, and sometimes genocide for many others.” Different book chapters demonstrate that the Oromo national movement has engaged in cultural restoration, knowledge production, and theoretical innovation. The book has eight chapters.

Outlines of the Chapters

This first chapter deals with some methodological and theoretical issues. The second chapter provides historical, cultural, political, moral, and legal reasons why the Oromo nation must achieve national self-determination. Focusing on how Abiy Ahmed came to state power in 2018, chapter three explains why his government has targeted the destruction of the Oromo people and their national movement, led by the Oromo youth movement, OLF, and the OLA. Chapter IV examines the relationship between the Ethiopian Empire building and racism; it also describes the essence of Ethiopian racism and its development through the processes of enslavement, colonization, racialization, domination, exploitation, and continued subjugation. Chapter V discusses why it is necessary to engage in the renaissance of the Oromo democratic tradition called the *gadaa/siiqqee* system as an integral part of the Oromo national movement. Chapter VI focuses on the necessity of building robust institutional and organizational infrastructures to defeat the racialized Ethiopian colonial state and its political and ideological hegemony. Focusing on the birth of the OLF in the 1970s, Chapter VII explains the intellectual, political, and leadership contributions of Baro Tumsa in building this organization as its principal architect. It also describes how this liberation front has mobilized and led the Oromo society. Chapter VIII further explains the essence, characteristics, opportunities, and challenges of the OLF and its status.

CHAPTER II

THE NECESSITY OF THE REBIRTH OF SOVEREIGN AND DEMOCRATIC OROMIA¹

The Oromo people have shared history, culture, identity, collective grievances, and political aspirations. As the largest national group in the Ethiopian Empire, Africa, and the world, and having rich economic and human resources, it is paradoxical that the Oromo nation does not have a sovereign state to protect itself from internal and external enemies. Today, out of 193 countries, only twenty-two have more populations than the Oromo nation, estimated at over 50 million. New countries are still emerging in the world, and since 1990, thirty-six new countries have been born,² and ten more countries may emerge soon.³ This chapter provides historical, cultural, political, moral, and legal reasons why the Oromo nation must intensify its national struggle to recreate a sovereign and democratic Oromia as these liberated and liberating countries and be a member of the United Nations.

The chapter focuses on five central issues. First, it briefly explains the historical and theoretical perspectives of the modern nation-state and the interstate system in the capitalist world system by relating them to the Oromo question. Second, the chapter demonstrates that, before its colonization, Oromia had its unique civilization and sovereign democratic state, which the Oromo enjoyed until the mid-nineteenth century. Third, it also explains how the Oromo have suffered politically, economically, culturally, psychologically, and socially for about 150 years. Without their liberation, the Oromo will continue to suffer from state terrorism, gross human rights violations, poverty, and underdevelopment. Fourth, recognizing the significance of ideology and worldview, the chapter compares *Ethiopianism* and *Oromummaa* and explains why an Ethiopianized Oromo class has defended the Ethiopian Empire at the cost of the Oromo national interest, identity, history, and culture. Finally, the chapter provides reasons for applying the principles of the United Nations and international law to determine Oromia's national destiny.

The Modern Nation-State: Historical and Theoretical Considerations

Large-scale and long-term social changes since the sixteenth century, with the development of capitalism as the modern world system, necessitated the invention of political structures, which have become nation-states and interstate or international systems. Nation-states have become the basic units of political organizations in the capitalist world system. They have established themselves as international systems through trade, colonization, imperialism, and global political and economic institutions. After WW II, the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund have buttressed the international system.

Each nation-state theoretically claims to govern a nation or people with a common identity based on language, cultural practices, institutions, historical experiences, and interests. Theoretically, the nation-states have created the ideas of citizenship, a uniform system of law, and legal equality, but practically practiced colonialism, racial slavery, segregation, dehumanization, and exploitation of the peoples they have considered different from those who have controlled the political economies in these states and beyond (Jalata, 2001).

The Oromo people were outside of the capitalist world system until the last decades of the nineteenth century when they were colonized by the alliance of European imperialism, Abyssinian colonialism, and an Oromo collaborative class, which sided with the enemies of the Oromo people for their individual and group interests (Jalata, 1993/2005). Before colonization, the Oromo people had an egalitarian political and economic system based on the *gadaa/siiqqee* system and their sovereign and democratic state (Jalata and Schaffer, 2013). Oromo nationalists need to inform the Oromo people and the world community about the necessity of the rebirth of the sovereign, democratic Oromia state. Before the sixteenth century, when capitalism developed in Western Europe and expanded to different continents, there were about sixteen known ancient civilizations or cultures⁴ and a few countries worldwide. Starting from the sixteenth century, Portugal, Spain, Great Britain, France, and Holland mainly developed their nation-states with the development of capitalism and began to expand their colonial territories (Jalata, 2013a, 2013b, 2015; Shannon, 1996).

The Oromo people were sovereign and democratic until the mid-nineteenth century (Baissa, 2004). They were enslaved and colonized for almost one and a half centuries and reduced to the colonial subjects of Habashas or Ethiopians starting in the last decades of the nineteenth century (Melba, 1980; Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990; Jalata, 1993). The

Abyssinian/Ethiopian colonial state and its agents have controlled almost all Oromo resources, including human resources, through violence, genocide, cultural destruction, and the control of the Oromo minds by imposing *Ethiopianism*⁵ through auto-oppression and self-rejection (Jalata, 1993/2005; 2016).

Historical *Biyya Oromoo* (the Oromo Country)

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, when they intensified their territorial recovery through the *butta* wars, many Oromo branches were under one *gadaa* government (Jalata, 2019)). The *gadaa* system empowered the Oromo people politically and militarily to recover their lost territories and accommodate their increased population and stock (Legesse, 1973). The Oromo fought twelve *butta* wars between 1522 and 1618, recovering and reestablishing the Oromo country called Oromia today (Ta'a, 1986). According to *The Oromos* (1971: 12-13), “the sixteenth century's so-called [Oromo] invasion was neither an invasion nor a migration. Instead, it was a national movement of the Oromo people incited by the southern Oromos and supported by the northern Oromos under the domination of the Abyssinians with the specific goal of liberating themselves and their territories from colonial domination.”

Until the alliance of the Abyssinian warlords and European imperialists resulted in colonization during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Oromo were sovereign, democratic, and free people (Melba, 1980; Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990; Jalata, 1993). As Virginia Luling (1965: 191) notes, “From the mid-sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, the [Oromo] were dominant on their territories; no people of other cultures were in a position to exercise compulsion over them.” Until the mid-seventeenth century, all Oromo branches lived under one *gadaa*⁶ government and later built a confederation by establishing the *Gadaa* Republic of Oromia (Baissa, 2004: 101). After the mid-seventeenth century, with their increased population and territories, different Oromo groups started to have autonomous *gadaa* governments (Baissa, 2004; Jalata, 2005a). However, various Oromo branches and their autonomous local governments formed alliances, federations, and confederations to maintain political and cultural solidarity and defend their security and interests from their common enemies (Bulcha, 1996: 50; Etefa, 2008).

The *gadaa* system had the principles of checks and balances (such as periodic transference of power every eight years and division of power among the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches), balanced opposition (among five *gadaa* grades⁷), and power sharing between higher

and lower administrative organs to prevent power from falling into the hands of despots. The *gadaa* system accepted Oromos as the ultimate source of authority, and nobody was above the rule of law. All *gadaa* officials were selected by established criteria⁸ from the *qondala* grade and received rigorous training in *gadaa* philosophy and governance for eight years to enter the *luba* grade (administrative grade); the main criteria for selection to office included bravery, knowledge, honesty, demonstrated ability, etc. *Gadaa*, as an integrative social and political system, organized male Oromos according to *hirya* (age sets) and *luba* (generation sets) for social, political, and economic purposes. The *gadaa* and *siiqqee*⁹ institutions influenced the Oromo value system in pre-colonial Oromo society. During this period, Oromo women had the *siiqqee* institution, a parallel institution to the *gadaa* system that “functioned hand in hand with *Gadaa* [sic] system as one of its built-in mechanisms of checks and balances” (Kumsa, 1997: 119).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the sovereign Oromo people were also administered by the *gadaa* government and independent *mooti* states (kingdoms) in Wallo, Gibe states, Leqa-Naqamte, and Leqa-Qellem (Abir, 1965; Lewis, 1965). These autocratic and hereditary chiefs emerged by overthrowing democratically elected leaders because of the external influence and the internal weakness of the *gadaa* system after its decentralization. Under *gadaa*, the Oromo established the rule of law and promoted social equality, justice, and democracy. Specifically, the design of *gadaa* as a social and political institution worked to prevent exploitation and political domination.

Consequently, under the *gadaa/siiqqee* system, Oromo society enjoyed peace, stability, and political sovereignty. The Oromo had a glorious history and practiced democratic governance (Jalata, 2019), which the colonial government outlawed and suppressed (Jalata, 1996). As *The Oromos: Voice against Tyranny* (1971: 9) notes, the Oromo settled in the Horn of Africa and the Oromo country before “the so-called Sabceans crossed the Red Sea and started settling on the East African Coast.” The hostile relationship between Oromos and Amharas began eight hundred years ago, and most Oromos successfully defended themselves from their enemies for centuries (The Oromos. 1971). Sociologist Mekuria Bulcha (2011: 221-222) notes that “the Gaalaan and the Amhara were fighting in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. The Gaalaan, who the Tulama Oromo considers as *angafa* (the senior *gosa* or the firstborn), is numerically the largest Oromo *gosa* [clan] cluster.” He considers the northern Shawan plateau the ancient country of the Oromo nation and refutes the claims that the Oromo came to Oromia from another place.

Furthermore, Mekuria Bulcha characterizes the Shawan plateau as the “*cradle of Oromo civilization and springboard for Amhara expansion*” to the Oromo country. But other sources consider Odaa Mormor (the Blue Nile)¹⁰, where the first *gadaa* assembly occurred in the fifth century A.D. before other *gadaa* centers (Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2006: 74). How did the status gradually change? How did/does the Habasha colonization of Oromo society, which was free and independent, affect the community?

Habasha Colonial Terrorism, Repression, and Unfreedoms

The alliance of European imperialism, Ethiopian colonialism, and an Ethiopianized Oromo collaborative class ended the existence of the sovereign Oromia (Jalata, 2008). Abyssinian warlords established strong relationships with European institutions and governments in the nineteenth century (Harris, 1844; Hassen, 1981). Orthodox Christianity created a bridge between European imperialism and Ethiopian colonialism as a religion and state ideology. It also helped Amhara warlords create an Amharaized/Ethiopianized Oromo collaborative class, which played an essential role in the colonization of Oromia.

However, the alliance with European powers was the primary factor in strengthening the Abyssinians militarily to colonize Oromia. For instance, around 1840, the British and French governments supplied Sahle Selassie, Menelik’s grandfather, with firearms “so that he could spread the seeds of civilization [i.e., Christianity] among the [Oromos]” (Isenberg and Krapf, 1968: 251). European missionaries, explorers, and merchants convinced their respective governments to support the Abyssinians/Ethiopians against the Oromo and others that they considered “pagan” and “savage.”¹¹ Between 1855 and 1868, under the leadership of Tewodros, the Amhara fighters started campaigns to colonize and convert the Wallo and Yejju Oromos to Orthodox Christianity or expel or exterminate them (Crummey, 1971: 107-125). Before this period, Wallo, Yejju, Azabo, and Raya Oromos had accepted Islam “as a bulwark against being swamped by Abyssinian nationalism” (Trimingham, 1965: 100).

The Habasha rulers have feared Islam and the Oromo since the sixteenth century, “and the thought of the two in combination has been their recurring nightmare” (Baxter, 1978: 285). Tewodros mobilized the Amhara fighters against the Oromos by reintroducing the fear of the Oromo and Islam (Abir, 1968) and defeated the Yejju Oromo dynasty of Ras Ali II in 1853; then, he concentrated on the de-Oromoization of Wallo by imposing terrorism, mutilation, and killing starting in 1855 (Crummey, 1971: 107-125). He also

exterminated the Tulama Oromos living between Dabra Berhan and Angolala (Crummey, 1971: 107-125). Despite his barbaric campaigns and the attempt to deport the Wallo Oromo *en masse* to western Abyssinia, Tewodros failed to control them effectively (Crummey, 1971: 107-125). However, in his letter to Queen Victoria of England, Tewodros boastfully stated: "My fathers, the emperors, having forgotten the creator, He handed over their kingdom to the [Oromos] and Turks. But God created me, lifted me out of the dust, and restored this empire to my rule. He endowed me with power and enabled me to stand in the place of my fathers. By this power, I drove away the [Oromos]. As for the Turks, I have told them to leave the land of my ancestors" (Cited in Greenfield and Hassen, 1980: 8).

When the British ignored his letter, Tewodros mistreated and imprisoned British diplomats. Great Britain sent an expeditionary force to release the hostages, and Yohannes of Tigray provided logistic assistance. Surrounded in 1968 by the British expeditionary force and near defeat, Tewodros released other prisoners and expressed his hatred for the Oromos by massacring 1,000 Oromo captives (Waldhaansso, 1979: 19-20). Then he committed suicide, and his dream of unifying Abyssinia proper (Rubenson, 1976: 173) and colonizing the Oromo people failed. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Yohannes IV of Tigray and the Amhara king, Menelik II, allied with rival European powers to centralize their political power and expand their territories by participating in "the scramble for Africa." When the rivals— Britain, France, Russia, and Italy— sought alliances with the Abyssinian warlords to obtain jumping-off places in the Horn of Africa, Yohannes and Menelik, with the assistance of these imperialist powers, started to lay the foundations of the Abyssinian/Ethiopian central state administration.¹²

Yohannes obtained rewards from military technology and army expertise for helping the British eliminate Tewodros, which opened a new opportunity. He became the emperor of Abyssinia in 1872. He reigned as emperor until 1889 and came into conflict with the Mahdist state of Sudan and the Italians who had occupied the Red Sea basin. Due to the geographic location of his political center, Yohannes was put under severe external political pressure: The Italians were expanding their territory from the Red Sea coast to Tigray and allying and consolidating Menelik in Shawa. At the same time, the Mahdists were penetrating Abyssinia through Gondar. There was a counterpart to the political space created for Yohannes by the British expedition that removed Tewodros from power—the Mahdists killed Yohannes in 1889 and developed an equal political opportunity for Menelik, who transferred the center of power from Tigray to Shawa (Caulk, 1971: 23-420).

By allying with the European imperialists, Menelik successfully strengthened his Shewan administration. The French, Italians, and British continuously supplied Menelik with various weaponry, ammunition, and the technical expertise necessary for the current administration (Darkwah 1975: 205). "The French armed his troops with firearms and [helped in organizing] his campaigns . . . The [Oromo] was thus conquered by the Habasha [Ethiopians]" (The Early Lytton, 1975: 205). With Oromo economic and human resources, Menelik "rewarded his generals, paid his soldiers, and bought, first from the French and then from the Italians, huge supplies of arms and ammunition wherewith to equip his ever-growing armies" (Murray, 1922: 36). These resources were initially obtained through raiding, property confiscation, enslavement, control of trade routes and marketplaces, and tribute collection and exported to European markets. "To obtain the necessary finances," Harold Marcus (1975: 44) says, "Menelik and his advisors decided to organize a caravan to carry various . . . products to the coast for transshipment to Europe."

In a letter to European powers, Menelik expressed his intention to participate in the scramble for Africa: "I have no intention of being an indifferent spectator if far distant Powers make their appearance with the idea of dividing Africa" (Quoted in Skinner, 1906: 145). Using European military advisers and firearms, the invading Ethiopian army defeated the Oromo people between 1868 and 1900 and then organized an occupying force that ruled Oromia and its people.¹³ Explaining how Menelik began to establish his administration in Oromia. According to Marcus (1975: 64-65), Menelik organized expedition forces "during times of famine when numerous refugees went along to settle in newly conquered lands with the soldiers who stayed behind to garrison the fortified villages (katamas) erected as control points." Menelik also used Oromo mercenaries and collaborators to colonize Oromia. Through his Ethiopianized Oromo general, Gobana Daacee, Menelik made some Oromo leaders, such as the Jimma and Wallaga kings, submit to Ethiopian rule. Mohammed Hassen (1981: 11) asserts that he "was born into a Christian Oromo family, where the policy of forced Amharanization weighed heavily, permeating the whole atmosphere, affecting the family, their psychological attitudes and their whole manner of life."

Although Gobana was bilingual (speaking *Afaan Oromo* and Amharic), he preferred to speak in Amharic (Hassen, 1981: 6). In addition to Amharanization, Gobana had developed a strong interest in his military career in Menelik's army. As soon as Gobana began to provide his military service for Menelik, he was appointed as abagaz, chief palace guard (Hassen, 1981: 14); he was later promoted to commander of the armed

forces. The process of Amharanization and political ambition turned Gobana against his people (Hassen, 1981: 15), and now any Oromo who has collaborated with the Ethiopian state is called Gobana—a traitor. Gobana helped Menelik build the Ethiopian Empire but then lost his authority. As Mohammed Hassen (1981: 20) asserts, “After his removal from the administration of the Oromo . . . his influence in the imperial government diminished as fortuitously as it had risen, while that of the Amhara . . . grew steadily as the completion of the colonization became the hub of the government.” The Ethiopian colonial expansion resulted in mass killings, destruction, and expropriation of property, plundering, and enslavement (Bulatovich, 2000). In these colonial campaigns, some French, Russians, and others participated (Jesman 1958: 94). Between 1882 and 1886, the bloodiest colonial wars were conducted against the Arsi Oromo because they resisted Ethiopian colonialism under their *gadaa* government. Menelik colonized them in 1886 after running six savage campaigns. In addition to mass killings, the hands of thousands of Arsi Oromo men were cut off, and the breasts of thousands of Oromo women were mutilated by order of Menelik at Annole in 1886 (Gnamo, 2014). The massacre and enslavement of the Oromo continued through various colonial means. The Ethiopian army reduced the Oromo population from about ten million to some five million between 1868 and 1900 (Melba, 1980: 2; Bulatovich, 2000).

The Ethiopian colonial government developed five significant institutions in Oromia: the *katamas* (garrison cities), slavery, the *balabat* system (the collaborative class), the *naafxanya-gabbar* system, and the colonial landholding system (Jalata, 1993: 80-81). The *naafxanyas* (gun-carrying settlers) organized the garrison cities as their main geopolitical centers for practicing political domination, wealth and capital accumulation, and religious and cultural dissemination in Oromo and other colonized societies. Enslaved individuals served as domestic workers or were exported to other countries through the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. When patriotic Oromo leaders who resisted Abyssinian colonialism were killed, the Oromo intermediaries (*balabats*) were given one-fourth of Oromo lands and received Ethiopian titles, such as *balambaras* and *grazmach*. The *naafxanya-gabbar* system was another institution that entitled the colonialists and their intermediaries to exact labor and agricultural products from the Oromo and others. The settlers—soldiers, clergy members, and administrators (all known as *naafxanyas*)—exploited *gabbars* (semi-slaves) who were coerced to provide them food, free labor, tribute, and tax revenues both in cash and in kind.

The Habashas colonialists continuously settled their countrymen and women in Oromia. As James McCann (1986: 369) writes, “A key component

of this process has been the movement of people out of . . . Abyssinia's empire into the south [mainly Oromia], first as soldiers/settlers and then as landlords, administrators, and political entrepreneurs." The colonial state claimed absolute rights over three-fourths of Oromo lands and provided portions for its officials instead of salary. The Habasha notables and ecclesiastical, civil, and military officers were rewarded with grants of *maderia* and *rist-gult*.¹⁴ The Amhara farmers and foreign mercenaries who participated in the colonization of Oromia as soldiers, settlers, messengers, priests, spies, and correctional officers were also granted land as a reward for their services. The amount of land (whether given temporarily or permanently) depended on rank or position. An ordinary soldier received from one to three *gashas* (a gasha is approximately forty hectares), a captain of fifty soldiers was granted up to five *gashas*, and a leader of three hundred soldiers received up to twenty *gashas* of land (Markakis, 1974: 113). The state also commodified and sold some lands to individuals.

Following Menelik's footsteps, Haile Selassie expanded settler colonialism by establishing and consolidating *Habasha's* political and religious institutions and garrison cities, creating and consolidating an intermediary class, and developing colonial education, the colonial landholding system, and the media. Under these conditions, most Oromo farmers, pastoralists, and others became landless and impoverished and were forced to produce food and other commodities for their colonizers and the Ethiopian colonial state. In the 1960s, these collective grievances resulted in various resistance movements in Oromia and other territories. The successive governments of Mengistu Haile Mariam, Meles Zenawi/Haile Mariam Desalegn, and Abiy Ahmed have continued state terrorism, repression, gross human rights violations, and economic exploitation, as we shall see below.

The Habasha State and Ethiopianized Oromos: Two Roadblocks to Oromia Sovereignty

Since their colonization, the Oromo have faced state terrorism and repression from successive Ethiopian governments. The Ethiopian authoritarian-terrorist state is characterized by militarization and repression, tight control of foreign aid and domestic financial resources, and direct ownership and control of all aspects of the state, including the security and military institutions, judiciary and other public bodies, and financial institutions (Jalata and Schaffer, 2010). Through its educational institutions, the Ethiopian political system has produced a small number of Ethiopianized Oromo collaborative leaders who would function as intermediaries between the Ethiopian colonial ruling class and the Oromo people. The design

intentionally limited the number of educated Oromos by denying education to the overwhelming majority of Oromos (Tusso, 1982). Furthermore, the Ethiopian government has disconnected most of the few educated Oromos from their cultural and historical roots through various political, educational, and cultural mechanisms, such as assimilation, political marriage, religion, and divide and conquer policies, and continuously forced them to show loyalty to the colonial state.

The political and military leaders of the successive Ethiopian governments have been gangsters and robbers; they have used state power to expropriate lands and other resources in the name of privatization—all with the support and blessing of the World Bank and the IMF (Jalata, 2011). Successive Ethiopian governments have targeted the Oromo because of their economic resources and refusal to submit to the orders of colonial authorities and their Oromo collaborators. The military regime that emerged in 1974 under the leadership of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam replaced the Haile Selassie government and continued dictatorship and Ethiopian colonial policies. When Oromo activists and the people started to resist the military regime, it intensified its state terrorism and political repression. The Military government (*derg*) and its supporters committed massive human rights violations in the name of the so-called Revolution (Singer, 1978: 672-673). The *derg* continued mass imprisonments and killings. In 1980, the Oromo Relief Association (1980: 30) mentioned that “the Oromo constitutes the majority of the more than two million prisoners that glut Ethiopia's jails today.”

In the 1980s, hundreds of Oromo nationalists were murdered or imprisoned. The regime also terrorized other elements of Oromo society. According to Gunnar Hasselblatt (1992: 17-19), the military government repeatedly held mass shootings among the Oromo population, hoping to break the free, independent Oromo spirit. A hundred, sometimes two hundred men were shot on this raised dry field ... and were buried with bulldozers. Over the years, this procedure has been repeated several times. Other techniques were used when the method did not work, and the Oromo population could not be forced into submission. The victims were made to lie down with their heads on stone, and their skulls were smashed with another stone. The ... government ... tried everything to consolidate its reign of terror and exploitation of Oromia.... When the Oromo movement could not be quenched by shooting or the smashing of skulls, [the government] came up with a new idea. Men's testicles were smashed between a hammer and an anvil. Three men tortured and maimed in this way are still living.

Ethiopian state terrorism manifested itself in different forms: Its obvious manifestation was violence in the form of unjustified war, assassination, murder, castration, burying alive, throwing off cliffs, hanging, torture, rape, confiscation of properties by the police and the army, forcing people to submission by intimidation, beating, and disarming citizens (Pollock, 1997: 81-110). It is impossible to precisely know at this time how many Oromos have been murdered because successive governments hide this information.

Since 1992, security forces of the Tigrayan-led government have imprisoned thousands of Oromo on charges of plotting armed insurrections on behalf of the OLF. Such accusations had been regularly used as a pretext to detain individuals who publicly questioned colonial government policies. Various human rights organizations reported the testimonies of former prisoners to depict the criminality of the Tigrayan-led regime: Former prisoners testified that their arms and legs were tied tightly together on their backs, and their naked bodies were whipped. Large containers or bottles filled with water were fixed to their testicles, or if they were women, bottles or poles were pushed into their vaginas. Some prisoners were locked up in empty steel barrels and tormented with heat in the tropical sun during the day and cold at night (Fossati, Namara, and Niggli. 1996. Some prisoners were forced into pits so that fire could be made on top of them. The Ethiopian colonial system has also taken away the sovereignty of the Oromo people and exposed them to massive and absolute poverty by denying them their fundamental human rights and needs that Ron Shiffman (1995: 6-8) calls subsistence, protection, affection, and understanding.

Most Oromos in urban and rural areas have low subsistence levels because they do not have adequate income, enough food, and livable homes. The Oromos have been denied their inalienable right to self-determination and democracy. They have been denied the right to build their social, economic, cultural, and organizational infrastructures. Without political freedom, democracy, and a responsible government, a community cannot improve its quality of life. People like the Oromo who do not have personal and public safety in their homes and communities and are denied the freedom of self-expression, association, and organization do not have a good quality of life. In the twenty-first century, when the world is changing fast because of the intensification of globalization, social revolutions, and revolutions in technology, information, communication, and transportation, the Oromo people are in the darkness of ignorance and poverty.

Successive Ethiopian governments have banned independent Oromo organizations, including the OLF, and declared war on these organizations and the Oromo people. In addition, these governments have outlawed Oromo journalists and other writers and closed Oromo newspapers. They

have also banned Oromo musical groups and all professional associations and continued to eliminate or imprison politically conscious and self-respecting Oromos; thousands of Oromos have been in official and secret prisons simply because of their nationality and resistance to injustice. The bureaucrats and collaborators have believed that Oromo intellectuals, businessmen and women, conscious Oromo farmers, students, and community and religious leaders are their enemies and should be eliminated through terrorism and genocide (Hizbawi Adera, 1996 and 1997; Jalata, 2020/2022). The government officials, cadres, and soldiers have frequently raped Oromo girls and women to demoralize them and their communities and show how the rulers and their collaborators have wielded limitless power (Fossati, Namara, and Nigli. 1996: 10).

Amnesty International (2014: 1), in its paper entitled “Because I am Oromo,” notes, “Between 2011 and 2014, at least 5,000 Oromo [were] arrested because of their actual or suspected peaceful opposition to the government, based on their manifestation of dissenting opinions, the exercise of freedom of expression or their imputed political opinion.” In 2014, the government massacred over seventy-eight university students in Ambo for peacefully protesting the so-called master plan.¹⁵ Large-scale arrests, massive shootings, rapes, tortures, extra-judicial executions, and deaths due to suffering or lack of medical treatments have been everyday events in Oromia. The Tigrayan-led government and its agent, the Oromo People Democratic Organization, accused students of organizing demonstrations and arrested and tortured them; they detained and tortured singers for cultivating Oromo nationalism and not praising the government. People had been arrested and tortured for not providing false testimonies against other people or being accused of supporting the OLF and the OLA¹⁶

The opposition to land grabbing, gross human rights violations, cultural destruction, political and economic marginalization, poverty, and rampant unemployment mobilized the entire Oromo society against the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government and engaged in the *Qeerroo/Qarree*-led peaceful protest movement between 2014 and 2018. The *Qeerroo/Qarree* were predominantly students from elementary school to university, organizing collective actions through media networks, such as radios, televisions, and personal relations and networks. Through daily slogans or chants, the *Qeerroo/Qarree* had clearly articulated that the OLF should replace the Tigrayan-led government and recognized the front as the origin of Oromo nationalism. The government's reactions to the *Qeerroo/Qarree* protests had been violent and suppressive. The Tigrayan-led government had been able to use martial law to kill or detain thousands of Oromos, holding them in prisons and concentration camps.¹⁷ This government also implemented

security structures called *tokkoo-Shane* (one-to-five), *garee*, and *gott*;¹⁸ their responsibilities included spying, identifying, exposing, imprisoning, torturing, and killing Oromos who were not interested in serving the government.

Thousands of Oromos were maimed or blinded due to torture, beatings, or the suppression of protests.¹⁹ For example, during the Oromia-wide day of peaceful protest on July 6, 2016, the regime's army, known as *Agazi* massacred nearly 100 Oromos.²⁰ According to *Amnesty International*, government forces killed 400 Oromo before July 6, 2016.²¹ The Tigrayan-led government engaged in beating, torturing, castrating, decapitating, raping, and murdering Oromo students, farmers, educators, and merchants to stop the Oromo struggle.²² In early October 2016, when millions of Oromo gathered at Hora Arsadi, southeast of Finfinnee, for the *Irreechaa* celebration, the Oromo national holiday, the government's army killed more than 700 Oromo and injured or imprisoned thousands.²³ The state of emergency aimed to curb the growing anti-government protest movement at six months and extended it by three months. This action was the last attempt by the government to stop the Oromo protests and stay in power. Therefore, the Tigrayan-led government used all situations to gain control over information and the rally;²⁴ it utilized heavy forces and denied the freedoms of organization and association.

For several years, the Oromia region had been under a crackdown enforced by special police groups and the army known as *Agazi*.²⁵ After the protest movement started, according to rights organizations, more than 2000 Oromo were killed in eleven months.²⁶ Several thousand more had been imprisoned, tortured, blinded, and raped. The Tigrayan-led government stated that 11,000 people were detained, and the regime had blocked the Internet and collected phones from thousands of Oromos to hide its crimes from the international community.²⁷ The protest movement brought about some changes in Oromo society. Young Oromo protesters were equipped with the ideology of national *Oromummaa* (Oromo nationalism), which has uprooted the divisions that the enemies of the Oromos created among different Oromo branches. Oromo collaborators and opportunists who had been evicting Oromo farmers from their ancestral lands by joining the Tigrayan elites were temporarily shocked and started to feel national shame. The Oromo protest movement demonstrated that it could destroy Oromo intermediaries or mercenaries who worked for the enemy at the cost of the Oromo nation. The Oromo protesters had practically shown that they were struggling to establish a democratic system that would exercise the principles of national self-determination and egalitarian multinational democracy, which align with their democratic tradition.

The cost the Oromo had paid in lives and suffering is very high. According to different reports, between 2014 and 2018, more than 5000 Oromo, including school children, pregnant women, and older people, were massacred, and tens of thousands of Oromo were imprisoned, kicked, beaten, tortured, and decapitated. As one of the Oromo national struggle phases, the Oromo youth movement emerged as a formidable political force and shook the foundation of Ethiopia's Tigrayan-led racist and terrorist minority government. The brain of this government was the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which organized and led the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) for almost twenty-seven years. As the result of the popular struggle of the *Qeerroo/Qarree* movement, the ruling party, the EPRDF, was reorganized in April 2018, and Abiy Ahmed, who was trained in the Ethiopian army and politics under the leadership of the TPLF, emerged as Prime Minister by replacing Haile Mariam Desalegn. The Oromo youth peaceful protest movement forced the TPLF/EPRDF to replace Prime Minister Haile Mariam Desalegn with Abiy Ahmed in the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO).

Abiy "stepped into power [because of] the historical success of the *Qeerroo* movement... This unprecedented grassroots movement enabled the birth of Team Lemma, a reformist group within the ruling party of Oromia, which in turn forced the EPRDF, the long-ruling authoritarian party, to undertake an intraparty '*talk tehadiso*,' or deep reform, in response to the youth's relentless demands."²⁸ As a colonel who worked in the security system, Abiy was a trusted man for the TPLF/EPRDF. Furthermore, the TPLF-led government assumed he was an Oromo, and appointing him as the prime minister would cool down the Oromo protest movement. The Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government changed its leadership by selecting and mandating Abiy to introduce needed reforms and facilitate the transition to democracy.²⁹ The choice of Abiy for the premiership position showed the lack of Oromo's national organizational capacity, which could have mobilized Oromo's human and material resources under national leadership to confront and defeat the internal and external enemies of the Oromo nation. The *Qeerroo/Qarree* movement lacked the required national organization capacity to remove the TPLF/EPRDF, the terrorist and genocidal government, to form its own.

The absence of robust Oromo organizations helped Abiy use the OPDO and the protest movement to gain political power and hijack the revolution.³⁰ To undermine its potential enemies or competitors, the Abiy government invited all diaspora political organizations, including those of the Oromo, to return to Oromia and Ethiopia and participate in the so-called process of democratic transition. However, this government has been anti-

democratic and terrorist and genocidal like the TPLF/EPRDF regime it replaced. It only changed its name from the TPLF/EPRDF to the Prosperity Party (PP) without changing its essence and characteristics. In other words, the P.P. is TPLF minus the EPRDF. Therefore, most leaders and members of the P.P. were members of the EPRDF and have been in power since 1991. As a result, the EPRDF/PP is called the *neo-nafxanya* government by Oromo nationalists and others.

Almost all *Habasha* organizations have allied with the *neo-nafxanya* government of Abiy because it articulated that it would restore so-called glorious Ethiopia and popularized its former leaders, namely Menelik, Haile Selassie, and Mengistu Haile Mariam.³¹ Abiy's political intention is to achieve absolute power by rebuilding the Ethiopian Empire in the image of Amhara history, culture, and language and by attacking Oromo nationalism and Oromo nationalists and organizations, such as the OLF, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), and the Oromo Federalist government (OFC).³² The Abiy government invited the OLF leadership and its army to return to Oromia from Eritrea and peacefully struggle for Oromo rights. The way the OLF was received on September 15, 2018, in Finfinnee was beyond the government's imagination and the enemies of the Oromo. On September 15, 2018, Aljazeera said:

Hundreds of thousands of people have gathered in the capital of Ethiopia to welcome leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the latest members of a formerly banned rebel group, to return home following a string of political reforms in the country. On Saturday, the jubilant crowd waving OLF flags gathered at Addis Ababa's Meskel Square [by organizing a large concert] to welcome the group's leader, Dawud Ibssa, and others. In contrast, similar events were held in Ethiopia's Oromia region.³³

The same source also said 1,500 OLF fighters returned to Oromia from Eritrea.³⁴ One thing that was not clear to many people was that there were numerous OLF leaders and soldiers in Oromia while some leaders and members were returning from Eritrea. After some OLF fighters who returned to Oromia were abused and mistreated by the government, those OLF fighters already in Oromia started to suspect the peace deal that the OLF leadership made with the Abiy government and decided to continue the armed struggle. Gradually, the OLA split from the OLF leadership. The Abiy government deployed its security networks and the Ethiopian National Defense Force to Wallaga and Guji to root out the OLA and its leadership on December 19, 2018.³⁵ Gradually, Kumsa Diriba became the OLF-OLA High Command, popularly known as Jaal Marroo. Jaal Marroo and Jaal Gamachu Aboye, his deputy, articulated their dissatisfaction with the

policies and actions of the Abiy Ahmed government and declared that the government was the continuation of the previous colonial government.

“On December 19, 2018, the Ethiopian National Defense Force started a mass deployment of its forces across Oromia state (mainly the Wallaga zones and the Guji ... Eyewitnesses stated that the military was digging encampments in the middle of cities and hauling in sandbags for fortification”³⁶ At the same time, Jaal Marroo released a video circulating on social media, explaining the similarities between Ethiopia’s transitional period in 1991 and the transitional period of 2018.³⁷ During the 1991 transition, thousands of Oromo fighters were encamped and destroyed by the TPLF/OPDO soldiers after the OLF leadership was expelled from the transitional government. Jaal Marroo's assessment was correct, and Abiy openly expressed that he and the OPDO should rule Oromia for several decades as the TPLF ruled Tigray. Milkessa M. Gemechu, who was a member of the OPDO/ODP, says: “When opposition leaders were arrested *en masse*, I recalled that during an Oromo Democratic Party [ODP] central committee meeting that I attended in late 2018, Abiy said his government should learn from the TPLF, observing that it ruled Tigray for over 27 years without any opposition, especially from within the region.”³⁸

For half a year, “Abiy publicly committed to follow the mandate given [to him] to bring the country through a transition to democracy under his watch. He has failed to honor that commitment. Abiy was not a part of the youth movement, yet he came to power on the shoulders and sacrifices of the Oromo youth. He had already lost his popular base even one year into his premiership. He was primarily openly regarded as a traitor in Oromia.”³⁹ Once he came to power, Abiy started to divide and conquer the *Qeerroo/Qaree* movement by attracting the opportunist elements, providing them jobs, land, and money, and attacking, repressing, and killing the nationalist ones. Within six months, Abiy controlled the critical branches of the federal state machinery, such as the national intelligence and security agency, defense forces, the police, and other institutions.⁴⁰ He started controlling the Oromia Regional State, the largest state, by dividing and conquering the OPDO.⁴¹

In April 2019, Abiy deposed Lemma from the Oromia presidency, replaced him with his yes man, Shimelis Abdisa, and removed Oromo political leaders that he suspected had the spirit of Oromo nationalism and supported him, Lemma Megersa.⁴² At the same time, he intensified the attack he started in December 2018 on the OLA in western and southern Oromia. Suspecting the connection between the *Qeerroo/Qarree* and the OLA, Abiy also intensified the attack on the Oromo youth in June 2019. Milkessa M. Gemechu, who attended a meeting with Abiy, testifies:

“During a high-level central committee meeting of the Oromo Democratic Party, at which I was present, Abiy argued that the *Qeerroo* posed the 'number one potential threat to his power.' Many of us were shocked by this sharp reversal. He demonized the youth as an 'ungovernable pestilence that must be dealt with soon as possible.' He said that 'these unarmed *Qeerroo* are more dangerous than the Oromo Liberation Army.’”⁴³ While criticizing, attacking, imprisoning, and killing Oromo nationalists, Abiy formed his neo-*naafxanya* party by using the ideology of “medemer” or “synergy” and called it the Prosperity Party.

Starting in December 2018, Abiy began establishing command posts in different parts of Oromia to impose state terrorism, crush the Oromo national movement, reestablish the archaic ideology of *Ethiopianism*, and the practice of settler colonialism with the help of the neo-*naafxanya* (colonial settlers) class. Currently, for Oromo nationalists, only three independent political forces are engaging in the Oromo national movement: the OLF, OLA, and the OFC. Oromo nationalists assert that the OLF and OLA have achieved the ideological victory of Oromo nationalism. The OLA intensifies the guerrilla struggle in Oromia to liberate the Oromo people and their country, Oromia. Farsighted political activists, serious nationalists, and organic intellectuals have realized that without building strong national civic institutions and organizations, protests or revolts alone cannot empower the Oromo nation. Developing new political strategies and building solid national civic institutions and political organizations are urgent steps that should be taken immediately.

The Oromo youth protest movement created conducive conditions for restoring the Oromo democratic tradition and building solid national civic institutions and political organizations required to establish a sovereign Oromia democratic state, which may join a confederal multinational democratic state. The OLF and OLA faced multiple enemies during this historical period. The neo-*naafxanaya* government and its allies, such as the Amhara Regional Government, including the Amhara Special Force, the terrorist group called *Fano*, the Somali military forces, the Eritrean soldiers, and other regional forces, such as Somali and Sidama, are mobilized against the Oromo in Wallo, Wallaga, Tulama, and Guji areas. These forces are the primary enemies of the Oromo nation. All these forces are terrorizing and massacring the Oromo people to prevent them from supporting the OLA. These actions will increase the commitment and determination of the OLA and the Oromo people to intensify their liberation struggle. Abiy also has intensified ideological warfare on national *Oromummaa* (Oromo history, culture, identity, and nationalism) by glorifying Amhara nationalism disguised as *Ethiopianism* to advance the Amharanization nation-building