

FULL RESEARCH ARTICLES

Oromo institutions that united, inspired, and sustained Arsi Oromo's heroic resistance against imperial expansion and its long-term consequences (1881-1892)

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This short paper deals with a number of topics, including but not limited to, Oromo institutions that were the foundation for their democratic heritage. These institutions also united and inspired Arsi Oromo resistance from 1881-1892. The first part of this paper deals with key Oromo institutions, background to and the creation of the Ethiopian empire, while the second part discusses how Arsi Oromo, who did not have access to modern European weapons, nor European military training, and lacked a centralized military leadership, managed to defeat three times the army led by King Menelik of Shawa. What enabled Arsi Oromo warriors to register heroic resistance against King Menelik, whose soldiers were trained by French officers, and were supplied with thousands of European guns and ammunitions? The paper demonstrates with evidence that the key for Arsi Oromo resistance, was because they had kept intact, their key Oromo institutions, that united, inspired and mobilized their human, material and spiritual resources for sustaining their long resistance. Despite Arsi Oromo incredible sufferings, their long resistance has earned them a shining pride of place in Oromo history. This paper also explores the impact of King Menelik's conquest of Arsi Oromo, the occupation of their country, their loss of their land, their transformation into Gabbars,(serfs) in the land of their birth, the destruction of their key institutions, which inspired Arsi Oromo's large-scale acceptance of Islam.

Introduction¹

Since 2018, there have been open and hidden efforts by top OPDO officials to deny the mutilation of breasts and hands that took place at Anole in December 1886. Why deny a cruel historical injustice if it did not take place? The purpose behind that denial is to demolish the statue that was built on the historic site of Anole. The statue keeps alive for posterity the memory of the brutal mutilation of the breasts and hands of Arsi Oromo in 1886, which was documented by a contemporary eyewitness account by a French missionary.² Demolishing that statue would force Arsi Oromo to

¹ I am indebted to Professors Ezekiel Gebissa and Tsega Etefa for their most helpful suggestions that shaped this article.

² Martial de Salviac, *An Ancient people in the State of Menelik The Oromo Great African Nation*, Translation from the original French edition by Ayalew Kanno (self-published, 2005), 350.

relieve the pain and the suffering of their ancestors under the government that has inflicted more pain and suffering upon the Oromo people than any previous Ethiopian government. The campaign to deny history and erase memory from public consciousness by demolishing a memorial statue cannot succeed. This is because Abbas H. Gnamo's *Conquest and Resistance in the Ethiopian Empire, 1880-1974: The case of the Arsi Oromo*³ provides an irrefutable historical account of the Anole mutilation based on the extensive primary and secondary sources.

This article is inspired by and heavily depends upon *Conquest and Resistance in the Ethiopian Empire, 1880-1974: The case of the Arsi Oromo*, and supplemented with other scholarly works. The purpose is to bring into focus the book's core themes to fend off the ongoing efforts by the current Ethiopian government officials, who deny the mutilation of Arsi Oromo at Anole in December 1886. The book is the most researched scholarly work dealing with the dramatic period in Arsi Oromo history. It catalogs the pain and suffering Arsi Oromo had endured, since their conquest and incorporation into the Ethiopian empire, under which the once proud and feared people were transformed into *gabbars* (serfs), who lost their lands, their freedom, their human dignity, and were abused in all manner. The passion with which the author pursued and the amount of time he devoted to the completion of this inspiring book are remarkable. It shows Professor Abbas Gnamo's strong determination and deep commitment to shine light on the Arsi Oromo suffering under the Ethiopian empire between 1880 and 1974, while registering their proud heritage of resistance. Abbas H Gnamo charts a broad definition of Oromo identity that truly captures the essence of Oromo identity. His definition is broader than how others define it.

It is important to underline that Oromo identity resides not only in the Afaan Oromo (Oromo language) and the gada Qaalluu system, the hallmark and epitome of Oromo culture, but also in kinship organization. In other words, being 'Oromo' is like a big tree with many branches and branches of branches and despite growth and outgrowth of these branches are held together through a complex web of kinship relations, beliefs in common ancestry, real or putative, for centuries by major regional groups.⁴

In the first two chapters, Abbas Gnamo discusses extensively three fundamental Oromo institutions that shaped the course of Oromo history, their democratic political culture and the foundation of their moral system and spiritual life. These are the gadaa system, the Qaalluu institution and

3 Abbas H. Gnamo, *Conquest and Resistance in the Ethiopian Empire, 1880-1974: The case of the Arsi Oromo* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 370 pages.

4 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 16.

the “Oromo kinship identity and structure”. These institutions were “the epitome of Oromo culture” and their democratic heritage. These three institutions “...were organized in such a way so as to be complementary and contradictory, functionally interdependent with checks and balances to ensure the continuity of the social system.”⁵ In the following pages, all three institutions are discussed, with special focus on the gadaa system that mobilized strong Arsi Oromo unity that sustained their long resistance accompanied with immense sacrifices. Additionally, these institutions were a collective heritage of the Oromo nation.

The Oromo Gadaa system was the basis of their democratic heritage⁶

It is not possible to understand the foundation of the rich Oromo democratic cultural heritage without the gadaa system, which Abbas Gnamo rightly considers as “uniquely the patrimony of the Oromo people.”⁷ Gadaa is a complex concept that encompasses political, religious, military, economic, social and cultural aspects of Oromo society. According to Asmarom Legesse, the leading authority on the gadaa system, “it is one of the universals that binds the entire nation into a coherent system and gives people a common political basis for understanding each other. It constitutes a shared political idiom.”⁸

Gnamo argues that “...gadaa encompasses rituals, politics, social organization and military activities ..., traditional Oromo social structure cannot be fully understood without it”. In short, “gadaa is central and a cornerstone of Oromo social organization.”⁹ Indeed, it was their gadaa system that enabled Arsi Oromo to mobilize their human, material, and spiritual resources to resist King Menelik’s soldiers from 1882-1892. Few other people in Ethiopia resisted colonial invaders as the Arsi Oromo did with their traditional weapons. What is most remarkable is that Arsi Oromo warriors defeated three times Menelik’s forces that were fully supplied with massive firearms. The Arsi warriors continued heroic resistance for nearly a decade. Such a remarkable feat of Arsi Oromo resistance was the legacy of “... long military traditions and warrior ideology enshrined in the Gadaa system & social solidarity and quality leadership provided in this legendary resistance to be organized by a people without a state.”¹⁰ Gnamo states that the Gadaa has three main functions.

5 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 34-35.

6 Asmarom Legesse, *Gadaa Democratic Institutions of the Boorana-Oromo* (New York: Regent Publishing Service, 2019): XV.

7 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 35.

8 Asmarom Legesse, *Gadaa. Three Approaches to the Study of African Society* (London: Free Press MacMillan Limited, 1973), 8.

9 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 35.

10 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 37-38.

First, gadaa is a symbolic reproductive system. It is evident that the gadaa ritual process beyond distributing role and status, aims to bring about peace and maintain harmony and prosperity in the society....Secondly, gadaa served as an important agent of socialization....The third and one of the most important attributes of the gadaa is its close association with the domain of military/war and politics.¹¹

According to Abbas Gnamo, the gadaa system was a participatory form of democracy, under which leaders were elected by the people. The elected leaders included Abba Gadaa (the father of Gadaa in power). Among the Arsi Oromo and others, the Abba Gadaa was also known as Abba Bokkuu.¹² The bokkuu was the specter held in the hand of the Abba Gadaa when he was chairing the *Chaffee* assembly meeting. The *bokkuu* symbolized the authority of his people. The other elected leaders include, but are not limited to: Abba Duula (the father of war or commander of the military), Abba Seerraa (the father of law, minister of justice), Abba Sa'aa (the father of economy) and other leaders. The elected leaders and seasoned advisors together constituted "The most important decision-making body" known as the "Gadaa Council, whose ... first magistrate and supreme authority was the Gadaa leader."¹³ The term of office for the elected leaders was limited to a single term of eight years. Election was followed by a smooth transfer of power from the outgoing to the incoming leaders. This was because, "under gadaa [system], the struggle for political succession was unknown thanks to obligatory transfer of power every 8 years."¹⁴ After the transfer of power, the *Chaffee* assembly (the Oromo parliament) met under an Odaa (sycamore), "the Oromo's most sacred tree"

In Oromo cosmology, green grass (*irressa*) symbolizes justice and fertility and, as such, the Organization of Oromo political-ritual assemblies in such places was not random. In brief, [*Chaffee*] is an Oromo parliament whose importance grew with the development of Gadaa as a refined political system.¹⁵

The *Chaffee* assembly was chaired by the elected gadaa leader known as Abba gadaa. Across Oromo land, there were numerous chafee assemblies, which "were generally attended by tens of thousands or even more than hundred thousand ... which indicates the central place it occupied in Oromo history and culture."¹⁶ Gnamo's book establishes that Arsi Oromo's *Chafee*

11 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 33-34.

12 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 34, 42, 51.

13 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 25, 46.

14 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 34.

15 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 42. See also, Bairu Tafla, trans. and ed., *Asma Giyorgis and His Work* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987), 155.

16 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 46.

assemblies were political nerve centers, where the people debated about crucial issues of the time, and made laws that lasted for eight years. Under Oromo law, "equality and justice form the bedrock of Oromo democratic ideals/ principles, as the case of western democracies." In other words, under Oromo law, "justice and law are inseparably in theory and in fact." Abbas Gnamo writes that,

The legislation of laws was a result of long discussions, debates, arguments, and counterarguments. ...likewise, every Oromo adults' rights and children's rights and obligations are enshrined in [*Chaffee*] laws such as seerra birmadumaa (the law of human liberty /freedom), seera rakoo (the law of marriage and divorce) seera dhaala (law of succession and heritage) ...Seera is an Oromo constitution which ensured without any ambiguity, rights, duties, equality and justice."¹⁷

The most unique aspects of the Oromo democratic institution (the gadaa system) include but are not limited to (1) systems of checks and balances, which prevent the emergence of despotism; (2) peaceful transfer of power, which was almost non-existent among the Christian society in northern Ethiopia. In the words of Asmarom Legesse,

The Christian Kingdom in Ethiopia failed to institutionalize orderly succession to political office during most of its history. ...During the past century and half nearly successions in Ethiopia were....accompanied by full-scale civil wars.¹⁸

The gadaa system was a remarkable system of power-sharing, which prevented a power struggle that usually drenched with blood every succession to the throne among the Christian society. "In Oromo democracy, power sharing rests on territorial kinship and generational entities that form the basis of political participation."¹⁹ Gadaa leaders were elected to serve their community without expecting any material reward for their service.

...Gadaa office did not give any chance for personal profit and enrichment. Contrary to a popular Amhara dictum which says, 'he who does not eat when he is appointed, regrets when he leaves the office,' the objective of gadaa officers was to serve the community and common interests and stand firm for the

¹⁷ Asmarom Legesse, *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political system* (Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 2006), 263.

¹⁸ Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 262.

¹⁹ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 28.

common good. [And yet]...gadaa officers could lose their power, usually in the middle of their term after 4 years in office, if they failed to provide good leadership and were corrupt and unfair.²⁰

The above brief discussion demonstrates that under the gadaa system, government was an embodiment of the popular will, and those who wielded power were accountable to the people. What is more, "...the concept of justice is central to the Oromo cosmology, gadaa and political culture in general". According to Gnamo, Seera is an Oromo constitution, which ensured, without any ambiguity, rights, duties, equality & justice."²¹ His study clearly establishes that the Arsi Oromo, like other Oromos, lived under their own laws made by their *Chaffee* assemblies before their conquest and colonization.

European scholars had documented the crucial importance of *Chaffee* assemblies in Oromo history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Let me just mention Antoine D'Abbadie, who was quoted by Abbas Gnamo also. D'Abbadie was a French explorer and geographer, who lived among the Oromo for more than two years. He learned the Oromo language and gathered extensive oral traditions from among them. He attended sessions of the *Chaffee* assembly meetings in 1843 in Guduru. Years later, D'Abbadie produced beautifully written paper entitled "The Oromo, the Great African Nation,"²² which was "...by far the most respectful of writing on Oromo society. He honored Oromo democracy by reading his paper at the French National Parliament."²³ D'Abbadie called them by their ancient name of Oromo ...at the time when nearly every other writer was calling them 'Galla' –a derogatory name given to them [by Amhara].²⁴

D'Abbadie confirmed that the Oromo lived under their own laws made by their *Chaffee* assemblies. He was the second European scholar who realized the immense potential of the Oromo as a great African nation.²⁵ The first was J. L. Krapf, who lived among the Oromo in Shawa from 1840-1843, and wrote about the Oromo potential to be a great African nation.²⁶

20 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 34, 39.

21 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 25, 46, 105.

22 Antoine, D'Abbadie, "On the Oromo: Great African Nation Often Designated Under the Name "Galla," *The Journal of Oromo studies* 14, no. 1 (2007):117-146.

23 Asmarom, *Gadaa Democratic Institutions*, xxiv.

24 Asmarom, *Gadaa Democratic Institutions*, xxiv.

25 J. L. Krapf, *Travels and Researches in East Africa* (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1860), 72.

26 D'Abbadie, "On the Oromo,"130.

For D' Abbadie, the Gudru *Chaffee* assembly was the Oromo political nerve center, where the people debated important issues of the day and made laws. In the following quotation D' Abbadie admires the oratory of the Guduru *Chaffee* assembly leaders and states that their dignity and decorum were much better than those of European parliaments of the time.

When the orator finished, the assembly kept quiet for a long while in order to allow him to continue his speech if he then recalled an omitted argument. In these oratorical contesters of Africa, there is always a natural dignity and decorum that we would like to see in the turbulent chambers of Europe where the wisest have sometimes regretted untimely vivacity.²⁷

D' Abbadie tells us that while the *Chaffee* assembly was in session, its leader held in his hand the *bokkuu*, the specter symbolizing the authority of his people. The leader of Gudru *chaffee* assembly was also known as Abba Bokku (the father of bokkuu). In fact, among Arsi Oromo, gada leader was known as Abba Bokku.²⁸ D' Abbadie adds that “the bokkuu can be compared to the mace of the English Parliament,”²⁹ which demonstrates that he was fascinated with the Guduru Oromo *Chaffee* assembly's democratic practices. According to Asmarom Legesse, “Oromo made laws to meet some of the great challenges that conformed them in history. They did so...because they had...an effective legislative assembly. ... The Oromo constitution, though unwritten, is a rich source of ideas.”³⁰ Most likely it was because of that D' Abbadie compares the English and Oromo laws.

It was in their unwritten, their *common law* that constitutes the strength of England....one would not have difficulty therefore understanding that the Oromo, who do not know how to write , also have had laws just as valuable that as those of the English.³¹

D' Abbadie's observation confirms that the *Chaffee* assembly was the source of law. D' Abbadie adds three insightful observations about the Oromo, among whom he lived. First, that “the Oromo have established separation of power,”³² which is the basis for modern democratic societies. Second, that the Oromo developed complex rules of government comparable to those of the great Roman Republic during its democratic period.³³ Finally,

²⁷ D'Abbadie, "On the Oromo," 130.

²⁸ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 33-34.

²⁹ D' Abbadie, "On the Oromo," 130.

³⁰ Legesse, *Gadaa: Democratic Institutions*, 247.

³¹ D'Abbadie, "On the Oromo," 134.

³² D'Abbadie, "On the Oromo," 134.

³³ D'Abbadie, "On the Oromo," 127.

that “the Oromo, as ancient Rome, have faith in their future greatness.”³⁴ Unfortunately, the Oromo potential to become a great African nation as well as their faith in their future greatness were aborted by the conquest and occupation of Oromo country by Emperor Menelik’s forces, which facilitated the plunder of Oromo resources, destruction of their institutions and opened the long chapter of Oromo humiliation under the Ethiopian empire as will be discussed later on in this article in relation with Arsi Oromo.

Here we focus on the views of Asma Giyorgis on the Oromo Gada system. He was a knowledgeable Amhara traditional historian, who had extensive knowledge about the Oromo society and wrote a manuscript in the early 20th century that has plenty of information about Oromo the gada system, their history and their traditional religion. By the standard of the time, Asma Giyorgis was a relatively fair historian.³⁵ I say this because he was the second Amhara historian to write that these people, who are our neighbors, call themselves by their ancient national name of Oromo. He clearly stated that it was the “Amhara who call them Galla.”³⁶ The term Galla is loaded with negative connotations. As noted by Gada Melba, the Amhara attach a derogatory connotation to the Galla, namely “pagan, savage, uncivilized, enemy [of the Amhara] slave or inherently inferior.”³⁷ In fact, “up until 1974, the Oromo were denied the basic democratic right to name themselves and to define their own identity.”³⁸ The first Amhara traditional scholar who confirmed that the Oromo call themselves by their national name was Abba Gregory, who also stated that it was the Amhara who call them Galla.³⁹

Asma Giyorgis wrote about the gada system, the chaffee assembly, and the Qaalluu institution. As a fluent speaker of the Oromo language, Asma Giyorgis either observed the gathering of chaffee assembly himself or he got accurate information from knowledgeable individuals.⁴⁰ As a keen observer, Asma Giyorgis had better grasp of the gada system than his educated Christian contemporaries in Menelik’s empire. He accurately confirms that the authority of the Abba Gada or Abba bokkuu was

34 D’Abbadie, “On the Oromo,” 129.

35 Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis*, 135, 155.

36 Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis*, 155.

37 Gada Melba, *Oromia: An introduction to the History of the Oromo people* (Minneapolis, MN: Kirk House, 1999), 14.

38 Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo & the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia 1300-1700* (Rochester, New York: James Currey, Boydell & Brewer, 2015): 3.

39 Job Ludolphus, Trans. J. P. Gent, *A New History of Ethiopia* (London: Samuel Smith, 1682), 81.

40 Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis*, 131.

Bestowed upon him at the [chaffee assembly] after he received a blessing for his [bokkuu]. The [bokkuu] is like a scepter. [The Abba gadaa] is blessed and installed into office with [bokkuu]. He presides for eight years. At the end of the eight years, he is removed from office.⁴¹

Additionally, Asma Giyorgis provides us with fascinating information about the Tulama Oromo chaffee assembly that was held every eight years at Awash Malka Bullo, where “as many as 100,000 gathered for a week.”⁴² Such huge number of people gathered at Awash Malka Bullo for celebrating the peaceful transfer of power and for praying for the outgoing as well as for the incoming leaders. Then the elected leaders and members of the chaffee assembly met,

once every eight years to administer justices, to hear the historical and judicial report of the expiring eight years, to [reform] some of the existing laws and legislate new ones, and to proclaim the future law and procedures of the [Oromo].⁴³

Most important, Asma Giyorgis was far ahead of his educated Christian contemporaries of his time in two respects. First, he wrote about the unwillingness of Orthodox clergy for spreading Christianity among the Oromo. In his own words,

The [Oromo] prefer to be Muslim rather than Christian, because they hate the [Amhara]. The [Amhara] priests, the bishops and the clergy do not like the [Oromo]. They believe that Christianity cannot be understood by those whose ancestors were not Christians. Therefore, they do not teach them.⁴⁴

Second and most remarkable, Asma Giyorgis wrote about the superiority of Oromo laws made by chaffee assembly compared to that of his Christian society. In his own words, “...the justice administered in each [chaffee] excelled that which is possessed by those of us who are in their vicinity and claim to be Christians.”⁴⁵

Are the democratic principles of Gadaa system relevant to the current yearning for democratic governance in Oromia and other parts of Ethiopia? Three writers answer the question with a resounding yes.⁴⁶ First, Abbas

41 Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis*, 185.

42 Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis*, 185.

43 Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis*, 135.

44 Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis*, 133.

45 Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis*, 135.

46 Mohammed Hassen, “The Egyptian Occupation of Harar and Its Impact on the Oromo of Hararghe,” *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 15, no.2 (July 2008): 36-40.

Gnamo argues "...beyond the role of a unifying factor and a common idiom for a widely spread nation, the Gadaa has immense potential to be used in the construction of a modern political structure based on indigenous tradition."⁴⁷ Second, the writer of this article, believes that Oromo democratic principles of the accountability of leaders, which limits their tenure of office to a defined eight-years period, the peaceful transfer of power, the principles of checks and balances, separation of power and authority, extensive debates during the process of law-making, the spirit of compromise, concession and consensus, which constituted the hallmarks of Oromo democracy, can serve as a basis for democracy to take root in Oromia and possibly in other parts of Ethiopia.⁴⁸

Third, and most important, Asmarom Legesse, the leading authority on the Oromo democratic institution, believes that the principles of the gadaa system "... can serve as the cornerstone of a modern political system based on the egalitarian heritage of an indigenous African Democracy."⁴⁹ In his most recent book, Asmarom Legesse strongly emphasizes importance of harnessing the constitutional principles of Oromo democracy as shown below.

Gadaa offers a rich democratic tradition that can serve as the basis for a modern democracy. The traditions include lawmaking, law enforcement, parliamentary ethics, methods of checking the abuse of political power, balancing mechanisms that permit lawful, legitimate opposition, separation of powers and checks and balances that give the secular and sacred elements opportunity to play a limited role in government. ... Oromo democracy has much great resources to offer to Oromia, to Ethiopia as a whole, a constitutional thought, and to the very-fabric of democratic discourse and strategies of consensus building. In several domains Oromo democracy has something vital to offer to the nation.⁵⁰

The Qaalluu institution

This institution is discussed briefly as it was one of the pillars of unity of Arsi Oromo, which was the foundation for their long resistance against the expanding Ethiopian empire created by Emperor Menelik, as will be shown further in this article. The Qaalluu institution was the core of traditional Oromo religion, based on Waaqa, an Oromo God, "the Creator of everything, source of life, omnipresent. He is pure, intolerant of injustice."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 54.

⁴⁸ Mohammed Hassen, "A Short History of Oromo Colonial Experience 1870's-1990's: Part One 1870's To 1935," *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 6, nos. 1&2 (July 1999): 126-28.

⁴⁹ Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 264.

⁵⁰ Legesse, *Gadaa Democratic Institutions*, 323.

⁵¹ Mengesha Rikitu, *Oromia Recollected* (London: Magic Press, 1988), 23.

This institution is “believed to have existed since mythical times.”⁵² Existing data shows “that traditional Oromo religion had institutions, ritual practices, ritual experts, calendars, and ritual terminologies and texts that were common for the different branches of the Oromo nation in the past.”⁵³ Qaalluu was the spiritual leader of the traditional Oromo religion, based on Waaqa (the Oromo God), the creator of the universe and sustainer of life. It was the Qaalluu,

Who interpreted the laws of Waaqa and served as a link between Waaqa and the Oromo. As the spiritual leader of traditional Oromo religion, the Qaalluu legitimated the institution of Abba Muudaa and validated the pilgrimage to his shrine. In other words, the Qaalluu himself became the Abba Muudaa, which literally means the ‘father’ of the muudaa rituals. Muudaa refers to both the ceremony held every eight years to honoring the holy person-the Qaalluu-and the pilgrimage to his shrine, which is a sacred site.⁵⁴

Azaj Tino, an imperial chronicler and scholar of the early seventeenth century, writing in the 1610s or shortly after, described the Abba Muudaa as “the prophet of the nation” who guarded the law of Waaqa and its interpretation.”⁵⁵ He added that the Oromo believe in their Abba Muudaa “as the Jews believe in Moses and the Muslims in Muhammad.” Just as Christians and Muslims went on pilgrimage to the birth of places of their religions, the Oromo went to the land of Abba Muudaa in southern Ethiopia. Those who went on the pilgrimage to honor the Abba Muudaa were known as *jila*. According to Azaj Tino, they all go to him from far and near to honor the Abba Muudaa and receive his blessings.”⁵⁶ Indeed, the pilgrimage to the Abba Muudaa was integral to the practice of the traditional Oromo religion. Above all else, the Qaalluu were regarded as “holy men” and men of peace and, hence, they were revered and showered with gifts by the pilgrims.⁵⁷ The title of the “prophet” of the nation confers upon the Abba Muudaa the title of father, the source of all traditions. According to Asmarom Legesse,

52 Karl Knutsson, *Authority and change: A study of the Kallu Institution among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia* (Gothenburg: Ethografiska Museet, 1967), 65.

53 Mekuria Bulcha, *Contours of the emergent and Ancient Oromo Nation: Dilemmas in the Ethiopian Politics of state and Nation Building* (Cape Town: Center for advanced studies of African society, 2011), 254.

54 Hassen, *The Oromo & the Christian Kingdom*, 47.

55 F.M. Esteves Pereira, Ed. *Chronicade Susenyos, Rei de Ethiopia* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1892-1900), 214.

56 Pereira, *Chronicade Susenyos*, 214.

57 Pereira, *Chronicade Susenyos*, 214.

The [Qaalluu], the men with the highest ritual authority, are the men of blessing and men of peace par excellence. They are prohibited from bearing arms, shedding blood and making laws. They are excluded from the highest decision body in the land.⁵⁸

Yet, because of their ritual authority and prestige, they oversaw the election of Gada leaders, those who provided political and military leadership.⁵⁹ Finally, the Abbas Gnamo sums up the importance and connectedness of the Gadaa system and the Qaalluu institution in the following words.

The Oromo constitution stipulates, among other things, the legitimacy of the ruling Gadaa class...for a period of 8 years, without guaranteeing a full term mandate. ... the Qaalluu played a tremendous role at local and national levels as the guardian of traditions and values and checks and balances against abuses of power. The Oromo of all the regions visited the home of the great [Abba Muudaa] every 8 years through institutionalized pilgrimage in order to render their homage and receive his blessings. ... Qaalluu and Gadaa leadership served as a system of checks and balances, it contributed, to some extent, to the diffusion of political power among the various actors. In so doing, it might have prevented the Gadaa from being the only source of power.⁶⁰

The Making of Oromo kinship identity

The third institution that is discussed here is “the making of Oromo kinship identity and structure.” The other name for this institution is gosa or descent group, which had pervasive importance in traditional Oromo society. The term gosa is difficult to define precisely. In a number of sources, gosa is defined as “a lineage, or a clan, or sub-clan, or a tribe,...or people or a nation.”⁶¹ However, for Abbas Gnamo, “...gosa is a large category of descent groups which includes all peoples descending or claiming descent from a putative or real common ancestor.”⁶² Gosa is also one of the mechanisms for defining individual and collective identity within Oromo society, as well as for “...organizing solidarity and cooperation among its members.” Members of a gosa have rights and obligations for helping each other during times of crises.⁶³ As Paul Baxter observed among the Borana Oromo, members of a gosa “should render each other every sort of assistance, contributions to fines,

58 Legesse, *Gada: Three Approaches*, 121.

59 Hassen, *The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom*, 48.

60 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 53.

61 Paul Baxter, “Social organization of the Galla of northern Kenya” (PhD diss., Oxford University, 1954), 77.

62 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 57.

63 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 60, 68-69.

hospitality, ...gifts in misfortune and distributions from fortunes of bounty.⁶⁴ With amazing clarity and economy, Abbas establishes some basic rules of gosa among traditional Oromo society.⁶⁵ They include descent through the paternal line, strict exogamous marriage, a territorially defined area that bears the name of a particular gosa, political autonomy and its dynamic nature through the process of segmentation, fission giving birth to hundreds of gosas each with its own name.⁶⁶ Though a territory may bear the name of a gosa, different gosa members were mixed extensively in that territory itself. Mekuria Bulcha explains the reason for this in the following words.

A gosa name can be a structural and territorial term. However, the groups are not territorial in themselves. A territory is inhabited not only by a gosa groups whose name it bears but many others. Almost everywhere, different descent groups live interspersed with other groups. As a structural feature, a gosa name can be used to denote a sub-branch or federation of several sub-branches of the Oromo nation.⁶⁷

Background to the creation of the Ethiopian Empire

Abbas Gnamo discusses extensively not only the concept of an empire but also provides solid evidence that Ethiopia is an empire. He makes accurate comparisons backed with massive data for establishing that the characteristics of the Ethiopian empire is very similar, if not identical, with other empires in history. Most empires in history were created through conquest and maintained by soldiers. Likewise, the Ethiopian empire (as will be shown later) was created through brutal conquests and maintained by soldiers up to now. What is more “all official Ethiopian documents referred to the country as an empire up to 1974. Many foreign observers also employed the concept of empire for Ethiopia up to the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974.”⁶⁸ Like other empires the beneficiaries of the Ethiopian empire were Amhara leaders, their collaborators, soldiers and settlers in Oromia and other conquered territories in southern Ethiopia. Like other empires, the Ethiopian empire was based upon “domination, injustices, and subordination.”⁶⁹ According to Gnamo,

Modern Ethiopia perfectly fits the imperial category due to the fact that there is an imperial center organized around the [Shawan] kingdom, which became an empire at the end of the 19th century. This center is dominated by the Amhara from

⁶⁴ Baxter, “Social organization,” 202.

⁶⁵ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 59-70.

⁶⁶ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 59-70.

⁶⁷ Bulcha, *Contours*, 135-6.

⁶⁸ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 100.

⁶⁹ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 105.

1889-1991 when the...(Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front) seized state power. Moreover, there was an imperial project, imperial narratives and legitimizing myths, imperial conquests involving sheer force and diplomacy or a combination of both. The conquest was followed by organized systems of exploitation (land alienation, slavery, serfdom, and tribute), imperial cultural hegemony and political oppression as well as imperial relationship between the core, the dominant center and the newly conquered peoples, kingdoms, nations, regions and provinces.⁷⁰

The early phase of that conquest of the Oromo started during the long reign of Sahle Sellassie (1813–48), King Menelik's grandfather. It was Sahle Selassie who first called himself *Negus* (king) of the small kingdom of north Shawa. He established his capital at Angolala, on the land he captured from the Oromo. Sahle Selassie started systematic attacks against his Oromo neighbors, by conducting three annual raids “for the purpose of killing people, capturing slaves and cattle, and burning crops and houses.”⁷¹ Additionally, Oromo “became fair ‘game’ for Amhara children to kill, loot, and pillage and thereby learn the art of warfare.”⁷² In the words of Asma Giyorgis, an Amhara scholar and a fair historian:

All the youths of fourteen, fifteen and above wished to participate in the expedition to kill [Oromo], for he who did not put [shariti] on his head and shamme on his neck, would not be counted among men. Furthermore, one who experienced in the campaign and killing would take away the children of his kinsmen in order to enable them to kill the [Oromo]. When they captured the [Oromo] and taught the youths to exercise on them how to stab or hit with the blade, there would be great happiness and singing on their return.⁷³

By 1840, Sahle Selassie could mobilize up to 50,000 warriors against his Oromo neighbors. And yet, for breaking psychologically, Oromo resistance, Sahle Selassie's Amhara warriors embarked upon mutilating Oromo prisoners of war. Abbas Gnamo quotes from Rochet d' Hericourt, a French diplomat, who witnessed King Sahle Selassie's war against his Oromo neighbors during the 1840s.

⁷⁰ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 105.

⁷¹ Mohammed Hassen, “Genocidal Conquest, Plunder of Resources and Dehumanization of the Oromo in Ethiopia,” *Journal of Genocide Research* (2021): 1.

⁷² Gnamo, *Conquest*, 158.

⁷³ Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis*, 533.

The Amhara were not content to seize the cattle, they pursued with the ferocity and cowardice women and children. For an [Amhara], the sign of victory is snatching from the enemy that was defeated the organ of manhood, so he seeks to deprive his enemy to take away that awful trophy.⁷⁴

While having a large number of warriors, Sahle Selassie requested French and the British assistance in "...sending guns, cannons and other things which I have not in my country."⁷⁵ Though limited in quantity and quality, the king's firepower was directed against the Oromo, who virtually lacked firepower. And yet, according to the missionary Krapf, the king's soldiers were not able to neutralize the effectiveness of Oromo cavalry.⁷⁶

Besides the weapons he acquired from European source, Sahle Selassie discovered the policy of using internal Oromo conflicts, by fighting on the side of a weak group against strong Oromo neighbours.⁷⁷ Rochet d'Hericourt, the French diplomat, as quoted by Abbas Gnamo, gives an excellent example of Sahle Selassie's policy.

The Oromo of Galan and Abichu fought for seven years and every time the Galan were the victors. The war began to be of great interest to Shale Selassie. He allied with the Abichu and gave support. By siding with the Abichu he subjugated the Galan, Gidda, Wabaria, Illamu, Aga, Gerru, Wayyu, Salale.⁷⁸

The creation of the Ethiopian Empire during the 1880s & 1890s

It was King Menelik (1865-1889) and later Emperor Menelik (1889-1913) who created the Ethiopian empire through over two decades of brutal conquest. Early in his reign King Menelik realized that it was only through monopoly of firepower that he could neutralize Oromo cavalry and break the backbone of Oromo resistance. For that purpose, King Menelik warmly welcomed private French weapon sellers to his court. In fact, by 1875, Menelik was already claiming that "the French are my friends; it is upon them that I shall base the hope of my reign."⁷⁹

The French provided him with weapons and trained his soldiers. Menelik ... operated with French technicians, French map makers, French advice on the management of a standing army, and more French advice as to holding captured provinces

⁷⁴ Quoted in Gnamo, *Conquest*, 159.

⁷⁵ Afrique Memoires et Documents Abyssinie 1838a, 1850, Archives des Affaires Etrangères, folio 231.

⁷⁶ A.I. A .Gen. 16A. India Office Records, Krapf's letter of 3 July 1840, from Ankober, folio 127-133.

⁷⁷ A.I. A .Gen. 16A. India Office Records, 127-133.

⁷⁸ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 130.

⁷⁹ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 130.

with permanent garrisons of conscripted colonial troops. The French also armed his troops with firearms and did much else to organize his campaigns ... Without massive European help; the [Oromo] would not have been conquered at all.⁸⁰

Menelik continued receiving large scale weapons from a number of European countries, including, the French, the Italians and the Russians. De Savliac prophetically predicted that the "accumulation of munitions, the piles of firearms,... was the big cloud which hid in its bowels the devastating blow to the Oromo[nation]."⁸¹ While amassing an arsenal of modern weapons, Menelik harnessed the talents of capable generals. One of which was Gobana Dacche, a Christianized Oromo.

Gobana took upon himself the conquest of his people. Gobana was an excellent horseman, a brave warrior, an able strategist, and an accomplished expert in the knowledge of Oromo warfare and psychology. He was Menelik's ablest general and the greatest empire builder [for Menelik].⁸²

It was Gobana who completed the conquest of the Oromo and other people of Shawa. It was also Gobana, who, through dubious promises of local autonomy and threat of powerful military action, forced the five Oromo Gibe states, Illu Abbabora, and Wallaga to submit to Menelik. In short, it was Gobana who made the three richest regions of Ethiopia an integral part of the expanding empire of Menelik.⁸³

The conquest of the Oromo of Wallo, Arsi, Hararge and Borana and other peoples of southern Ethiopia was very brutal. Its consequences include, but are not limited to, the loss of sovereignty, land alienation, reducing the previously free peasants into *gabbars* (serfs) slavery, abject poverty, and destruction of their cultural heritage. In fact, "Menelik did not unify the people of the same ethnic stock and culturally related peoples, but he carved an empire of tens of disparate Ethno-national groups under the hegemony of Amhara-Tigreans."⁸⁴

Historically, the Amhara and Tigreans were known as Abyssinians. The latter were the core people of the empire, who in many ways were the beneficiaries of the newly created empire. "The conquered people [were] not considered as citizens, but they also suffered from racism, ethnocentrism, and biases

80 Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia, 1844-1913* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 44.

81 Lytton, Lord, *The Stolen Desert* (London: McDonald, 1966), 160.

82 de Salviac, *An Ancient people*, 348.

83 Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 198.

84 Hassen*, *The Oromo of Ethiopia*,* 199.

of all sorts at the hands of the dominant society, as is often the case with European colonizers.”⁸⁵ Gebru Tareke describes the Abyssinian settlers among the Oromo and other conquered peoples of southern Ethiopia as follows.

Paternalistic and arrogant, Abyssinians looked upon and treated the indigenous people as backward, heathen, filthy, deceitful, lazy, and even stupid, stereotypes that European colonialists commonly ascribed to their African subjects. Both literally and symbolically, southerners became the object of scorn and ridicule.⁸⁶

Menelik's brutal war of conquest produced thousands of captives for the Emperor and his generals, who intensified the slave trade and slavery in Ethiopia. Harold Marcus, an American historian who wrote books on Emperors Menelik and Haile Sellassie, stated that Menelik was “the greatest slave entrepreneur [who] received the bulk of the proceeds.”⁸⁷ In fact, Emperor Menelik continued collecting revenue in slaves from chiefs of the conquered territories until his death in 1913.⁸⁸ By 1900, Menelik, the Christian emperor of the then Abyssinian, and his wife, Taitu, owned 70,000 slaves.⁸⁹ According to Abbas Gnamo,

Even Ras Tafari, the crown prince (1916-1928) owned slaves. He freed his 7,500 slaves only in 1923 when he was obliged to abolish slavery under international pressure, which was set as a condition for Ethiopia's admission to the League of Nations. The country became a member of the League of Nations not as Ethiopia, but as Abyssinia.... Although officially suppressed, slavery was tolerated by authorities in Ethiopia who were great slave owners.⁹⁰

After the conquest, the Oromo and other conquered peoples of southern Ethiopia lost their lands, which Emperor Menelik confiscated and distributed to his family, generals and their soldiers, the Orthodox Church and settlers from northern Abyssinia.⁹¹ The Arsi Oromo & other conquered peoples of southern Ethiopia were denied not just basic human dignity but also economic rights, reduced as it were to the status of the *gabbar* (serf) and controlled by the predatory *neftayna* (armed settlers).

85 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 177- 79.

86 Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest Peasant revolts in the Twenty-century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 75.

87 Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II*, 73.

88 Mekuria Bulcha, *The Making of the Oromo Diaspora: A Historical Sociology of Forced Migration* (Minneapolis, MN: Kirk House Publishers, 2002), 55.

89 Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia 1800-1935* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1968), 75. See also H. Darley, *Slavery and Ivory in Abyssinia* (London: H.F. & G. Witherby, 1926), 197-199, 201.

90 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 127.

91 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 128.

Soldiers were given extensive land and *gabbar* according to their ranks and service. The *gabbar* was obliged to work two to three days a week for soldiers and administrative officers, who received no wages but allowed to live on the local population. These obligatory services included production, cultivation and harvest, construction of houses and fences, and household activities such as searching for firewood and water, grinding the grain, and many other chores.... In addition, the *Gabbar* had to pay tribute to the central government in kind, honey, flour, and cattle, which had to be transported by his own means up to three times a year. ...[*Gabbar's*] productive capacity and that of his family belonged to soldiers-setters and he could not leave the land.⁹²

Under the Abyssinian *gabbar* system, especially in the southwestern region bordering with the Sudan “when governors and their followers were transferred from one region to another, they took with them their private *gabbars* in chains.”⁹³ In this sense, it is difficult to distinguish *gabbars* as being any different from slaves. It was probably for this reason that Charles Ray, who visited the country and wrote a book on *the Un Conquered Abyssinia*, “characterizes the Ethiopian version of *gabbar* system in the south as ‘another form of slavery.’”⁹⁴ According to Alberto Sabacchi,

Slavery was an intrinsic part of the social and economic life of Ethiopia, and slave owners were unwilling to part with their slaves unless they were financially compensated. Haile Selassie, it is said, suggested that American capitalists invest in the exploitation of Ethiopia's natural resources by engaging slave labor.... This plan failed. The Italians claim to have liberated about 500,000.⁹⁵

In short, the empire established by Menelik in southern Ethiopia was based on twin pillars, namely serfdom and slavery. Both of these institutions were abolished in 1936 during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. Evelyn Waugh, who attended the 1930 coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie's (1930-1974), was an eyewitness to the harsh condition of the Arsi Oromo and other conquered peoples of southern Ethiopia stated that they

...were treated with wanton brutality unequalled even in the Belgian Congo. Some areas were depopulated by slavers; in others Abyssinian garrisons were permanently quartered on the

92 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 135-36.

93 Darley, *Slavery and Ivory*, 201.

94 Charles R. Rey, *Unconquered Abyssinia* (London: Seeley Services and Co. Ltd, 1923), 189-90.

95 Alberto Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935-1941* (Lawrenceville, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 1997), 11-12.

people, whose duty is to support them and their descendents. Abyssinian officials, with retinues, which varied in size from a royal guard to a standing army, lived upon the work [&] taxes of the original inhabitants; their function was not to protect but hold in subjugation; fighting was the only occupation they recognized. It was not a question of a tolerable system being subject to abuse, but of an intolerable system,⁹⁶ [which was particularly the case in Arsi land after its conquest, see below].

The empire created by Menelik was based on unequal relationships between the Abyssinians and Arsi Oromo and other conquered people of southern Ethiopia. First, the beneficiaries of that empire were overwhelmingly the Abyssinians, who enjoyed political, economic, cultural and military hegemony. Secondly, Menelik's empire "...provided immense opportunity for social mobility"⁹⁷ for the Abyssinians. For instance, as Richard Caulk wrote, within four short years (1888-1892), between two hundred thousand and three hundred thousand Abyssinian settlers rushed "to take advantage of the new opportunities" in the fertile and newly-conquered province of Hararghe.⁹⁸ Similarly, a huge number of people moved from the Abyssinian heartland to the newly conquered regions, including Arsi land and other regions in southern Ethiopia, where they became not only land owners, but also had access to free labor in the form of either *gabbars* or slaves.⁹⁹ Amazingly, "...when a gabbar died, his son was under obligation to accomplish the same tasks."¹⁰⁰ In short, the previously landless poor Abyssinians were suddenly transformed into land-owning, relatively wealthy individuals.

Berhanou Abbebe, an Ethiopian historian, clearly states" ... that the conquest was a paradise for the Shoan political-military elites and for the emerging empire-state."¹⁰¹ Indeed, it was a paradise for those hailing from the heartland of Abyssinia, especially from Shawa, to Arsi Oromo land and other regions of Oromia. This was because those who came from Abyssinian had access to extensive land and free labor in the form of *gabbars* or slaves.¹⁰² What is more, Ethiopian government officials, who came to Arsi land, from the top official to minor functionaries came "... with one thing in mind to be served, not to

⁹⁶ Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia* (London: Longman Green and Co. Ltd, 1936), 24.

⁹⁷ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 127,130.

⁹⁸ Richard Caulk, *Between the Jaws of Hyenas: A Diplomatic History of Ethiopia (1876-1896)*, edited, with an introduction by Bahru Zewde (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 291.

⁹⁹ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 136-7

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in *Gnamo, Conquest*, 131.

¹⁰¹ Gnamo, *Conquest*, 135-37.

¹⁰² Gnamo, *Conquest*, 133.

serve, and to be enriched from the office they held, however, insignificant the position may have been,”¹⁰³ [through exploitation of Arsi Oromo resources and their labor].

Arsi Oromo institutions that united them against King Menelik's repeated invasions

The first of Arsi Oromo institutions that united them against their dangerous enemy was that of the Gadaa system. Gadaa encompasses political, military, social and cultural aspects of Arsi Oromo society. Historically, just like other Oromo groups, the gadaa system was the foundation of Arsi Oromo military strength and their democratic traditions for centuries. This was because gadaa was “...central and cornerstone of [Arsi Oromo] social organization.”¹⁰⁴ Arsi Oromo were the largest branch of the Oromo nation that kept their gadaa system fully intact up to the 1880s. While the Arsi Oromo gadaa system was intact, it enabled them for mobilizing huge number of fighters.¹⁰⁵ De Salviac, states that Arsi Oromo alone could mobilize more than hundred thousand fighters.¹⁰⁶ while Paulitscheke estimated that the Arsi Oromo could mobilize up a million fighters.¹⁰⁷ which most likely was an exaggeration. According to Abbas Gnamo, what the Arsi had was “...their unity and demographic strength.”¹⁰⁸ Mobilizing even the low number of hundred thousand fighters was a remarkable achievement. It was the legacy of “...long military traditions and warrior ideology enshrined in the Gadaa system.”¹⁰⁹ The gadaa system provided Arsi Oromo with experienced, capable and charismatic military commanders.¹¹⁰ Arsi Oromo commanders were gifted strategists, who inspired their people for defending their land. Defeating with their traditional weapons three times, the soldiers led by King Menelik personally was a remarkable achievement for Arsi Oromo warriors. As we have seen above, Menelik's soldiers were trained by French military officers; French technicians and his soldiers were provided with French and other European weapons.¹¹¹

It was the Arsi Oromo gadaa system that enabled them for marshalling their human, material and spiritual resources for resisting Menelik's invasion of their land. Gadaa leaders were able for mobilizing Arsi Oromo as a unified

103 Gnamo., *Conquest*, 135.

104 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 145.

105 de Salviac, *An Ancient people*, 348.

106 Quoted in Gnamo, *Conquest*, 145.

107 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 145.

108 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 145.

109 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 145.

110 Gnamo*,* *Conquest*, 149-50.

111 de Salviac, *An Ancient people*, 349.

force who clearly understood the danger they all faced by King Menelik's invasion of land. One of the reasons why other Oromo groups were unable to mobilize on a vast scale as Arsi Oromo did, was because their gadaa system was greatly weakened by several internal factors by the first half of the nineteenth century. In other words, the key to Arsi Oromo resistance was that their gadaa system was fully functional up the late 1880s. To paraphrase Asmarom Legesse's apt description, the gadaa system served Arsi Oromo as "a shared political idiom,"¹¹² that inspired and united most of Arsi Oromo warriors who continued with their heroic resistance for nearly a decade. That was precisely why huge number of Arsi fighters responded to the call of gadaa leaders for defending their land. In short, resistance in Arsi land was not conducted by only few gosases or descent groups as it happened in other Oromo areas. It was collective endeavor by the overwhelming majority of Arsi Oromo gosases, who were mobilized by their gadaa leaders for writing their glorious history with their blood and bones.

The two other institutions that were the pillars of Arsi Oromo unity during their heroic resistance were the Qaalluu Institution and the gosa or descent groups. The above mentioned three institutions united and inspired Arsi Oromo resistance against King Menelik's conquest of their land. As shown above, the Qaalluu was the spiritual leader of the traditional Oromo religion, based on Waaqa (the Oromo God). It was the Qaalluu who "interpreted the laws of Waaqa and served as a link between Waaqa and the Oromo." As such, it was the Qaalluu ...himself became the Abbaa Muudaa, which... refers to both the ceremony held every eight years to honoring the holy person-the Qaalluu-and the pilgrimage to his shrine, which is a sacred site.¹¹³ Remarkably, the most sacred site for the Oromo was in Bale, southern Arsi land, at Madda Wallabuu, where major Oromo institutions appear to have developed. Oromo pilgrims, who went to the shrine of Abbaa Muudaa, were known as Jila.

The Abbaa Muudaa commands the jila to teach the people to live according to the laws... of gadaa...not to fight each other but drive the [Abyssinians] from their lands. From this perspective, the Abbaa Muudaa was the [spiritual] leader who inspired [Arsi]Oromo to [strongly resist] the Abyssinian occupation of their lands.¹¹⁴

112 Legesse, *Gada: Three Approaches*, 8.

113 Mohammed Hassen, "Pilgrimage to Abbaa Muudaa," *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 12, nos. 1&2 (July 2005): 149.

114 Hassen, "Pilgrimage," 149.

Huntingford argued that for Emperor Menelik the pilgrimages to Abbaa Muuddaa were not so much religious acts as opportunities to stir up pan-Oromo feelings and to form plans for rebellion.¹¹⁵ It was precisely for this reason that Emperor Menelik banned the pilgrimage to Abbaa Muuddaa in 1900.

The third institution was that of gosa or descent group, which had huge importance in traditional Oromo society for centuries."¹¹⁶ Gosa was also one of the mechanisms for defining individual and collective identity within Oromo society, as well as for "...organizing solidarity and cooperation among its members." Members of a gosa [had] rights and obligations for helping each other during times of crises.¹¹⁷ This was particularly the case during the time of war. Arsi Oromo gadaa leaders and their military commanders explained to their people that the attack on one gossa was the attack on all Arsi Oromo. That was probably why the majority Arsi Oromo gosases participated in the resistance against King Menelik's conquest of their land. If it were only a few Arsi Oromo gosases who resisted, Menelik would have won at once in 1882, without suffering repeated humiliations in Arsi land for years, as shown below.

Menelik's Conquest of Arsi Oromo 1882-1892

Factors behind King Menelik's expeditions into Arsi Oromo territory were several, only four are mentioned here. First, there was a strong need for capturing booty with which to pay for imported European guns and ammunition, without which he could not win against the formidable Arsi Oromo cavalry. P. Antonnelli, a seasoned Italian diplomat, who dealt with King Menelik for years stated;

Menelik needs Europe to have ammunitions and arms without which he would lose all [he had already conquered]...in one day, since it is impossible to dominate the [Oromo] without rifles. On the contrary, if they are in a state of equality in traditional arms they [Oromo] are superior to the Amhara.¹¹⁸

Second, in 1878, facing the heavily armed superior force of Emperor Yohannes (1872-1889), Menelik was humiliated and forced to renounce his short-lived claim to the imperial title. Menelik was forced to submit to Yohannes and begged for mercy. In return Emperor Yohannes allowed Menelik to keep his title as King of Shawa. As a vassal king, Menelik was forced to pay a huge annual tribute both in cash and in kind to Emperor

115 G.W.B. Huntingford, *The [Oromo] of Ethiopia: The Kingdom of Kaffa and Janjero* (London: International African Institute, 1955), 83-4.

116 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 60.

117 Baxter, "Social organization," 202.

118 Antonnelli, P. quoted in Gnamo, *Conquest*, 143.

Yohannes. "These obligations could not be met by Shoan resources alone." It was for meeting his heavy tribute requirement that King Menelik in the early 1880s led expeditions into Arsi land, from where he returned "with 100,000 head of cattle."¹¹⁹ By leading continuous devastating expeditions, Menelik was able to obtain a monopoly of firearms against the Oromo and other peoples of southern Ethiopia. He did that by buying

Firearms without disposing of his own resources, using the spoils from the south as his principal resource. He was then able to loot the south further to import highly sophisticated weapons, which enabled him to conquer more territory, revive the northern economy and confirm the political and cultural hegemony of the Amhara.¹²⁰

Third, conquering Arsi Oromo land was the key for Menelik's strong ambition for conquering the city-state of Harar, which would open up for him not only the vast resources of Hararghe, but also for revolutionizing the flow of firearms to Menelik's empire. For instance, Menelik won the Battle of Caalanqo, on January 7, 1887, which opened up the vast resources of Hararghe for Menelik. Five days after that battle, when Menelik occupied the city of Harar, he collected 75,000 Maria Theresa Thaler¹²¹ (huge silver coins). King Menelik used that windfall for buying firearms. Additionally, King Menelik also used the custom of the City of Harar, as collateral for buying European weapons, which had immediately increased the flow of firearms to Menelik's court. According to Bonnie Holcomb & Sisai Ibssa before the end of 1887 "...there were hundreds of thousands of rifles and artillery pieces complete with ammunition available to Menelik's army."¹²² Most of those weapons were imported through Haraghe. This was because the city of Harar is located only about 200 miles from the port of Berbera on the Somali coast.

Finally, in the early 1880s there "was an acute economic crisis" in the kingdom of Shawa. Menelik was determined for looting the huge Arsi Oromo cattle and for expanding to Hararghe in the east and southern parts of Ethiopia.

Arsi Oromo warriors, who were targeted for devastation, not only lacked firearms but also a trained "... professional army, centralized authority, or foreign advisors."¹²³ And yet, Arsi warriors fiercely resisted Menelik's soldier's

119 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 144.

120 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 144.

121 Mohammed Hassen, "Testing the Thesis of The Invention of Ethiopia: Reinterpreting Menelik's Conquest of Harerge and Its Impact on the Oromo 1887-1900," *The Journal of Oromo Studies* 18, no.1 (July 2011): 129.

122 Bonnie Holcomb & Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1990), 105.

123 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 145.

skirmishes directed at looting cattle, horses, mules, donkeys and other properties up to 1881. The first expedition led by King Menelik himself was in 1882. Arsi Oromo cavalry caused havoc among the soldiers commanded by Menelik'. "At the height of the war,"...Menelik's soldiers were overwhelmed by Arsi warriors." Surprised by the ferocious attack by Arsi warriors, especially their cavalry, King Menelik complained to an Italian diplomat by strongly requesting him that 'We cannot fight horse against horse, spear against spear' and urged him to send the promised Italian weapons rapidly."¹²⁴

To avoid surprise Arsi cavalry attack, King Menelik was forced to return to Shawa, with looted Arsi cattle. He was relieved and delighted to have returned safely to Shawa, which he called his country. After months of preparation while obtaining additional European weapons, Menelik led his second expedition into Arsi land in December 1883. The king was surprised with ferocious Arsi resistance when he

Encountered the most organized resistance ...under the famous warrior and commander called Gossa Dilamo, who inflicted heavy casualties [on the invading army]. Menelik lost many soldiers including his three dignitaries....In retaliation for his considerable loss, [Menelik] exterminated many people, including women and children....Leenjeso Digaa [the greatest hero Arsi resistance produced]surprised [Menelik]at Dodota,[whose force]succeeded in crushing practically the whole royal force. The king himself narrowly escaped death and was pursued on horseback up to the present Mojo.¹²⁵

In 1884 Menelik organized another expedition into Arsi land. Arsi warriors bravely defended their land, while suffering heavily from King Menelik's formidable firepower. However, the king did not achieve his goal of breaking the backbone of Arsi resistance. On the contrary, when Menelik's 1884 campaign ended, the king was not only "forced to retreat without loot,[but] his three generals lost their campaign materials and half of their soldiers."¹²⁶ Menelik led another unsuccessful campaign to Arsi land in 1885. Although Arsi Oromo warriors suffered greatly from Menelik's firepower, the king was unable to occupy Arsi land.

In fact, according to de Salviac, "...the Abyssinian army sustained cruel losses. Nowhere did they sustain such an enormous disaster as [among] the innumerable Arsi."¹²⁷ It is not an exaggeration to say that during his long reign, nowhere did Menelik suffer repeated humiliations as he did in Arsi land. As we have seen briefly above, from 1881 to 1885, Arsi warriors drove Menelik's soldiers from their land at least four times. As mentioned earlier,

124 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 144.

125 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 149-150.

126 de Salviac, *An Ancient people*, 350.

127 Lytton, *The Stolen Desert*, 160.

Menelik's soldiers were well trained and equipped with massive European weapons.¹²⁶ For Arsi Oromo "firearms came...out of hell [for annihilating their warriors, children, men and women].¹²⁸ By 1886 King Menelik had an estimated 30,000 guns and several artillery pieces, which grew into 112,000 by 1896.¹²⁹ It was such a powerful king, who in 1886, decided for breaking once and for all, Arsi warrior's resistance. It was for that purpose that Menelik adopted three interconnected policies in 1886.

First, he gave the task of conquering Arsi Oromo to his uncle, *Ras Darghe*, who had a long experience of breaking Salale Oromo resistance in Shawa. Secondly, as we have seen above, Menelik had already exterminated Arsi men, women and children in 1883. *Ras Darghe*, intensified that policy on a large scale. His goal was for psychologically destroying Arsi Oromo resistance. "Thirdly, Menelik made a strong call to mobilize his soldiers and Shoan subjects on a massive scale and those who refused to heed to his words were threatened with confiscation of their property."¹³⁰

With his well-armed, massive force, Menelik attacked Arsi country in May 1886. The Arsi warriors abandoned their frontal attack against Menelik's soldiers during the day and adopted the policy of a surprise attack during the night, killing between two and five thousand of Menelik's soldiers.¹³¹ This Arsi victory was followed by that of *Leenjeso Digaa*, whose warriors burned down the royal camp "... and the king miraculously escaped death for the third time."¹³²

Ras Darghe accepted Menelik's challenge for breaking Arsi Oromo warrior's resistance. For that purpose, in rash and without picking a strategic position for fighting against Arsi warriors, *Darghe* exposed his soldiers to destruction. This was because according to *de Salviac*, *Ras Darghe*,

...drove his hordes across the same tribe and there lost entire columns. Between *Bakaksa* and *Fugug*, the Oromo lured one of his lieutenants into an ambush, and his brigade, 2000 men strong, were perished there to the last soldiers.... [*Menelik*] in person ran to the rescue of his generals. He almost fell into the hands of the Arsi.¹³³

Humiliated, *Ras Darghe* abandoned his rash policy of attacking Arsi warriors. He was determined to devise a new policy for trapping Arsi Oromo warriors for destruction (see below). What is more, *Ras Darghe*, learned through his

128 *de Salviac, An Ancient people*, 350.

129 *Holcomb & Ibssa, The Invention of Ethiopia*, 112.

130 *Gnamo, Conquest*, 151.

131 *Gnamo, Conquest*, 151.

132 *Gnamo, Conquest*, 151-152.

133 *de Salviac, An Ancient people*, 351-52.

two Arsi Oromo informants, that Arsi warriors were planning for a massive attack against his forces. He knew Arsi Oromo cavalry was a formidable force. He was determined to neutralize that cavalry. As we have seen above, King Menelik benefited from “French advice as to holding captured provinces with permanent garrisons of conscripted colonial troops.”¹³⁴ That advice involved picking strategic locations and digging trench around that location. Most likely Menelik shared that advice with his uncle, Ras Darghe, who picked the most strategic place, which was easy to defend, but difficult for attack. That strategic place was called Azule. *Ras* Darghe quickly established a fortified base at Azule. He dug huge trenches around that base. The purpose was for trapping and destroying Arsi Oromo cavalry. As mentioned earlier, De Savliac, predicted that the main purpose behind King Menelik's accumulation of European weapons was for annihilating Oromo resistance.¹³⁴ That prediction became a reality for Arsi Oromo warriors on December 6, 1886, when Arsi warriors, who were “...emboldened” by their victories against *Ras* Darghe, made early morning attack on the well fortified base at Azule. Early in the morning on December 6, 1886,

Huge masses of Arsi profiled their swarming silhouettes on the surrounding summits. The Abyssinians were seized with terror. [*Ras* Darghe] figured at a glance the gravity of the situation [and ordered] do not move, he shouted to the soldiers, form square. Here [they] ...arrive trapped, remain compact, because if you give an entrance in your ranks to the Arsi, they will devour you like dogs would. You do not know the formidable tenacity of these men there. Be immobile, and when they will be in your sight, shoot, let your rifles go off together: shoot, shoot, shoot....The Arsi came to within...twenty meters, raining a hail of javelins against the rifles. ...The Oromo saw their own killed or wounded, heap on the ground, and never back out. ‘Arsi dies, but does not at all back out’. The rifles spit out until the evening.¹³⁵

Probably most of the horsemen fell into trenches and perished. Thousands of Arsi foot soldiers who managed to enter the Azule camp were cut down with hell of bullets. What happened on December 6, 1886 was not a battle, but carnage. According to de Salviac, that fateful day more than twelve thousand Arsi warriors perished.¹³⁶ The number of perished Arsi warriors was counted by *Ras* Darghe's soldiers. The counting had to be done quickly as bodies decomposed rapidly. The soldiers counted mainly those who were mowed down by bullets as bodies were on the ground and it was easier and faster to count the corpses on the ground. However, counting those who died in the trenches was extremely difficult and time consuming. In short, out of thousands of Arsi Oromo horsemen who attacked Azule base, most likely

¹³⁴ Lytton, *The Stolen Desert*, 160.

¹³⁵ de Salviac*, *An Ancient people*,* 348*.*

¹³⁶ de Salviac*, *An Ancient people*,* 351-52.

only a limited number of dead horsemen were counted by Darghe's soldiers. What is most surprising is that even after their huge victory, Ras Darghe soldiers expressed profound fear of Arsi warriors. Thus, when Darghe arrived on that battlefield, his soldiers warned him with the following words.

If you camp here, you are lost. The Arsi are like the grasshoppers; you could cover the ground with their corpses; you cannot exterminate them. They will come back, they will find you harassed and without munitions, and they tear you to pieces. The warning was listened; they raised the camp.¹³⁷

Ras Darghe, who did not massacre all Arsi warriors, followed the retreating “survivors for many days, killing and mutilating countless people along the way, [which]... took on the characteristics of genocide, a deliberate attempt to exterminate men and women.”¹³⁸ After the Battle of Azule, *Ras Darghe* intensified the policy of mutilation and castration, for terrorizing Arsi Oromo into submission. For that purpose, he picked the village of Anole for avenging the losses he and King Menelik's soldiers suffered in Arsi land for some years. Thus, at Anole, the unsuspecting Arsi men and women responded to *Ras Darghe's* call for “peace talk,” a trap for committing horrific mutilation.

Arsi's strong men and women assembled under the pretext of concluding peace. All the men and women present... perhaps more than thousand people, were mutilated, their right hands [of men] and right breast [of women] were cut off. As a further form of humiliation [for spreading] fear and terror the mutilated breasts and hands were tied around the neck of the victims who were sent back home.¹³⁹

The purpose of massive mutilation, according to Mekuria Bulcha, was to psychologically destroy Arsi Oromo resistance.¹⁴⁰ Indeed those who returned to their villages, with their breasts and hands around their neck sent a shock wave of terror through numerous Arsi villages. Martial de Salviac, a French missionary who lived among the Oromo during their conquest, saw 400 Arsi warriors who were mutilated. The reason behind that mutilation was Arsi warriors's stiff resistance as they;

137 de Salviac*, *An Ancient people*,* 352.

138 de Salviac*, *An Ancient people*,* 352.

139 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 153.

140 Gnamo*,* *Conquest*, 158.

... dispute[d] foot by foot their territory, and come together in mass of imposing columns, against which the fortune of Abyssinia failed to break and go down. General Walde Gabriel was held in check. Furious about such resistance, he had cut the right wrist of 400 notable Oromo in one day alone. We have seen with our own eyes some of these glorious ones mutilated.¹⁴¹

Besides the above-mentioned mutilation of breasts and hands, King Menelik's soldiers mutilated the manhood of prisoners of war, even dead Oromo warriors. The barbaric mutilation during the time of King Sahle Selassie (1818-1848) was transformed into commercial value during the time of King Menelik. "According to Merab, pieces of mutilated vital organs (*salaba*) had commercial value in [Shawa] and were sold for up to 12 [Maria Theresa] thalers.¹⁴²

As indicated previously, Arsi Oromo resistance lasted from 1882 - 1892. "This happened in two phases: 1881-1886 in northern Arsi (Dide'a) and 1888-1892 in southern Arsi, or Bale.¹⁴³ Since the resistance in Bale area was very similar, it continued intermittently until it was crushed by formidable firepower. Resistance both in Arsi and Bale areas were ended through brutal devastation. Both Arsi and Bale areas were;

Transformed into a looted and burnt battlefield. Every campaign resulted in the capture of thousands of cattle. For instance, in one of his campaigns, Menelik ...captured 150,435 head of cattle as well as an unlimited number of horses, goats, and mules. Beyond the devastation caused by the pillage, agricultural production also failed because of drought. Land remained uncultivated and harvests were not collected by years of generalized war. This combination of disasters hastened the defeat of Arsi Oromo and the occupation of their country.¹⁴⁴

Consequences of the conquest of Arsi Oromo

The consequences of the long Arsi Oromo resistance were several. First, their conquest and massive devastation were accompanied by loss of their population and property. During a decade-long resistance in Arsi land,

141 Bulcha, *The Making of the Oromo Diaspora*, 73.

142 de Salviac, *An Ancient people*, 350.

143 [Gnamo], Abbas Haji, "Menelik's Conquest as the Genesis of Ethiopian Crisis: A Case of the Arsi Oromo," *The Oromo Commentary* IV, no. 2 (1994): 20

Tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousand, [of men, women and children] were killed; thousands of women and men were mutilated, harvests and homes were set on fire, and their cattle were captured and taken away. Above all, they lost their land and were reduced to serfdom.¹⁴⁴

De Salviac, a contemporary eyewitness, who lived among the Oromo for more than three decades, documented the sufferings of Arsi Oromo. He was an eye witness, who met with some of the 400 men whose hands were amputated as shown above. In fact, no one exposed more clearly than de Salviac, the cruelty carried out by Menelik's soldiers.

The conduct of Abyssinian armies invading [Arsi Oromo] land is simply barbaric. At daybreak, fires begin, surprised men in the huts or in the fields are three quarter massacred and horribly mutilated; the women and the children and many men are reduced to captivity; the soldiers lead the frightened herds towards the camp, take away the grain and flour which they load on the shoulders of their prisoners spurred on by blows of the whip, destroy the harvest, then, gluttoned with booty and intoxicated with blood, go to walk a bit further from the devastation. That is what they call 'civilizing a land'. 'If the first time, they say, the people are not crushed, they rebel, and that must be followed by a great Expedition to *civilize* them entirely,[meaning destroying entirely]¹⁴⁵

Donaldson A. Smith, an English traveler who passed through Arsi land only four years after its devastation had this to say about it:

Now was the time for the terrible [Oromo] to appear. Where was the country teeming with lusty war-like people? Certainly not here! What we found as we progressed was only a few poor villages of a hundred huts each and the native presenting the most abject appearance imaginable. Only four years ago they must have been a fine race of men. They loved to tell us of their former glory; their eyes would light up, and they would forget for the instant their present condition. Now the Abyssinians are the masters, and these poor people are only a remnant of a great tribe ...The [Arsi], here as elsewhere, were regarded as slaves and were even sold in the market as such.¹⁴⁶

144 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 160-61.

145 de Salviac, *An Ancient people*, 349.

146 Donaldson A. Smith, "Expedition Through Somali Land to Lake Rudolf," *The Geographical Journal* 7 (1896): 123-127.

According to de Salviac, Menelik's war of conquest and the natural calamities which followed its train, "all cut down [Oromo] ranks to eyesight," that is greatly reducing the size of the Oromo population.¹⁴⁷ This was particularly true of Arsi Oromo land. Alexander Bulatovich, who "as a special guest of Menelik" toured extensive areas from Hararghe passing through Arsi land, and other Oromo territories in 1896 and 1897 and gathered information both from Menelik's soldiers and its Oromo victims, concluded that "the dreadful annihilation of more than half of the population during the conquest took away from the [Oromo] all possibility of thinking about any sort of uprising."¹⁴⁸ Such a catastrophic decline of population in colonial Africa took place only in the Congo, where King Leopold II of Belgium carried out genocidal plundering and "looted its rubber, brutalized its people, and ultimately slashed its population by ten million."¹⁴⁹

Factors that contributed to Arsi Oromo's conversion to Islam

There were Muslim Arsi men and women at least since the 17th century, if not earlier. However, they were a minority as most Arsi Oromo continued practicing their traditional Oromo religion based on Waaqa. However, this situation changed dramatically after the conquest of Arsi land and the new political economy under which they were condemned to live as *Gabbars* (serfs). The conquest of the Arsi Oromo was followed with confiscation of two-thirds of their lands which were distributed during the 20th century among royal family members, the nobility, government officials, soldiers, Orthodox Church and northern settlers in Arsi land. "In the absence of monetary economy" Arsi Oromo had to pay tribute "in kind: beef cattle, which had to be accompanied by other kinds of contributions in honey, butter, flour etc. at least three times per year."¹⁵⁰ Arsi Oromo *gabbars*, like others, had also to pay taxes, dues, and tithes to the imperial court and the Orthodox church.¹⁵¹

The main function of armed settlers was not protecting Arsi Oromo *Gabbars* but plundering and holding them in subjugation. Armed settlers, as agents of the government, "...demanded beef cattle, horses, and other types of livestock, or simply took them under threat of arms whenever they wished and without offering an explanation. They even advised foreign travelers to do so."¹⁵²

147 de Salviac, *An Ancient people*, 350.

148 Alexander Bulatovich, *Ethiopia through Russian Eyes: Country in Transition, 1896–1898*, trans. and ed. Richard Seltzer (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2000), 68–69.

149 Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 4.

150 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 224.

151 Getahun Delibo, "Emperor Menelik's Ethiopia, 1865–1916: National Unification or Amhara Communal Domination" (PhD diss., Howard University, 1974), 198–199.

152 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 224.

In Arsi land, the government officials, the clergy and the armed settlers (known as *neftanya*) lived in *Katamas* (garrison towns or colons) separated from the conquered Arsi Oromo “...in their language, religion, way of life, and their socio-economic organization.”¹⁵³ *Katamas* were the center of power, privilege; wealth produced with sweat and blood of Arsi Oromo *gabbars*, who were condemned to powerlessness.¹⁵⁴

As indicated above, for a long time, there were Muslim Arsi Oromo men and women. However, they were the minority. Massive conversion to Islam took place only after Arsi Oromo conquest, the devastation of land and their condemnation to powerlessness in the land of their birth. Asmarom Legesse provides a succinct reason why Arsi Oromo turned to Islam during their darkest moment. “When the Arsi lost their institutions under the double impact of a most ruthless branch of the Abyssinian imperial army under Ras Darghe [they] enthusiastic[ally] accept[ed] Islam as their religion and their shield.”¹⁵⁵ Gnamo further provides basic factors that facilitated the spread and consolidation of Islam among Arsi Oromo. These include, but not limited to the following.

Beyond the emotional and psychological trauma caused by the war of conquest, perhaps the most important factors encouraging Islamization of the Arsi was the destruction of the Oromo socio-political institutions notably the *Gadaa*, the *Qaalluu*, and the [*Chaffee*]. This forced them to find a new cultural identity, different from that of their rulers- an identity that would help them to maintain their social cohesion.¹⁵⁶

Contemporary written evidence supports Abbas Gnamo's conclusion. This is because by 1900, Emperor Menelik had banned by a decree both the election to and the meeting of *Chaffee* assembly.¹⁵⁷ That decree dealt a fatal blow to the *Gada* system that was the basis for Oromo democracy and their strength as a formidable force for hundreds of years. Again in 1900 Emperor Menelik banned by a decree the famous Oromo pilgrimage to the land of *Abba Muuda*, the spiritual head of traditional Oromo religion.¹⁵⁸ By banning the pilgrimage, Menelik “knowingly aimed to destroy the crucial links that sustained Oromo cultural, political and religious unity.”¹⁵⁹ In response to King Menelik's conquest and subjugation, the overwhelming majority of

153 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 225.

154 Mohammed Hassen, “The Militarization of the Ethiopian State and the Oromo” *Proceedings of 5th International Conference on the Horn of Africa* (May 26-28, 1990, New York, Teachers College of Columbia University), 94.

155 Legesse, *Oromo Democracy*, 95.

156 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 177-78.

157 Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis*, 135.

158 Knutsson, *Authority and change*, 147-155.

159 Hassen, “Pilgrimage,” 154.

Arsi and Hararghe Oromo were converted to Islam. Asma Giyorgis, the famous historian, stated that the Oromo “..prefer to be Muslims rather than Christian.”¹⁶⁰ The reason for this is beautifully explained by Professor Mekuria Bulcha with the following words.

Abyssinian priests never came to Oromia as messengers of God and peace. They...came as conquerors with Menelik's generals, 'blessing' the massacre that their soldiers inflicted upon the Oromo people. They shared with the Emperor, his generals and soldiers booties plundered from the Oromo. The clergy were given land that was confiscated from the Oromo peasants and became landlords; they owned Oromo peasants as *Gabbars* (serfs) and thrived upon their labor.¹⁶¹

For the reasons mentioned above, most Arsi Oromo refused accepting Orthodox Christianity “the official religion of the state.”¹⁶² However, they did not reject Christianity as a religion. What they rejected was the Amhara colonial administration that confiscated their land and cattle, reduced them to *gabbars*, and they were exploited economically, dominated politically. Above all, Arsi Oromo, “...were physically victimized, socially and psychologically humiliated and devalued as human beings.”¹⁶³ It was precisely for this reason why Arsi Oromo were

...denied justice, and excluded from political power at all levels of the administrative hierarchy [which was followed by]...their total conversion to Islam. The psychological and emotional trauma created by the war, the ensuing catastrophic political economy and above all the destruction of their representative institutions accelerated the process of Islamization...Islam gave Arsi Oromo a new form of cultural expression and permitted them to maintain their social cohesion.¹⁶⁴

Islam as a religion and a shield became “a major unifying factor,”¹⁶⁵ and part of Arsi Oromo cultural life. It enabled them to maintain their identity and equipped them with a mobilizing ideology that inspired Arsi Oromo to resist against the regime that belittled their human dignity, which was clearly expressed by General Waqo Gutu, the leader of the Bale armed resistance that lasted from 1963 to 1970.

160 Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis*, 135, 185.

161 Mekuria Bulcha, “Priests, religion and language in Ethiopia,” *The Oromo Commentary* IV, no.1 (1994): 8-11.

162 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 164.

163 Hassen, “The Militarization of the Ethiopian State,” 94.

164 Gnamo, *Conquest*, 164, 190.

165 Mohammed Hassen, “Islam as a resistance ideology among the Oromo in Ethiopia” *Africa, Islam and Development: Islam and Development in Africa- African Islam, African Development*, Edited by Thomas Salter & Kenneth King (Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, 2000), 88.

Notice, when the Amhara occupied our country ...many of our people were massacred. Then the survivors were allotted like slaves who partitioned our lands amongst themselves.... Do you realize how many times you have been denied justice in the courts of law? You, Muslims your religion has been denigrated.... Innumerable crimes that have not been committed by European colonists on the African peoples have been perpetrated upon you. You have been crashed for eighty years now.¹⁶⁶

Though brief, while discussing the key Oromo institutions, the creation of the Ethiopian empire, the conquest of Arsi Oromo, this article attempts to shine light on the truly heroic history of the Aris Oromo resistance. What is most astonishing about it is that without having access to firearms, Arsi Oromo warriors defeated three times king Menelik's soldiers, who had access to tens of thousands of guns. Such an achievement is rare in African history, possible in world history. In the process, the brave Arsi Oromo warriors left behind a long legacy of heroic resistance, which was taught in high school in Oromia under the Previous EPRDF regime. However, as indicated on the first page of this article, since 2018, there have been open and hidden efforts by top OPDO officials to deny the mutilation of breasts and hands that took place at Anole in December 2018. That is why the 2022 Ethiopian high school curriculum does not include a single word about Azule massacre and Anole mutilation of breasts and hands. However, denying historical injustice does not erase it from public memory as that historical injustice was documented by a contemporary eye witness account. Above all, Professor Abbas Gnamo's excellent book provides an irrefutable historical account of the Anole mutilation based on the extensive primary and secondary sources.

Finally, what is not in doubt is that Arsi Oromo history of resistance will have pride of place in Oromo history. It will continue inspiring the current and future Oromo generations to struggle for their freedom, human dignity, and self-determination.

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¹⁶⁶ Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest*, 131.

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