

**Ethnic Persecution and Crimes against Humanity in the Horn of Africa: the
Case of Oromia**

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1. Introduction

Nations within the current day Ethiopian empire have witnessed horrifying crimes against humanity that include genocide, mass arrest, eviction from lands, rape and other forms of torture. Atrocities and human rights violations in this part of the globe date back to the 19th century *scramble for Africa*. Abyssinia, the only black colonial power that participated in the scramble for Africa, has committed despicable crimes against humanity to silence any resistance to their empire-building project¹. Oromo, potentially the largest nation in the continent has suffered disturbing violations of human rights under the Ethiopian rule. Ethiopian colonial terrorism and the violence that started during the last decades of the 19th century continues to the present day. The empire has been known for extra-judicial killings, the massacre of innocent people including students; arbitrary mass arrest and detention of people supporting opposition political parties; arrest, detention, and harassment of journalists for publishing articles critical of the government; torture and other cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment of political prisoners; eviction and land grabbing; restrictions on freedom of the press; super regulatory restrictions on civil society organisations and freedom of association.

This piece of work is intended to initiate structured debate on crimes against humanity in the Ethiopian Empire. I would never claim that this article is a comprehensive study into human rights violations in Ethiopia, yet it will briefly shed light on the intent and magnitude of human rights violations committed by the current Ethiopian government against Oromo and its neighbouring nations. The method used in this study is qualitative. Empirical data has been gathered from published and unpublished materials and reports compiled by academia, credible international media, government agencies and human rights organisations. In spite of the fact that accusing governments of crimes against humanity is a serious and risky activity, especially when dealing with dictatorships like that of Ethiopia, I believe that bringing these authorities to the attention of the world is the moral thing to do. I will leave the judgment to confirm or reject the conclusions I have drawn to other social science researchers.

¹ Roland Oliver Anthony Atmore: *Africa since 1800*. 5th ed. Cambridge University Press. 2005

2. Historical Background

A wide range of historical, sociological and anthropological studies show that Ethiopia is an empire that has been established and maintained by violence that has involved despicable crimes against humanity². The Abyssinians invaded, violated the sovereignty of, and committed atrocities against, the Oromo and other nations that have been forcefully incorporated into the current Ethiopian state. The Ethiopian colonial atrocities that started during the last decades of the 19th century continue today. Therefore, it is of great significance to analyse the past, not only because the impacts of past injustices are relevant today and shape the way we view the present, but because I also believe that a genuine and evidence-based understanding of history influences the answers we offer for existing problems.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, the Abyssinians (under the rule of Menilik II, and supported by the European colonial establishment) invaded, terrorized and committed genocide on the Oromo people.³ Other nations like the Wolayita, the Kaffa, the Sidama, Benashangul, Affar and the Gambella also endured severe atrocities and human rights violations. Having been provided with technical and material support, including firearms from the Anglo-French colonial establishment, the conquering forces committed genocide particularly against the Oromo, the Walaita, and the Kaficho, to reduce or eliminate any resistance to the Abyssinian empire-building project⁴. It has been proven that the conduct of Abyssinians during the conquest was horrifying and barbaric. Millions of people including innocent women and children were massacred and horribly mutilated, and many more forced into captivity. About half of the Oromo people were killed⁵ and tens of thousands of innocent women and children massacred overnight in one single incidence at Annole in 1886.⁶ During the conquest of Walayita Kingdom in 1894 nearly 120,000 people were massacred, and thousands more taken into slavery.⁷

²Asmaron Legesse: ***Three Approaches to the Study of African Society***. 1st ed. Free Press. Michigan-USA, 2000, Dirribi Demissie: ***Oromo Wisdom in Black Civilization***. 1st ed. Addis Ababa – Ethiopia, 2011, Martial De Salviac: ***An Ancient People, Great African Nation***, (trans by Ayalew Kano) East Lansing, Michigan, 2005, John Iliffe: ***Africa- the History of a Continent***. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press. 1995, Makuria Bulcha: ***Genocidal Violence in the Making of Nation and State in Ethiopia***. African Sociological Review 2005,

³ Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa: ***The Invention of Ethiopia***. The Red Sea Press, 1990, Asafa Jalata, ***Oromia & Ethiopia***. Denver: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993.

⁴ Roland Oliver Anthony Atmore: *Africa since 1800*. 5th ed. Cambridge University Press. 2005

⁵ De Salviac, de Martial, ***Une peuple antique au pays Menelik: les Galla grand nation africaine***, Paris, 1901

⁶ Haji, Abbas: ***Arsi Oromo Political and Military Resistance against the Shoan Conquest, (1881-86)***, *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. II, 1995

⁷ Gebre-Sellassie, Zwede, ***Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: A Political Biography***. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975

Another gruesome event was the campaign to conquer the Kafficho Empire in 1897 that resulted in the slaughter of more 70% of the Kaffa people.⁸

The socio-economic and cultural boundaries of the conquered nations were violated, and their human dignity was desecrated. The, human, social, physical and natural assets of the colonized nations have been crushed, thereby incapacitating or completely destroying the social, economic and political fabric of the conquered nations. Some of the assets targeted by the Abyssinians were evidently perceived to have had a pivotal role for the socio-economic advancement of Africa and beyond. The Oromo *Gada* is one of the social assets that has barely managed to survive the violence. An array of social and anthropological studies show that *Gada* is an authentic Oromo social invention and contribution to the world's outlook and practices of social justice, showing the competency and far sightedness of Africa's indigenous knowledge.⁹ The rule of law; equality and equity; limitation of office to a single term; separation of ritual, religious and political domains; and equitable representation of all members of society are the distinctive aspects of the governance system. The delicacy and intricacy of *Gada* portrays one of the most complex systems of social organization ever devised by human civilization.¹⁰ This has given *Gada* a reputation amongst Africans to be proud of their understanding, inventions, and practice of the principles of human rights before they were ever declared by the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* to ensure human dignity and values.¹¹ The Abyssinian colonizers were threatened by the democratic nature of the *Gada* system and, thus, worked hand in hand with the European colonizers to replace *Gada* with absolute Monarchies and chiefdoms. As Dirribi says:

An independent state ruled by the Gada system consists in a supreme danger for the Anglo-French colonial establishment; if average citizens and specialists of the Western World studied a society ruled by Gada, they would propagatate its benefits among the Western Societies and this could cause a thunder for more menacing than the Lenins October Revolution. Even worse, with in an Oromo state organised by Gada, the Ango-French colonial establishment would fail to infiltrate and impose its norms, inflecting the international stance of the country and dictating choice and decisions. For them the existence of genuine Oromo state and society would gradually trigger their end.

⁸ Fein, H. **Genocide: A Socio logical Perspective**, Sage Publications. London 1993, Dilebo, Getahun. **Emperor Menelik's Ethiopia, 1865-1916: National Unification or Amhara Communal Domianation?** PhD Dissertation, Department of History, Howard University, Washington, DC.

⁹ Asmarom Legesse: **Oromo Democracy; an Indegenious African Political System**. 1st Ed. The Red Sea Press, Inc, Asmara, Eritrea, 2006

¹⁰ Donald N. Levien: **Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society**. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, USA, 1974

¹¹ Dirribi Demissie: **Oromo Wisdom in Black Civilization**. 1st ed. Addis Ababa –Ethiopia, 2011

Upon completion of the Ethiopian empire-building process, the Kings issued many proclamations targeting the dismantling of the Oromo culture.

Their (Oromo) tchaffe were banned by a proclamation issued by Menilik II, in order to prevent an eventual disturbance emanating from the gatherings. Nevertheless, the judgments which the Oromo pass at their tchaffe are better and more observed than (those by) us who are near them and claim to be Christians.¹²

The Abyssinian emperors also carried out covert political campaigns targeting the social values of the Oromo nation. This part was more sophisticated and involved various "scholars" who attempted to achieve systematic misrepresentation of the Oromo culture to the world.¹³ Furthermore, the Ethiopian modern education system has never been in the position to enlighten citizens of genuine historical facts. In history classes, Oromo children have been taught a lot of groundless and fabricated stories. The "History text books" have always been full of myths, legends, and propaganda, intended to praise the colonial system, and to inculcate superiority of the Abyssinian language, culture, and religion to those of the colonized nations. It is argued, in this regard, that academics have been manipulated to obfuscating the atrocities against, and persecution of, the colonized nations within Ethiopia. Such atrocities are either blamed on the victims or have been rationalised as a necessity.¹⁴ Even some of "liberal minded" Abyssinian scholars and writers have few sympathetic words for the plight of the conquered peoples.¹⁵

3. Crimes against Humanity by the current Government of Ethiopia

In the 1880s, there were no human rights organisations, the United Nations was not yet in existence, and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was many years away from conception. In the time since then, though, the world has gone through a great deal of structural and institutional changes in relation to human rights protection. Dictators seem to receive mounting political pressure and, sometimes, coercion from the "democratic" governments in the West with the intention to promote human rights. In our generation, governments of civilized states publicly condemn and sincerely regret violations of human rights committed by respective country's colonial administrations. For instance, the United Kingdom has even gone as far as to have paid compensation to those who have suffered crimes against humanity under colonial administration in Kenya¹⁶. Unfortunately, life for the Oromo and other nations under the Ethiopian regime, however, has remained the same, and in some areas, worsened.

¹² Dirribi (2010) as quoted from Getachew Haile: **Ye abba Bahire Dirsetoch Oromowochn kemimeleketu leloch senedoch gara** (Finfine), 2002.

¹³ Mohhamed Hasen: *The Oromo of Ethiopia, a History 1570- 1860*. Read Sea Press, Trenton, Canada, 1994

¹⁴ Levine, D: ***Greater Ethiopia the Evolution of a Multi ethnic Society***, Chicago University of Chicago Press, USA 1974.

¹⁵ Zewde, Bahru: ***Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intel lectuals of the Early Twentieth Century***. Oxford: James Currey, 2002

¹⁶ Theguardian.com, Thursday 6 June 2013 13.22

Ethiopia currently perpetrates all kinds of crimes against humanity¹⁷ that were initiated by colonial atrocities in the 19th century.

Following in the footsteps of its predecessors, the current Ethiopian government has gone to extreme lengths in its violation of Human Rights. Democratic rights of citizens have been put at the mercy of the authorities¹⁸; millions of people have been evicted from their land; freedom of thought and expression of opinion is virtually impossible, ordinary people face torture and imprisonment if they fail to pledge allegiance to the authorities; free press and media are banned for their critiques of the system; peaceful protesters shot dead; sexual violence and inhuman treatments used as tools of interrogation in political prisons¹⁹; and foreign aid used as a weapon of political repression²⁰. Even people taking refuge in neighbouring countries have been abducted and murdered by the Ethiopian authorities.²¹ The magnitude of human rights violations committed by the current Ethiopian government against the Oromo and other nations arguably stands next to none in Africa.

3.1. Major Crimes Against Humanity

3.1.1. Genocide

Genocide is defined as any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, and (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group²². It is the deliberate destruction, in whole or in part, by government or its agents, of a racial, sexual, religious, tribal, ethnic or political minority. It may involve not only mass murder, but also starvation, forced deportation, and political, economic, and biological subjugation.²³

According to the US State Department, *Human Rights Watch* World Reports and other reliable sources, such killings have been committed by the Ethiopian government security forces who shot at civilians peacefully demonstrating in protest against atrocities carried out by the government. Every year, human rights organisations report a large number of extra-judicial killings and the disappearances of civilians suspected of supporting groups opposing the regime.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2013

¹⁸ US State Department: **2009 Ethiopia Human Rights Reports**, March 2010

¹⁹ BBC: **Ethiopia 'Using Aid as Weapon of Oppression**, a joint undercover investigation on abuse of aid in Ethiopia by BBC News night and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, August 2011

²⁰ <http://www.voanews.com/content/ethiopia-is-top-uk-aid-recipient-117204413/157544.html>.

²¹ <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/ethiopian-repression-muslim-protests-must-stop-2013-08-08>

²² UN Convention on Genocide (UNCG), Article II, 1948

²³ Porter, J. N: ***Genocide and Human Rights: A Global Anthology***, Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1982

For instance, *Oromia Support Group*, the UK-based international human rights Organisation that closely monitors human rights situations in Ethiopia reports that thousands of civilians have been murdered and have disappeared at the hands of the government security forces.

The following table summarizes the number of extra-judicial killings and disappearances reported by the Organisation over the past few years.

Period	Extra Judicial Killings reported	Disappearance reported	Source
1997	2316	606	24
1998-1999	2418	676	25
2000	2592	838	26
2001	2,850	847	27
2002	3085	857	28
2003	3097	886	29
2004	3097	886	30
2005	3604	903	31
2005-2006	3874	925	32
2006-2007	3981	943	33
2008-2010	4,185	944	34
2010	4,279	987	35
2012	4498	1010	36

The vast majority of these victims have been reported to be Oromo. Although the victims come from every sector of the society, the majority are civic leaders,

²⁴ Oromia Support Group, Report Number 20, December 1997

²⁵ Oromia Support Group, Report Number 26, December 1999

²⁶ Oromia Support Group, Report Number 32, November 2000

²⁷ Oromia Support Group, Report Number 35, December 2001

²⁸ Oromia Support Group, Report Number 38, December 2002

²⁹ Oromia Support Group, Report Number 39, July 2003

³⁰ Oromia Support Group, Report Number 40, May 2004

³¹ Oromia Support Group, Report Number 41, July 2005

³² Oromia Support Group, Report Number 42, 2006

³³ Oromia Support Group, Report Number 43, 2007

³⁴ Oromia Support Group, Report Number 44, March 2010

³⁵ Oromia Support Group, Report Number 46, December 2010

³⁶ Oromia Support Group, Report Number 49, 2012

teachers, engineers, medical professionals, students etc., with the potential of building the Oromo nation and providing leadership.

Incidences of innocent civilians being brutally massacred by the government security forces have occurred in different parts of the country since 1991. One such incident is the Kofale Massacre where 25 civilians including children were murdered and hundreds injured by government troops in Wabe Gefarsa town in Arsi (a province of the Oromia region) on August 3, 2013.³⁷ Most recently, more than 50 people, the majority of whom were students protesting against human rights violations, were shot and killed between April 28 and May 1, 2014.³⁸ The Oromia Support Group has published the partial list of those killed during this massacre.³⁹

In the Somali region of Ethiopia, *Human Rights Watch* reported that the Ethiopian government security forces- known as "*Liyu Plice*"- murdered 29 people following a confrontation over an incident at Ragda village in the Gashaamo district on March 16th/17th, 2013.⁴⁰ In the region, villages were reportedly burnt, pregnant women tortured and gang raped by government troops and many others killed.⁴¹ Following the 2005 national election, several hundred protesters, the vast majority of whom were students, were shot and killed by government security forces in different parts of the country. In one single incident in Finfine, according to the US State Department, Ethiopian police and the army shot and killed 42 unarmed demonstrators over three days in the first week of June 2005. In the same year, in a separate incident, between November 1st-7th, military and police forces opened fire on rioters killing at least 40 people in Finfine.⁴² A massacre of Anuak people in the Gambella region in 2003/2004 was another overnight brutality perpetrated by the Ethiopian military force. *Genocide Watch* and *Survival International* reported that on 13th December 2003, soldiers using automatic weapons and hand grenades targeted Anuaks, summarily executing civilians, burning dwellings with people inside, and looting property. In four days, according to the report, 424 Anuak people were reported killed, with over 200 more wounded and some 85 people unaccounted for.⁴³ In addition, the Looqe massacre is another manifestation of the Ethiopian government's brutality. This was a gruesome incident where over 100 high school and college students, who were only marching, holding tree leaves as a

³⁷ The Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa (HRLHA): ***Ethiopia: Extreme Brutality against Civilians***, HRLHA Appeal and Urgent Action, August 2013

³⁸ www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-27251331 or www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndJ1NE0qV_M.

³⁹ Oromia Support Group press release 7 may 2014 (http://www.oromo.org/osg/Demonstrators_arrested_b_eaten%20and_shot_dead.pdf)

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2013

⁴¹ BBC: ***Ethiopia 'Using Aid as Weapon of Oppression***, a joint undercover investigation on abuse of aid in Ethiopia by BBC News night and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, August 2011

⁴² US Department of States, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, March 8, 2006

⁴³ Genocide Watch : ***Crimes Against Humanity, Acts of Genocide and Ongoing Atrocities Against the Anuak People of South western Ethiopia***, A Genocide Watch and Survivors Rights International Field Report', 16 February 2004.

symbol of peace, were shot and killed by heavily armed soldiers on May 24th, 2002.⁴⁴

It has been reported that the UN Convention (1951) *Relating to the Status of Refugees* fails to protect Oromo refugees in neighbouring countries as many of them have reportedly been abducted and murdered by Ethiopian undercover security. The most recent of such malevolent acts is the murder of engineer Tesfahun Chemda⁴⁵. Because the Ethiopian government hides its criminal activities and does not keep written records of its extrajudicial executions and prolonged detention of political prisoners, thousands of extra-judicial killings remain unreported. For instance, studies show that 50,000 killings and 16,000 disappearances took place in Oromia between 1991 and 2001 and 90 percent of the killings were not reported.⁴⁶

In general, violation of the most fundamental right to life is the gravest of all crimes committed by the current Ethiopian government against the Oromo and other nations since 1991. The country still remains fertile soil for genocidal killings. *Genocide Watch* considers Ethiopia to have already perpetrated genocidal massacres against the Oromo and other nations in the empire.⁴⁷

3.1.2. Arbitrary Arrest, Torture , Inhuman or Degrading Treatment of People

Since 1991, a great deal of governmental agencies including UN and the US Department of State as well as non-government agencies like *Human Rights Watch*, *Amnesty International* and the *Oromia Support Group* have documented patterns of serious human rights violations, including arbitrary arrest and detention, ill-treatment, and torture in many prisons throughout Oromia and regions in the empire. Over the decades, the abuse and violation of human rights show no sign of abating; rather they are getting even worse. Most recently, the US State Department has published detailed violations of human rights committed by the government of Ethiopia. The report lists atrocities including:

. . . arbitrary killings; allegations of torture, beating, abuse, and mistreatment of detainees by security forces; reports of harsh and, at times, life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; detention without charge and lengthy

⁴⁴ Seyoum Hameso: ***The Politics of Genocide- The Case of Sidama***. Paper presented in the Oromo Studies Association Conference in Washington DC, July 2002.

⁴⁵ <http://www.opride.com/oromsis/news/horn-of-africa/3701-oromo-activist-tesfahun-chemeda-dies-in-prison-while-serving-life-sentence>

⁴⁶ Mohammed Hassen : **Is Genocide Against the Oromo in Ethiopia Possible**, Paper Presented at the *Fourth International Biennial Conference of the Association of Genocide Scholars*, Radisson Hotel, Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 10, 2001.

⁴⁷ Genocide Watch, *the International Alliance to End Genocide: Countries at Risk Report 2012*, Washington DC.

*pretrial detention; a weak, overburdened judiciary subject to political influence; infringement on citizens' privacy rights, including illegal searches; . . .*⁴⁸

The government has made the country a most terrible home to live in for the Oromo nation. Hundreds of thousands of people have suffered arbitrary arrest, torture and other forms of human rights violation. In Oromia, according to independent sources, about 45,000 people were arrested between 1994 and 1995 alone.⁴⁹ The situation shows no signs of improvement and thousands of people (primarily university students, teachers, medical practitioners and other professionals) are arrested arbitrarily and tortured every year, being accused of supporting opposition political parties. Particularly, since the disputed 2005 elections and the promotion of an "Anti-Terrorism Law" in 2009, the government has intensified restrictions on the freedom of expression, association, and assembly, deploying a range of measures to clamp down on dissent⁵⁰, which has increased the numbers of people arrested. For instance, it was estimated that over 30,000 people were arrested during a protest over election fraud in 2005⁵¹. Police investigators in prisons use coercive methods on detainees amounting to torture or other ill-treatment to extract confessions, statements, and other information from detainees. Government forces also use rape as a coercive method of torture in prisons and detention centers and a large number of Oromo women have become victims of this barbaric act⁵².

3.1.3. Economic Exclusions and Discriminations

These days, it is common knowledge that an ordinary Oromo person stands a high chance of arbitrary arrest, torture and of losing their livelihood when accused of being a member or supporter or sympathizer of the Oromo liberation struggle. I have decided to share part of my personal experience to illustrate this point:

I have personally experienced the ordeal of living under the ruthless authority of the dictatorial regime since 1991. Ever since I was a child, I witnessed people being shot and killed by the government troops on different occasions at my home town in West Arsi. Personally, my parents and my siblings were arbitrarily arrested and tortured on several occasions having been accused of supporting the Oromo liberation movement. My father, who was a lawyer and teacher, has been banned from engaging in any employment or self-employment activities since 1996 simply because he did not support the government. To make matters worse, he has suffered severe and permanent physical injuries from torture at the notorious Maikelawi Prison in Finfinne between 2000 and 2002. During this period, I was a

⁴⁸ US Department of States: Ethiopia 2013 Human Rights Report

⁴⁹ Amnesty International, in Ethiopia: Accountability, past and present, human rights in transition. London. April 1995, stated 20,000 were detained; clandestine human rights groups in Ethiopia claimed 45,000 were detained, in communications to the Oromia Support Group in 1994/5.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch: **Torture and Ill-Treatment in Ethiopia's Maekelawi Police Station**, USA, 2013

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch: **"One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure" Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia**, USA, 2010

⁵² Oromia Support Group: Human Rights Abuses in Ethiopia Reports from refugees in Kenya, September 2010

student at the Adama Teachers College and went through similar torment. Having been accused of being involved in the Oromo students movement, I was arrested along with many other students at Adama zonal police station where we were harshly tortured and, later, banned from taking any paying job in public institutions in the country. Subsequently, our teachers at the college, including Mr. Bekele Garb, suffered atrocities since they were accused of instigating us (the students). Many of whom were arrested lost their teaching jobs afterwards and others fled the country. Since I had been banned from taking employment in public institutions, I got a teaching job in a non-governmental institution where I worked as a high school teacher. Later in 2004, the government banned me again from teaching in any school because I refused to be a member of the ruling party. This was followed by continuous threats and intimidations from the government security forces until the final time I fled the country in 2012.

Millions of Oromo people have suffered similar violations of rights. To the Ethiopian government authorities, every Oromo appears to be a member of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a political organization struggling for the socio-economic, cultural and political rights of the Oromo people. One has to prove he/she is not a member or supporter of the OLF in order to live in relative peace. The safest (and only) form of proof is securing a membership of the EPRDF, the ruling party (which has only one opposition seat in the parliament). Failure to prove non-affiliation with OLF, or any attempt to remain politically indifferent, has come to be dangerous for every ordinary Oromo person in Ethiopia. It results in severe consequences with impacts on daily life and livelihood. They face discrimination in getting public jobs, and are denied social services, all of which are controlled by the government (even including residence ID). Adults intending to study a course in public universities are discriminated against. Oromo businessmen and women are systematically marginalized and prevented from accessing investment if they fail to become members of the ruling party. Every student in college or university is required to secure membership of the ruling party in order for her/him to get a job in public institutions or to run a private business after completion of study. The situation is worse for rural people. Farmers are required to be members of and demonstrate allegiance to the EPRDF in order to get agricultural inputs and/or to allow their children to study in school without assault from government security. *Human Rights Watch* recently reported:

Today, kebele officials wield a massive amount of power over their constituents in a myriad of ways, in a system where the line between state and ruling party is usually non-existent. Kebele officials determine eligibility for food assistance, recommend referrals to secondary health care and schools, and provide access to state-distributed resources like seeds, fertilizers, and other essential agricultural inputs. They also run the community social courts, which deal with minor claims and disputes at the kebele level; local prisons; and, in some places, local-level militia that are used to maintain law and order. These broad powers have been consistently used to punish and ostracize those perceived to support the political opposition. Since 2005, state resources have also been used to press individuals to join the ruling party so that they can benefit from access to services, jobs, and economic activity. Between 2005 and 2008, when the kebele and woreda (district) elections were held, the EPRDF's party membership more than quadrupled, from approximately 760,000 to more than 4 million members in just three years. In these local elections in 2008, the EPRDF first expanded the number of available positions

on kebele and woreda councils and then won more than 99.9 percent of the 3.5 million seats, thus consolidating its control of the local administrative structure. The practical implication of this development is that in an average kebele, one of every 10 residents—almost one member of every family—is now both a kebele official and EPRDF member.⁵³

Another mysterious torment, indeed an insult to the international humanitarian community, is that even emergency food and other aid distributions discriminate against qualifying beneficiaries who fail to prove they are not supporters or sympathizers of opposition parties⁵⁴. As a result of the enforcement of the FDRE Proclamation 621/2009 that was intended to impose superior regulation on charities, the party leaders exercise extremely abusive control over who should and should not receive the emergency support at community level. The government authorities always manipulate food aid distribution to hurt the supporters of political opponents.

Food aid is shamelessly used as a weapon of political repression to protect the ruling party in power. People who do not vote for or pay allegiance to the government suffer discrimination as reported by the international media:

. . . . Despite being surrounded by other communities which are well fed, a village with a population of about 1700 adults is starving. We were told that in the two weeks prior to our team's arrival 5 adults and 10 children had died. Lying on the floor, too exhausted to stand, and flanked by her three-year-old son whose stomach is bloated by malnutrition, one woman described how her family had not eaten for four days. Another three-year-old boy lay in his grandmother's lap, listless and barely moving as he stared into space. The grandmother said, we are just waiting on the crop, if we have one meal a day we will survive until the harvest, beyond that there is no hope for us. . . .⁵⁵

Older people are usually the victims of this type of abuse because of their allegiance to the values of the Oromo *Gada* governance system that promotes respect and dignity to people in difficult situations⁵⁶. This apparently was intended

⁵³ Human Rights Watch: **"One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure" Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia**, USA, 2010

⁵⁴ BBC: **Ethiopia 'Using Aid as Weapon of Oppression**, a joint undercover investigation on abuse of aid in Ethiopia by BBC News night and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, August 2011

⁵⁵ BBC: **Ethiopia 'Using Aid as Weapon of Oppression**, a joint undercover investigation on abuse of aid in Ethiopia by BBC News night and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, August 2011

⁵⁶ **Denebo D. Wario: The Benefits of Integrating Traditional Institutions for Sustainable Management of Social Protection Programmes for Older People in Oromia: The Case of Arsi and Karayu Oromo Tribes**, Thesis for the Degree of Master's of Business Administration in Non Profit Making Corporate Management, Finfinne 2012

to increase the climate of insecurity and fear in society. This means that, for those who depend on food aid, they must support the ruling party in order to survive.

3.1.4. Land Grabbing and Eviction

Many human rights organisations argue that 'land grabs' carried out by corporate and private sector companies pose a major threat to livelihoods of rural communities in economically poor countries, as well as having a negative impact on food security. This practice is considered by many, a new form of agricultural neo-colonialism as investors of global land businesses are targeting the poorest countries with weak land tenure security.⁵⁷ Studies show that Eastern and sub-Saharan Africa are the most targeted areas for land grabs. The majority of land deals worldwide take place in this part of the world because, among other reasons, the region features a relative abundance of water and land resources, cheap manual labour, and very low land sale & leasehold prices.

Land grabbing multinational companies are interested in investing in Ethiopia because the government is reckless and corrupt enough to protect the profit-oriented interests of investors by violating the land use rights of the governed people. In Ethiopia, the history of land grabbing, in practical terms, dates back to the 19th century when Emperor Menilik II decided to remunerate its colonial army in land - more than 100,000 troops were given fertile land in conquered nations- Oromia, Kaffa, Wolayita and others⁵⁸. During the Imperial regime in Ethiopia (1889-1974), Land in Oromia and other non Abbysinian parts of the empire belonged to the emperors who allocated land rights to those they appointed to office and the indigenous people of the colonized states were denied land use rights.⁵⁹ The current government of Ethiopia seems to be implementing the same policy and globally the increase in the global demand for land has made the situation worse.

These days, millions of people have been the victims of land grabbing in Ethiopia. Nearly 4,000,000 hectares of fertile land have been 'leased' to investors and 94% of the land allocated to investors is located in colonised nations, the highest

⁵⁷ Arezki, R., K. Deininger and H. Selod: **What drives the global land rush?** IMF working paper, 2011

⁵⁸ Roland Oliver Anthony Atmore: Africa since 1800. 5th ed. Cambridge University Press. 2005

⁵⁹ Mongabay: **Ethiopia-The reign of Menelik II, 1889-1913**. As accessed from the website www.mongabay.com/history/ethiopia/ethiopia-the_reign_of_menelik_ii,_1889-1913.html

percentage being in Oromia.⁶⁰ Allocation of agricultural land to global investors is insignificant in North Ethiopia (Amhara and Tigray), because the land use rights of rural communities of Abyssinia is constitutionally protected by their government.

Whereas, in Oromia and Southern Ethiopia, the land accessibility rights of rural communities are systematically restricted and controlled by the land governance and investment policies of the colonial regime.

Moreover, the conditions required for commercial land grabbing in Ethiopia are some of the most attractive in the world, because the regime does not take into account the land use rights of colonised peoples.

Subsequently, the families of rural Ethiopia, particularly those evicted from their households, are suffering in terrible poverty. Economic conditions have been deteriorating for the majority of people. Even if it is difficult to make accurate estimates, it is clear that people are dying as a consequence of the prevailing socio-economic conditions. In October 2004, for instance, the United Nations reported that as many as 200,000 people, mainly children, died during the last eighteen months in Ethiopia. Between ten and fifteen million Ethiopians are threatened by starvation every year and need international assistance to stay alive. Despite this, the government has kept pursuing unproductive and inequitable land policy. It has already signed away about 10% of its total agricultural land to foreign investors (to produce agricultural commodities for international markets) whilst Ethiopia remains in the midst of a severe food crisis and is heavily dependent on food aid to feed its people.⁶¹ This shows that agricultural investment in Ethiopia fails to address national food insecurity, since crop produced by these large scale commercial farms is entirely export oriented.

This is the tragic history behind the proliferating large-scale commercial estate farms, sugar factories, hydroelectric dams, cement factories and large-scale real estate industries and flower farms. These schemes have not only evicted the people from their only source of livelihood but also caused tremendous depletion of natural resources and environmental pollution, thereby worsening the social problems of local people. For instance, the flower farms covering hundreds of thousands of hectares in the Rift Valley lakes region of Oromia have not only dismantled the livelihood of thousands of smallholder farmers, but also spoiled the four big lakes in the province- the Koka, the Dambel, the Langano and the Abijata. The flower farms discharge chemical waste directly to the lakes. I have personally witnessed the situation in one of the farms in August 2012 when I went to pay a visit to my uncle living in the village just next to the farm. It is called the Share Ethiopia. This farm was established few years ago by foreign investors and covers thousands of hectares of land by the Lake Dambel. The land had been protected as a buffer zone

⁶⁰ www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/OI_Ethiopa_Land_Investment_report.pdf

⁶¹ Hobbelink, H: **How global finance fuels a secretive and unethical land grab in Africa**. From the website www.theecologist.org/how_to_make_a_difference/food_and_gardening/116261/how_global_finance_fuels_a_secretive_and_unethical_land_grab_in_africa.html

to the Lake before the farm was established. It was shocking for me to find out that there were water tunnels constructed at a distance of about every twenty meters from one another adjacent to the farm to discharge waste chemicals from the farm directly to the lake. Terrestrial and marine animals are affected by these chemicals. Cattle grassing in the peripheries of these farms have been found dead on several occasions, a large number of birds have been found dead by the lakes, fishes found dead on the shores. The hazards for humans have turned out to be unbearable. A large number of people working in the flower farms have developed skin diseases unknown to previous generations. Many people have died from unknown illnesses. Despite this evidence, no government authority has questioned or attempted to ascertain that the flower farms are complying with environmental protection policies. Local people in the areas bitterly protested, but were silenced by arrests and intimidation immediately.

3.1.5. Violations of Freedom of Thoughts and Expression of Opinion

In Ethiopia, the government decides which Television channels the people should watch; the government decides which radio channels the people should listen to; the government decides the newsletters that people should read. I was accused by the authorities of listening to the BBC World service and the "Radio Sagale Bilisumma" several times and that has been the case with millions of people in the country. The government does not allow any media that criticize its policies or expose its human right violations. It has been more than a decade since all free electronic and print media were banned. Hundreds of national journalists who dared to expose the situation have ended up in jail or had to flee the country. In this regard, "*the country is close to replacing Eritrea as the African country with the most journalists behind bars*".⁶² International media are not allowed to operate in the country and attempts to report undercover would result in severe ramifications. No one knows this fact better than Martin Scribble and Johan Persson, the Swedish journalists who were jailed in Ethiopia for more than 400 days in an Ethiopian prison between 2011 and 2012.

Similarly, the government has banned civil society organisations that it suspects of promoting holistic development that include human right issues. The US State Department has recently reported restrictions on freedom of expression and association, and on the activities of civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) imposed by the Charities and Societies Proclamation (the CSO law) as some of the most significant human rights abuses in Ethiopia.⁶³ The law, whose provisions are among the most restrictive of any comparable law anywhere in the world, has narrowed the space for independent civil society activity in Ethiopia⁶⁴. The law makes any work that touches on human rights or governance issues illegal if carried out by foreign non-governmental organizations, and labels any Ethiopian organization that receives more than 10 percent of its funding from sources outside of Ethiopia as "foreign."⁶⁵ This shows that independent human rights work in the

⁶² ***BBC News on the 18 October 2013***

⁶³ US Department of States: Ethiopia 2013 Human Rights Report

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2009

⁶⁵ FDRE Proclamation No.621/2009, Charities and Societies Law

country is virtually impossible, and human rights work as deemed illegal under the law is punishable as a criminal offense.

Despite all these abuses of authority, Western democratic countries have continued to fund the Ethiopian government. The government receives financial aid of £500,000,000 from Western allies each year⁶⁶. Many people are puzzled and upset that countries like the UK and the USA are so committed to funding the Ethiopian dictatorial regime; turning a deaf ear and a blind eye to genocide and other gross violations of Human Rights. Many argue that the Western governments bestowing the money ought to, at least, make sure that the donation is spent against measurable benchmarks of human rights and the will of the beneficiaries. This should be augmented by some form of retributive measures without which growing disaffection with the west might mature to another, perhaps, more costly phase that could exacerbate the worsening instability in the Horn of Africa.

⁶⁶ <http://www.voanews.com/content/ethiopia-is-top-uk-aid-recipient-117204413/157544.html>.

4. Concluding Remarks,

Ethiopia is an empire initiated, established and maintained by violence targeted against the Oromo and its neighbouring nations. The current government of Ethiopia has committed despicable crimes against humanity including genocide; arbitrary arrest, torture ,and other inhuman or degrading treatment of people ; economic exclusions and discriminations ; land grabbing and eviction from land; violation of freedom of thought and expression of opinion. Such violations of human rights amount to crimes against humanity that, as discussed in this article, not only reflect the authoritarian behaviour of Ethiopian regimes, but also prove that systemic human rights abuses have apparently become the very foundations of the current government of Ethiopia.

The question remains: How long and what does it take to stop the ruthless violation of human rights and crimes against humanity committed by the government of Ethiopia? May the international community show solidarity to victims of the crimes against humanity as committed by the government of Ethiopia? If so, what action must be taken by the international community in response to the mounting evidence proving that crimes against humanity are being committed by the government of Ethiopia? These and other questions concerning the issues of democracy, human rights and rule of law need to be addressed by all actors including researchers, policy makers and, of course, those “democratic” countries providing the government of Ethiopia with financial aid in the face of such appalling crimes against humanity.