



# Oromo Studies Association

## Newsletter

Issue # 2

December 2008

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### ***Message from the President***

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Greetings to you! In this issue, we highlight some of the main events that took place over the last two months.

First, let me start with the good news: OSA has just received a grant of \$3000 from Georgia State University (GSU) to (partially) cover expenses associated with the 2009 Annual Conference in Atlanta. This was made possible through the hard work of Dr Mohammed Hassen, who as many of you know, has always found creative ways to help OSA. Last year, OSA received a similar grant in the amount of \$2000 from GSU through a similar effort by Dr. Mohammed. He is a great example to all of us to continue to look out for opportunities to support OSA where we work.

Second, the Executive Committee has been meeting regularly (every other week through Paltalk) to discuss the business of OSA. Among the highlights of what we have been doing are:

- **Membership update:** We are going through our email database to make sure that we can identify and reach every member—and match emails with names and names with mailing addresses. As many of you know, OSA’s database consists of a list of emails (often without names or addresses) accumulated from many years back. Some of you may thus have received an email message from OSA requesting you to update your information. If so, please respond. In the process of updating the database, we have also confirmed what we have always known: that many well known OSA “members” who for one reason or another do not make it to the annual conference simply do not bother to renew their membership from one year to another. This year alone, there are over one hundred such persons on the

OSA mailing list who have not renewed their membership. In the coming weeks, the EC will reach out to those who have not renewed their OSA membership for 2008/09.

- **Financial update and fundraising:** As requested during the General Assembly meeting in Minneapolis, included below for your review are OSA's financial statements covering the period August 2007-September 2008. As the statement shows, OSA is financially very fragile and essentially barely makes it from one conference to another. The weak financial base in turn makes conference planning difficult, and weakens the quality of our conferences including the capacity to attract good speakers. In response to this challenge, the EC is currently putting together a short grant proposal that we can submit to potential sponsors for the annual conferences (which can also be kept on file for regular updating and submission by successive OSA ECs in the future). Fundraising is an area where the EC would like to see greater effort and collaboration with the Board this year. The EC is also working on making it easier for OSA members to renew their membership online (e.g. through PayPal).
- **Mid-year Conference:** We are currently at the early stage of planning for the mid-year conference. The conference will be held in March –April 2009, and the emerging theme of the conference is how the change in the U.S. administration may impact the Oromo, and the Horn of Africa, with an additional focus possibly on current Oromo human rights issues. In this conference, we also intend to reach a wider audience through the use of modern technology, including Paltalk. If you have any suggestions, or would like to participate in the conference, please let us know. We would like to hear from you.
- **Annual Conference:** Dr Mohammed has helped us reserve a conference hall at the Georgia State University for the annual conference, August 1-2, 2009 (please note that these dates are tentative and may change).

I hope you find these updates helpful.

Best regards,

Abebe Adugna, Ph.D.  
OSA President

### *OSA Receives Grant Funding from Georgia State University*

Dr. Mohammed Hassen has continued to support OSA effectively. Thanks to his efforts, OSA has just received a grant funding of \$3,000 towards covering the costs of the 2009 OSA Annual Conference. Below is a letter from Professor Amy Lederberg announcing the grant award:

>>> Amy Lederberg 11/24/2008 6:30 PM >>>  
Dear Mohammed,

I am pleased to inform you that Georgia State University Research Foundation will fund your conference grant for \$3,000. Once I receive a detailed budget for the GSURF funding, I will set up a conference account. Please acknowledge this support in your conference program and website. I have attached a copy of the GSURF logo if you want to use it on your conference materials.

In addition, please send me after the conference a brief report that includes the program of events, as well as the number of attendees and presenters (total, and subdivided into number from Georgia State, from outside the state of Georgia, and international.)

Good luck with this worthy endeavor.

Best

Amy

Amy R. Lederberg, Ph.D.  
Associate Vice President for Research & Professor of Educational Psychology and Special Education  
University Research Services & Administration  
Georgia State University

In response, Dr. Mohammed Hassen wrote the following thank you letter to Georgia State University:

December 5, 2008

Dr. Amy R. Lederberg  
Associate Vice President for Research  
Georgia State University  
Alumni Hall, MSC 3AO318  
Atlanta, GA 30303

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

On behalf of our annual Oromo Studies Association Conference local organizing committee and myself, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to you and Georgia State University Research Foundation, for generous and invaluable support of \$ 3,000 for our next Conference to be held on GSU campus, August 1-2, 2009. Your support is not only a wonderful news for us but it inspires all OSA members and creates an excitement about our conference. Above all, your support will enable us to provide a collegial intellectual environment for academics, students and the public at our beautiful University Center.

As you know OSA is a modest scholarly organization with extremely limited resources. Since OSA will incur unusually high costs associated with organizing next year's conference on our university campus, our Board of Directors and Executive Committee members are particularly grateful for your support. You will receive formal thank you letters from Bonnie Holcomb, Chair, OSA Board of Directors and Dr. Abebe Adugna, OSA President. I would like to reiterate that your support will be a major source of encouragement for all OSA members, who will remain truly indebted to you for your timely and generous support. I want you to know that the \$ 3,000 GSU Research Foundation grant will be fully acknowledged in our next newsletter, our journal our conference program as well as at the opening of our conference on August 1, 2009 on GSU campus.

Finally, once again, we are truly thankful for your support, which will ensure that all of our conference participants will take advantage of the wonderful facilities and collegial environment at Georgia State University Center.

Sincerely,

Mohammed Hassen Ali

In addition, the EC has written a thank you letter to Georgia State University for this support. We are grateful to Dr. Mohammed for his continued support to OSA even in off-season when he is holding any formal title or responsibility.

## *OSA Financial Statement*

As you may recall, the EC agreed during the General Assembly meeting in Minneapolis to present the final financial report of OSA, including the income from the 2008 conference, to OSA members within two months from the date of the General Assembly. Please find below the statement prepared by our outgoing Treasurer:

<b>Oromo Studies Association</b>			
<b>Financial Statement for the Period of August 1, 2007 - Sep 30, 2008</b>			
	<b>Amount</b>		
<b>Beginning Balance</b>			
Beginning Balance	\$2,465.14		
<b>Total Beginning Balance</b>		<b>\$2,465.14</b>	
<b>Income from Membership and JOS</b>			
Income from registration, membership and JOS Sub(2007)	\$13,180.00		
Income from registration and membership and JOS Sub(2008)	\$11,981.53		
<b>Total Income from Membership and JOS</b>		<b>\$25,161.53</b>	
<b>Grants and Other Income</b>			
Oliqaa Foundation	\$5,100.00		
Georgia Univ. Donation for JOS	\$2,000.00		
Contribution from Pharmaceutical Company	\$1,000.00		
Mid Year Conference Cover Charge	\$430.00		
Book Sale	\$187.00		
Other donation (Dr. Mohammed Hassen)	\$200.00		
<b>Total Other Income</b>		<b>\$8,917.00</b>	
<b>Total Income</b>			<b>\$36,543.67</b>
<b>Expenses</b>			
<b>Total 2007 and 2008 Expenses</b>			
U of M Hall Rental and Oromo Student Service(2007)	\$3,095.00		
U of M Hall Rental and Oromo Student Service(2008)	\$3,170.00		
2007 Guest Speakers Ticket Expenses	\$5,751.56		
2008 Conference Expenses (Name tag and folders)	\$395.00		
Book Shipping Fees 2007	\$316.16		
2008 Guest Speakers Ticket Expenses	\$5,799.45		
P.O.Box Rental (2006-2007)	\$82.00		
P.O.Box Rental (2007-2008)	\$92.20		
P.O.Box Rental (2008-2009)	\$94.00		
JOS 1 Publishing (2008)	\$3,750.00		
JOS 2 Publishing (2008)	\$3,750.00		
OSA List Server Charge From the month of July 07 - Sep 08(\$29.95/month)	\$449.25		
2008 Conference Expenses (Name tag, programs, Proceedings and folders)	\$1,105.00		
<b>Total Expenses</b>			<b>\$27,849.62</b>
<b>Balance As of September 30, 2008</b>			<b>\$8,694.05</b>

## *New Publications, Book Reviews*

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### *New Publications*

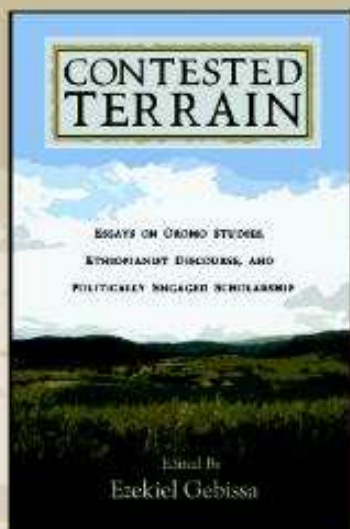
Edited By Ezekiel Gebissa

#### **Essays on Oromo Studies, Ethiopianist Discourse, and Politically Engaged Scholarship**

Since 1991, there has been renewed debate in Ethiopia concerning the implication of the country's past for the present polity. The long-standing debate was given an added impetus by Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia and the threat of disintegration posed by the continued struggle for self-determination by other ethnonational groups. Ethiopianist scholars, always committed to the indivisibility and unassailability of the Ethiopian state, blamed the country's political troubles on nationalist scholars, accusing them of fabricating history and instigating people into taking up arms against the state. Vowing to protect Ethiopia from further disintegration, the Ethiopianist elite called on 'patriotic' scholars to challenge, expose, and discredit what they described as the 'politically motivated propaganda' of irresponsible nationalists.

In *Contested Terrain*, a team of historians and sociologists confront 'the scholarship of power' that dismisses politically engaged scholarship in the name of academic objectivity. Based on the experience of the Oromo in Ethiopia, they tackle the methodological and political challenges of nationalist scholarship within the highly contested terrain of Ethiopian studies and argue that objectivity in scholarship should not mean neutrality in the face of injustice and exploitation. In eight chapters, they show that scholars can recover the experiences of the disadvantaged and underrepresented and give voice to the powerless and downtrodden. They demonstrate that there is no contradiction between challenging prevailing dogmas and inherited orthodoxies in academia on the one hand and giving support to struggles aimed at ending exploitative practices and dismantling institutions of oppression on the other. Academic objectivity must not be a tool for questioning the scholarly value of nationalist scholarship solely on the basis of the scholar's commitment to certain political causes. As an intellectual enterprise, politically engaged scholarship should be judged on its own merits, not on the basis of its implications for the well being of political entities.

Please see the bottom of next page for ordering information:



Ezekiel Gebissa is Associate Professor of History at Kettering University. He is the author of *Leaf of Allah: Khat and the Transformation of Agriculture in Haxerge, Ethiopia, 1875-1991* (James Currey and Ohio University Press, 2004). He has published several articles in refereed journals. He is past president of the Oromo Studies Association and currently editor of the *Journal of Oromo Studies*.

## CONTESTED TERRAIN

Essays on Oromo Studies, Ethiopianist Discourse, and Politically Engaged Scholarship

Edited By Ezekiel Gebissa

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**THE MAKING, UNMAKING AND REMAKING OF ETHIOPIA**

As Published in THE JOURNAL OF AFRICAN HISTORY (2008), 49: 335-338 Cambridge University Press

doi:10.1017/S0021853708003885

The History of Ethiopia. By SAHEEDA. ADEJUMOBI. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007. Pp.xix+219. \$45 (ISBN0-313-32273-2).

Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective. Edited by DAVIDTURTON. Oxford: James Currey Publishers; Athens OH:Ohio University Press, 2006. Pp.x+246. \$49.95 (ISBN0-8214-1696-0); \$24.95, paperback (ISBN0-8214-1697-9).

**KEYWORDS:** Ethiopia, ethnicity, historiography, nationalism, politics/political.

For centuries, the territory bearing the name 'Ethiopia' has expanded and contracted, its ethnic composition reconfigured, and its socioeconomic characteristics transformed. The state that eventually emerged in the nineteenth century included diverse cultural and linguistic communities out of which successive rulers have tried to forge a nation, either by emphasizing the metaphor that Ethiopia is a 'museum of peoples' or by devising policies that would redress the contrary image that it is 'a prison house of nations'. While all previous rulers have denied that constituent ethnonational groups ever demanded autonomy and self-determination, the present government has recognized the existence of such demands and proposed to resolve the issue through a federal arrangement. Saheed A. Adejumobi's *The History of Ethiopia* provides an account of the historical trajectory of the making and unmaking of the Ethiopian state, which led to the present situation, while David Turton's edited volume, *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, explores the effort at remaking a multi-national entity.

As part of Greenwood's series on modern nations, Adejumobi's book identifies Ethiopia's place in the development of the modern world. He argues that globalization began for Ethiopia in the sixteenth century when Portuguese sailors arrived on its coast, offering Christian solidarity against local Muslims but also challenging Ottoman dominance of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade. Ethiopia has since remained at the center of major events in world history, including the ongoing democratization process in Africa and the global war on terror. Domestic modernization, according to Adejumobi, began in the mid nineteenth century with the unification of Ethiopia. At this stage, 'modernization' meant increasing the state's military capacity, enlarging the state, expanding education and developing the physical infrastructure. Such developments are discussed under the rubrics of Afro-modernism, fascist modernization and the modernizing autocracy of Emperor Haile Sellassie. Another theme in the book is the significance of Ethiopia as a symbol of black people's aspiration for equality, freedom and nationhood. The symbolism originated in biblical representations of Ethiopia and was reinforced by the victory at Adwa in 1896 and the coronation of Haile Sellassie in 1930. Italy's invasion of this cherished symbol in 1935 thus mobilized black people around the world in support of Ethiopia. Even Ethiopia's socialist period is described as 'Afro-Marxist' to stress the African connection.

The reader might expect *The History of Ethiopia* to build on two recent general history books (Harold Marcus's *A History of Ethiopia* and Bahru Zewde's *A History of Modern Ethiopia*). If this was the Greenwood series editors' intention, it has not been achieved because Adejumoni's account adds little to our knowledge, in terms either of providing a sweeping narrative or of presenting a novel interpretation. With regard to the modernization theme, perhaps unbeknownst to Adejumobi, careful observers of Ethiopian society have long ago demonstrated that the modernizing ventures of Ethiopian emperors were a superficial facade for what was a profoundly conservative culture that actually subverted the modernization program. The 'modernizing emperors' of Adejumobi's book have been shown to be reactionary despots who actually stood in the way of change, rather than agents of change.

Other factors also undermine the significance of this book. Contrary to the general editors' claim that they have selected 'an author who is recognized as a specialist' and has worked with them in producing a volume 'that reflect[s] current research' (p. x), the book is marred by problems that expose an alarming lack of expertise. No specialist in Ethiopian history who knows current research would consistently use such pejorative references as 'Galla' (to refer to the Oromo), 'Wallamo' (Wolayita), 'Tigre' (Tigrayan) or 'Shankalla' (Nilo-Saharan speakers). No specialist would state: 'Lebb Woled Tarik authored a pioneering novel in Amharic' (p.17); this is not an author's name at all but a phrase that literally means 'a novel' in Amharic. Only those who are unfamiliar with Ethiopian names refer to Haile Sellassie as Emperor Selassie, to Yekuno Amlak as Emperor Yekuno and list 'Menelik I, Queen of Sheba, and King Solomon' among notable people in Ethiopian history. Inconsistencies in spelling names of places and persons abound—too many to list here—but it is amusing to note that, beginning on p.152, Meles Zenawi becomes Prime Minister Menawi. More substantively, it is hard to expect that anyone would do justice to the analysis of the Derg years (1974–91) in a mere ten pages, this despite the general editors' claim that the author has 'devoted a significant portion of the book to the last thirty years' (p. x).

In reviewing *The History of Ethiopia* together with *Ethnic Federalism*, one can-not fail to notice that the present experiment in federalizing the Ethiopian state is essentially a reversal of the centralizing drive, which started when the 'modernizing' Emperor Tewodros II made it his mission to remove the Oromo elite from Abyssinian court politics. The politics of exclusion led to the deposing of Iyasu II (1913-16), an Oromo and a Muslim from Wollo. His replacement, Haile Sellassie, dismantled what could be described as Menelik's nascent federalism (local autonomy-for-tribute for southern kingdoms that submitted to his suzerainty peacefully) with a policy of political centralization and cultural assimilation. Not surprisingly, when the Eritrean, Tigrean and Oromo guerrillas defeated the Derg in 1991, they targeted the infrastructure of cultural domination and the practice of political exclusion. As they tackled the challenge of remaking Ethiopia, they seized on 'ethnic federalism' as the only workable model for 'maintaining intact a multi-ethnic Ethiopia' (*Ethnic Federalism*, p.2). Critics have dismissed the effort as an attempt by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) to resuscitate Leninist federalism. In this volume, Will Kymilcka rejects this claim, stating: 'the Ethiopian constitution can be seen as consistent with the most progressive development within Western democracies' (p.54).

In many ways, *Ethnic Federalism* attempts to gauge the success of Ethiopia's bold and unorthodox political experiment against the backdrop of the experiences of Western countries (Will Kymilcka), Nigeria (Rotimi Suberu) and India (Rajeev Bhargava). Federalism has not been an unqualified success in each case, but it has worked remarkably well in holding these nations together. In evaluating success, David Turton says, 'what matters is what works' (p.12). It is too early to pass the final verdict on Ethiopian federalism, but the studies in this volume identify some troubling areas. Merera Gudina posits the 'nationalities problem' as the handiwork of



radical students who, to this day, refuse to engage in pragmatic politics. Assefa Fisseha, in a brilliant chapter, identifies gaps between policy and practice and between the principle of empowerment and the institutional capacity of regional states to implement federal policies. The gaps are filled by the ruling party's political machinery that extends down to the smallest administrative units. Gideon Cohen warns against several misconceptions in language policy formulation. Sarah Vaughn shows the catastrophic consequence of a misguided social engineering scheme in which the EPRDF attempted to create ethnic identity where it never existed. Dereje Feyissa shows the problem of introducing ethnic autonomy where there was no popular demand for it nor capacity to sustain it.

In the Afterword, Christopher Clapham (p.234) joins David Turton(p.7) in urging Ethiopians—following Nigeria's lead to 'fragment, crosscut, and sublimate the identities of each of the major ethnic formations' (p.73) in the Oromia and the Amhara regions. Nigeria's historical itinerary is altogether different from that of Ethiopia. The volume contains no case studies on how the ethnic federalism has fared in regions where there has always been demand for autonomy. The call for a break-up of these regions cannot be justified based on experience from regions that have never shown demonstrable desire for autonomy.

The threat to Ethiopia's federalism is not that it is organized along ethno-linguistic lines. Kymilcka makes it clear that 'the institutionalization of ethno-national identities is not illiberal or undemocratic—on the contrary, it is the outcome of liberal democracy in action, and it would be illiberal or undemocratic to preclude this as a possible outcome of politics' (p.58). The danger is posed precisely by those challenges that the studies in the volume have highlighted: the gap between policy and practice, the blurring of the line between state and party, and, despite claims to achieving the contrary, the continuation of Ethiopia's political culture that puts a premium on hegemonic control of power. The chapters in this volume demonstrate that federalism has gone too far along to turn it back. A reader is left to surmise whether the forces of liberal democratic values and the human rights revolution that, as Kymilcka shows, made federalism the popular choice to address minority grievances in the West can also triumph in Ethiopia.

## *Congratulations letter to President-elect Barack Obama...*

November 15, 2008

President-Elect Barack Obama  
P.O. Box 8102  
Chicago, IL 60680

**Subject: Congratulations on your election victory**

Dear Mr. President-Elect,

Congratulations on your election as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America. As President, we wish you great success in confronting the many domestic and international challenges currently facing the United States.

At a time when the world is afflicted with so many ills, your election has given new hope to so many around the world, including us, the Oromo Studies Association (OSA). OSA is a scholarly nonprofit organization established to promote studies on the Oromo people and the Horn of Africa. Over the past twenty-two years, OSA has attracted several scholars, politicians, and activists to discuss various issues of interest to the Oromo and the Horn of Africa, with a view to promoting understanding among peoples and seeking peace in that part of the world.

The messages that you have delivered on change and on the future inspire hope in many quarters, not least in the Horn of Africa—a region that has witnessed some of the most egregious violations of human rights, political instability, and suppression of political dissent over the last several decades. In Ethiopia, the US policy towards that country has emphasized the fight against terrorism, often at the expense of democracy, respect for human rights, and domestic accountability. The Oromo people, by far the largest ethnic group and representing about 40 percent of the Ethiopian population, have for many decades been shut out of the political process in Ethiopia. Despite its autocratic political processes and massive human rights violations at home, the Government of Meles Zenawi has continued to enjoy considerable external support from the US government in the name of the fight against terrorism.

We are hopeful that your administration will help bring about change in Ethiopia and in the Horn of Africa – a change that will balance alliance against terrorism with democracy and domestic accountability. We believe that the United States and other countries with a liberal democratic tradition can and should support the efforts of men and women everywhere—including the Oromo in Ethiopia-- to secure for themselves the rights and freedoms they often take for granted. A lasting peace and stability in Ethiopia is assured not through excluding but rather including a majority voice.

May God bless you with wisdom, strength, and good health. All of us at OSA will pray for your great success as the 44th president of the United States of America.

Respectfully,

Abebe Adugna, Ph.D.  
President, Oromo Studies Association (OSA)

## *Your OSA membership renewal*

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If you who have not yet renewed your OSA membership for 2008-2009, we ask you to please do so now. Please send your completed membership form alongside with your membership fee (\$75 regular, and \$25 for students and retirees), payable to Oromo Studies Association, at the following address:

**Oromo Studies Association**  
**P.O. Box 32391**  
**Fridley, MN 55432**  
**USA**

A membership renewal form is available at [oromostudies.org](http://oromostudies.org), under the "membership" link. Please download the form, complete it, and send it along with your membership fee to the above address.

## *If you have news to share...*

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Do you have any story or news that you think will be of interest (publications, events, etc.) to OSA members? Please send them to Abebe Adugna at [aadugna@verizon.net](mailto:aadugna@verizon.net). We welcome your participation.