

**THE OROMO STRUGGLE AMID POLITICAL TRANSITIONS IN
ETHIOPIA**
FROM 1974 TO 2023

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Capstone Project

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Acronyms

ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement
CAFPDE	All-Ethiopia Unity Party, and the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia
COPWE	Commission for Organising the Working People of Ethiopia
CUD	Coalition for Unity and Democracy
EDU	Ethiopian Democratic Union
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
MEISOM	All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement - <i>Mela Ītyōpp̄yā Soshalīsit Nik'inak'ē</i>
MNCs	Multi-National Corporations
NNP	Nations, Nationalities, and People
OMN	Oromo Media Network
ODP	Oromo Democratic Party

ODP	Oromo Democratic Party
OFDM	Oromo Federal Democratic Movement
OLA	Oromo Liberation Army
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONC	Oromo National Congress
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organisation
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council
SEPDM	Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UEDF	United Ethiopian Democratic Forces

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Two issues have been at the centre of contestation between Oromo perspectives and dominant accounts of state formation in Ethiopia. The first issue is the presentation of Ethiopian history, and, therefore, its culture and identity. Three things are to be noted on this issue. Firstly, the history of Ethiopia has often been presented as uniform, single, and consistent. Secondly, this single, homogeneous account of Ethiopian history is made synonymous with Amhara and, to a large extent, Tigrinya history, identity, and experiences; they have been presented as the collective history of all the peoples of Ethiopia.¹ Thirdly, and consequently, historical and lived experiences of other nations, such as the Oromo and other peoples found in western and southern Ethiopia, have been suppressed. Although their accounts and stories began to be told publicly and boldly from the 1970s, Abyssinian history is still dominant and passes as Ethiopian history in the minds of many outside Ethiopia. This paper addresses that generally.

The second issue concerns the perception of the state-building process of modern Ethiopia, ranging from its boundaries to its constituents. The formation of the current Ethiopian state is habitually traced back to Emperor Menelik II and his rule starting in the late 19th century.² Menelik expanded his jurisdiction from Abyssinia (northern Ethiopia) to modern-day western and southern Ethiopia, often through conquest.³ While some scholars and others may hold different and more conservative opinions about Menelik's expansion, a significant number of

¹ Leenco. Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?* (Red Sea Press, 1999).

² Bonnie K. Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa* (Trenton, New Jersey: Red Sea Press, 1990), *Introduction*.

³ Mekuria Bulcha, 'Conquest and Forced Migration: An Assessment of the Oromo Experience', in *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy, and Self-Determination* (Red Sea Press, 2006), 28–56.

Oromo scholars and people hold that this process of conquest was, essentially, colonialism:⁴ the beginning of Abyssinian colonisation of the Oromo.

These two issues shape the way the Oromo have, since late 19th - 20th century, perceived the Ethiopian state, its relationship with them, and their interaction with it. They have formed the basis of underlying issues that have culminated in discernible Oromo grievances. The expression of these grievances has, in turn, moulded the process of state-building in Ethiopia since 1974 by advocating and spearheading change, thereby generating transitions.

There have been three transitions, starting with the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974; the EPRDF take-over in 1991; and the transition of 2018. This paper studies these transitions within the context of Oromo grievances and vice-versa. It aims to examine how and whether, at each stage of transition, Oromo grievances were addressed or exacerbated. The goal is to appreciate the Oromo role and contribution to state-building in Ethiopia and to understanding current struggles and how they may be approached going forward. This work is divided into four broad sections and a minimal discussion of theory and review of literature relating to the themes of nationalism, colonialism, decolonisation, and self-determination.

The first section studies the period between 1974 and 1991, when the Dergue ruled Ethiopia. It focuses on Dergue reforms, their impact on the Oromo, and Oromo responses to these reforms and their attendant implications. The second section studies the period of 1991-2016, when governance in Ethiopia was dominated by a single party, the EPRDF. This section examines reforms introduced, theoretically, to correct the mistakes of the Dergue and to usher in a system that acknowledged and responded to the diversity of peoples in Ethiopia. It provides an analysis of the practical implementation of these reforms, also, with a view to understanding

⁴ Mohammed Hassen, 'A Short History of Oromo Colonial Experience: Part Two, Colonial Consolidation and Resistance 1935-2000', *The Journal of Oromo Studies* Vol. 7, No. 1 & 2 (July 2000): 109-98.

the uprising of 2016. The third section is dedicated to examining the causes of the 2016 uprising which lasted for three years, ending with yet another transition in 2018. The last section examines current developments and instability in Oromiyaa and concludes with questions for Oromo leadership.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE & THEORY

1. Literature Review

There is considerable literature on the Oromo question in Ethiopia, although disproportionately less than overall literature on Ethiopia's political challenges in the in pursuit of reforms in the wake of transitions. What has been discussed minimally or not discussed at all, is the Oromo contribution to state-building in Ethiopia, simply as a result of their expression of their historical grievances, marginalisation, and Oromo nationalism. What has also not been examined is the role of the Oromo in stimulating transitions. Finally, also lacking in the literature is an examination of the responses to Oromo grievances by the different regimes that have assumed power in Ethiopia since 1974. An analysis of what their grievances are or have been, whether some have been addressed over the years and others left unanswered, and whether these grievances have evolved over time, thereby occasioning subsequent transitions, are all covered here in an attempt to fill existing gaps. Yet, it is still necessary to briefly address what already exists in literature.

Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa were one of the first to write about and to frame the Oromo question as a question of settler colonialism.⁵ The authors argue that Ethiopia is a dependent colonial state, enabled by British and French interests going back to Emperor Menelik II's reign and continuing with the support of Western and Soviet interests during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie and the Dergue regime, respectively.⁶ It is an account of history that studies cultural violence and confronts issues such as land and class in Oromiyaa from Menelik's epoch to the end of the Dergue regime. While this book relates the Oromo version of the story, it presents the Oromo struggle and position as homogeneous, failing to sufficiently take into

⁵ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*.

⁶ Holcomb and Ibssa.

account Oromoo diversity. This work proves that there is diversity of positions. It also suggests that political actors who dominated Ethiopia before 1991 had little agency and were purely driven by the need to maintain the *neftegna-gabbar* (landlord-peasant) system. As such, it misses an analysis of the reforms introduced by the Dergue, initially genuinely, for the benefit of the Oromo. Finally, its analysis is limited to the end of the Dergue regime, the book having been published in 1990, just before the overthrow of the Dergue.

Leenco Lata, in *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization or Disintegration?*, is a first-hand account of what transpired during the 1991-1995 transitional period in Ethiopia.⁷ Lata's work is crucial because it was written by a co-founder of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and a negotiator of the Transitional Charter and Ethiopia's political path in 1991 as an OLF representative. The Transitional Charter of 1991 formed the basis of the 1995 Constitution. In some ways, the book picks up from the discussion initiated by Holcomb and Ibssa. He critiques and demonstrates how the EPRDF handled the transition in contrast to what had been agreed in 1991. He particularly sheds light on the conduct of the 1992 district and regional elections, and how it led to the ouster of the OLF from Ethiopia's political scene.⁸ His work is equally limited in time, as it only stretches to 1995 towards 1999.

In *Arrested Development*, Mohammed Hassen and Seyoum Y. Hameso edit essays about the western and southern nationalities of Ethiopia.⁹ The books dwells extensively on the Oromo and Sidama. It insightfully provides a history of the Oromo,¹⁰ their conquest and forced

⁷ Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?*, 1999.

⁸ Lata.

⁹ Seyoum Y. Hameso and Mohammed Hassen, *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy, and Self-Determination* (Red Sea Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Hamdesa Tuso, 'Prologue: The Tears of Generations', in *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy, and Self-Determination* (Red Sea Press, 2006).

migration,¹¹ and Oromo nationalist movements that became active in the 1970s.¹² This book's essays have been useful in informing knowledge covered in parts of chapters 3 and 4. Regardless, it is also limited in time and scope; its analyses only stretch to 2006.

Terrence Lyons published *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics* just after Abiy assumed power in 2018.¹³ The author argues that Ethiopian politics and governance, especially under the TPLF-led EPRDF, ought to be understood through the lens of the legacies of war and war-to-peace transition. He relies on his experience as a researcher, observer of Ethiopia's electoral processes, and consultant on Ethiopia, as well as other secondary sources, to make his arguments.¹⁴ This work was instrumental in contributing to chapters 4 and 5 of this research. It, however, does not demonstrate a pattern of Oromo grievances and how they have contributed to state-building post-1991. His focus on legacies of war and war-to-peace transition almost suggests that only this factor is credited for state-reconstruction post-1991.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section is limited to two theoretical issues: nationalism and self-determination.

2.1. Nationalism

Benedict Anderson defined a nation as “an imagined political community”.¹⁵ Effectively, such a community can be created, re-created, or even disbanded at any time. It can also take any form with different members at different stages. This, for instance, partly explains diversity

¹¹ Bulcha, ‘Conquest and Forced Migration: An Assessment of the Oromo Experience’.

¹² Mohammed Hassen, ‘The History of Oromo Nationalism: 1960s-1990s’, in *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy, and Self-Determination*, Hameso, S.Y. and Hassen, M., Ed. (Red Sea Press, 2006).

¹³ Terrence Lyons, *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Incorporated, 2019).

¹⁴ Lyons.

¹⁵ Benedict R. O’G. (Benedict Richard O’Gorman) Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition. (London: Verso, 2006).

among the Oromoo and their coming together slowly, beginning from the 1960s, through the ideology of Oromo nationalism. Prior to that, ethnicity was not the primary factor for establishing or sustaining communities made up of Oromoo or, indeed, such a nation. The Oromo are diverse and have historically been organised along religious, tribal, or socio-economic lines. For instance, the Oromo constitute the biggest population of Muslims, who have previously identified with other Muslims around them, such as the Somalis.¹⁶ This is evident from the fact that Oromo movements fighting against an Amharised Ethiopia had members from different ethnicities, mostly Somalis, fighting for the same cause under the umbrella of Islam.¹⁷

Other Oromo, especially from Shewa, were fully Amharised, choosing to be part of the Amhara community by identity.¹⁸ They embraced Orthodox Christianity, adopted Amharic names, and had little or no knowledge of Oromo history or culture. Yet, others are Protestant Christians by faith, while there are others that adhere to traditional beliefs and practices. Still, others organised around their economic ways of life. The farmers formed a sedentary community and would produce products as peasants to sustain the Empire. As such, they found a class struggle more relevant to them rather than an ethnic one,¹⁹ while others were pastoralists with little recognition and side-lined up to present times. What brought them all together was a wave of Oromo nationalism that was born out of common grievances, and which made connections revealing that they were all marginalised, suppressed, and sidelined on the basis of ethnicity.²⁰

¹⁶ Mohammed Hassen, 'Islam as an Ideology of Resistance among the Oromo of Ethiopia', *American Journal of Islam & Society (Online)* 26, no. 3 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v26i3.385>.

¹⁷ Hassen, 'The History of Oromo Nationalism: 1960s-1990s'.

¹⁸ Alex de Waal, 'Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia', Human Rights Watch, September 1991, p. 55.

¹⁹ Ahmed Hassan Omer, 'Close yet Far: Northern Shewa under the Derg', in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After*, Eastern African Studies (Oxford, England: J. Currey, 2002), 74–89.

²⁰ Hassen, 'The History of Oromo Nationalism: 1960s-1990s'.

Oromo nationalism was born in the late 1960s to the 1970s,²¹ when a collection of learned Oromo elites, most of whom served in Emperor Haile Selassie's government, came together to agitate for equality.²² These Oromo elites had been assimilated into the Amhara culture and identified as Amhara (Amharised). What changed in the 1960s was a conscious realisation that their Amharaness could not afford them equality in regard to questions of governance and the education of Oromo masses.²³ A movement was, therefore, established that began with the establishment of the Macha and Tulama Association.²⁴

Eventually, Oromo nationalism resulted in the creation of a nation by necessity, the heart of such creation and coming-together being shared exclusion. The Amharised Oromos were not Amhara enough; Muslims and traditionalists were regarded inferior; they were all referred to as *Galla*, a derogatory term denoting inferiority.²⁵ Inequalities can invent communities and, thus, a nation.

2.2. Self-determination

Scholars of Oromo history and the Oromo struggle, such as Mohammed Hassen, Holcomb and Ibssa, as well as Leenco Lata, argue that the Oromo struggle should be viewed as a struggle for decolonisation. There are strong sentiments among Oromo populations that, indeed, what they experienced from the late 19th century was colonialism. Oromo consensus on this issue is that decolonisation can only be achieved by the pursuit and exercise of the right to self-determination.²⁶ What, in fact, self-determination means, taking into account the diverse views

²¹ de Waal, 'Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia'.

²² Jan Záhorký, 'Understanding the Oromo Movements: From the Macha Tulama Association to the "Oromo Protests"', in *Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa*, Routledge International Handbooks (Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2022).

²³ Hassen, 'The History of Oromo Nationalism: 1960s-1990s'.

²⁴ Hassen.

²⁵ Hassen.

²⁶ Hassen, 'A Short History of Oromo Colonial Experience: Part Two, Colonial Consolidation and Resistance 1935-2000'.

and experiences of the Oromo, has been difficult to ascertain. In international law, self-determination is both a right and principle.²⁷ International law holds that the right to self-determination can be expressed in either of the following three ways: independence; free association with an independent state; or integration with an independent state.²⁸ However, these options seem to be limited to non-self-governing territories.

Three things ought to be considered in the discussion of self-determination as a principle in Law and in the context of the Oromo struggle: first, the concept of *terra nullius*; secondly, the principle of territorial integrity; and thirdly, the product or resulting options of the exercise of the right to self-determination. In the advisory opinion of the ICJ on the Western Sahara dispute, the concept of *terra nullius* was discussed extensively.²⁹ A territory that is bare and unoccupied is considered *terra nullius* (no man's land). As such, anyone who settles and exercises political authority over it, is considered to have legally acquired it through occupation. The question, therefore, that emerges, is whether the territories that Menelik II acquired were unoccupied.

It is evident that these lands were occupied by the Oromo and other western and southern nations.³⁰ There are those who permanently settled on specific parts of present-day Oromiya, because their economic and social activities supported such a lifestyle, such as those who led an agricultural or farming life.³¹ There were those, like the Gujji-Oromo, who were agro-pastoralists, both growing crops and leading a nomadic life.³² Finally, there were and still exists

²⁷ Zubeida Mustafa, 'The Principle of Self-Determination in International Law', *The International Lawyer* 5, no. 3 (1971): 479–87.

²⁸ UN General Assembly, 'Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples', Pub. L. No. A/RES/1514(XV) (1960), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-granting-independence-colonial-countries-and-peoples>.

²⁹ United Nations (UN), Western Sahara, Advisory Opinion, No. ICJ GL No 61, [1975] ICJ Rep 12, ICGJ 214 (ICJ 1975) (International Court of Justice (ICJ) 16 October 1975).

³⁰ Bulcha, 'Conquest and Forced Migration: An Assessment of the Oromo Experience'.

³¹ Tesema Ta'a, "'Bribing the Land": An Appraisal of the Farming Systems of the Maccaa Oromo in Wallagga', *Northeast African Studies* 9, no. 3 (2002): 97–113.

³² Tadesse Berisso, 'Modernist Dreams & Human Suffering: Villagization among the Gujji Oromo', in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After*, Eastern African Studies (Oxford, England: J. Currey, 2002), 116–32.

Oromo who are purely pastoralists, mainly the Karrayyu Oromo and the Borana, who, to date, move around as nomads in search of pasture for their cattle and camel.³³ These cases demonstrate that this part of present-day Ethiopia was not unoccupied. Most of it was acquired by annexation, an unlawful form of land acquisition in international law.

Second, is the principle of territorial integrity. This principle is enabled by another principle, *uti possidetis juris*. *Uti possidetis*, in the case of African states, dictates that boundaries at the time of decolonisation are to be preserved.³⁴ This position was embraced by the states forming the Organisation of African Unity in Cairo in 1964.³⁵ Despite the fact that Ethiopia was not colonised by a foreign, European state, it elected to be a party to this Declaration, which has preserved Ethiopian borders as they are now or were when state-formation began in the late 19th century during Menelik's reign.³⁶ Therefore, any form of secession would result in a breach of Ethiopia's territorial integrity.

Self-determination is a right and principle of international law, whose exercise can result into, as previously noted, three outcomes: independence, free association with an independent state, or integration with an independent state.³⁷ There are two kinds of self-determination: internal self-determination and external self-determination.³⁸ Internal self-determination ordinarily occurs when a people agitate for, and successfully so, rights such as cultural freedom and recognition or autonomy within the state complex. External self-determination, on the other

³³ Eyasu Elias, 'Environmental Rights and Pastoral Livelihoods: The Case of Borena and Kaarrayu Pastoralists in Ethiopia', *Journal of Environment and Earth Science* Vol.4, No.21, 2014 (2014): 146–55.

³⁴ United Nations [UN], Frontier Dispute, Burkina Faso v Mali, Merits, Judgment, No. ICJ Rep 554, ICGJ 116 (ICJ 1987) (International Court of Justice [ICJ] 22 December 1986).

³⁵ Organisation of African Unity (OAU), 'Border Disputes among African States (Cairo Declaration)', AHG/Res. 16(I) (1964), https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/9514-1964_ahg_res_1-24_i_e.pdf.

³⁶ de Waal, 'Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia'.

³⁷ United Nations (UN), Western Sahara, Advisory Opinion.

³⁸ Alex de Waal and Sarah M.H. Nouwen, 'The Necessary Indeterminacy of Self-Determination: Politics, Law and Conflict in the Horn of Africa', *Nations and Nationalism* 27, no. 1 (2021): 41–60, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12645>.

hand, occurs when a people, usually through a referendum, separate from an existing state to form a new independent state, as was the case in South Sudan.³⁹

The question that emerges in the discussion of external self-determination is whether its exercise constitutes a breach of territorial integrity or whether it amounts to secession, therefore breaching the territorial integrity of a state. Professor and former Ambassador Maria Nzomo argues that the exercise of external self-determination is not incompatible with the principle of territorial integrity.⁴⁰ She explains that self-determination is a guaranteed right of a people under international law and human rights law.⁴¹ Moreover, external self-determination is theoretically achieved within the ambit of the laws of the state concerned, making it legal. It is, consequently, different from secession, which occurs without the following of a prescribed legal process or without the consent of the state concerned.

To different Oromoo, the expression of the right to self-determination results in either autonomy or secession, it can also be expressed through either. This means that self-determination can be both a means to an end or an end in itself, or both. The Constitution of Ethiopia provides for a right to secession, effectively not only legalising it and but also classifying it as an expression of the right to self-determination.⁴² Subsequently, the ethnic-federalist model introduced in 1995, which created autonomous states or regions in Ethiopia with the agreement of the peoples forming the country, can be seen as an exercise of the right to internal self-determination through autonomy.

³⁹ de Waal and Nouwen.

⁴⁰ Maria Nzomo, 'Principle of Self-Determination Should Not Undermine a Country's Territorial Integrity', *Nation*, 18 January 2018, <https://nation.africa/kenya/blogs-opinion/opinion/principle-of-self-determination-should-not-undermine-a-country-s-territorial-integrity--2586>.

⁴¹ Nzomo.

⁴² Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 'Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia', Proclamation No. 1/1995 § (1995), Art. 39.

As stated, the Constitution also affirms and confers to its peoples the right to secession, which is invariably an exercise of external self-determination.⁴³ What it fails to clarify, are what would constitute a people/nation/nationality and what borders are concerned. It assumes that if a right to secession were invoked, it would naturally be ethnic in nature and that such ethnicity would do it as a unit. It also fails to perceive a situation where the exercise of the right to secession can be invoked by multiple ethnicities. This is imagined in the Constitution of Oromiyaa, which provides that self-determination by secession can encompass people of a similar culture with the Oromo.⁴⁴ What would the implications of all this be to the different peoples in different territories of Oromiya who only seek autonomy?

Altogether, when the OLF and Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) participated in creating ethnic-federalism as representatives of the Oromo, despite the clause on secession, they chose to stay within the body politic of Ethiopia. They accepted that autonomy was, to them, the exercise of the right to self-determination and, therefore, equal to their decolonisation. Any further exercise of the right to self-determination can barely be seen as decolonisation but simply that—an exercise of the right to self-determination—whether that exercise is in the pursuit of (more) autonomy or secession.

⁴³ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

⁴⁴ Magalata Oromiyaa, 'Heera Mootummaa Naannoo Oromiyaa (Constitution of the Regional State of Oromia)', Pub. L. No. LabsiiLak.1/1987 (Proclamation No. 1/1995) (1995), Art. 14.

CHAPTER 3: THE OROMO UNDER THE DERG REGIME, 1974-1991

This section interrogates the period of Derg rule in Ethiopia and its implications for the Oromo people. The Oromo are indigenous to parts of the central, western, and southern territories of Ethiopia and comprised about 35% of the Ethiopian population.⁴⁵ The Derg deposed the imperial rule of Haile Selassie and brought reforms that had substantial effects on all Ethiopians at large, but especially the nations and nationalities of western and southern Ethiopia. This section, therefore, studies these reforms; their implications on the Oromo; and the responses these implications elicited.

3. Introduction

On 12 September 1974, a group of middle-rank officers of the Ethiopian army successfully deposed Emperor Haile Selassie in a coup.⁴⁶ Known as the *Dergue*, these soldiers presented their cause as revolutionary and one that would transform Ethiopia's repressive and authoritarian imperial system. The success of the Derg can be traced to the prevailing conditions of that time. The oil crisis of the 1970s, for instance, had affected the economy of the state, resulting in mass protests.⁴⁷ It was also during the era of liberation and decolonisation in Africa, when African revolutionaries then were leftists and anti-imperialists. Unlike most African states, Ethiopia escaped external colonisation; it was able to retain its independence and imperial governance structure.

Under the reign of its Emperor Menelik II, it defeated Italian attempt at colonisation in the Battle of Adwa.⁴⁸ However, the territory Menelik inherited, upon his ascension to power,

⁴⁵ 'Ethiopia - World Directory of Minorities & Indigenous Peoples', accessed 9 August 2023, <https://minorityrights.org/country/ethiopia/>.

⁴⁶ Bonnie K. Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa* (Trenton, New Jersey: Red Sea Press, 1990) p. 332.

⁴⁷ Holcomb and Ibssa p. 329-338.

⁴⁸ Holcomb and Ibssa p. 7.

consisted of what are now the northern territories of Ethiopia. These territories were collectively known as the Abyssinia or the Abyssinian Empire, and under Menelik's rule, it expanded southward to cover much of what is, presently, western, and southern Ethiopia.⁴⁹ These territories, as described in the first chapter, had indigenous nations occupying it. Among them were the Oromo, who were now brought under imperial rule. It is worth noting that there were some Oromo communities in the central highlands who were ready to be part of Menelik's empire. Ensuing colonial boundaries acknowledged and endorsed such territories as forming part of imperial Ethiopia.

Therefore, at the time when the Dergue were taking control of Ethiopia, several factors had ripened the country for change and paved the way for new governance. First, an enlightened body of students, pre-dominantly from northern Ethiopia and Eritrea, agitated for change.⁵⁰ Their grievances were three. First, they could not find readily available employment upon graduation, as they had been made to believe. Second, educational empowerment brought with it the realisation that they could, altogether, be part of or challenge the prevailing system of governance.⁵¹ Finally, there were also idealists who were intent on modernising and transforming Ethiopia.⁵²

Second, subjugated Tigray began to actively agitate for autonomy by challenging a system that had long treated Tigrayans as second-class citizens.⁵³ Third, liberation fronts became vibrant during this period. These movements came from peoples that saw the Ethiopian state and its imperial system as a colonial power occupying their lands and establishing a settler colony on

⁴⁹ Leenco. Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization or Disintegration?* (Red Sea Press, 1999), <https://books.google.com/books?id=wKw3vgAACAAJ>.

⁵⁰ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa* p. 329-338.

⁵¹ Holcomb and Ibssa.

⁵² Donald L. (Donald Lewis) Donham, 'Introduction', in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After*, Eastern African Studies (Oxford, England: J. Currey, 2002), 33–36.

⁵³ Holcomb and Ibssa p.315-318.

their territories. They consisted of the Eritreans, Afar, Somali, Sidama, and the Oromo.⁵⁴ Their movements, termed liberation movements, aimed for decolonisation and were heavily influenced by the wave of liberation and decolonisation that was sweeping through the continent of Africa. While Tigrayans through the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) defined themselves as fighting for liberation, their aim was self-determination through autonomy, and not detachment from the body politic of Ethiopia.⁵⁵ This was unlike the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and some in the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), who pursued secession as self-determination.

According to Holcomb and Ibssa, the middle-rank soldiers who later formed the Derg were catapulted by these factors.⁵⁶ However, their motive for challenging Emperor Selassie was different.⁵⁷ Initially, as part of demotivated soldiers, they generally advocated for better social welfare: the increase of salaries. This call came from different pockets of the military, especially the non-commissioned officers. When their grievances elicited a positive response from the Emperor, they advocated for more. This demand-response cycle culminated in middle-rank soldiers demanding their place in the Empire. Holcomb and Sisai argue that these soldiers came from the ruling class of the Amhara ethnicity.⁵⁸

This was the class of which the Emperor was a part, and the soldiers were the children of that class, who were promised positions in government or whose older landholding relatives were hungry for change.⁵⁹ When this dream seemed far from realisation, they decisively took control and acted to de-throne Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. They also proceeded to eliminate those

⁵⁴ de Waal, 'Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia', p. 68.

⁵⁵ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*.

⁵⁶ Holcomb and Ibssa.

⁵⁷ Holcomb and Ibssa.

⁵⁸ Holcomb and Ibssa.

⁵⁹ Holcomb and Ibssa.

who made part of the imperial governance system. Their motto was *Ethiopia First*, and in the early years of their rule, Ethiopia experienced relative peace and contentment, although local uprisings emerged within months of the Dergue rule. This relative calm was short-lived and the peoples previously opposing the imperial system found themselves forced to do so again. Much of this is traced to the changes the Derg introduced and termed *reforms*.

4. Dergue Reforms

Within the Oromo context, the most consequential reforms that the Derg introduced, had to do with identity and land. Their objectives for these reforms are contested. Some scholars argue that they were introduced to facilitate the provision of basic services, such as infrastructure, hospitals for health, and schools for literacy.⁶⁰ Tadessee also argues that these reforms were aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and cultivating a sense of security among peasant farmers.⁶¹ In contrast, others hold that the reforms were a means for the Derg to assert their rule and secure their interests.⁶² Holcomb and Ibssa argue that the Derg introduced these reforms to establish themselves as the new *neftegnas* (settlers).⁶³ Therefore, they simply replaced the imperial system of Haile Selassie and previous emperors.⁶⁴ This is not entirely the case: the Dergue had members who were Oromos and some of the reforms were indeed revolutionary and designed by Oromo activists.⁶⁵

The Derg, also known as the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), employed communism as its guiding ideology. Concerning identity, it promoted the motto *Ethiopia*

⁶⁰ Tadesse Berisso, 'Modernist Dreams & Human Suffering: Villagization among the Gujji Oromo', in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After*, Eastern African Studies (Oxford, England: J. Currey, 2002), 116–32, p. 117.

⁶¹ Berisso.

⁶² Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*, p.368.

⁶³ Holcomb and Ibssa.

⁶⁴ Holcomb and Ibssa.

⁶⁵ de Waal, 'Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia', p. 69.

Tikdem or *Ethiopia First*; the idea that everyone was Ethiopian.⁶⁶ This slogan disregarded the differences and diverse experiences of the peoples forming Ethiopia, such as the Oromo. This newly imposed identity not only disregarded diversity, but it also presented Amhara identity as the collective and single identity of all Ethiopians. Amharic, as the official and national language, was retained. This meant that school-going children in Oromia received instruction in Amharic, as opposed to Oromo.⁶⁷ Notably, however, the Derg banned the use of the term “Galla” to refer to the Oromo, legalised the use of Oromo language, and its initial land reforms benefitted Oromo farmers, primarily.⁶⁸ Still, the Derg inhibited any avenues for Oromo self-determination. Abyssinian traditions, customs, and practices remained synonymous with Ethiopian identity.

Land reform, however, was the most significant of reforms that the Derg regime pursued. In the period of mass protests and challenge to the rule of Haile Selassie, student organisations formulated the slogan, *Land to the Tiller*.⁶⁹ This slogan essentially meant that land ought to be liberated from ruling elite landlords, who expected returns from it but did not actually till it. It was a position that was widely held and accepted across Ethiopia at that time because it reflected the grievances of most around the land question; however, it still excluded pastoralists. It was also open to clashing interpretations.⁷⁰ To the elite, empowered students, and settlers in parts of western and southern Ethiopia, it meant that they had the right to own and pass down the land which they occupied.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*.

⁶⁷ Alula Pankhurst, ‘Surviving Resettlement in Wellegga: The Qeto Experience’, in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After*, Eastern African Studies (Oxford, England: J. Currey, 2002), 133–50.

⁶⁸ de Waal, ‘Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia’, p. 69.

⁶⁹ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*, p. 323.

⁷⁰ Holcomb and Ibssa.

⁷¹ Holcomb and Ibssa.

To the indigenous peoples of southern and western Ethiopia, such as the Oromo, it was an affirmation that their lands had to be liberated from *neftegna* or landlords and be returned to them.⁷² When the Dergue assumed power in 1974, it adopted this popular slogan. In its first few years in power, it nationalised land and established peasant associations that largely gave freedom and agency to the settlers, and, to the indigenous peoples of the south, the liberty to use land according to their needs. This was formalised through the Land Reform Proclamation of March 1975.⁷³

In 1977, Mengistu officially assumed power as the President of Ethiopia.⁷⁴ Famine also erupted, with its most devastating effects felt in northern Ethiopia, although much later in 1984. These changes brought with them government alterations of land policy. The regime orchestrated forced migrations of people from northern into southern Ethiopia, in a programme known as *resettlement*. Resettlement referred to the mostly forceful migration of “thousands upon thousands of impoverished northerners into the south”.⁷⁵ For the Oromos and other western and southern peoples, a programme known as *villagisation* was introduced to apply to them. Villagisation entailed “gathering Ethiopian peasant farmers into regimented, compact settlements”.⁷⁶ Families and units were forced to move out of their subsisting settlements into densely populated designated lands that would form villages. With this, land could be alienated for farming, and each person would be required to cultivate it through a system of quotas.⁷⁷

The Dergue and its military personnel replaced the students who oversaw peasant associations and supervised this new form of land policy directly.⁷⁸ Scholars argue that the land policy

⁷² Holcomb and Ibssa.

⁷³ ‘Public Ownership of Rural Lands Proclamation No. 31/1975’ (1975).

⁷⁴ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*.

⁷⁵ Donham, ‘Introduction’.

⁷⁶ Donham.

⁷⁷ Berisso, ‘Modernist Dreams & Human Suffering: Villagization among the Gujji Oromo’.

⁷⁸ Omer, ‘Close yet Far: Northern Shewa under the Derg’.

served more than the economic motivation behind it. It was also a political tool the Derg used to penetrate southern societies, where their ideologies had failed to work.⁷⁹ They could govern them directly, cement centralisation, and curb any opposition forces.

Soldiers and party cadres, who began to directly supervise peasant associations, *de facto* became landlords. These positions were given to them as rewards and to keep in check any potential motivation to overthrow Mengistu. It was during this period, in 1979, that the PMAC established the Commission for Organising the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE).⁸⁰ Ethiopia came to be officially known as the *People's Republic of Ethiopia*, a communist, one-party state in 1987, following the formation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia.⁸¹ Some scholars argue that this rush to making such drastic changes came from the fact that sponsoring communist states, such as the Soviet Union, needed evidence that the Dergue was implementing communist policy.⁸² Conversely, some in the Dergue and the Workers Party of Ethiopia were true adherents of socialism.

Holcomb and Ibssa argue that communism was a desperate attempt by the Dergue to formulate an ideology it could use to marshal public approval.⁸³ Its intention was not to transition Ethiopia into a socialist state; rather, it lacked an ideology on which to pin its governance model that was not different from Selassie's. To prove this assertion, the authors demonstrate that many of the policies Selassie pursued or reforms he set in motion, were adopted and implemented by the Dergue. Some of these were the land reforms. Holcomb and Ibssa conclude that the Dergue

⁷⁹ Omer.

⁸⁰ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*.

⁸¹ Holcomb and Ibssa.

⁸² Holcomb and Ibssa.

⁸³ Holcomb and Ibssa.

brought about reforms and not a revolutionary order, as they did not engineer any form of social transformation.⁸⁴ This position is disputed by other scholars.

5. Implications of Dergue Reforms

Derg reforms had implications for the Oromo on the issues of identity and land. These implications can be studied through the lens of their effects economically, socially, culturally, and politically.

Economically, villagisation had severe repercussions. Early reforms in the first years of Derg rule increased the yields of agricultural products, as farmers organised in peasant association and allowed to use familiar farming methods.⁸⁵ However, these gains were short-lived. With villagisation, locals now lived together in densely populated areas. The farms on which they worked were located in areas that were much farther from their settlements.⁸⁶ This wasted the time they spent travelling to and from their farms. Intensive farming in fixed areas affected soil fertility and the farms became susceptible to soil erosion.⁸⁷ These factors, coupled with the famine that was at its peak in 1984, diminished crop yields.

Social development was experienced. For the first time, schools, roads, and hospitals were built in some sections of Oromiyaa; albeit their still being few and, therefore, unable to cater effectively to the demands of the people.⁸⁸ Organisation of education around Amhara history and identity, disadvantaged Oromo children. Learning in a second language made them unable to compete equally with Amhara children whose first language was the language of instruction.⁸⁹ As a consequence, inequality remained relatively entrenched. Culturally,

⁸⁴ Holcomb and Ibssa.

⁸⁵ Omer, 'Close yet Far: Northern Shewa under the Derg'.

⁸⁶ Berisso, 'Modernist Dreams & Human Suffering: Villagization among the Gujji Oromo'.

⁸⁷ Omer, 'Close yet Far: Northern Shewa under the Derg'.

⁸⁸ Berisso, 'Modernist Dreams & Human Suffering: Villagization among the Gujji Oromo'.

⁸⁹ Pankhurst, 'Surviving Resettlement in Wellegga: The Qeto Experience'.

resettlement and villagisation affected Oromo cultural identity to different degrees in the various parts they occupied.

The mixture of people resulted in a good number of Gujji-Oromos converting to either Islam or Protestantism.⁹⁰ In addition to that, conflicts became more prevalent among families. Most Oromo communities are organised through clans and extended families. A family could, normally, comprise of one polygamous man and his wives and children. Wives often lived farther apart from each other to impede disagreements.⁹¹ With villagisation, extended families were forced to live together, and this created strife. Religious life was equally disrupted. The new policies were centred around agricultural production for economic ends. This meant that people had to till the land to achieve this goal and sustain themselves; including religious leaders who could not be protected by the state that had little regard for religious diversity.⁹²

Oromo communities that are defined by animal husbandry, such as the Gujji-Oromos, were affected the most.⁹³ They were forced to keep few cattle because of restrictions on land use and access. Most of them resorted to selling their cattle, that were not only a source of economic wealth, but that were also integral to religious and social rites, such as animal sacrifices and bridal dowry.⁹⁴

6. Response to the Dergue and its Reforms

In the early years of Dergue rule, there was positive reception of its reforms among the Oromo. Regardless, it is worth noting that the Oromo, being culturally organised by clans and occupying different parts of present-day Oromiyaa, had different experiences with these

⁹⁰ Berisso, 'Modernist Dreams & Human Suffering: Villagization among the Gujji Oromo'.

⁹¹ Berisso.

⁹² Berisso.

⁹³ Berisso.

⁹⁴ Berisso.

reforms. Some of these reforms arrived much later in some parts, such as Jam Jam, where villagisation started in 1986.⁹⁵ Accordingly, they were affected differently by these policies on identity and land.

In the years between 1974-1977, reception was largely positive in numerous parts of Oromo territories, although scholars such as Ahmed Omer restrict this joy-phase to 1974-1975 in Northern Shewa.⁹⁶ The Land Reform Proclamation of 1975 gave a sense of ownership to the peasants and eradicated the land-holding system that had been tied to imperialism. Oromo communities became organised in peasant associations that were headed by either Dergue soldiers or students co-operating with the Dergue. In Northern Shewa, for instance, Oromo students, local peasants, and students from the elite class worked together to realise agricultural productivity and build infrastructure and social amenities.⁹⁷

Peasant associations allowed farmers to use the means they found productive and with which they were familiar, to till their land. In these first years, agricultural yields increased, promoting economic development in large sections of Oromiyaa. However, from 1977, harsher land policies were introduced and communities in Northern Shewa began to resist the Dergue. Alongside them, were land-holding classes that felt disenfranchised by the Dergue Land Reform Proclamation of 1975. The sections of the Oromo who felt aggrieved sided with former land-holders against the Dergue, and those that opposed the land-holders took the side of the Dergue. As such, they were turned into instruments that waged the wars of one side against the other.⁹⁸ They, eventually, appreciated that their cause did not matter to either of those groups.

⁹⁵ Berisso.

⁹⁶ Omer, 'Close yet Far: Northern Shewa under the Derg'.

⁹⁷ Omer.

⁹⁸ Omer.

Between 1977 and 1991, the grievances of the Oromoo in Northern Shewa were shaped by the “Red Terror”, the 1984 famine, and forceful conscriptions by the Derg to fight its wars against opposition voices.⁹⁹ Since the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP) had been a constant opposer of the Dergue, Northern Shewa Oromos aligned with them.¹⁰⁰ Their grievances also made them receptive to other opposition forces that became dominant in the final years of Dergue rule, such as the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), who used Northern Shewa to access Addis Ababa, upon defeating the Derg.¹⁰¹

In Jam Jam, where villagisation was introduced in 1986, the Gujji-Oromo consistently resisted the reforms. In Wellegga, where northern Ethiopians were forced emigrate to through resettlement, both the settlers and Wellegga Oromo response to Dergue reforms were mixed. Re-settlement was often forceful, and, when voluntary, was not welcome by host peoples.¹⁰² Depending on the reason for re-settlement and reception attitudes, the level of adaptability varied among settlers. Those who were forced to migrate for agricultural farming had a difficult time adjusting to their new environments, as they were separated from their families. In most of Wellegga, they were viewed as settlers and were unwelcome. Aggravating this, was the fact that the settlers received better and more favourable treatment from the government than the local population.

During the rule of Haile Selassie, some Oromoo joined the student organisations protesting imperial rule. The dominant leadership then was the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which fought for the self-determination and independence of the Oromo people, alongside other liberation movements, such as the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front, the Eritrean Liberation

⁹⁹ Omer.

¹⁰⁰ Omer.

¹⁰¹ Omer.

¹⁰² Pankhurst, ‘Surviving Resettlement in Wellegga: The Qeto Experience’.

Front, the Afar Liberation Front, and, later, the Ogaden National Liberation Front.¹⁰³ The OLF remained a constant inconvenience to the Dergue and was instrumental in overthrowing it. Nevertheless, it is worth reiterating that the Oromo response was not homogenous, as Holcomb and Ibssa imply. The goals they pursued when they revolted against the Dergue ranged from liberation to inclusivity and equality.

¹⁰³ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*.

CHAPTER 4: UNDER THE EPRDF, 1991-2018

7. The Oromo as a Diverse People

The Oromo people are one of the most diverse ethnicities culturally, economically, politically, and socially.¹⁰⁴ Politically, economically, socially, and culturally, they govern themselves through the Gada system.¹⁰⁵ The Gada is a traditional democratic form of governance that consists of five political parties.¹⁰⁶ Each party governs on a rotational basis, with a term limit of eight years per party.¹⁰⁷ The Oromo are also further organised into tribes and clans, and they occupy the modern region of Oromiya that divides them into 22 zones. These are: Arsi, West Arsi, Bale, Borena, Buno Bedele, East Hararge, West Hararage, East Shewa, West Shewa, North Shewa Zone, Southwest Shewa, East Wellega, West Wellega, Gujji, West Gujji, Horo Guduru Wellega, Illubabor, Jimma, Kellam Wellega, Adama Special Zone, Jimma Special Zone, and Oromyia Special Zone.

Some lead a pastoralist life like those in the Upper Awash Valley, e.g., Bale and Karrayyu.¹⁰⁸ They have, over the years, been separated from their ancestral lands to make room for commercial farming, especially of sugarcane by multi-national corporations.¹⁰⁹ When it comes to levels of enlightenment and marginalisation, the Wellega Oromo are the most educated and the Shewan Oromo have maintained close ties to the government of the day in each phase of Ethiopia's political situation since 1974. With the Derg regime introducing resettlement

¹⁰⁴ Berisso, 'Modernist Dreams & Human Suffering: Villagization among the Gujji Oromo'.

¹⁰⁵ 'UNESCO - Gada System, an Indigenous Democratic Socio-Political System of the Oromo', accessed 9 June 2023, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/gada-system-an-indigenous-democratic-socio-political-system-of-the-oromo-01164>.

¹⁰⁶ Authority for the Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage, 'Format for National Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Ethiopia', 25 March 2015, <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/30580.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ Authority for the Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage.

¹⁰⁸ Mekuria Bulcha, 'Conquest and Forced Migration: An Assessment of the Oromo Experience', in *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy, and Self-Determination*, Seyoum Hameso and Hassen M., eds. (Red Sea Press, 2006), 28–56.

¹⁰⁹ Bulcha.

policies and favouring the resettled peoples from the North, the grievances of Wellega Oromo were economic, cultural, social, and political equality. Eastern Oromos, with proximity to Somalia, are Muslims by faith and have historically expressed sentiments of secession for an Independent Oromiya. The Oromo in Karrayyu and Wollo have been the most marginalised and side-lined.¹¹⁰

Wellega consists of the most fertile soil and is where resettlement occurred in Oromo land.¹¹¹ The Gujji-Oromo lead an agro-pastoralist life economically and, politically, they organise in “confederations of three independent but closely-related groups, i.e., Uraga, Mati, and Hoku, with an elected leader”.¹¹² Religiously, they practice a combination or variety of spiritualities, i.e. traditional beliefs, Orthodox Christianity, Protestant Christianity and/or Islam.¹¹³ Therefore, their social class and cultural differences dictated their response to the Dergue, which varied across present-day Oromiya. For instance, the Oromo of Northern Shewa had grievances relating to the Red Terror, the 1984 famine, and their forced conscriptions by the Dergue.¹¹⁴

8. Transition: Oromo Grievances in 1991

A number of factors led to the overthrow and downfall of the Dergue regime. These factors generally revolved around repression, land policies, and high centralisation of the Ethiopian state. In specific terms, grievances differed among ethnicities and groups. For instance, the TPLF fought against high centralisation and the repression of their autonomy and the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) fought to secede.¹¹⁵ The Oromo, on the other hand, had historical grievances that were either not fully addressed or exacerbated by the Dergue. The

¹¹⁰ de Waal, ‘Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia’.

¹¹¹ Bulcha, ‘Conquest and Forced Migration: An Assessment of the Oromo Experience’.

¹¹² Berisso, ‘Modernist Dreams & Human Suffering: Villagization among the Gujji Oromo’.

¹¹³ Mohammed Hassen, ‘Islam as an Ideology of Resistance among the Oromo of Ethiopia’.

¹¹⁴ Omer, ‘Close yet Far: Northern Shewa under the Derg’.

¹¹⁵ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*.

most notable of these were land; political autonomy; and social, cultural, and linguistic self-determination.

All of these grievances were historical and had been inherited from as early as the Menelik II era to the Selassie regime. Initially, the Dergue had introduced land reforms aimed at eliminating the landholding class tied to Ethiopia's imperial history.¹¹⁶ As discussed in the previous chapter, the *Land to the Tiller* slogan resonated with not just a majority of Ethiopians, but the Oromo in particular.¹¹⁷ The Dergue co-opted this slogan to boost its legitimacy as it toppled Emperor Haile Selassie. In its early years, it implemented this policy by giving the peasants more ownership of the land, subject to supervision by their own people of technical expertise and learning.¹¹⁸

However, in the last half of its existence, Mengistu Haile Mariam implemented a communist land policy of villagisation and resettlement. The Oromo were villagised and the northern ethnicities resettled on Oromo ancestral land. Villagisation and resettlement negatively affected the Oromo. They were separated from their ancestral lands; their social and cultural lives tied closely to their land were disrupted; and resettlement entrenched resentment and animosity between most Oromos and the new settlers.¹¹⁹ Consequently, the most crucial grievance in 1991, at the time of overthrowing the Dergue, was land.

Political autonomy was another cause for agitation. Heavy centralisation deprived the Oromo of the room to adhere to their existing structures of governance and organisation. This was a

¹¹⁶ Holcomb and Ibssa.

¹¹⁷ Mohammed Hassen, 'The History of Oromo Nationalism: 1960s-1990s', in *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy, and Self-Determination*, Hameso, S.Y. and Hassen, M., Ed. (Red Sea Press, 2006). In p. 251, Hassen explains that the slogan is attributable to Oromo nationalists of the Macha and Tulama, one of them being Baro Tumsa.

¹¹⁸ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*.

¹¹⁹ Omer, 'Close yet Far: Northern Shewa under the Derg'.

crucial matter that attracted divergent views. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) had adherents that fought for secession or autonomy within Ethiopian borders for the Oromo. Closely tied to this grievance is self-determination. In this paper, self-determination encompasses the political, social, cultural, and linguistic questions and grievances.

The deprivation of self-determination manifested well with the introduction of the slogan *Ethiopia Tikdem*, which advocated for one Ethiopia. This *One Ethiopia* identity was founded upon Amhara history, culture, and practices.¹²⁰ Intrinsicly, it denied and relegated the histories of the diverse peoples of Ethiopia, including the Oromo, who did not form part of the traditional Abyssinian Empire.¹²¹ Amharic became the official and national language, and the different religious practices of the Oromo were undermined; some professed Islam, others were traditionalists, yet others were either Pentecostal or Orthodox Christians. Their social lives were almost erased.

Pastoral communities, agro-pastoralist like the Gujji-Oromo, and others had to conform to government reforms and policies that undermined their ways of life. Therefore, by 1991, Oromo grievance was a culmination of historical injustices around land; marginalisation and the desire for self-determination; and political autonomy, whether that meant secession or democracy and internal autonomy.

¹²⁰ Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?*

¹²¹ Lata.

9. Oromo Movements and Representation

9.1. Oromo People's Democratic Organisation

The Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) was established in 1990 to be part of the coalition, Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).¹²² The Coalition was also made up of the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), formerly the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM); the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM); and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).¹²³ OPDO members consisted of Oromo prisoners of war who fought as part of Dergue conscripts or alongside the TPLF and the EPLF.¹²⁴ It is a matter of controversy whether OPDO was an independent Oromo political organisation or a creation of the TPLF and the EPLF.¹²⁵ Members of the Oromo Liberation Front and other Oromoo assert that OPDO was a creation of the TPLF. Nevertheless, it was one of the representatives of the Oromo at the 1991 transition.

9.2. Oromo Liberation Front

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is a significant political organisation among both the Oromo and in the Ethiopian political space. It was established in late 1973-early 1974 as an Oromo nationalist movement by Oromo nationalists, like Baro Tumsa, to fight for the liberation and self-determination of the Oromo.¹²⁶ Oromo nationalism is driven by the desire to end

¹²² Aden Dejene Tolla and Alvaro Oliver Royo, 'The Transformative Power of the Oromo Protests in Ethiopia', *Journal of African Elections* 21, no. 2 (n.d.).

¹²³ Tolla and Royo.

¹²⁴ Hamdesa Tusso, 'Prologue: The Tears of Generations', in *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy, and Self-Determination* (Red Sea Press, 2006), p.19.

¹²⁵ Some Oromo scholars and OLF leaders argue that OPDO was created by the TPLF for the purpose of undermining OLF – See, Leenco Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?* (Red Sea Press, 1999) and Hamdesa Tusso, 'Prologue: The Tears of Generations', in *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy, and Self-Determination*, Seyoum Hameso and Hassen M., eds. (Red Sea Press, 2006), p. 19.

¹²⁶ Mohammed Hassen, 'The History of Oromo Nationalism: 1960s-1990s', in *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy, and Self-Determination*, Hameso, S.Y. and Hassen, M., Ed. (Red Sea Press, 2006) p. 257.

“political oppression, economic exploitation, and cultural dehumanisation” of the Oromo.¹²⁷ As part of its structure, it had a military wing called the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), making the original OLF a para-military political party,¹²⁸ like most ethnic-based political parties in Ethiopia. The need for a para-military wing was based on the belief then in the use of force to liberate the Oromo. OLF recruited de-mobilised Oromo soldiers upon the downfall of the Dergue regime, who then formed part of OLA.¹²⁹

Its leadership in 1991 consisted of Leenco Lata, a co-founder of the Front and a prominent figure in the political process that followed.¹³⁰ Some scholars argue that during the period leading up to 1991—the period of fighting the Dergue—the goal of OLF was the decolonisation of the Oromo.¹³¹ Yet, how this would be achieved was the subject of opposing views within the OLF which was pluralistic. The Front consisted of members with divergent goals: some pursued secession, a dismantling of the state,¹³² while others pursued autonomy and democratisation.¹³³ Notwithstanding, they both expressed the desire for the self-determination of the Oromo, in one way or another. Land and identity were at the heart of this struggle.¹³⁴ Altogether, the power of the OLF comes from its idea of Oromo nationalism and self-determination, which resonates with most Oromos.¹³⁵

Between 1991 and 1992, the EPRDF and the OLF had intense episodes of disagreements, which often led to clashes.¹³⁶ These were serious enough to warrant the involvement of the

¹²⁷ Hassen p. 273.

¹²⁸ Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?*

¹²⁹ Terence Lyons, *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Incorporated, 2019), p. 55.

¹³⁰ Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?*

¹³¹ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*. p.344.

¹³² Holcomb and Ibssa.

¹³³ Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?* p. xi-xxiv.

¹³⁴ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*. p. 345.

¹³⁵ Hassen, ‘The History of Oromo Nationalism: 1960s-1990s’ p. 263.

¹³⁶ Lyons, *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics*, p.56.

United States and Eritrea as mediators, in April 1992, between the two political movements.¹³⁷ After the 1992 elections, relations between the EPRDF and OLF broke down almost irretrievably, and their differences quickly became irreconcilable.¹³⁸ Subsequently, intimidation, the targeting, the disappearing, and the assassination of OLF officials, their affiliates, and supporters, forced many in the OLF leadership to self-exile. Between 1992 and 2018, OLF conducted its operations from the diaspora, including from Eritrea, parts of Europe, the Middle-East, and the United States.

9.3. Minor Groups

In 1991, there were other Oromo political movements that fought for different Oromo causes, aside from OPDO and the OLF-OLA. Key among these movements were: the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO); the Oromo Abbo Liberation Front (OALF); and the United Oromo People's Liberation Front (UOPLF). Generally, little is known about these movements, most of which later absorbed themselves into the OLF. IFLO was a para-military political party established in 1985, after its leader, Sheikh Abdulkarim Ibrahim Hamid fell out with the OLF. It used Islam as the ideology guiding its fight for the liberation of Oromiyaa. During the Transitional Period of 1991-1995, it joined the Transitional Government of Ethiopia where it had three out of the 27 seats preserved for the Oromo.

10. Transitional Period

When the EPRDF coalition of forces marched into Addis Ababa after militarily defeating the Dergue, the subject of transition inevitably arose. To ensure a seamless transfer of power, the United States convened a meeting between the EPRDF and the Dergue in what became known

¹³⁷ Lyons.

¹³⁸ Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?*

as the London Peace Conference.¹³⁹ Also invited to this process, for the first time, were the Oromoo, including Oromo movements like OLF.¹⁴⁰ Although the meeting lasted a few days, power had been transferred to the EPRDF by late May 1991.¹⁴¹ In order to usher in a new dawn for Ethiopia's political future, the EPRDF coalition, led by the TPLF, extended a hand to the Oromo Liberation Front, inviting its leaders to join it in mapping out the future of Ethiopia's governance system.

Therefore, in July 1991, EPRDF, OLF, and other movements representing other ethnicities, such as the Somali and Sidama, congregated in Addis Ababa to officially launch the Transitional Period (1991-August 1995). In Addis Ababa, these parties negotiated, successfully, the stages of Ethiopia's transition to democracy. It involved the drafting of a transitional charter, the drafting of a new Constitution, and the duration of the transition. It also involved setting up a transitional government. At this meeting, the Oromo were represented by three movements: the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (OFLO); the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO); and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).

Concerning the first item on drafting a transitional charter, the above movements and organisations formulated a document to guide the Transition Period. Leenco Lata, the then deputy-head of OLF was among the drafters of the Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia (Transitional Charter/the Charter).¹⁴² Its provisions, very explicitly, declared that Ethiopia was bound by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which guarantees and safeguards rights

¹³⁹ Hamdesa Tuso, 'Prologue: The Tears of Generations', in *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy, and Self-Determination*, Seyoum Hameso and Hassen M., eds. (Red Sea Press, 2006), p. 16-17.

¹⁴⁰ Tuso.

¹⁴¹ Blaine Harden, 'In London, U.S. Urged Rebels to Enter Capital, Restore Calm', *Washington Post*, 28 May 1991, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/05/28/in-london-us-urged-rebels-to-enter-capital-restore-calm/d0dcf2c9-75ec-4d55-8256-fee71fcc618f/>.

¹⁴² Peaceful and Democratic Transitional Conference of Ethiopia, 'Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia', Pub. L. No. No. 1/1991, *adopted on 22 July 1991*, (1991).

such as the freedom of speech, assembly, and association. The Charter, most importantly, affirmed and guaranteed the right to self-determination to “each nation, nationality and people”.¹⁴³ This right had three elements. First, it stated that self-determination meant the pursuit of cultural life, identity, and the development of a nation’s language.

Second, it affirmed that self-determination had a political angle. It provided for the right of the nations, nationalities, and people to “administer their own affairs” and to be fairly represented.¹⁴⁴ The third and final element was also political but relating to independence. A guarantee of independence was conditional on the failure to meet and satisfy the first two elements. In essence, were a people denied leading their cultural life, identity, and the development of its language, as well as the right to administer its own affairs and to fair representation, then such a people had a right to independence, as a way of exercising their right to self-determination. A few observations should be noted about the provisions of the Charter.

First, it generally catered for Oromo grievances in Article II. The biggest grievances the Oromo battled with since the 1960s were the recognition of their culture, identity, and language; the end to political oppression through self-determination; and the land question. All these were explicitly or implicitly evident in Article II. The land question, though not adequately addressed in this Article and any other provision of the Charter, was alluded to in Article II(b), which gave each nation, nationality, and people the right to administer its own affairs within “its own defined territory”. It would have been unrealistic to expect that an issue as complicated as land to be extensively addressed in a transitional charter or during a transitional period. Its recognition, implicitly, would have sufficed at this stage.

¹⁴³ Peaceful and Democratic Transitional Conference of Ethiopia, Art. 2.

¹⁴⁴ Peaceful and Democratic Transitional Conference of Ethiopia.

Secondly, the Charter crucially settled the Oromo nationalist debate on the question of decolonisation. As stipulated above, Oromo nationalism was driven by the need to end oppression and marginalisation. As stipulated also in the preceding sections, Oromo nationalists viewed Ethiopia and Oromiyaa as a case of (settler) colonialism. Therefore, the goal was to decolonise from Ethiopia or the Abyssinian legacy that had created modern Ethiopia through conquest and subjugation. To this end, it was unclear whether Oromo nationalists wanted secession or fair representation and recognition. Oromo sentiments on this issue have ranged from secession to democratisation, and even Ethiopian nationalism.

The whole of Article II, but especially parts b) and c) shed light on what decolonisation or the course of Oromo future should take. Democratisation would be pursued in accordance with the right to administer own affairs and the principle of fair representation at the central-government level. Failing that, then the Oromoo would have a right to pursue independence, which translates to secession.¹⁴⁵ This, it seems, was an attempt to compromise among competing views from diverse sections of the Oromo. Lata and other Oromo scholars like Mohammed Hassen argue in favour of decolonisation by democratisation, or decolonisation by self-determination through the democratisation of political governance in Ethiopia. It seems that, normatively, Oromo grievances had been taken into account by the Transitional Charter.

The Transitional Charter created a transitional government termed the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE/Transitional Government). This Government represented the true face of Ethiopia by composition. It had two organs: the Council of Ministers and the Council of Representatives (CoR) that would act as parliament. This CoR elected the Transitional Period President, Meles Zenawi, who in turn appointed the Prime Minister.¹⁴⁶ The Prime Minister

¹⁴⁵ Peaceful and Democratic Transitional Conference of Ethiopia, Art. 2(c).

¹⁴⁶ Peaceful and Democratic Transitional Conference of Ethiopia, Art. 9(b).

nominated members of the Council of Ministers to be approved by CoR.¹⁴⁷ The CoR also designated a constitutional committee known as the Constitutional Commission, to begin the process of drafting a new Constitution for Ethiopia.¹⁴⁸

This was an important improvement for the Oromo and also the first time they were treated as equals with traditional Abyssinian ethnicities, i.e., Amhara and Tigray.¹⁴⁹ Thus, the Oromo were given a total of 27 seats in the Transitional Government: 12 seats for OLF, 10 for OPDO, and 3 for IFLO. Arguably, the Oromo had adequate or fair representation in the Transitional Government. However, as time progressed, this representation was diminished.¹⁵⁰

On the issue of timelines and the duration of the transition, it was agreed that the Transitional Period would last for at least two years or a maximum of two and a half years.¹⁵¹ In practice, the Transition Period lasted for around four years, ending officially in May 1995.¹⁵² During the period between July 1991 and May 1995, several developments were witnessed that shook the course of events for the Oromo, particularly the OLF. In June 1992, district and regional elections were held.¹⁵³ These elections and the few weeks preceding it saw a series of events that reversed some of the gains already made. First, the EPRDF, equated with the TPLF among a majority of the Oromoo, intimidated Oromo political parties that attempted to contest for the elections.

Their camps were shut, and this intimidation led to many dropping out of the elections.¹⁵⁴ Secondly, blatant abuse of human rights was witnessed. The EPRDF, it was alleged, forcefully

¹⁴⁷ Peaceful and Democratic Transitional Conference of Ethiopia, Art. 9.

¹⁴⁸ Peaceful and Democratic Transitional Conference of Ethiopia, Art. 10.

¹⁴⁹ Tuso, 'Prologue: The Tears of Generations'.

¹⁵⁰ Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?*

¹⁵¹ Peaceful and Democratic Transitional Conference of Ethiopia, Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia, Art. 12.

¹⁵² Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?*

¹⁵³ Lata.

¹⁵⁴ Lata.

disappeared some Oromo and imprisoned others without trial, on the guise of quelling destabilising forces in Oromiyaa.¹⁵⁵ Thirdly, people in the region were forced to turn out to vote.¹⁵⁶ Fourthly, the elections were marked with irregularities in favour of EPRDF-aligning Oromoo. These events resulted in the OLF officially pulling out of the Transitional Government, thereby excluding it from participating in the drafting process of the Constitution.¹⁵⁷ Prior to all this, the OLF had tried to galvanise the Council of Representatives to postpone the elections but were unsuccessful.¹⁵⁸

11. Ethnic Federalism: Normative Attempts at Addressing Grievances

Beyond the infamous elections of 1992, there were other elections in 1994 and 1995. The May 1995 elections marked the end of the Transitional Period and the Transitional Government of Ethiopia. A new Constitution had been adopted on 8 December 1994 and, subsequently, passed into law on 21 August 1995.¹⁵⁹

11.1. Constitution of 1995

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (the Constitution) came into force in August 1995. Similar to the Transitional Charter, it uses the terminology “Nations, Nationalities and People” of Ethiopia to describe the ethnicities within the State.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, in its Preamble, it “strongly” commits itself to the “full and free exercise of” the right to self-determination of the nations, nationalities, and people (NNP) and pledges to abide by the rule

¹⁵⁵ Hassen, ‘The History of Oromo Nationalism: 1960s-1990s’.

¹⁵⁶ Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?*

¹⁵⁷ Lata.

¹⁵⁸ Lyons, *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics* p. 62.

¹⁵⁹ F. Nahum, *Constitution for a Nation of Nations: The Ethiopian Prospect*, Constitution for a Nation of Nations: The Ethiopian Prospect (Red Sea Press, 1997).

¹⁶⁰ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, ‘Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia’, Proclamation No. 1/1995, *promulgated on 21 Aug. 1995*, (1995).

of law and democracy.¹⁶¹ The Transitional Charter had expressed, in general terms, the same views and principles in its Articles I and II(b).¹⁶²

Further, the Constitution echoes the aforementioned provisions of the Transitional Charter where it underscores the right to self-determination in light of cultural life and commits to abide by fundamental rights and freedoms on the basis of equality free from discrimination; it makes special mention of cultural discrimination.

The author makes, below, an analysis of the provisions of the Constitution within the context of what have, so far, been Oromo grievances.

1.1.1. Political Self-Determination

The first of this analysis is self-determination in the political context. Article 1 declares Ethiopia a federal and democratic state, changing the name of the country from Dergue's *People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* to *The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*.¹⁶³ This provision not only changes the name but defines the kind of political governance structure that Ethiopia was to pursue from 1995: a state that is organised through federalism and is democratic in accordance with the rule of law and fundamental rights and freedoms, as declared in the Preamble.¹⁶⁴

Article 3 provides for the specifications of the Ethiopian flag. However, more importantly, it gives each NN&P the right to develop its flags and emblems.¹⁶⁵ This is another indicator of political self-determination. Article 5 has both a political and identity/cultural self-determination aspect to it. This is the provision that provides, "All Ethiopian languages shall

¹⁶¹ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Preamble.

¹⁶² Peaceful and Democratic Transitional Conference of Ethiopia, Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia.

¹⁶³ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

¹⁶⁴ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Art. 10.

¹⁶⁵ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Art. 3(3).

enjoy equal state recognition.”¹⁶⁶ From a political standpoint, this means that NNPs can conduct their political affairs in their own languages, with “the working language of the Federal Government” being Amharic, i.e., for official purposes at the central-government level.¹⁶⁷

Democracy is upheld in Chapter Two of the Constitution. It begins by vesting sovereignty on the people, adding that such sovereignty shall be exercised through the election of representatives “...through direct, democratic participation”.¹⁶⁸ Declaring that the Constitution is supreme precludes authoritarianism, autocracy, and imperialism, all legacies of the Ethiopian State before then.¹⁶⁹ A responsibility on the part of political leaders to be accountable and transparent serves to enrich democracy.¹⁷⁰

As a federation, Ethiopia, henceforth, would be organised in states (regions).¹⁷¹ Delimitation of those regions would occur along ethnic lines, as stipulated in Article 46(2). Ethnic lines are determined by “settlement patterns, language, identity and consent of the people concerned”.¹⁷² One of the initial nine States created by the Constitution was the State of Oromia (Oromiyaa).¹⁷³

Moreover, Article 49 designates the capital city of Ethiopia as Addis Ababa.¹⁷⁴ Although it gives it special status, it acknowledges that it is located in the State of Oromiyaa. It also anticipates potential conflicts that could arise between Oromiyaa and Addis Ababa in terms of “the provision of social services or the utilization of natural resources and other similar matters,

¹⁶⁶ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

¹⁶⁷ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Art. 5(2).

¹⁶⁸ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Art. 8.

¹⁶⁹ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Art. 9.

¹⁷⁰ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

¹⁷¹ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Art. 46(1).

¹⁷² Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

¹⁷³ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Art. 47(1)4).

¹⁷⁴ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Art. 49.

as well as joint administrative masters”.¹⁷⁵ As stipulated below concerning Article 40(6), practice will dictate the progress or lack thereof in addressing Oromo grievances on land.

All in all, Fasil Nahum asserts that residual power remains with the states/regions, making them, *de jure*, more powerful than the Federal Government.¹⁷⁶

1.1.2. Identity and Other Aspects of Cultural Self-Determination

As already mentioned, Article 5 on Ethiopian languages also has an element of self-determination within the context of identity and cultural life.¹⁷⁷ Designating equal status to all languages of Ethiopia answers the grievance relating to the right of Oromos to speak, learn and conduct their activities in *Afaan Oromoo* (the Oromo language), something that had been suppressed for nearly a century.

Further, Article 11 clearly demarcates the boundary between state and religion and settles that Ethiopia shall have no state religion. This is a significant departure from the long-standing practice when Orthodox Christianity was the official state religion, and state and religion were almost, if not entirely, intertwined.¹⁷⁸ That provision, combined with guaranteed fundamental rights and freedoms, e.g., freedom of conscience, essentially means that Orthodox Christianity is no longer to be imposed on the population.

It also means that Oromoo now have the backing of the Constitution to practice their various religions, such as Orthodox or Protestant Christianity, Islam, and traditional Oromo religious beliefs. The Oromo form the largest group of Muslims in Ethiopia and has populations that practice traditional Oromo religion known as *Waaqeffanna*.¹⁷⁹ Article 27 of the Constitution

¹⁷⁵ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Art. 49(5).

¹⁷⁶ Nahum, *Constitution for a Nation of Nations: The Ethiopian Prospect*.

¹⁷⁷ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Art. 12.

¹⁷⁸ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

¹⁷⁹ Mohammed Hassen, ‘Islam as an Ideology of Resistance among the Oromo of Ethiopia’.

firmly supports this assertion, when it affirms the right to thought, conscience, and religion for every Ethiopian.¹⁸⁰

1.1.3. Land

The Constitution, in Chapter Two, classifies fundamental rights and freedoms as either Human Rights or Democratic Rights. One of these democratic rights is the freedom of movement, which grants the right to liberty of movement for every Ethiopian, espousing further that this right includes the “freedom to choose his residence”. Sensitivities around land have plagued Ethiopia since the central, western, and southern peoples were conquered by Emperor Menelik II, whose predecessors upheld the precedent he set. During the Dergue period, the land policies of resettlement, villagisation, and collectivisation were pursued, all of which related to or involved the land question.

The right to “choose his residence” can be ambiguous or create a loophole allowing for the migration of different NNPs to other regions of Ethiopia; the southern parts are known to be more fertile and have a friendlier climate. The demarcation of regions along ethnic lines also means that homogeneity is the general rule for regions. This provision potentially presents a situation where Ethiopian nationalists can legally further their cause by moving to occupy parts like Oromiyaa to alter ethnic demographics. The converse is also true: it can lead ethno-nationalists to pursue a policy of ensuring such homogeneity.

Article 40 provides for the right to property, which encompasses land.¹⁸¹ It stipulates that land and natural resources are “vested in the State and in the peoples of Ethiopia”.¹⁸² Being common property, land cannot be sold. It is unclear what this means, and further legislation is supposed

¹⁸⁰ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

¹⁸¹ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

¹⁸² Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Art 40(3).

to clarify this position. Notably, Article 40(6) goes ahead to protect pastoralists from displacement from their lands.¹⁸³ This provision is particularly important for and relevant to pastoralists and agro-pastoralists like the Gujji-Oromo, who have previously been evicted and displaced from their lands on the premise that those lands were or are *terra nullius*.

A potentially controversial provision of this Constitution on the issue of land is Article 40(6).¹⁸⁴ It stipulates,

Without prejudice to the right of Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples to the ownership of land, government shall ensure the right of private investors to the use of land on the basis of payment arrangements established by law. Particulars shall be determined by law.¹⁸⁵

Compulsory acquisition of land, especially Oromo land, on behalf of private investors before the promulgation of this Constitution, had been a source of disenfranchisement. From Emperor Selassie to the Dergue, parts of Oromo land had been leased to multi-national corporations (MNCs) from Canada and the Netherlands for large-scale farming of crops like sugarcane.¹⁸⁶ Their presence encroached on Oromo land, resulting in two consequences. First, it reduced Oromo land considerably. Second, it displaced people from a resource tied to their political, economic, social, and cultural lives, without any regard for those factors, especially the cultural aspect relating to religious sites and practices and ancestral ties.

¹⁸³ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

¹⁸⁴ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

¹⁸⁵ Nahum, *Constitution for a Nation of Nations: The Ethiopian Prospect, At. 40(6)*.

¹⁸⁶ Bulcha, 'Conquest and Forced Migration: An Assessment of the Oromo Experience'.

Therefore, while such a provision might be necessary and even inevitable, it is a source of contention, protest, and suspicion. In the discussions that follow on the practical application of the Constitution and the grievances that have subsisted, this provision will be revisited.

Finally, and perhaps the most consequential and conclusive provision of the Constitution on the subject of self-determination is Article 39.¹⁸⁷ It provides,

1. Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession.
2. Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history.
3. Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in state and Federal governments.¹⁸⁸

It summarises the discussion above and provides the elements of self-determination for which most Oromo scholars advocate. It is clear that the Constitution covered Oromo grievances, generally. Normatively, therefore, the Constitution has, to a great extent, addressed Oromo demands and their ideas of self-determination.

¹⁸⁷ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

¹⁸⁸ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

11.2. Reception

The Oromo Liberation Front, which co-created the Transitional Charter, did not participate in the constitution-making process. By 1992, relations between OLF and TPLF had broken down.¹⁸⁹ As a result, as far as process is concerned, its members and affiliates did not feel that they owned the document that is the Constitution. However, it appears that Leenco Lata, while surveying the provisions of the Constitution, agreed with a lot of its provisions self-determination. This includes, specifically, identity and cultural specifications; ethnic-federalism; and democratisation. An explanation for this may lie in the fact that, in these respects, the Constitution had only elaborated the basic principles or provisions of the Transitional Charter, a document of which the OLF had full ownership.

Lata is not the only prominent Oromo figure whose views reflect this position. Other Oromo scholars, like Mohammed Hassen, also espouse similar views.¹⁹⁰ While Hassen still holds that decolonisation must occur through self-determination, his proposition of self-determination is democratisation, which is provided in the 1995 Constitution.¹⁹¹ This is evident when he breaks down the meaning of decolonisation and articulates the divergent views of it among the Oromo. He concedes that there are two distinctive positions. There are those for whom decolonisation means self-determination by secession and those for whom it means democratisation within the existing borders of Ethiopia.¹⁹² He holds the latter view to be the better option.¹⁹³

Oromo adherents of OPDO embraced the Text and its introductions, as OPDO was actively involved in the Transitional Government and in the constitution-making process, by virtue of

¹⁸⁹ Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?*

¹⁹⁰ Hassen, 'The History of Oromo Nationalism: 1960s-1990s' p. 274-275.

¹⁹¹ Hassen.

¹⁹² Hassen.

¹⁹³ Hassen.

being a part of the EPRDF coalition. On the other hand, it is unclear whether Ethiopian nationalist who are Oromo embraced the Document that challenged the unity of Ethiopia.

12. Practical Implementation of Ethnic-Federalism

12.1. Democratisation, Human Rights, & Political Federalism

Implementation of reforms to address grievances that existed before, arose from, or were exacerbated by the Dergue, began in 1992, after the Transitional Charter was adopted. In June 1992, Ethiopians held their first elections under the new regime headed by the EPRDF.¹⁹⁴ There was strong engagement from the OLF, as well as active participation from various political parties eager to exercise their democratic rights.¹⁹⁵ In May 1992, Lata argues that the EPRDF conducted a “snap election” to test its general popularity.¹⁹⁶ The outcome revealed that it lacked support in some central regions, which Lata argues motivated the EPRDF to strategise on how to approach the June elections in a manner to ensure its victory.¹⁹⁷

Subsequently, in June 1992, district and regional elections were conducted. The hope that the Transitional Charter brought to Ethiopians, saw over 60 organisations register to contest for the elections.¹⁹⁸ The OLF was among these organisations, alongside OPDO. Distressingly, these elections were marred with voter intimidation and coercion, intimidation of opposing political parties (non-EPRDF/non-EPRDF-allied parties), and gross human rights violations, such as violence against other contesting parties and their supporters, imprisonment without trial, and enforced disappearance.

¹⁹⁴ Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?*

¹⁹⁵ Lata.

¹⁹⁶ Leenco. Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?* (Red Sea Press, 1999) p. 27.

¹⁹⁷ Lata p. 26-27.

¹⁹⁸ Lata, p. 26.

The OLF was the most affected by these events that commenced before the elections and proceeded during and in the aftermath of those same elections. As a result of all this, EPRDF and its allies emerged as the greatest winners of the contest. Parties, such as the OLF, found the environment too hostile to compete.¹⁹⁹ Due to the violence and intimidation it and its supporters faced, it boycotted the June 1992 elections.²⁰⁰ As such, OPDO became the sole political representative of the Oromo, as early as the first election under the EPRDF-led regime.

In total, five elections took place between May 1991 and May 1995. The other three were conducted the same way, using the same tactics of intimidation, resulting in similar outcomes where the EPRDF won the most seats and most opposing political parties boycotted the elections.²⁰¹ The May 1995 federal elections were the first to be conducted under the new Constitution of 1995 enacted in 1994. The House of Representatives thereafter adopted the document as Ethiopia's Constitution.²⁰²

By 2000, Ethiopia had had experience with elections. The elections of 2000 were no different from the previous ones. The EPRDF won with a landslide, and so did its affiliated or allied political parties. At this stage, also, ethnic-federalism had crystallised, at least in terms of political organisation, within this context. Oromiyaa had become a full-fledged region with an executive headed by a President and a parliament known as *Caffe Oromiyaa*. Its capital city had been designated as Addis Ababa, a city that was now administratively shared between the Region of Oromiyaa and the Federal Government.

¹⁹⁹ Lyons, *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics*.

²⁰⁰ Lata, p. 25-32.

²⁰¹ Lyons, *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics*.

²⁰² Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization Or Disintegration?*

The 2005 elections marked a turning point in Ethiopia's democratic experience.²⁰³ It provided an opportunity for excluded political parties and independents to contest in federal elections. For the first time, they presented an opportunity for opposition leaders to contest with minimal restrictions on their human and democratic rights.²⁰⁴ A year before the elections, opposition parties began campaigning in an environment that was friendly to them for the first time. They were hopeful and renewed their will to contest against EPRDF. The prominent opposition parties organised in coalitions. They were: first, the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) established in 2003 and made up of the Oromo National Congress (ONC), a section of the All-Ethiopia Unity Party, and the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia (CAFPDE).²⁰⁵ Merera Gudina led ONC and brought with him support especially from eastern Wellega and Arsi.²⁰⁶

The second consequential opposition coalition was the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD). Its constituents were parts of the All-Ethiopia Unity Party, the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), and the Ethiopian Democratic League.²⁰⁷ The other significant party that represented the Oromo was the Oromo Federal Democratic Movement (OFDM). It was headed by Bulcha Demeksa who had support from western Wellega.²⁰⁸ When the election results began to come in, it showed that OPDO support in Oromiyaa had been challenged substantially, despite evidence of electoral malpractices. OPDO still took a majority of the seats, leading with

²⁰³ Alex de Waal, 'The Theory and Practice of Meles Zenawi-A Reply to René Lefort', *African Affairs (London)* 112, no. 448 (2013): 471–75, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adt022>.

²⁰⁴ Alex De Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power* (Cambridge, UK; Polity, 2015), Chapter 10, p. 150-167.

²⁰⁵ T. Lyons, *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Incorporated, 2019), p. 130-131.

²⁰⁶ Lyons.

²⁰⁷ Lyons.

²⁰⁸ Lyons.

109 out of the 177 seats designated for Oromiyaa.²⁰⁹ However, UEDF garnered 41 seats, CUD 16, and other parties a total of 11.²¹⁰

The OLF did not participate in the elections, as it had been outlawed and most of its members forced into exile. Still, to demonstrate its influence, the other Oromo political parties conceded that, according to Terence Lyons, “their supporters would have voted for the outlawed OLF, given the opportunity”.²¹¹ Despite the developments and progress registered from the outcome of the 2005 elections, allegations of EPRDF rigging and intimidating voters surfaced. Consequently, opposition parties organised strikes while the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) postponed the announcing of results. Political parties established *ad hoc* committees to deal with the tensions. However, these bodies were still dominated by EPRDF, ultimately resulting in the withdrawal of opposition parties from the *ad hoc* committees and subsequently their rejecting the official results.²¹²

Instantly, opposition parties were faced with a dilemma after expressing their dissatisfaction with the election results. They were forced to decide between assuming their seats or boycotting the whole process altogether. Most opposition leaders assumed their positions while many of those in CUD sustained their boycott with support from the diaspora.²¹³ The 2010 and 2015 elections followed the course of events of previous elections. Opposition parties boycotted them and EPRDF won seats by a landslide, recording wins of 99.6% in 2010 and 100% in 2015.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ Lyons, p. 133.

²¹⁰ Lyons.

²¹¹ Lyons, p. 134.

²¹² Lyons.

²¹³ Lyons, p. 138.

²¹⁴ Lyons, p. 145.

Democratisation, therefore, has been the biggest failure of all the reforms the EPRDF promised to actualise.

12.2. Self-determination

Self-determination for the Oromoo has, perhaps, been the most practically implemented grievance of all Oromo grievances. Politically, a regional state was formed for the Oromoo, known officially as the Regional State of Oromiyaa.²¹⁵ Its capital city is Finfinnee, referred to as Addis Ababa by the rest of Ethiopia, and historically a territory predominantly inhabited by the Oromoo.²¹⁶ Oromiyaa is administered by a Regional Government that is made up of the three arms of government: the *Caffe Oromiyaa* (Council of the Region/Parliament), the Executive Committee, and the Judiciary.²¹⁷

Cultural freedom, linguistic expression, the guarantee of human rights and democracy, as well as the restoration of land and resources, had been at the heart of Oromo struggle.²¹⁸ The Constitution of Oromiyaa rectifies all these injustices by declaring *Afaan Oromoo* (Oromo language) the official language of Oromiyaa and providing that the Region shall have a flag and a national anthem.²¹⁹ Article 11 is another provision that recognises Oromo diversity and attempts to reconcile or balance the dominance of Orthodox Christianity, Islam, or Protestantism. It stipulates that Oromiyaa shall have no state religion and there shall be a separation of the state from religion.²²⁰

²¹⁵ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 'Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia', Proclamation No. 1/1995 (1995), Art. 47(1)(4).

²¹⁶ Magalata Oromiyaa, 'Heera Mootummaa Naannoo Oromiyaa (Constitution of the Regional State of Oromia)', Pub. L. No. LabsiiLak.1/1987 (Proclamation No. 1/1995) (1995), Art. 6.

²¹⁷ Magalata Oromiyaa, Art. 46.

²¹⁸ Magalata Oromiyaa, Preamble.

²¹⁹ Magalata Oromiyaa, Arts. 3 and 4.

²²⁰ Magalata Oromiyaa.

This Article sufficiently protects Oromo traditional religious beliefs and allows their adherents to practice them freely. Article 14 largely echoes and gives effect to the provisions of Article 39 of the Constitution of the Federal State.²²¹ It preserves self-government and particularly emphasises the right to secession which it holds is unconditional.²²² While Article 2(1) recognises that there are non-Oromo who have chosen to live in Oromiyaa, its Article 14(6) presents a potential challenge on the question of secession.²²³ It states:

For the purpose of this Constitution, the expression, "the people of the Oromoo Nation", shall be construed as meaning those people who speak the Oromo language, who believe in their common Oromo identity, who share a large measure of a common culture as Oromos and who predominantly inhabit in a contiguous territory of the Regional State.

Three things emerge from this provision. First, it concedes that there are Oromoo living in contiguous areas or other parts of Ethiopia. Second, it engulfs other non-Oromoo whose cultures are largely compatible with Oromo culture as being potentially Oromo by association or identity. Thirdly, it creates uncertainty regarding the demarcation of borders; essentially, it poses the question, "What should be regarded as Oromiyaa, in the event the Oromoo decide to secede from Ethiopia to form an independent Oromo state?" The latter raises important questions relating to land and the protection of political and socio-cultural rights of the diverse Oromoo.

²²¹ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

²²² Magalata Oromiyaa, Heera Mootummaa Naannoo Oromiyaa (Constitution of the Regional State of Oromia).

²²³ Magalata Oromiyaa.

CHAPTER 5: FROM PROTESTS TO PROSPERITY, 2016-2018

13. Addis Ababa or Finfinnee?

The question, status, and place of Addis Ababa or Finfinnee, as the Oromo refer to it, has always been sensitive and controversial both for the Oromo and the wider Ethiopia. The territory was conquered by Emperor Menelik II during his southward expansion in the late 19th Century.²²⁴ Emperor Menelik moved his capital from Gondar in northern Ethiopia or proper Abyssinia to Finfinnee, a territory occupied by the Oromo. Northern tribes, especially the aristocrats and military officials also followed Menelik and set up Finfinnee to become a city, a proper capital.²²⁵ Surrounding Oromo lands became owned by Amhara elites who were awarded these lands as a form of patronage.²²⁶ They became landlords to the Oromoo.

This remained the case with Emperor Haile Selassie and all the succeeding regimes, which maintained Finfinnee, known formally as Addis Ababa, as Ethiopia's capital. When ethnic-federalism was introduced, the hope of self-determination allowed the Oromoo to contest the status of Addis Ababa within the Oromiyaa region which engulfs it. Notwithstanding its designation as a special zone and the seat of the Federal Government,²²⁷ the Oromo pushed for the recognition of Addis Ababa/Finfinnee, as a symbol of Oromo self-determination and a land rightfully belonging to the Oromo.²²⁸

²²⁴ Afropop Worldwide and Kumera Zekarias, 'Oromo Music: Historical Memory and Competing Visions in Ethiopia', Spotify, Spotify, accessed 24 July 2023, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/614g1EuMFokTj8euiO8kLw>.

²²⁵ Holcomb and Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*.

²²⁶ Holcomb and Ibssa.

²²⁷ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Art. 49(1).

²²⁸ Getahun Benti, 'A Blind without a Cane, a Nation without a City: The Oromo Struggle for Addis Ababa', in *Contested Terrain: Essays on Oromo Studies, Ethiopianist Discourses, and Politically Engaged Scholarship*, ed. Gebissa, E. (Red Sea Press, 2009), 147–66.

The Constitution of 1995, subsequently, reflected and confronted this sensitivity in Article 49.²²⁹ Article 49(5) acknowledges the special interest of Oromiyaa in the City and makes arrangements for “joint administrative matters arising from the location of Addis Ababa” in Oromiyaa.²³⁰ This provision was put to the test in 2000, when the Federal Government unilaterally relocated the capital of Oromiyaa to Adama. This decision was later reversed after the 2005 elections.²³¹

13.1. Legal Aspect

The provisions of Article 49 are immensely ambiguous. The Article states (some words emphasised by the author in italics and/or bold):

Article 49. Capital City

1. Addis Ababa shall be the capital city of the Federal State.
2. The residents of Addis Ababa shall have a *full measure of self-government*. Particulars shall be determined by law.
3. The *Administration of Addis Ababa shall be responsible to the Federal Government*.
4. Residents of Addis Ababa shall in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution, be represented in the House of Peoples' Representatives.
5. The *special interest* of the State of Oromia in Addis Ababa, regarding the provision of social services or the utilization of natural resources and *other similar matters*, as well as **joint administrative matters arising from the location of Addis Ababa within the State of Oromia**, shall be respected. *Particulars shall be determined by law.*²³²

There are indisputable legal facts about Addis Ababa, such as that it is not a separate state under Article 47, but a federal city. Article 49(5) makes it possible to argue that while Addis Ababa may be a federal city and the federal capital, it nonetheless can be considered part of Oromiyaa, but not necessarily as a city. The Constitution of Oromiyaa designates Finfinnee as the capital

²²⁹ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

²³⁰ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

²³¹ Benti, ‘A Blind without a Cane, a Nation without a City: The Oromo Struggle for Addis Ababa’.

²³² Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

of Oromiyaa.²³³ It does not go further to confirm that Finfinne is synonymous with Addis Ababa, even though there is consensus among the Oromo that it is. This is possibly intentional for two reasons.

First, it serves to preserve the historical and Oromo name of the territory upon which Addis Ababa was founded when it was conquered by an Amhara-dominated monarchy. Second, it may be a way of bypassing what could amount to an express contravention of the FDRE Constitution, which reigns supreme and proclaims null and void any law that is in opposition to its provisions, such as Article 49 juxtaposed with Article 6 of Oromiyaa's Constitution.²³⁴ Whether this was the intention of the drafters of Oromiyaa's Constitution, remains to be ascertained. It is uncertain what the borders of Finfinnee are, historically; whether it covers the whole of, part of, or stretches beyond Addis Ababa. It is also uncertain that it is considered a city and not an ordinary territory in Oromiyaa by the Oromo.

The issue that arises, therefore, is whether the Oromo in Addis Ababa consider themselves to be under the state of Oromiyaa or under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, in line with Article 49(3). Statistics show that, in terms of the ethnic composition of the City's population, the Amhara make up 48% followed by the Oromo who constitute only 19% of the overall population.²³⁵ Yet, Oromo claim to Addis Ababa remains strong, the reason for this being the subject of the succeeding section. Regardless, the obligation to respect the "special interest" of Oromiyaa in Addis Ababa, one of those interests pertaining to "joint administrative

²³³ Magalata Oromiyaa, Heera Mootummaa Naannoo Oromiyaa (Constitution of the Regional State of Oromia), Art. 6.

²³⁴ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Art. 9.

²³⁵ UN Refugee Agency, 'Main Area of Return Addis Ababa' (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)), accessed 26 July 2023, https://help.unhcr.org/kenya/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2021/06/Addis-Ababa-City_Information-Brochure.pdf.

matters”, justifies that Addis Ababa is a shared capital: the federal capital and the Oromiyaa capital, whether or not that relegates it to a ceremonial capital for Oromiyaa.

It is unclear whether the Oromoo in Addis Ababa or Oromiyaa are to benefit at an unequal level, to their advantage, from services arising from the City, as stated in Article 49(5). In the alternative, it is unclear whether these services ought to be provided to the whole of Oromiyaa through a form of positive discrimination. Most importantly, it is unknown what the phrases “special interest” and “other similar matters” mean; it is yet to be defined by legislation. This law is yet to be enacted, as promised by the Constitution, although a draft of it was released in 2017 with little record of parliamentary deliberations.²³⁶

13.2. Significance of Addis Ababa to the Oromo

There were many Oromo villages that Menelik II conquered as he expanded his empire. What makes Finfinne stand out, is the fact that it was not only conquered. Finfinne was also turned into the seat of the Abyssinian Empire, the territory from which the Emperor would administer his own people as well as the newly conquered nations.²³⁷ It was then re-named Addis Ababa.²³⁸ Further, it became the largest site of emigration of the northern nobilities and peoples; it was effectively occupied, although by conquest. This is in contrast with other Oromo villages that came under the overall oversight of the ruling class, who did not in fact settle nor encourage emigration to those areas.

Attendant significances of the City stem from this history. Politically, laying claim to and acquiring Addis Ababa/Finfinne as Oromiyaa’s capital city is a firm reclamation of the lost

²³⁶ Tsegaye R. Ararssa, ‘How the “Special Interest” of Oromia over Addis Abeba Became a Vacuous Exercise in Legal Rhetoric: What’s Next?’, *Addis Standard*, 9 February 2018, Special Edition.

²³⁷ Richard Pankhurst, ‘Menelik and the Foundation of Addis Ababa’, *Journal of African History* 2, no. 1 (1961): 103–17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700002176>.

²³⁸ Wakgari Dulume, ‘Finfinnee and the Oromoo: The Need to Redeem Historical Injustice Done to the Oromoo in the Course of Addis Ababa Establishment and Beyond’, *Asian Journal of Sociological Research*, no. 5(1) (17 March 2022): 87–94.

territory from settlers. This is also symbolically true,²³⁹ even to signify that a historical injustice is being corrected. Economically, Addis Ababa is the most developed city in Ethiopia. Having control or a share of control over it, therefore, should ensure economic gains for the Oromoo who truly built the economic power of the City upon and since its conquest.²⁴⁰

14. Causes of the 2015-2017 Protests

14.1. Expansion of Addis Ababa

In April 2014, the Federal Government's "Master Plan" to expand Addis Ababa for development-related reasons, was leaked to the public.²⁴¹ In 2015, this Integrated Masterplan was launched by the Federal Government.²⁴² Three things cause discomfort with expansion plans for or the selling of land in proximity to Addis Ababa. Firstly, the expansion of Addis Ababa results in the reduction of Oromiyaa territory. This is indeed the case taking into account that the Constitution declares Addis Ababa a federal city. Secondly, such expansion will easily result into the emigration of people into new parts of Addis Ababa that had, before the expansion, been predominantly occupied by the Oromo. The implications of this can be tied to the historical injustices the Oromo have endured in the form of land grabs.

Since almost half of Addis Ababa is occupied by people from the Amhara nationality, it is possible that such an expansion will result in strife based on both historical and current reasons. The historical reason is sufficiently understood to relate to displacement and replacement of the Oromo with the Amhara. Current reasons relate to land struggles occurring in other parts of Oromiyaa that border Amhara. Amhara claims to parts of Oromiyaa due to what they believe

²³⁹ Benti, 'A Blind without a Cane, a Nation without a City: The Oromo Struggle for Addis Ababa', p. 155.

²⁴⁰ Benti.

²⁴¹ Oromo Liberation Front, 'Finfinne ("Addis Ababa") Is an Oromo Land', accessed 27 July 2023, <https://oromoliberationfront.org/english/finfinne-addis-ababa-is-an-oromo-land/>.

²⁴² Awol Allo, 'Haacaaluu Hundeessaa: A Towering Musician and an Oromo Icon | Opinions | Al Jazeera', accessed 30 July 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/7/5/haacaaluu-hundeessaa-a-towering-musician-and-an-oromo-icon>.

are lands historically belonging to them, have caused clashes that have brought into these dynamics the return of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). Finally, the expansion of Addis Ababa simply displaces Oromos from their lands, thereby re-settling them.

14.2. Corruption & the Promise of Democratisation

Protests came in the aftermath of a transition both for Ethiopia and within the EPRDF, as a result of the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. The promise of democratisation was yet to be fulfilled 20 years after the promulgation of the Constitution of 1995. True democratisation would have allowed for opposition parties to exist with and fairly contest for elections against the EPRDF. This failed to be the case from 1992; the experience had been painful and marred with intimidation, human rights violations, enforced disappearances, and even resulted in opposition leaders self-exiling. A true marker of failed democratisation was the despair of opposition parties, which led many to consistently boycott elections as early as 1992 and stretching to 2015.²⁴³

In addition to the failure to democratise, was the rampant corruption that had spread all over Ethiopia and experienced both at the federal level and in Oromiyaa. In Oromiyaa, kebele leaders were powerful, corrupt, and gatekeepers of social mobility.²⁴⁴ Further, OPDO officials cut corrupt deals with different investors looking to either set up their businesses close to Addis Ababa or deep inside Oromiyaa. Such deals resulted in compulsory acquisition of land, which displaced people. Corruption resulted in under-development, lack of access to services and resources, and meant that federal leadership and elected Oromo representatives were not articulating, implementing, and acting in the interest of the Oromoo.

²⁴³ Lyons, *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics*.

²⁴⁴ Lyons.

14.3. Other Causes and Sequences

In November 2015 protests erupted in Ginchi, a territory west of Addis Ababa, when forests were cleared out for development projects.²⁴⁵ There were other protests relating to land and against OPDO officials for selling them for commercial purposes to national and international corporations.²⁴⁶ Issues arising from this were: little and unfair compensation for land acquisition and environmental degradation.²⁴⁷ These grievances were shared all over Oromiyaa among people of diverse ideologies. As such, protests were independent and uncoordinated. Notably and unusually, OPDO officials did not attempt to quell or respond to them.²⁴⁸

During this period, there were two factors that made OPDO initially take an indifferent approach and later the side of the protestors. First, OPDO and other constituent parties under the EPRDF had grown bolder, more powerful, and legitimate and sole voices of their peoples. In the mid 2010s, OPDO had grown more independent from TPLF and increased its legitimacy before the Oromo.²⁴⁹ Its position during the protest signified and/or was a result of this. Secondly, had OPDO officials not been seen to be taking the side of their people, then their fragile legitimacy would have suffered, and their survival would have been at stake. In order to preclude this, OPDO leaders, led by Lemma Megersa, the party leader, took the side of the protestors.

At the same time, amid the protests, a group of Oromoo youth, known as Qeerroo, emerged to advocate for the Oromo and took up the responsibility of coordinating the protests.²⁵⁰ They operated alongside the diaspora who were active on social media, such as the Oromo Media

²⁴⁵ Lyons, p. 181.

²⁴⁶ Oromo Liberation Front, 'Finfinne ("Addis Ababa") Is an Oromo Land'.

²⁴⁷ Lyons, *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics*.

²⁴⁸ Lyons.

²⁴⁹ Lyons.

²⁵⁰ Lyons, p. 182.

Network (OMN) and its operator, Jawar Mohammed; Awol Allo; and Mohammed Ademo, an editor of OPride.com.²⁵¹ Chants of “I am Oromo first!” were heard in the protests.²⁵² The highpoint of these protests came during the Oromo *Ireecha* holiday in October 2016 in Bishoftu.²⁵³ Over 50 Oromoo participating in the holiday were killed,²⁵⁴ resulting in unprecedented levels of protests that tested EPRDF legitimacy. A state of emergency was declared that October and lasted until August 2017.²⁵⁵ It was reinstated in February 2018 and lifted in June 2018.²⁵⁶

The territorial integrity of Ethiopia can barely be sustained when the Oromo are disenfranchised and rise up in large numbers. It became clear to EPRDF that to stabilise the country, it had to undergo a change of leadership where an Oromo assumed the position of Prime Minister. Initially, it was assumed that Lemma Megersa, the leader of OPDO and the President of the Oromiyaa Regional State would be the candidate for this.²⁵⁷ However, he was not a member of the House of Peoples’ Representatives and could, therefore, not qualify for the premiership.²⁵⁸

Subsequently, the position was given to Abiy Ahmed Ali, an OPDO member of the House of Peoples’ Representatives and the Deputy President of Oromiyaa.²⁵⁹ This decision was

²⁵¹ Lyons.

²⁵² Mohammed A, ‘OPride’s Oromo Person of The Year 2016: The Qubee Generation’, OPride.com, 31 December 2016, <https://www.opride.com/2016/12/31/oprides-oromo-person-year-2016-qubee-generation/>.

²⁵³ Felix Horne, “Fuel on the Fire”, *Human Rights Watch*, 19 September 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/09/20/fuel-fire/security-force-response-2016-irreecha-cultural-festival>.

²⁵⁴ ‘Q&A: Recent Events and Deaths at the Irreecha Festival in Ethiopia’, *Human Rights Watch* (blog), 8 October 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/08/qa-recent-events-and-deaths-irreecha-festival-ethiopia>.

²⁵⁵ John Aglionby, ‘Ethiopia Lifts 10-Month State of Emergency’, *Financial Times*, 4 August 2017, sec. Africa, <https://www.ft.com/content/293b05b6-78fb-11e7-90c0-90a9d1bc9691>.

²⁵⁶ Meron Moges-Gerbi, ‘Ethiopia Lifts State of Emergency Two Months Early’, CNN, 5 June 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/05/africa/ethiopia-lifts-state-of-emergency/index.html>.

²⁵⁷ Lyons, *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics*.

²⁵⁸ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Art. 73.

²⁵⁹ ‘Abiy Ahmed Elected as Chairman of Ethiopia’s Ruling Coalition | Abiy Ahmed News | Al Jazeera’, accessed 27 July 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/3/28/abiy-ahmed-elected-as-chairman-of-ethiopia-ruling-coalition>.

actualised in April 2018 and successfully ended the protests. It is worth noting that other peoples and nations of Ethiopia, particularly the Amhara and the Southern Nationalities, affected this transition, although the Oromoo protests played a most significant role in leading the country into a transition.

CHAPTER 6: THE 2018 TRANSITION AND ONWARDS

15. Aftermath of the Transition

In the first year of Abiy Ahmed's leadership, radical changes were witnessed. He released political prisoners and welcomed exiles and the diaspora back to Ethiopia.²⁶⁰ These exiles included the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) leaders, such as Dawud Ibsa (OLF Chairperson), and the OLF was delisted as a terrorist organisation.²⁶¹ The return of the OLF was the product of negotiations between Abiy's government and the OLF in Eritrea, which resulted in the signing of an agreement that promised, among other things, the re-integration of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA).²⁶² Oromos in the diaspora, notably Jawar Mohammed, also returned.²⁶³

The hope was that Abiy Ahmed would implement EPRDF reforms that had been proposed during the uprising.²⁶⁴ However, this did not entirely happen, and unrest quickly resumed in Oromiyaa. Oromo activists and writers limit the joy-phase of Abiy Ahmed's administration to between six months and one year.²⁶⁵ The actions the Prime Minister took afterwards made him unpopular in Oromiyaa. He began cracking down on Qeerroo, the youth movement that coordinated the uprising in Oromiyaa;²⁶⁶ OLF and OLA leaders;²⁶⁷ Jawar Mohammed of the

²⁶⁰ Allo, 'Haacaaluu Hundeessaa: A Towering Musician and an Oromo Icon | Opinions | Al Jazeera'.

²⁶¹ 'Exiled Leader of Ethiopian Rebel Group Returns Home amid Reforms', *Reuters*, 15 September 2018, sec. Emerging Markets, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-politics-idUSKCN1LV0GP>.

²⁶² 'UNPO: Oromo: OLF and Ethiopian Government Sign Peace Agreement in Eritrean Capital', accessed 10 August 2023, <https://unpo.org/article/21021>.

²⁶³ Ermias Tasfaye, 'Jawar Mohammed: From "A Luta Continua" to Peace Preacher', *Ethiopia Insight* (blog), 26 June 2022, <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2022/06/26/jawar-mohammed-from-la-aluta-continua-to-peace-preacher/>.

²⁶⁴ Milkessa M. Gemechu, 'How Abiy Ahmed Betrayed Oromia and Endangered Ethiopia', *Foreign Policy* (blog), 25 January 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/25/abiy-ahmed-ethiopia-qeerroo-romia-betrayed/>.

²⁶⁵ Gemechu.

²⁶⁶ Asafa Jalata, 'Abiy's Regime Is a Modern Version of the Ethiopian Empire-State', *Ethiopia Insight* (blog), 25 April 2022, <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2022/04/25/abiys-regime-is-a-modern-version-of-the-ethiopian-empire-state/>.

²⁶⁷ Jalata.

Oromo Media Network;²⁶⁸ and officials within his now Oromo Democratic Party (formerly Oromo People's Democratic Party—OPDO), notably Lemma Megersa and Milkessa Gemechu.²⁶⁹

The crackdown came after Abiy Ahmed pursued some changes that altered the ruling-party structure.²⁷⁰ He dissolved the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of ethnic-based political parties, to replace it with Prosperity Party (PP/the Party) in December 2019.²⁷¹ This change was heavily opposed by both Oromo nationalists as well as officials within the former Oromo Democratic Party.²⁷² The crackdown also stemmed from the fact that Abiy Ahmed was trying to quell any form of opposition or a potential threat to his position by any movement in Oromiyaa that displayed that prospect.²⁷³ The crackdown, in addition to the assassination of popular Oromo musician Haacaaluu Hundeessaa,²⁷⁴ created a state of instability in the Region, resulting in confrontation between the government and OLA, as well as with protestors.

16. Current Fears

Fears and grievances that have emerged from Oromos following the crackdowns and reforms introduced by Abiy, can be classified into two: the need to restore ethnic-federalism and preservation of Oromiyaa boundaries.

²⁶⁸ 'Ethiopia: Youth Gather at Jawar Mohammed's House to Show Support', accessed 10 August 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/24/ethiopia-youth-gather-at-jawar-mohammeds-house-to-show-support>.

²⁶⁹ Gemechu, 'How Abiy Ahmed Betrayed Oromia and Endangered Ethiopia'.

²⁷⁰ 'About Us – Ethiopia Prosperity Party', accessed 10 August 2023, <https://aapp.gov.et/about-us/>.

²⁷¹ Prosperity Party, 'Prosperity Party By-Laws' (n.d.), <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PP-by-laws-2.pdf>.

²⁷² Gemechu, 'How Abiy Ahmed Betrayed Oromia and Endangered Ethiopia'.

²⁷³ Jalata, 'Abiy's Regime Is a Modern Version of the Ethiopian Empire-State'.

²⁷⁴ Allo, 'Haacaaluu Hundeessaa: A Towering Musician and an Oromo Icon | Opinions | Al Jazeera'.

On ethnic-federalism, reforms pursued by Abiy Ahmed seem to encourage a more centralised Ethiopia with a unified identity. The creation and existence of the Prosperity Party represents this fear. Unlike the EPRDF, the PP is not a coalition, but a single political party representing inclusivity and encouraging national unity.²⁷⁵ Its perceived or real threat to ethnic-federalism is not only present among most Oromos but also a majority of Tigrayans; of all the former constituent and ethnic-based parties of the EPRDF, only the TPLF refused to be part of Prosperity Party.²⁷⁶ The Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) also had officials and members who resisted the idea of dissolving ODP to form one national party for all NNPs of Ethiopia. Lemma Megersa, former Oromiyaa President and Minister for Defence, opposed this change initially.²⁷⁷ He was later removed from both positions and put under house arrest.²⁷⁸

Secondly, the fear that Oromiyaa may be dissolved and its borders altered, is cause for unrest and instability. Abiy Ahmed's reforms embodied in the creation of the Prosperity Party sparks this fear. The Oromiyaa branch of Prosperity Party elaborates, "The merger into a countrywide party is part of Abiy's general policy of distancing the country's politics from ethnic federalism."²⁷⁹ Although the by-laws of the Party express its subservience to the Constitution of Ethiopia, the document is conservative about using words related to ethnic-nationalism, such as "nations" and "nationalities", restricting itself to phrases such as "citizens and peoples".²⁸⁰ References to unity and proximity to Amhara elites and their aspirations for Ethiopian

²⁷⁵ Prosperity Party, Prosperity Party By-Laws.

²⁷⁶ 'About Us – Ethiopia Prosperity Party'.

²⁷⁷ Gemechu, 'How Abiy Ahmed Betrayed Oromia and Endangered Ethiopia'.

²⁷⁸ 'Confirmed: Defense Minister Lemma Megerssa under House Arrest - Addis Standard', accessed 10 August 2023, <https://addisstandard.com/confirmed-defense-minister-lemma-megerssa-under-house-arrest/>.

²⁷⁹ 'Oromia Prosperity Party', accessed 10 August 2023, <https://www.opp.et/about-us>.

²⁸⁰ 'About Us – Ethiopia Prosperity Party', *Values of the Party*.

nationalism, have further exacerbated these fears.²⁸¹ They have also resulted in border violence between Amhara factions, such as Fano, and Oromo insurgents, such as OLA.²⁸²

17. Oromo Leadership, Organisation, Response

In the wake of the transition, multiple Oromo movements and personalities emerged or returned and began or resumed operations. This section briefly examines their constitution and objectives post-2018.

17.1. Prosperity Party

The Prosperity Party is the ruling party in Ethiopia, led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. The Prime Minister identifies as Oromo, and the party has a regional office in Oromiyaa.²⁸³ Its political goal is the pursuit of national unity, describing its vision as the taking of “a centralized approach rather than extremism”.²⁸⁴ Abiy Ahmed perceives himself a representative of the Oromoo.

17.2. Jawar Mohammed

Jawar Mohammed is a member of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC). However, he is also a public figure with political ambitions; he indicated this in an interview with Al-Jazeera.²⁸⁵ Jawar founded the Oromo Media Network (OMN) and was instrumental in supporting the 2016 uprising in Oromiyaa using the media platform.²⁸⁶ He amplified the voices of the Qeerroo

²⁸¹ Jalata, ‘Abiy’s Regime Is a Modern Version of the Ethiopian Empire-State’.

²⁸² ‘Ethiopia’s PM Sees OLA Rebellion Grow in His Own Backyard - BBC News’, accessed 10 August 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63710783>.

²⁸³ Prosperity Party, Prosperity Party By-Laws, Chapter 4.

²⁸⁴ ‘About Us – Ethiopia Prosperity Party’.

²⁸⁵ ‘Ethiopia’.

²⁸⁶ Tasfaye, ‘Jawar Mohammed’.

youth, particularly in the diaspora when the government shutdown internet and communication networks.²⁸⁷ He also acted as an adviser to Qeerroo.²⁸⁸

He is a critic of the Oromo Liberation Front, who believes that the OLF has failed the Oromo due to its inaction,²⁸⁹ inability to be accountable,²⁹⁰ and disunity.²⁹¹ He has argued that the OLF cannot be resurrected and held that it can only truly bring change by relocating to Oromiyaa, stating, in an essay in 2009: “No country or people have ever won their freedom by an exiled organization and leadership.”²⁹²

Jawar Mohammed believes in an autonomous Oromiyaa within a federal Ethiopia.²⁹³ He has worked alongside the Qeerroo and was a supporter of ODP before the new reforms that transitioned ODP to PP.²⁹⁴ His opposition to reforms introduced by Abiy Ahmed got him

²⁸⁷ Tom Gardner, “‘Freedom!’: The Mysterious Movement That Brought Ethiopia to a Standstill”, *The Guardian*, 13 March 2018, sec. Global development, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/mar/13/freedom-oromo-activists-qeerroo-ethiopia-standstill>.

²⁸⁸ Gardner.

²⁸⁹ Jawar Siraj Mohammed, ‘Failure to Deliver: The Journey of the Oromo Liberation Front in the Last Two Decades (Part I) | Opinion’, accessed 10 August 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090731100212/http://www.oromoindex.com/opinion/failure-to-deliver-the-journey-of-the-oromo-liberation-front-in-the-last-two-decades-part-i.html>.

²⁹⁰ Jawar Siraj Mohammed, ‘Failure to Deliver: The Journey of the Oromo Liberation Front in the Last Two Decades (Part II) | Opinion’, 1 August 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090801110216/http://www.oromoindex.com/opinion/failure-to-deliver-the-journey-of-the-oromo-liberation-front-in-the-last-two-decades-part-ii.html>.

²⁹¹ Jawar Siraj Mohammed, ‘Failure to Deliver: The Journey of the Oromo Liberation Front in the Last Two Decades (Part III) | Opinion’, 1 August 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090801145323/http://www.oromoindex.com/opinion/failure-to-deliver-the-journey-of-the-oromo-liberation-front-in-the-last-two-decades-part-iii.html>.

²⁹² Jawar Siraj Mohammed, ‘Failure to Deliver: The Journey of the Oromo Liberation Front in the Last Two Decades (Part IV) | Opinion’, accessed 10 August 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090801145428/http://www.oromoindex.com/opinion/failure-to-deliver-the-journey-of-the-oromo-liberation-front-in-the-last-two-decades-part-iv.html>.

²⁹³ Jawar Siraj Mohammed, ‘Failure to Deliver: The Journey of the Oromo Liberation Front in the Last Two Decades - OPride.Com’, accessed 10 August 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090731100212/http://www.oromoindex.com/opinion/failure-to-deliver-the-journey-of-the-oromo-liberation-front-in-the-last-two-decades-part-i.html>.

²⁹⁴ Tasfaye, ‘Jawar Mohammed’.

arrested and imprisoned in July 2020 and released in January 2022.²⁹⁵ Some reports indicate that he is currently in exile in Kenya.

17.3. Oromo Liberation Army

The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) split from the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in 2018, citing failure to be re-integrated.²⁹⁶ OLA has been conducting an active and violent insurgency in Oromiyaa, operating in many sections of the Region against the Federal Government, Oromiyaa regional officials, and other non-Oromo insurgencies like the Amhara-Fano.²⁹⁷ The new OLA manifesto stipulates that the organisation's objective is to fight for the self-determination of the Oromo people.²⁹⁸

It frames its struggle as (emphasis in italics):

We, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), fight for the Oromo people's right to self-determination. We fight for the freedom of the Oromo people from political exclusion, economic exploitation, and socio-cultural marginalization.

- a) We fight to realize the *Oromo people's right to freely determine their political status*. For the right of our people to determine their *political destiny* and establish a responsive government through *freely elected representatives*.
- b) We fight to secure the Oromo people's *economic sovereignty*. To stop the exploitation of our people's natural and human resources. To develop these resources for the benefit of all.
- c) We fight to realize the socio-cultural rights of our people. We demand respect for and full recognition of the Oromo language, culture, and history.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ Declan Walsh, 'Ethiopia Frees Prominent Political Prisoners, Calls for Reconciliation', *The New York Times*, 7 January 2022, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/07/world/africa/jawar-mohammed-release-ethiopia.html>.

²⁹⁶ Buli Edjeta, 'Imperial Ambition Is the Main Hurdle to Peace in Ethiopia', *Ethiopia Insight* (blog), 4 June 2022, <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2022/06/04/imperial-ambition-is-the-main-hurdle-to-peace-in-ethiopia/>.

²⁹⁷ 'News | Press Release | Oromo Liberation Army', OLF-OLA, accessed 10 August 2023, <https://www.olf-olahq.org/>.

²⁹⁸ Oromo Liberation Front- Oromo Liberation Army (OLF-OLA), 'A Brief Political Manifesto: From Armed Struggle to the Prospect for Peace' (Oromo Liberation Front- Oromo Liberation Army (OLF-OLA), January 2023), https://www.olf-olahq.org/_files/ugd/a055c6_b6ff668cfb3b445bad4ffda2e121e152.pdf.

²⁹⁹ Oromo Liberation Front- Oromo Liberation Army (OLF-OLA), p. 1.

It is unclear, from its manifesto, whether its goal is Oromiyaa autonomy and a democratic Ethiopia or self-determination through secession. Concerning the Qeerroo, the Manifesto notes:

The Oromo qeerroo who led the social protest movement and the OLA fighters are two faces of the same phenomenon. As such, preserving the victories gained on the back of the Oromo Qeerroo Revolution was OLA's political priority.³⁰⁰

On the other hand, there has been little action registered by the OLF.

17.4. Qeerroo

Qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromoo is a youth movement that was the face of the Oromo protests in 2016-2018. It consists of young Oromos in their twenties-to-early thirties whose objective is to fight for democracy and against repression and exclusion.³⁰¹ They originate from Adama and organise by hierarchy.³⁰² During the uprising, the movement had the support of Jawar Mohammed, Lemma Megersa, and Milkessa Gemechu (a member of the Movement).³⁰³ Qeerroo is credited with bringing about the 2018 transition and catapulting Abiy Ahmed to the Premier position. After 2019, members of Qeerroo have been targeted by government officials, in an attempt to quell opposition.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁰ Oromo Liberation Front- Oromo Liberation Army (OLF-OLA), p. 2.

³⁰¹ 'Who Is Qeerroo? What Is Qeerroo?', *QEERROO* (blog), 26 December 2018, <https://qeerroo.org/xalayaaleetters/who-is-qeerroo-what-is-qeerroo/.Q>

³⁰² Gardner, "Freedom!"

³⁰³ Gemechu, 'How Abiy Ahmed Betrayed Oromia and Endangered Ethiopia'.

³⁰⁴ Gemechu.

CHAPTER 7: QUESTIONS FOR OROMO LEADERSHIP

A study of the Oromoo people, their grievances, and movements over a period of 50 years reveals immense progress but also setbacks. With every regime that came to power since 1974, reforms instituted seemed to slowly address Oromoo grievances, which this study has broadly classified as: land, self-determination, identity, and democratisation. The Dergue brought considerable land reforms that gave the Oromoo and the rest of Ethiopia general ownership of land through nationalisation. The EPRDF promulgated a Constitution that introduced ethnic-federalism, a governance system that realised socio-cultural self-determination for the Oromoo, therefore addressing the issue of identity. The model of ethnic-federalism created Oromiyaa as a politically autonomous region, also facilitating self-determination.

However, with every regime, also came an increase in repression and human rights violations, especially those relating to democratic rights. The outstanding grievances before the 2018 Transition were democratisation and the expansion of Addis Ababa. The current administration of Abiy Ahmed has failed to address democratisation, as is evident from its crackdown of Oromo movements and political leaders. It is unclear whether the Addis Ababa “Master Plan” was abandoned.

The new regime, through its reforms, has created fears within a majority of Oromoo, who perceive these reforms as threats to ethnic-federalism and the territorial integrity of Oromiyaa. These fears have birthed new grievances: the need to preserve ethnic-federalism and Oromo land. These grievances are now coupled with the long-standing fight for democratisation. Responses from Oromo leadership have been divided and uncoordinated, despite their agreement on most of these issues.

Consequently, this study culminates in posing questions for the current Oromo leadership, in light of both new and old grievances, as follows:

- i. Different Oromo movements and leadership theoretically demonstrate an ability to complement each other. What inhibits them from co-ordinating and unifying the Oromo under one common agenda?
- ii. What, unequivocally, does self-determination mean or entail?
- iii. Are the Oromo people desirous of creating an independent Oromiyaa or preserving an autonomous Oromiyaa within a federal Ethiopia? Essentially, has ethnic-federalism worked, how can it be improved, and should it be improved?
- iv. What are the immediate priorities for the Oromo?
- v. Is there a place for national dialogue as a means of addressing some of the outstanding grievances? How will they contend with competing nationalisms?
- vi. How do Oromo movements hope to engage the ruling party now and in future elections? Has boycotting elections served them well or should they aim to be persistently more active in different arms of government, particularly the House of Peoples' Representatives?

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