Rich in historical and cultural heritage, the Oromo, the single largest nation in Ethiopia, has experienced complex political, economic and social life for millennia. Some of these experiences are obviously exclusive to the Oromo and some others are shared ones with the neighboring societies, nations and states. Given the huge population magnitude, the territorial size and diverse modes of economic and political activities, its multilayered historical and cultural heritage can never be a bizarre phenomenon. With regard to this, any academic endeavor to comprehend the history of the Oromo is almost equally challenging as to figure out the history of the rest of Ethiopia.

For decades, scholarly and political debates on the history of the Oromo essentially revolve around two fundamental issues: periodization and the nature of interaction the Oromo has had with other peoples in Ethiopia. In the case of the former, both ancient and medieval times (16th century) have become defining moments. An argument that claims the remote origin of Oromo history and culture stresses the fact that the Oromo have been part and parcel of the celebrated Cushitic civilization to which ancient Egypt, Nubia and Axum itself belong. To this thesis, scholars refer to linguistic and anthropological evidences chiefly. Contrary to this, there is a widely disseminated narrative that gives emphasis to the advent of the Oromo into the region in the 16th century in the form of pastoral invasion, expansion and assimilation. Again, linguistic, oral as well as written sources and anthropological evidences are offered to strengthen this argument. The debate is still going and seems to be a researchable subject matter for anyone interested in it.

The other issue that has become the source of political conflict, not to mention the scholarly debate with its heavy dosage of dogmatic presumption, in the recent history of Ethiopia in general and Oromiya in particular is the very nature of the Oromo interaction with the rest of Ethiopian peoples. Here, we have three ideological perspectives and, thus, political positions. The first propagates the notion of “Abyssinian” conquest against the free Oromiya at the last
quarter of nineteenth century during the reign of Emperor Menilek II and that resulted in the introduction of Amhara colonial system. The overall historical place of the Oromo in Ethiopian politics is perceived in this framework. In this thesis, much more emphases are given to narratives of invasion and subjugation in some provinces of Oromiya (e.g. Arsi and Harerge) and, subsequently, any account on the history of positive interaction and integration of the Oromo (both from below and from above) with the rest of Ethiopian societies and states, for instance, in Wallo, Gondar, Shawa and Finfine/Addis Ababa is either ignored or alleged as an act of collaboration and infidelity. According to this thesis, the Ethiopia imperial state is equated with European colonial countries, and consequently independence is stipulated as a logical outcome. Among Oromo political organizations, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), is known for its rudimentary propagation of this thesis among its followers for decades. Some of the organization’s ideologues among scholars are also disseminating the thesis, in the name of academia, with no inquiry on the sensibleness of the concept of colonialism in the Ethiopian context.

Seen from historical context, however, in which the OLF’s colonial thesis emerged (1960s and 1970s) the Ethiopian Empire and its ruling class (not the state) was disgraced at home and decolonization became the fashion of the day, accordingly, the thesis seems to be viable especially for ambitious Oromo political elites. However, rushing into the colonial thesis without proper assessment of Oromo history (especially its role in empire building at Gondar and Shawa) and culture (the eminent accommodating values such as mogafechaa, gudifecha, ilma Miti, ilma burchuma, Ilma Boju) in the provinces of Oromiya as well as without the critical evaluation of the geopolitical factors that do affect politics led the OLF into ideological and strategic rumple. However, when this intolerant ideological stand of OLF was transformed into administrative practices during the transitional period in 1990s, the result was clear. Being non-Oromo and even being an Oromo but supporting other Oromo political organizations other than OLF had grave consequences. People lost their lives in an atrocious manner in Harargee, Arsi, Bale and Wallagaa.
The second thesis on the nature of Oromo interaction with the rest of Ethiopian societies publicizes the story of peaceful and affectionate bond which can be explicated and exemplified mostly in marriage relationship. Ancestral genealogies and political marriages, not the reality on the ground as they were witnessed in administrative and ideological practices, are provided as evidences. Consequently, developed in response to the colonial thesis with traumatic paranoia of Ethiopia’s disintegration, this narrative of unity and mutual love ignores any violent atrocities, economic exploitation and cultural intimidation inflicted against the peoples in the course of the conquest and during a century long oppressive rule. As ideologues of the colonial thesis prefer to downplay the historical and cultural role of the Oromo in Ethiopian history, correspondingly, the unionist thesis also ignores the agony of the Oromo people under the harsh rule of the Ethiopian feudal empire. Except some half-educated, but parvenu, artistic and narrow minded literary clique in Addis Ababa and some opposition political activists within the Ethiopian Diaspora, no institutional body urged to materialize this cause overtly. The fallacy that the proponents of the two theses i.e., the colonial and unionist theses, commit in common (in fact unconsciously) is that both select a single aspect of Oromo experience and omit the other. This led both to a reductionist interpretation of the Oromo history and its historical role in Ethiopian politics.

The last thesis on the essence of Oromo relationship with the rest of Ethiopian societies and political entities underlines the fact that the issue at hand is not as simple as it seems to be. This thesis deems the unspeakable misery that the Oromo had experienced at the course and consequence of imperial conquest since the last quarter of 19th century. Equally, it considers the role of the Oromo elites in the subjugation of dozens of other nations and nationalities as instrumental force at all echelons. As a victimized people, nevertheless, the thesis understands the domination of the Oromo by others at two levels, i.e., ethnic and class. However, in the conquest and subjugation of the Oromo and other peoples in the south, the Oromo itself is not blameless either. The thesis understands the fact that the historical role of the Oromo nation in the process of Ethiopian empire building has been, thus, Janus-faced. The role of the Oromo both in the process of nation building and defending the independence of the country in major battle fields against foreign invaders. It is really impossible think, for instance, the victory of
Adwa without the decisive role of the Oromo both as war leaders and as soldiers. Undoubtedly, the Oromo contributed to the freedom of the peoples of African and the world at large. Similarly, the patriotic struggle of the Oromo people during the period of Italian Fascist Occupation is without parallel.

This thesis on Oromo’s relation with others seems to have taken a middle ground between the colonial and the unionist theses. To put it in the language of dialectics, it is the synthesis of the unionist thesis and the colonial antithesis. OPDO/EPRDF is branded for this position, in fact, with a conspicuous ideological bent towards the decisiveness of the ethnic factor. As this ideological position is put into governmental practice, it has manifested itself in the establishment of the National Regional State of Oromiya within the federal arrangement. The regional government of Oromiya has trying hard to address the political, economic and cultural questions in accordance with the parameter of its own thesis on the Oromo issue. Though far from its ideal goal, the achievement so far is momentous.

However, evaluating the condition of OPDO and the Oromiya National Regional State in reference to the impractical target of the colonial thesis is the common mistake of some negligent commentators. These commentators demean the ongoing achievements by the Regional State comparing them with the political position of colonial thesis. The tendency to make the colonial thesis the standard bearer for overall cause of the Oromo does not emanate from the objective realities of the Oromo history and culture. But, this inclination did throw some Oromo politicians into confusion. Rather, critical are those who evaluate the validity of the colonial thesis in comparison with the modest thesis.

Either failing to understand the apt nature of the place of the Oromo nation in the Ethiopian history and politics or selecting one aspect and omitting the other deliberately, not few political activists, historians and commentators, have been taking reductionist views and utilized them for their political goals. These reductionists, at times, drew the attention of the local as well as the international media and, sadly, some politically active social groups. Jawar Mohammed, a loud-mouthed young Oromo political activist, is one of these personalities. Here, few words are pertinent on the reason why he has secured transient media acceptance, no matter how his
analysis and commentaries are far from scholastic quality. Since Jawar’s specious reputation is directly correlated with the failure story of OLF in Oromo politics, let me begin with my reflection on Jawar’s views, “political analysis” and, political aspiration with the following contextual background.

It is apparent that the period of the momentous advent of OLF in Ethiopian politics is during the historic transitional interlude of the early 1990s after the demise of the Darg government. Surprisingly enough, OLF was not ready even for this opportune situation that this intermission offered. Leenco Leta, one of the top leaders of the organization at that time clearly narrates the circumstances in which the Front had been just prior to the transitional period. Since the paragraphs are extremely essential for their empirical value, I deliberately quote them at lengthy.

The OLF was facing a number of new conditions that it could not easily overlook. The beginning of the collapse of the Somali state eliminated the major traditional ally of those fighting Ethiopian colonialism. Although the Oromo struggle benefited the least from the Somali’s opposition to Ethiopian colonialism there are always been an objective alliance between the struggles of the Somali and Oromo peoples. After the disintegration of Somalia, a situation was created in which whoever would come to power in Ethiopia had no more worries of confrontations coming from the East and the Southeast.

The stand of Ethiopia’s Western neighbor also suddenly turned against anyone trying to fight the group that was coming to power. The Sudanese government, at that time, was working closely with both the TPLF and EPLF to speed up the end of the Derg regime. The obvious immediate dividend for the Sudanese government was the end of the threat that the Southern based Sudan Peoples Liberation Army posed by operating from inside Ethiopia with the support of the Derg. Possible long term regional economic, political and security cooperation among the countries of the region was also being alluded to. The era in which neighboring countries were subverting each other by supporting each other’s armed opposition groups was beginning to be considered a thing of the past. Under these circumstances, the OLF was emphatically informed by the Sudanese government that any continued relation would hinge on its agreement with the emerging new government.
Presidential guarantees of continued support were relayed to the OLF leaders only in case the TPLF would renege on its promise.

In the 1980s the OLF’s operation in Western Oromia, like that of EPLF and TPLF, was dependent on territorial access to the Sudan. The OLF’s important rear installations including grain stores, hospitals and orphanages were situated inside the Sudan or close to the border. The possible loss of the Sudanese government’s cooperation overnight meant not only the loss of much-needed resources but also endangering many children and other dependent civilians.

The Western powers, especially the US Government, and many of their agencies, also insisted that the OLF would exhaust all possibilities of peacefully reforming Ethiopia by addressing Oromo political grievances. The then US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, who was the top US official trying to facilitate the London conference, emphatically told the OLF leaders that their only option was to work within the new Ethiopian government. His public assurance was the declaration that he made at the time linking US economic assistant with the commitment to and actually affecting the democratization of the remainder of the empire. Western governments were pulling strings to persuade the OLF to enter into a coalition with the TPLF/EPRDF. Further, humanitarian organizations involved in the cross-border operations made it clear that continued cooperation with its relief wing—the Oromo Relief Association (ORA)—would depend on the OLF reaching an agreement with the TPLF/EPRDF.

Finally, and much more important, the EPLF leaders were assuring the OLF that they would resist the emergence of any new forms of domination in Ethiopia. They repeatedly told the OLF leadership that the EPLF had a vested interest in a new pluralist Ethiopia as a neighbor. A vision of regional cooperation, in which all communities would become direct and equal partners, was held up to entice the OLF to think of new possibilities. All these and other factors influenced the OLF to join the drafting of the Transitional Period Charter, which was supposed to be the beginning of a cooperative effort that was to culminate in the birth of new democratic polity (54-56).

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Two, nonetheless interconnected, key facts can be drawn from this very extended, yet crucial, quotation. The first is that OLF was absolutely at the mercy of others and unbelievably inept throughout its history and, second, the Oromo people had no say in OLF’s major decisions. Rather than listening to the voice of the Oromo people, OLF relied on the guidance of Sudanese leaders, US diplomats and Eritrean chiefs. To uninformed Oromo political activist, this institutional incapacity of OLF, lack of farsightedness even to examine the regional developments in advance and adjust its strategy in line with the new dynamics, its dependency on foreigners (not on the Oromo people), and the Front’s enthusiastic love of externalizing every weakness its leadership has had, are disgusting.

Though the Front did not have any liberation record in Oromia unlike its bragging rhetoric, it is during the transitional period that this organization could reach the Oromo people at home openly, in mass and, in relative terms, freely. During this interlude, thanks not to OLF’s achievement, but to the power vacuum created, the Front could become functional in almost all provinces and towns of Oromia via its amorphous and unruly army as well as demagogic cadres. Contrary to the reality, it is sad to witness the fact that the euphoric psyche of its followers during the transitional period gave a faulty image to OLF. Transitions are odd in breeding a feeling of honeymoon or trauma. Otherwise, no one can deny the bare fact that OLF’s influence before 1991 was limited to remote Ethio-Sudanese border areas and in the Diaspora. In a nutshell, OLF’s fleeting populist acceptance was unintentional, consequently, incidental. However, it took years, if not decades, the real image of OLF to be uncovered.

While the image of OLF was fading drastically from the euphoric mind of its followers in Diaspora and at home, Jawar Mohammed appeared mainly with his criticism against the strategic crumple of OLF. Being a young activist, in fact, he posed a generational challenge. For those Oromo opposition activists who used to live in a state of morbid atmosphere due to OLF’s ideological and organizational decay, Jawar seems to be a biological incarnation of the aging leadership. As the “founding fathers” are aging fast without meaningful achievement, OLF followers became impatient with the out of reach promise and liked to hear the new old voice. This being, like his ideological forefathers, Jawar perceived the politics of Oromo and the place
of Oromo in Ethiopian history only from a single perspective and recurrently made the famous sin of reductionism. To the extent that observers suspect his academic record as a student of political science at Colombia University, he repeatedly made grave conceptual and factual mistakes as a “political commentator” and “Ethiopian affairs specialist”. What are these mistakes? Why did he do those academic blunders? Is he struggling to the cause of the Oromo or has his own personal ambition? Is he really a political analyst? How? In the following few pages, I will try to address these and other questions meticulously.

Jawar Mohammed has written a number “articles” on the Ethiopian politics in general and the Oromo politics in particular. His insatiable desire to give a comment on every political development is perceptible. His quick response to every political dynamics in Ethiopia and abroad in the form of interview, commentary and “analysis” via mass and social media has attracted the attention of casual observers. For them, he is a prolific writer and energetic orator. If truth be told, for critical experts on the Oromo politics, nevertheless, his remarks are amateurish and reductionist.

**Jawar’s views on Oromo Politics**

Since the onset of his political engagement, Jawar has been criticizing OLF and the Ethiopian government repeatedly in his pieces of writing. However, what makes Jawar famous in Oromo Diaspora is his bold criticism against OLF’s strategic collapse. Among his articles, a piece entitled “Failure to Deliver: The Journey of the Oromo Liberation Front in the Last Two Decades” is remarkable one. It is notable because Jawar’s major views and opinions on the Oromo politics in general and on OLF and OPDO/EPRDF in particular are reflected clearly in this piece of

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2 See his “articles” on OLF, OPDO/EPRDF, Ethiopian Muslims as well as his opportune interviews on various issues. The following are the major ones: “Failure to Deliver: The Journey of the Oromo Liberation Front in the Last Two Decades”, On July 27, 2009; “Meles Zenawi’s new foreign policy” August 17, 2010; “Jawar Mohammed: Oromo movement has achieved its objectives, but not concluded its journey” Interview, March 12, 2010; Meles’ Recycled Old tactics being rendered obsolete by a new shrewd Adversary”, May 25, 2012; The ‘new’ OLF: Much do about nothing” January 6, 2012:March 16, 2011; “Ethiopian Muslim stick to nonviolence to overcome the regime’s divisive and repressive tactics” August 20, 2012; “Growing Muslim Activism and the Ethiopian State: Accommodation or Repression?” April 04, 2012; “Tigrean Nationalism: From Revolutionary Force to Weapon of Repression” Not dated; “Jawar Mohammed Opinion after Scotland Votes NO”, September, 2014.
writing. Even the basic assumptions of his later commentaries via various media can be derived straightforwardly from this essay. Hence, I mainly cite it as an illustration for the subtopic under discussion.

In this article, Jawar has carried out a study on political organization. As far as the discipline of Political Science is concerned, one can use the ‘role’, ‘group’ and ‘organizational’ analysis in this kind of study. As significant as these analyses, the major determinants of party structure such as historical, socio-economic and ideological must be taken into consideration, too. Jawar in his article has studied OLF based on role and group analyses. Therefore, he totally avoids other analyses. According to his study, the failure of OLF lays on the behavioral aspect of its leadership (individuals and factions). For Jawar, OLF’s sin is its failure to keep its promise it gave so far. There should be caution on the fact that Jawar never question the political program of OLF. He accused the Front of being a source of Oromo shame and disappointment by facilitating disintegration, growth of regionalist sentiment and retardation of the movement in general. He further argued that because of weak, undisciplined and incompetent leadership, through exile politics and a cult-like outdated organizational tradition, the OLF could not produce any result over the past decade, therefore brought its own demise. He blamed the organization for its lack of action, breaking promises and fabricated accomplishments.\(^3\) I somewhat agree with this.

Yet, Jawar’s ‘role’ and ‘group’ analysis to study OLF’s failure, illustrated with a model, is noticeably partial. In his study, key determinants of political organization are not considered. Alas, he told us that the academic training he received at Stanford University helped him give theoretical and philosophical interpretation to the experiences and beliefs he already developed.\(^4\) It is good to graduate from Stanford University and even to join Columbia University. But, did Stanford University teach Jawar that organizational study is limited only to role and group analyses? Is Jawar trained in Stanford University to disregard the relevance of historical, socio-economic and ideological determinants in a study of party organization? Are there no exogenous factors behind the bankruptcy of OLF, such as the success stories of OPDO/EPRDF at home?

\(^3\) Ibid
\(^4\) Jawar Mohammed:“Oromo movement has achieved its objectives, but not concluded its journey” Interview,Gadaa.com March 12, 2010
Nonetheless, as I emphasised earlier, Jawar states that there is no question that OLF’s political program effectively reflects the just demand of Oromo people. OLF is “the beloved organization of our people” and the leaders are “honourable”.5 To put it briefly, Jawar has no problem with the colonial thesis. In the study of party system, as mention is made in the above lines, history, socio-economic formation and ideology determine party structure. For Jawar, there is no link between ideology (the political program i.e., colonial thesis) of an organization and the structure of an organization. In short, his premise implies that ideology is not a determinant factor in party organization. He didn’t see or didn’t want to see the relation of OLF’s institutional disarray with its ideological crudeness due to the leader’s ignorance of Oromo history and culture. Indeed, though a student of political science in abroad, his knowledge of Oromo history is shallow.

He, supporting OLF’s ideology, assumed that the Oromo has been under the colony of Abyssinians for more than a century. Jawar at most ignores and at least downplays Oromo’s place in Ethiopian state formation since the 17th century. He didn't consider the historic role of the Yeju rulers in Wallo and Gonder since the 18th century, the role of Oromo leaders and their numberless followers in the 19th and 20th century such as ras Mikael Ali, Lij Iyasu Mika’el, ras Gobana Dacee, fitawrari Habtegiorgis Dinegde, dajazmach Balcha Safo and plentiful Oromo patriots and their multitude army during the Italian Occupation such as dajazmach Geresu Dhuki, ras Ababa Aragai (grandson of ras Gobana), General Mulugeta Buli and General Jakama Kelo. In the last 40 years of OLF propaganda, these and many other powerful Oromo’s and nameless followers were insulted as enemies of the Oromo people. Gobenist is OLF’s favourite labelling against Oromo Ethiopians, and Jawar says that there is no question that OLF’s political program effectively reflects the just demand of Oromo people. Who is an Oromo? What is their role in Ethiopian history and state formation? When did the Oromo resist conquest against invaders? When did the Oromo themselves participate in the conquest against their kin and others as commanders as well as soldiers? Why?

For these questions, in fact, OLF has its own obsolete and rudimentary explanations. But its monotonous propaganda against ‘Abyssinian’ rule cannot explain the crucial role of the Oromo especially in the Ethiopian state formation. Jawar (the political analyst) could not understand how this ideology (as determinant factor) based on colonial thesis contributed to their strategic fall down. He didn’t notice the very fact that without developing clear and realist political tenet

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based on Oromo history and culture which encouraged accommodation for centuries, the OLF leadership were fascinated by colonial thesis (intoxicated by the 1960s and 1970s continental and global discourse of decolonization and anti-imperialism) to materialize their elitist ambition to be the founding fathers of a new African state.

Indeed, because of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, too, the colonial thesis seems to be viable. During those two decades (1960s and 1970s), the ruling class of the imperial government of Ethiopia is disgraced and its nationalist impact was in decline. As a result of widespread opposition from many social groups, the Ethiopian state seemed to lose its rationale for survival. Due to this gloomy atmosphere in Ethiopia, the positive Oromo interaction with the rest of Ethiopian peoples, and even the contributions of the Oromo in the Ethiopian state formation were disregarded altogether with the imperial regime. Hence, owing to the humiliating effect of the Ethiopian Revolution against the imperial version of the Ethiopian nationalism, the menacing war from Somalia along with Eritrea, and the decolonization in Africa, OLF had benefited a lot in building its image without its meaningful endeavour. The context made OLF’s colonial thesis a legendary one temporarily. Let’s read Jawar:

Our elders, the generation that drew the program of the OLF, the generation that produced Qubee, the glorious youth of the 70’s who paid the ultimate price to free us from mental and physical bondage deserves our utmost respect. They will forever be remembered as the generation that saved the beautiful Oromo nation from complete destruction. We are their product, we are proud of being their successors. 

He could be their successor. But it is extremely important to consider the context. OLF’s ideology (the colonial thesis) is in some measure a result of contexts such as national (Ethiopian Revolution), regional (Somali war) continental (decolonization) and global (anti-imperialism). Similarly, the unionist thesis that belittles the subjugation of the Oromo is also the product of earlier national context i.e., the power of the Solomonic Dynasty during its apogee. With a sense of lamentation, yet, Jawar writes that it has been years since OLF has ceased to be the pride of the Oromo people and has transformed itself to a source of shame and disappointment by facilitating disintegration, growth of regionalist sentiment and retardation of the movement in general. However, seen from contextual perspective, OLF is as it was 40 years ago. It is the context that is transformed and exposed the image of OLF. Observers fear that Jawar and his fellows would repeat the mistake that OLF had done so far.

6Ibid, p.10
When Jawar, the "political analyst", tried to agitate the Oromo opposition activists at Diaspora to a new organized struggle at home, he also states that today, Oromos are sending their kids to school in millions and are leaving none behind. Bravo! Brilliant! I agree with that! But, who built the schools and the roads? Who established the economic and political system for the training of the teachers, medical personnel, public servants etc? OLF? Emperor Haile Sellassie? Jawar could not answer this question for ideological reasons. Let's help him by reminding him of some success stories at home. The Oromiya National Regional State and the FDRE give access millions and tens of millions of the Oromo to education, health service, cultural and political empowerment, as well as job opportunities. Regrettably, Jawar and his "honourable OLF leaders" call upon the students for a protest just because they do not have a government position. Who would forget their recurrent “education after liberation” propaganda? What a selfish and shameful claim! The point here is that Disregarding the gradual success of OPDO/EPRDF at home in addressing the demands of the Oromo mass and even some euphoric elites is another shallowness of the "political analyst".

Jawar, in examining the failure of the Front, has also mentioned the issue of factional politics among the OLF leadership as a problem. Dear political analyst, people became factional because of various reasons. Cliques develop when members lack common and clear goal. Division also prevail when difference emerge on strategic and even personal interests. In this regard, Jawar figured out regionalism along personalities, for instance, from Wallaga. It is important to understand this as a natural manifestation of such a broad people like the Oromo. Ecology and religion have their impacts on party structure. Political Science tells us that history is a determinant factor in party organization. Didn’t Jawar study this at Stanford University? But, regionalism is not only peculiar to the Oromo. There is regionalism among the Amhara, too. We have regionalism such as in Gojjam, Gondar, Wallo, and Shawa. Because he is a reductionist ‘political analyst’, Jawar didn’t examine the historical and cultural factors working on any organization. The point here is that OLF strategic failure should be examined vis-a-vis the ideological, historical and socio-economic determinant factors. Jawar missed this point absolutely. To sum up, conceptually, Jawar failed to see the link between the ideological, historical as well as socio-economic determinants and the organizational nature of a given political group. Furthermore, as a political analyst, he didn’t scrutinize the genesis of OLF with reference to the national, continental and international developments. He only attempted to

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7 ibid,p.11
understand OLF from role perspective (individuals and groups), thus, ended up with shallow interpretation and reductionist views.

Much more can be reflected on Jawar’s other commentaries, interviews and opinions on various pages of the social media as far as Oromo politics is concerned. Not less serious than his conceptual poverty is his factual mistakes as a result of excessive reliance on unverifiable gossips and fanciful sources. For instance, in his article on March 16, 2011 entitled “Meles Zenawi and OPDO Relations Enter A New Phase”, he stated that a massive purging campaign has hit the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the latest drama that slashed 120 senior and mid-level members, is by far the biggest ever. Reportedly, the same fate awaits the remaining leadership including the “Speaker of the House”, Abadula Gemeda. Who are these 120 senior and mid level members? What are the evidences beyond the general number? Can we have at least the names of half of these members with their offices and positions? What about the fate of Oobo Abadula Gemeda even after four years since this “political analysis” is disseminated? Is there any evidence for the alleged personal relation among EPRDF member organizations? Or is it imaginary? Then, what makes a political analyst (like Jawar) an expert in comparison with an ordinary citizen? As there are many more questions, there will be also several more shames.

Jawar has also presented a “paper” on August, 2014 at the OSA conference. It was all about the recent “Oromo movement” and the topic is a timely one and seems to be a fantastic presentation. Sadly, except for the clichéd rhetoric which is full of emotional tenor, Jawar didn’t even define and conceptualize what social movement or protest movement is. What is social movement? What is protest movement? What is the difference between directed and undirected movement? What kind of social movement is Oromo social movement that happened in May, 2014? What makes it different from other Oromo social movements since 1960s? What are the research questions and the hypothesis? Instead of addressing these basic issues, Jawar rushed into his habitual political propaganda. Not to mention the methodological scantiness and empirical shallowness of Jawar’s paper, it does lack the elementary components of any public speech: flow and coherence. Listening patiently to Jawar’s presentation, one automatically suspect whether this ‘political analyst’ knows what he is talking about. In fact, part of his superficiality can be attributed to his confused position as a student of political science and as a

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9 Jawar Mohammed, Oromo Movement, August 14, 2014.
political activist. Besides, there is no doubt that he is extremely ambitious to be the leader of Oromo Diaspora opposition group. We will see this point in the last section of this commentary.

**Jawar’s understanding of Ethiopian Muslims**

Besides his amateurish engagement in the Oromo politics, Jawar has also been meddling with Ethiopian Muslim politics seeing the recent protest by some Muslim activists as an opportune moment to amplify his militant view and biased position. His understanding of the Muslim politics in Ethiopia isn’t different from the belligerents who accused the Ethiopian government of importing an alien sect to the Ethiopian Muslims. However, there are two important issues that must be taken into consideration when one wants to deal with Muslim politics in Ethiopia. These are, first, the characteristic feature of the advent as well as the expansion of Islam in the region and, second, the historical relation of the Ethiopian state with the Muslim Sultanates and the community (*Umma*).

Like Christianity, Islam is a Middle Eastern religion, and set its foot at the Horn of Africa at its very formative years. The Ethiopian state has a unique privilege in the history of Islam in the world in hosting the first delegates of Prophet Mohammed in the early 7th century. As far as the contemporary Muslim politics is concerned, what is much more important than the story of the first *hijira* is the manner in which Islam has expanded in sub-Saharan Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular. Islam, like Christianity out of the Jew community, has been expanded by accommodating the cultures of the host communities. Why did the first sheiks and saints accept some elements of indigenous religious practices while these practices are not included in the Holy Quran or Holy Bible? This question is as important as its answer. It is because it was difficult to attract new believers. Why the monks and the Sufis did build pilgrimage centers while there are Mecca and Medina as well as Jerusalem and Bethlehem? To Africans and Ethiopians, these holy places were too remote to visit to new believers and even demanding in terms of economy and spiritual conviction. Thus, there has always been ritual syncretism and a religious accommodation, too. Several Muslim shrines in Wallo, Bali, and Harar did not emerge out of the blue. They have been functional and historical. Islam has expanded that way, and
Christianity, either. It is important to observe the very fact that the Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia cherished and glorified their local saints and sacred places in their respective districts not less than (sometimes even more than) the foreign saints in the Middle East.

History tells us that the origin of Ethiopian state together with its nationalist narrative is deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. As a result, Islam as religion and Muslims as communities like many other believers of indigenous belief systems had never been treated by the state as equal citizens until very recently. Not to enumerate the political oppression, the cultural suppression was undeniable. By creating a symbiosis relationship, the state and the leaders of the church (as an institution, not the Christian community as individuals), attacked harshly the non-orthodox Christians communities ideologically and marginalized them politically as well as economically. This does not mean that the respective followers of Christianity, Islam and customary belief system in Ethiopia have experienced a history of hostility. Nothing of that kind! As the Ethiopian state and the church had been working together for centuries, the majority of the Muslim kingdoms and the Mosque (in Yifat, Hadya, Fatagar, Bali, Adal and Harar) in the present southern and southeastern Ethiopia had also been behaving in the same manner until they were crushed by the Christian state amid their sporadic confrontations. As a result, the Muslim communities had been marginalized in Ethiopian history as far as the political and economic rights of the Umma are concerned. However, before their defeat, we have to bear in mind that the Muslim Sultanates themselves were not janat (paradise) for people who did not embrace Islam. An overview of the very economic bases of the Muslim Sultanates indicates how slave raiding, slavery and slave trade were widespread in those over-glorified sultanates by some young Muslim activists. Being a Muslim Sultanate or a Christian kingdom does not guarantee social justice. The economic factor (in slave-owning and feudal system) had always been there and both polities were exporting human commodity to the Middle East extensively. This point should not been disregarded. Just because they were defeated by the more powerful forces, the conquered political powers could not be righteous.

Since the second half of the 20th century, nonetheless, like many other democratic questions in the Ethiopian Empire, the issue of religious equality has become a rallying point. The gradual
response of the Ethiopian state to the just cause of the subjugated belief systems including Islam has culminated radically in favor of them since 1991. Given the context, any sane observer doesn’t dare to compare the current status of the spiritual life of the Ethiopian people with their previous experiences. However, it does not mean that all the social and democratic questions are addressed perfectly. Indeed, the policy-practice lacuna is one arena of setback.

The recent urban based protest by some young Muslim activists overlooked the above mentioned characteristic features of Islam in Ethiopia. The fact that the odious antagonism to the tested Islamic practices in the prominent pilgrimage centers in Bali, Harar, Wallo and other places endangered the same Muslim believers is considered as a minor issue even by ‘political analysts’. Jawar’s scholarly shortcomings on major Muslim issues range from his ignorance of historical knowledge to shallow political understanding. For instance, in his remark on Muslims in the course of the imperial conquest in the late 19th century, he noted that

Resistance against the state and the dominant society was conducted through ethnic rather than religious mobilization. While the emperors utilized the church to unify their forces and legitimize their objectives, Islam cut across the conquered ethnic and/or regional groups meant that they had to de-emphasize religious differences in order to keep intra-ethnic solidarity and cohesion. Therefore, even grievances born out of religion-specific discrimination were channeled through ethnic mobilization reducing the possibility of faith-based activism.\(^\text{10}\)

The weakness of this commentary emanates chiefly from Jawar’s anachronistic understanding of historical developments. Because Jawar is more political than intellectual, he did not worry about the error of anachronism. Anachronism is a well-known conceptual mistake in which past events are interpreted according to circumstances that did not exist at the time. Comparatively, the magnitude of ethnic resistance has increased remarkably in the last 40 years to the extent that the various forms of resistances since the period of imperial conquest even seemed to be ethnic ones.

\(^\text{10}\) Jawar Mohammed, “Growing Muslim Activism and the Ethiopian State: Accommodation or Repression?” April 04, 2012.p.2
As far as the history of imperial state conquest is concerned, the resistance of the subjugated people was both ethnic and religious ones. Where communities develop kingdoms along with ethnic lines such as Wallayta, Kaffa, and others they resisted through ethnic lines. Where communities established their political powers on the very basis of religion like in the case of Qebena lead by Hassen Enjamo and the Emirate of Harar lead by Amir Abdullahi, the resistance was religious. At Callanqo, for example, the resistance against Menilek II conquest was not conducted ethnically, rather religiously. Otherwise, we could not find the Harari, the Oromo and others against the Menilek forces at the battle front. The same is true for the resistance of the Hadiya, the Gurage and other Muslim communities lead by Hassen Enjamo. Even after conquest, the cultural resistance continued in Hararge and Arsi and Islam has begun serving as a weapon of defiance against the domineering ideology of Christian settlers. Undeniably, the Arsi armed resistance in 1880s was ethnical. After their defeat, however (Jawar was supposed to know this), Arsi resistance continued religiously, not ethnically. Jawar’s anachronistic interpretation on the nature of resistance by the subjugated societies mistook the relatively recent ethnic oriented insurgency with all religious based resistance of the conquest period.

When we scrutinize how Jawar Mohammed perceived the recent erratic protest in some Mosques and in the social media, the following excerpt from one of his piece of writing in 2012 can show his recurrent political position in his other commentaries in various forms.

Having failed to introduce structural changes to accommodate the changing Muslim society, having used shortsighted tactics that weakened the age-old Islamic institutions that facilitated coexistence, having attempted to impose unnecessary restrictions that offended the Muslim community, the regime is now trying to use another dangerous strategy that is supposed to ‘moderate’ Islam. Granted religious moderation is a vital state interest; such moderation ought to be engineered from within rather than being imposed externally. The regime, however, has apparently imported a foreign religious sect to provide ‘training’ for Ethiopian imams on “moderation”.

For sober political analyst, these sentences mean many things. First, Jawar unconsciously (like in the case of the number of Oromo students in school) admits that the Muslim society in Ethiopia is in a state of change. Recognizing this transformation of Muslim society without the
critical framework of political change and market liberalization in the country since 1991 is erroneous. Jawar is a confused commentator in this regard. Second, forgetting what he stated that the Muslim society is in a state of perceptible change, he accused the Ethiopian government of weakening the age-old Islamic institutions. Is that not contradictory? Are Islamic institutions weakening in pre or post 1991 Ethiopia? Were these institutions protected by the Military Regime or Imperial government? Jawar’s political analysis lacks factual accuracy and conceptual suitability severely.

Jawar has mentioned the weakening of Islamic institutions by the Ethiopian government. Here, the very government that guaranteed the religious equality within the exigent political sphere is criticized for being the enemy of Muslims! Who did endanger the age-old Islamic practices and rituals in Hararge, Bali, Wollo? Why didn’t the Muslim activists, for example as the Orthodox Christians have done (if we must make this comparison), accommodated the local Islamic practices and rituals? Who did introduce intolerant religious behavior to the Ethiopian type of Islamic observances? Why did the protesters stood against the local Islamic experiences? It is here that the foreign element of the protest is rooted with whatever nomenclature.

Third, Jawar stated that the regime has imported a foreign sect to Ethiopia. Here, the very government that guarantied freedom of thought and religion in its constitution and institutions is blamed for importing a sect. What an irony! It is needless to remind political analysts that any one has the right to worship and perform his/her religious practices in accordance of the law of the land. Who is a foreigner? Is sheik Abdalla Muhammed a foreigner? The sheik was a Harari spiritual leader! His historical rival, sheikh Yusuf Abd al-Rahman was not also a foreigner. A political analyst who has no empirical mastery over the subject of discussion is not a political analyst. Besides, an analyst with methodological and conceptual limitation is no more an Ethiopian/Oromo affairs specialist.

When Jawar argued for the notion that Muslim society is expelled from the political sphere, he attempted to explain the whole matter in the following words:

The displacement of Islam by ethnicity and the containment of Muslim grievances by progressivism and nationalism resulted in
less mobilization of the Muslim society in terms of religious identity. However, while ‘containment’ allowed for their grievances to be incrementally, indirectly and less contentiously addressed, it also resulted in lower participation and exclusion from political life.\textsuperscript{11}

Not to list down the contradictory statements even in a single piece of writing, Jawar is fond of prejudiced rhetoric that would draw the attention of unfounded opposition activists. From the above quotation, one may think that the Muslim cause in Ethiopia is given a cold shoulder by the state. But one can raise one fundamental question to Jawar: is the Ethiopian state secular or theocratic? Is that workable to a secular government to distribute offices in terms of religious representation? If not, how should a secular government entertain the rights of religious communities? What is wrong with the current system of government as far as the rights of religious interests? Is there any Muslim in Ethiopia since 1991 as a citizen who is marginalized from any public sphere just because he/she is a Muslim? Or, should a secular state submit to the political ambition of religious institutions?

In the above quotation, Jawar is arguing for the agenda that the cause of political Islam (which is roofed because of ethnic and nationalist questions, according to him) must be considered as a political constituency. It is really shameful to remind Jawar and his proponents the rationale behind the separation of Religion and State in Ethiopia. Historically until 1974 fully, and until 1991 to some extent, the Ethiopian State and the Orthodox Christian Church used to meddle with one another’s businesses. Is the Ethiopian State supposed to run the government under the auspices of Islamic principles once the divorce with the Orthodox Church is achieved? If truth be told, the ‘political analyst’ Jawar severely lacks (being a student at Columbia University) the knowledge of the modern world state system. This system, in the countries like Ethiopia (unlike some Middle East countries) is a secular one. The reason is comprehensible.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, p.3
Is Jawar a Political Commentator or Megalomaniac?

A political commentator/analyst or political affairs specialist is an expert in the political issues at hand. This expertise almost emanates from training in the discipline and from practical engagement in the political world. However, all students of political science or active or retired politicians cannot be considered as political analysts. In this regard, one thing about Jawar that is not controversial is the fact that he is a student of political science. Reading some of his commentaries and listening to his interviews, however, is a source of embarrassment for experts of the field. As it is examined in the previous pages, all of Jawar’s writings lack empirical mastery, methodological relevance and even most often conceptual clarity. His ignorance of the history of the Oromo in general and even the process of Islamic belief and practices among the Harerge and Arsi Oromo is outlandish. But the media hosts him for his political rhetoric and never question his analysis partly for the interviewers themselves lack the knowledge on Oromo politics or the Muslim issue in Ethiopia.

When one thinks of Jawar’s expertise, the very incident that could come to his/her mind is Jawar’s interview with Al Jazeera English at the immediate aftermath of the death of the former Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Unlike the two insightful commentators, Jawar, having constructed the gloomy picture of the post Meles Ethiopia, he boldly said “I expect an implosion of conflict, popular uprising and something that looks like the Syrian situation.” 13

What kind of comparison was he doing? Comparative analysis does require a number of common variables. Like many other insane Diaspora opposition activists, he could wish for the Ethiopian people who live at home the misery of the Syrians. But, as a political commentator and Ethiopian Affairs specialist, once he compared Ethiopia with calamitous Syria, the burden of proof was entirely his. Yet, he failed to do so and history proved Jawar wrong. In comparative analysis, Jawar’s fault was repeated recently as he attempted to make comparison between the referendum conducted in UK(Scotland) and the possible case in other countries. Are UK and

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13 Ibid.
another country in the rest of the world comparable? Are Scotland and a regional state in other countries similar? Are unionists in UK and, in Ethiopia identical, for instance? What an assessment!

More than Jawar’s erroneous comments, his notorious statement on the *meencaal* solution for the paranoia of imagined religious domination in Harerge/Arsi led many commentators to suspect Jawar’s sanity. He said “in a place where I lived, out of the total population, 99% is Muslim, therefore, no one dares to challenge us, we will cut his throat with *meencaal*(machete)”14 He usually boasted of joining Stanford and Colombia Universities. Jawar also lives in the modern country where its civilized society believes in dialogue and the dignity of human life. He benefited a lot from their educational and media system. Alas, he is obsessed still with *meencaal*! What kind of mentality difference can we point out between Jawar and Islamic Oromo Liberation Fronti(IOLF) soldiers? His speech indicate that he is longing for Islamic Oromiyaa and that Islamic state will be established and protected by act of terrorism. Otherwise how could he think of *meencaal*(machete)as a solution? Is Jawar really an educated person? Given the chance, wouldn’t he involve in murderous acts? In fact, Jawar could benefit from formal education in enhancing his skill and knowledge. But education can never give him conscience.

As discussed somewhere in this reflection, without questioning the colonial thesis of OLF, Jawar insisted that the Front is an outdated organization and the leadership is old fashioned. In his commentary, he noted “My generation must write its own destiny. We can learn from our elders’ wisdom and experience, but this generation shall not be held hostage to the old days”.15 He agitated young Oromo activists to accept his views and called upon them to join the struggle. Recently, in his “paper” on Oromo movement too, he recommended that there should be leadership replacement even by reminding his audience the similar case in the Ethiopian government. When his harsh criticism against the established Oromo political order coupled with his media mania, his ambition for power becomes as plain as a pikestaff.

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14 Jawar Mohammed’s Speech on August 7, 2013.
Obviously, when Jawar refers to ‘my generation’, he is referring to the Diaspora youth. According to him, the millions of Oromo young boys and girls at home are his weapons. He stated that today, Oromos are sending their kids to school in millions and are leaving none behind.\(^\text{16}\) Therefore, he attempted repeatedly in social media, these innocent young boys and girls can be mobilized and sacrificed for his political agenda.

Lately, news from Oromo Media Network (OMN) further uncovers the true behavior of Jawar. The news informed us that Dr. Hamza Abdurezak, the president of the Board of OMN officially resigned over Jawar Mohammed’s unruly dictation that perpetuates organizational and structural failures.\(^\text{17}\) Dr Solomon Bayana, another board member of OMN, has also resigned from his position due to Jawar’s misconduct. As Dr Hamza clearly stated in his interview with a television station, Jawar is literally a dictator and behaves in tyrannical way. According to Dr Hamza, he could not help but quitting his terms of office in the board when Jawar insulted him. “I will not lie to the Oromo people” said Dr Hamza when Jawar expected him to deceive his audience. Regrettably, in his paper on OLF failure, Jawar accused the Front of similar disingenuous act. What a paradox!

Without doubt, for his wicked political agenda, Jawar leaves no stone unturned. Further news from OMN indicates that Jawar, with no professional know-how in journalism, has fired some journalists from the station while the media’s financial backbone is the Oromo Diaspora. It is really a pity to witness that the Oromo Diaspora from all walks of life covers the costs of OMN and the juvenile Jawar abuses their inimitable sacrifices. The Jawar-Dr Hamza confrontation and other stories in OMN elucidate the fact that this ambitious fellow sees media as a tool to his end. In Oromo Diaspora politics, who would be young Machiavellian other than Jawar?

From all his activities and aspirations, there is no question that Jawar is ambitious to be a leader of the new Oromo political movement. He says “My generation must write its own destiny.” Jawar tells us that the previous generation is aging fast and their organization has also become old. Here, it seems that the biological senility and the organizational decay

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\(^\text{16}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{17}\) OMN news November 24, 2014.
encouraged Jawar to engage in politics with the new old voice. But Jawar, as a proponent of the machete (*meencaaa*) solution in Muslim inhabited Oromiyaa, cannot propose an all-inclusive (Pan-Oromo) political program. It is really sarcastic that the very person who criticized OLF leadership for regionalism himself has widened the age-long rift among Oromo Diaspora activists from Arsi, Wallaga and other provinces of Oromiyaa. It is needles to remind Jawar that all Oromo are not the followers of Islam. As he made clear in his pieces of writing, however, in order to address the Muslim question in Oromiyaa/Ethiopia, he is for the idea of a sort of political Islam. This was, without doubt, a political program of Islamic Oromiyaa Liberation Front (IOLF). Given the overall context in Oromiyaa, the rest of Ethiopia, an international arena, considering theocracy as a political solution for the question of the Muslim community is far from reality. It is also a matter of time that the old guards of IOLF and OLF themselves will confess how they designed the unrealistic and unattainable program carelessly and tantalized their followers. In Greek mythology, as Tantalus was punished by the gods for his misdeeds by the downfall of his kingdom and eternal hunger and thirst, no one but OLF which is responsible for propagating a program beyond its supporters’ reach.

In this regard, hammering the suppression of the Oromo people by others and by its own rulers is one thing, proposing independent Oromiya within the complex geopolitical circumstances of Ethiopia and the horn of Africa is another thing. Longing for the just cause of the Oromo is one thing, disseminating racist and hatred propaganda against others based on language and religious difference is another. Imagining the state of Oromiya is one thing, imagining historical and innate linguistic enemy is another thing. It is important to accentuate here that in the last 40 years, without forgetting the human and material lose of the Oromo people because of instabilities, the hatred-oriented political rhetoric of OLF has created a psycho-social community, whose mentality is fixated inadvertently at rumor and “Abyssinian” and “Semitic” conspiracy. The propaganda seems to be successful in creating the victim mentality among few educated Oromo who have always had a chip on their shoulder about others. Consequently, their impending professional merit is transformed psychologically to the skillfulness of gossip and backbiting. Though unconsciously, Jawar badly needs to nourish the mentality of this psycho-social community among some Oromo.
It is really absurd that the very political activist who has the audacity to speak out in public that OLF and its leadership are too inefficient and too old to achieve its goal did not accept the fact that the OLF program is imprudent. However, since the challenge he posed against OLF is generational, not ideological, he could attract some young Oromo activists. In fact, Jawar did not break new ground in Oromo opposition politics. What is novel in his advent is that he broke successfully the silence among the Diaspora on the very hopeless status of OLF.

Conclusion

Finally, two important things need to be underlined about issues addressed in this piece of writing. The first is that when a certain circle of opposition political community is in a state of confusion and frustration some pseudo-politicians (like Jawar) emerge suddenly posing either a generational or strategic challenge to the political status quo. As a result, new hope seems to grow up among that depressed community momentarily and the community received them with open arms. The initial reception is determined more by the degree of the melancholic mood of the community than critical consideration. When the true trait of the pseudo-politician becomes clear, the community begins an open conversation within and asks itself how the self-claimed ‘deliverer of a people’ is much more part of the predicament than the way out. This again in turn led the disheartened circle of the opposition political community to another chapter of dissatisfaction, then, over and over again. But, this has to stop somewhere.

One possible approach to address this problem is examining oneself critically. As the famous Greek philosopher Socrates stated ‘unexamined life is not worth living’. Externalizing the sources of the failures, as it has been done so far deliberately, is fruitless. Few have what it takes. They stated in public that OLF political program (colonial thesis), not organization or leadership, has a serious problem and should be modified. Because of many factor, it is apparent that OLF program is proven wrong. Otherwise, the performance of the Regional State of Oromiya will continue to put the bewildered Diaspora opposition to shame. Addressing the overall questions of the Oromo at home is a big challenge, but it is OPDO/EPRDF, not the Diaspora activists, that rose to the occasion. Here, one might narrate the major failure stories in
addressing the Oromo questions at home. But, who would tackle even those problems, when, where and how?

Two, occasional protests and riots are always short-lived in their impact and legacy. Some commentators mistook these with the protracted and revolutionary like social movements. However, these protests usually create conducive political environment for other extraneous agenda. Almost all ambitious political activists, such as Jawar, always try to exploit these kinds of riots. What these sorts of people want is nothing but attention and an opportune moment. In the last few years, for example, Jawar has involved in Oromo politics, in “Ethiopian Unity” politics and in Muslim politics. But as we have examined in the previous pages, Jawar is reductionist, pseudo-commentator and, worst of all, megalomaniac. In all his involvements, like a bull in a China shop where delicate plates and ceramic artifacts are displayed carefully, he has created messes both in the media and in the political area. No one knows what Jawar will do tomorrow. I, rather, expect him apologize the Oromo and the rest of Ethiopian people for what he did misguidedly.