

The Politics of Genocide Denial in Ethiopia

by

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"We Oromos naively think that this world cares, and somebody in it is going to help us solve our political problems. We fail to understand that we only get support from others if we first help ourselves and convince others that they can benefit by helping us."

---- Asafa Jalata

Abstract

This study argues that the genocide denial narrative that is repetitively used by genocide deniers globally is also used by the government of Ethiopia. The paper explains how Ethiopia deceives Western donors into accepting the denial narrative it manufactures, in part, because donors wrongly choose to accept the possibility that the minority Tigrayan government, active in the United Nations, will successfully maintain stability in the Horn of Africa. Thus, this work shows the global difficulty of defining Ethiopia as a genocidal nation; the ease with which the global community accepts Ethiopia's repeated excuses for mass deaths and violence stemming from development programs that benefit the ruling party and its cronies; and argues that donor nations appear to be knowingly complicit in and agreeable to massive human rights abuses and mass murder of the population including the intentional destruction of peoples in the Omo Valley and Oromia in order to maintain friendship with the ruling elite. Therefore, the genocide denial narrative of Turkey is compared with the denial narrative of the ruling elite with specific respect to the Oromia state and the development policies in the Omo Valley in the south of Ethiopia; and it is suggested that after analyzing government policy and acts, donor countries and private donors can for reasons of realpolitik, easily abnegate the reality of genocide.

Introduction

Genocide is the intentional act or attempted act of destroying a defined group of people. Slow genocide is the intentional destruction of a group without the rapid mass murder that is so globally shocking. Denial of genocide, whether by perpetrators or observers, is an attempt to deny intent to destroy a group in order to avoid the shame and responsibility of charges of genocide. Confusing the political reality of intent to destroy a group can continue decades after the violence ends. Because the UN Genocide Convention definition of genocide requires proof of intent to destroy a group, genocide does not exist without such proof although other horrendous illegal acts can be present.

The problem for a nation which commits genocidal acts and multiple human rights abuses, like Ethiopia, officially the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (hereafter referred to as the government of Ethiopia) which shares borders with Eritrea to the north and northeast, Djibouti and Somalia to the east, Sudan and South Sudan to the west, and Kenya to the south that includes over 102 million inhabitants, making it the most populous landlocked country in the world, as well as the second-most populous nation on the continent of Africa whose leaders are enamoured of the plunder of foreign aid, stems from the need to prevent knowledge of mass atrocity from leaking into global awareness, so that the reputation of its ancient grandeur might not be sullied, and aid would continue to flow. This aid, as we shall discuss in is about 3.6 billion US dollars per year, about one half the budget of the government of Ethiopia and about equals the amount stolen by government of Ethiopia officials.

Since financial aid funds both slow genocide disguised as development and the amount available for theft, government needs to carefully control the narrative. There is an information blackout, and the minimal information that escapes into global awareness is excused by the donors who have been fooled into believing that aid purchases Ethiopian loyalty.

Such donor denial enables government to freely continue to commit heinous genocidal acts upon the populace. In a slow genocide, there is no sudden outbreak of rapid mass murder that forces at least some global notice, and we shall argue that foreign governments and other donors are complicit in the cover up and in the funding of the violence in return for friendship.

At the present there are two sides to the denial of genocide in Ethiopia. The first consists of the minority Tigrayan group who rule and the second consists of the global elite cronies of the Tigray rulers, including foreign governments, media, aid agencies, and some human rights organizations. These two groups have engaged in denial for decades. While denial is a stage of genocide usually placed after the genocide, at a time when it has become generally recognized as genocide, according to Dr. Gregory Stanton¹ of Genocide Watch, these stages of genocide are predictable. Stanton elucidates that the stage of denial can exist simultaneous with ongoing genocidal atrocities.

In Ethiopia, denial is a way of life. The elite do not desire a violence free society with a thriving public because they are a minority people who have made many enemies. And they fear being overwhelmed by those enemies if there were to be a wealthy, educated, thriving, democratically run society. They believe that their only method of survival is to continue as they have. The gullible expectation of donors and the UN that the government of Ethiopia actually desires to control internal deaths and violence is unfounded. "We have your back, so please fund our development, but don't watch" is the cry, while the corrupt elite steal donated funds and destroy the human capital of targeted civilians. David Steinman advises that, "Ethiopia's government believes it has America over a barrel and doesn't have to be accountable to us or its own people."²

Because government is receiving foreign funds while carrying out a slow genocide, it is certainly in government's interests to deny that they intentionally attempt to eliminate targeted segments of the population.

The government of Ethiopia narrative blames its own violence on resistance by 'outsiders' and denies intentional atrocity while the globe watches exactly that. And so by tolerantly misunderstanding that the denial of culpability for internal mass death or tragedy during these projects is prevarication, the United Nations, the World Bank, donor nations and most global media are setting the stage for continued violence in the Horn. Although there might be promises of improvement, as soon as donors engage their attention elsewhere, atrocities begin again.

We observe that acts that relate to Article II a, II b and II c of the UN Genocide Convention³ are repeatedly committed against targeted populations, such as the Oromo, and result in many deaths. Article II b states, "Genocide means...Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group" and Article II c states, "Genocide means... Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." The situation in Ethiopia should not be referred to as human rights abuse or mass murder, but as genocide. It is the epitome of denial for observers to accept the government narrative and to ignore the truth on the ground. Donors are very careful to name the chronic hunger as food insecurity, and forced evictions and police violence as atrocities in order to avoid the serious situation of naming genocide. Nevertheless, they have involved themselves in genocide in exchange for favors from the Ethiopian regime.

Because these deaths are not caused by violence, but are indirectly caused by hunger or illness or lack of medication or clean water required to sustain life, are they easier to ignore? Mass deaths due to starvation have been so masked by occasional periods of drought as to be blamed on natural disaster. However, decades of alternative theories such as those discussed by Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze whose explanation for mass deaths due to hunger give other, more sinister, and shall we dare to admit, intentional reasons for mass hunger, and death.

They stated that, "... there is no real evidence to doubt that all famines in the modern world are preventable by human action..." and that the responsibility for action or lack of action deserves, "explicit attention and analysis, not evasion."⁴ We would also suggest here that children who survive would be a reduced future threat to the Tigrayan minority because, according to The Lancet, "damage suffered in early life leads to permanent impairment, and might also affect future generations."⁵ We believe that government policy that repeatedly creates hunger is evidence of true genocide and must be so named. Because of multiple denials and constant cover-ups by the government of Ethiopia, those observers who wish to remain unaware of the facts find that they are able to mask truth. It has become all too easy to permit politics to make the decision.

Hence, we examine the crucial question of how genocide is legally recognized, and we show that some acknowledge genocide in Ethiopia and the denial narrative of genocidaires that transcends time and borders and we explain the national historical development of the genocide denial in Ethiopia which includes the "Wax and Gold" cultural propensity of Ethiopian leaders to prevaricate. We also discuss the narrative of the international deniers that arises from the use of definitionalism that blurs the line between human rights abuse and genocide.

Next, we explain definitionalism as it concerns the narrative of denial and show parallels between the politics of global denial of the Armenian genocide and the Ethiopian donors political reasons for denial of intentional genocidal acts. And also, we discuss definitionalism using the genocide trial of the Derg leadership. We relate an incident of forced displacement which occurred during the Derg regime to further explain the how definitionalism blurred the presence of slow genocide during the Derg era. And we also outline two of the ongoing genocides, using the situations in the Omo Valley and the capital city of Addis Ababa as examples of the current appearance of the slow genocide that is carried out with global aid and complicity to demonstrate an unstable political situation that is leading to chaos.

Development projects in the Omo Valley, in the south, are easily destroying the starving peoples who have been displaced. Global populace knows little of these acts because victims cannot easily communicate with outsiders and have been intimidated into silence. The donor countries who fund these projects usually turn a blind eye to the plight of the involved families. When donors finally acknowledge that problems exist, they focus on the presence of human rights abuses, and ignore the pattern showing that these abuses are realistically, genocidal mass deaths and disabilities. At this time, some donors have been shamed into action, but donor action only means changing the names of the aid projects. And because money is fungible, and because the intent of Ethiopian regime remains the destruction of the Oromo and other peoples, as aid funding continues unabated, so does death and devastation.

Further, we discuss that in the very center of the country, the Addis Ababa Master Plan, an incredible expansion of 20 times the present size of the city, was touted as required for modern development of the city.

When completed, it would displace an estimated million Oromos. Because the outcome of similar past projects has devastated and povertized displaced populations, there was grassroots resistance which caused the government to incarcerate of tens of thousands of mostly young educated Oromos. As of this writing, they are undergoing torture and intimidation which will aid in the slow genocide by rendering this generation unable to organize and resist the continuous government policies which slowly destroy the chosen group(s). Dr. Kathleen Alden describes the effects of torture. She elaborates, "...torture sets horrific examples to those that come in contact with the victim...and can profoundly damage ... relationships between the victim and their communities. In this way, torture can break or damage the will and coherence of entire communities."⁶

The Difficulty of Naming Genocide

We discuss the difficulty of bringing the charge of genocide and the ease of turning a blind eye to the problem. Technically, Article VIII of the Genocide Convention dictates that 'competent organs' of the United Nations would consider appropriate action if they suspected the commission punishable acts enumerated in Article III. That works well when the genocidaire has few friends. Such an incident occurred on June 15, 2016, when the UN's Human Rights Council claimed, "ISIS has committed the crime of genocide as well as multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Yazidis..."⁷

In this example, because of the politics of the situation, the problem of the Yazidis fleeing to Mount Sinjar in Northern Iraq was easily determined to be genocide. Yet, this frequently does not occur. The multitude of definitions of genocide enables a confusion of non-truth should a deciding body seek to evade a decision. What, exactly, is genocide?⁸ How does one make the key determination of the presence of intent to destroy a group? What constitutes a 'group' as defined by the UN Genocide Convention? Were the acts targeted to a specific group(s) ? How many deaths does it take? What percentage of loss of the group is sufficient? Is death required or is sterilization of people within the group sufficient to trigger the use of the word? What about death by starvation, harsh treatment or illness? These questions and many others like them make it easy to use the terms war crimes or human rights abuses instead of muttering the more truthful name of genocide.

A more serious debate can arise when one observes a slow genocide, such as the tragedy that unfolds in Ethiopia. There are political and practical difficulties that exist that enable one to more easily deny the presence of genocide. There are, in Ethiopia, a high number of indirect deaths which have occurred over a long period of time. The smiling friendly leaders excuse them as unintentional , and ask for more funding to make improvements. A few years later, nothing has changed. When does the lie become evident? When does denial collide with truth? How often must time elide evidence?

Who calls out the name 'genocide'? The Clinton administration in the US refused to permit officials to use the G-word lest there would be calls to take action in Rwanda.⁹ The common occurrence is that those who do not understand the definition or are little concerned about adhering to the legal difficulties or the political realities of the definition of genocide freely use the word 'genocide' for various purposes. It can be used as a call for help by victims and their advocates or by media who are attempting to call attention to the importance of their information. The vast majority of the uses of the "G-word" refer to situations where the presence of genocide has not been decided by a court. In the case of Ethiopia, in 2016, a few examples written by survivors or observers follow:

- "A 'slow genocide' is unfolding in Ethiopia." This was originally published by Human Rights Watch and republished by *The Ecologist* April 7, 2014 under the title "20 years after Rwanda - Ethiopia's 'slow genocide' in the Omo Valley." It was accompanied by a note from The Ecologist as follows, "The original HRW article does not employ the phrase 'slow genocide'. The term has been applied in the headline and introduction paragraph by The Ecologist as we believe that the inevitable outcome of depriving the Indigenous Peoples of the Omo Valley of their land and water will be to extinguish their social and cultural identity, while also threatening the physical survival of many individuals and families."¹⁰
- "The extraordinary violence and massacre of peacefully protesting Oromo civilians amounts to a genocide. The TPLF/EPDRDF regime is committing genocide in Oromia before our own eyes today."¹¹
- "Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa (HRLHA) is deeply concerned that, if the international community fails to respond to the merciless killings presently taking place in the Regional State of Oromia as soon as possible, this could lead to a genocide comparable to those in Rwanda (1994), in Yugoslavia (1998), and in Darfur/Sudan (2003)."¹²
- "...an ideology to change and purify the ethnic demography of Ethiopia by destroying particular ethnic groups...the genocides committed in the Gambella, Ogaden and Oromia people..."¹³
- "... the government of Ethiopia has begun to show the symptoms of a state on the brink of genocide: routine killings of members of a targeted group,...hying up of jingoistic rhetoric, and openly invoking the specter of mass extermination..."¹⁴
- "Members of Australia's Ethiopia community are calling on the Australian government to help stop what they call a Rwanda-style genocide committed by Ethiopia's government."¹⁵
- "Grand Rally Washington DC, Stop The Genocide in Oromia, Ethiopia!"¹⁶

The UN Genocide Convention defines and limits the meaning of the term. However, as Stanley Cohen muses, "Ultimately, there is no way of determining that one reality is more valid than any other."¹⁷ That leads to problems for those who might be helped by victimhood or survivors with families still at risk. Adam Jones offers a list of the usual excuses for genocide denial: 1) "Hardly anybody died" , 2) "It was self-defense", 3) "The deaths weren't intentional", 4) There was no central direction", 5) "There weren't that many people who died", 6) "It wasn't/isn't genocide, because...", 7) "WE would never do that" and 8) "We are the real victims."¹⁸

The National Narrative of Ruling Groups in Ethiopia

It is well understood that "dissimulation and ambiguity are natural ways of communication" for the elite Ethiopian rulers.¹⁹ A philosophy called "wax and gold", with wax being the cover-up and gold the reality, permeates northern Ethiopian society, particularly Abyssinian society. Helen Epstein explained, "Even ordinary conversations frequently contain double entendres and ambiguities." Westerners do not comprehend that there is a cultural lifestyle of prevarication and that fact, if they were not familiar with the society, "might give Ethiopians like Meles (the now deceased Premier) an advantage in dealing with Westerners, especially when the Westerners were aid officials offering vast sums of money."²⁰ So it would be reasonable to expect that this proclivity to prevaricate might bleed into relationships with strangers, especially strangers who could provide knowledge, cash and weapons.

We can trace an early example of secretive behavior and denial narrative in Ethiopia to 1896. After the battle of Adwa in March of 1896, there were many among the defeated Italian army who were mutilated as punishment. Many were castrated; others lost a hand and foot. About 7% of Italian soldiers who returned home had been castrated.²¹ Jones related that vision of the mutilated of people in the streets of Italy sent a message of Ethiopian barbarism and undermined Ethiopia's reputation among nations. Jones commented on the European reaction to castration of fallen enemies. He wrote, "Abolishing the slave trade and eliminating the practice of castrating vanquished foes remained high on the lists of issues raised by Europeans in their dealings with Ethiopia."²² Chris Prouty related that, "the fact that a few Italian bodies were emasculated by the 'trophy'-collecting Ethiopians appalled readers of the European press."²³

One can understand that a regime, dependent upon foreign aid, addicted to global approval, understanding the global culture and global mores, and fluent in the disimulating language of wax and gold, would certainly be able to convince foreign donors of any story that would be conveniently available.

For example, as we will discuss infra in via a series of peaceful political protests originating from a proposed expansion of Addis Ababa that will impoverish the local Oromo residents, resulted in ruthless government retaliation. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Taye Atske-Selassie accepted some blame for the response of the government to political problems, but blamed "outside forces" for the problem. Government, he said " ...should not let outsider forces interfere in the internal matters of the country", and he excused the blocking of the internet as , "an immediate solution to protect youth from communicating with those extremist groups."²⁴

Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn told Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, "The government is not using extreme violence. If it happened, we will investigate the units involved."²⁵ The PM denied that people were detained or killed for political purposes. We note here that a US Department of State document minimizes the violence while at the same time admitting the existence of politically motivated incarceration which was denied by the regime. The document reads , "The most significant human rights problems included harassment and intimidation of opposition members...and politically motivated trials."²⁶

International Responses

"What kinds of responses did bystanders, other states, regional and international organisations, make to the situation?"

~ Helen Fein

International denial of genocide often stems from political motivations. However, in Ethiopia, the quid pro quo of financial support is not balanced by the weak promise of loyalty to the US and other donors. That is, the regime should not be trusted.

London School of Economics Fellow in Human Rights, Awol K. Allo, explains the US dilemma and the Ethiopian narrative. The Oromos are viewed as extremist secessionists while the governing elite appear to be forward looking and globally conscious. And so it might appear to the US that division of Ethiopia into smaller states, or the creation of a new regime led by Oromos might insure that the country would no longer be able provide stability in the region. It would then be reasonable to assume that "continued monitoring, control, and policing of Oromo intellectuals, politicians, artists and activists" is helpful to the stability and is even necessary to US policy. Even though the US is aware of serious internal problems and horrific government activities, it chooses, nevertheless, to see a more positive picture. In 2012, Susan Rice, US Ambassador to the UN, characterized Meles Zenawi as 'uncommonly wise' and in 2016 former US President Obama accepted the notion that Zenawi's election to Prime Minister was fair and legal.²⁷

Ethiopia, a member of the UN Human Rights Council, and a non-permanent member of the Security Council, is an active member of the UN. Despite unpleasant information about heinous acts by Ethiopian rulers, donor countries are therefore able to find a comfortable enough path to denial that would not only ignore atrocities and deaths of civilians, but would continue to fund programs which they tout as "development".

There is a great deal of hope and blind belief that Ethiopia will secure peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. With headquarters of the African Union in the capital city, Addis Ababa, donor countries have engaged in friendship with and trusted the genocidal government. For example, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi promised to engage in a proxy war in Somalia for the US. According to the BBC, "There were reports of US special forces operating from Ethiopia soil and close co-operation between Ethiopian troops and the US Africa Command base in Djibouti, Camp Lemonnier."²⁸ In 2015, the new nominal Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn has retained that relationship with the US, the UK and the EU regarding security in the Horn of Africa. Hailemariam Desalegn promised, in 2017, "We in the region will continue to shed our blood and do whatever is necessary to restore the long sought after peace and stability..."²⁹ Mosley wrote, "all indications are that external support will remain strong."³⁰

Yet, all is not as it seems. The US does not yet understand that it is in Ethiopia's own best interests to maintain the current situation in Somalia so that Somalis in Somalia do not unite with Somalis across the border in Ethiopia.³¹ From 2011-2016, the US was permitted to use the Arba Minch air base to survey the Somali terrorist group, Al Shabab. But when US withdrew forces from the base, Terrence Lyons, regional expert, mused the possibility that the decision was due to Ethiopian demands and that, "the US is having problems with its relationship with Ethiopia."³² The United Kingdom also attempts to deny the extent of Ethiopian Government lies and atrocities. As we know from previous examples, and as we discuss forced relocations generally have poor outcomes for the people. However, in the name of progress, several groups living in the Omo valley have been forcibly removed from their ancestral land. The displaced villagers were left without food, sanitation, and medical care, causing conditions not conducive to health and life. Donors sent missions to the area in August 2014, to observe, but the UK refused to release the reports. The UK attempted to withhold this information from its citizen-taxpayers who were partially funding these genocidal activities. A letter to the government of Ethiopia claimed that no evidence had been found to support these charges.³³

Definitionalism

Lack of language specificity can lead to denial via 'definitionalism', the academic battle "over whether or not a given event really fits the pure form of definition of genocide... the significance of the event and its enormous human tragedy are written out of existence."³⁴

The Armenian Genocide in Turkey

Here, we show the similarity of Turkish denial of intention to exterminate Armenians by forced relocation to the Ethiopian denial of any intention to harm Oromian citizens by forced relocation. We also show how the intent of the act of forced relocation can be refocused, in the case of Armenia, to the need for security, so that the definition of 'intent to destroy a group' can be emotionally separated from the contextual meaning of the UN Genocide Convention and morphed into a condition requiring defense against civil rebellion. And infra, we show how using forced relocation to prove intent to destroy a group can be morphed into forced relocation, not as intent to destroy, but for the benefit of the people. Use of 'definitionalism' muddies the pure water of certainty, making it easy for nations of this globe to accept the denial narrative, especially when there is political motivation.

The facts that in 1915 Armenians were forced from their homes and that many perished from extremes of weather, lack of food and medical care and because of predation from murderers and thieves is well documented. About 1.5 million, out of 2 million died.³⁵ What is of interest to us is the more recent denial narrative of Turkey and the political behavior exhibited by other countries as the denial narrative is accepted.

In 1965, marked by the 50th anniversary of the genocide, the Armenian Diaspora which consists of progeny of survivors began to fully understand their family history and to believe that genocide had occurred. They expected that others would agree with them. However, Turkey began "an active campaign of counterpropaganda" and insisted that the Armenian 'genocide' was a lie.³⁶ Hovannisian succinctly describes the Turkish narrative and writes, "...the dominant thesis...does not dismiss a great loss of life but puts it into the context of civil war, mutual victimization, unpreparedness and inability to judge the scope and consequences of the "relocation", disease, some local officials, and many uncontrollable tribesmen."³⁷ If one accepts the possibility that 'intent to destroy a group' was actually a preemptive strike in a chaotic setting, that went too far out of control, it would might be possible to avoid final verdict of genocide.

"In these efforts", to support its denial of genocide, Adam Jones explains, "Turkey has been greatly assisted by its close alliance with the US, its membership in NATO, and its mutually supportive arrangement with Israel."³⁸ By 2015, the Turkish position had become firm. Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan unequivocally stated, "It is out of the question for there to be a stain or a shadow called genocide on Turkey."³⁹

At this point in time, many have taken sides in this dispute, and one can see the politics of power in their decisions. For example, in the US Congress, in 2007, a bill to condemn the genocide was quashed by the Bush administration because of our military ties to Turkey. Over 70% of our supplies to Iraq passed through the Incirlik airbase.⁴⁰ In France, on December 22, 2011, France's National Assembly made it illegal to deny the genocide. Turkey promptly canceled all economic, political and military meetings.⁴¹

For the European Union there is even more than military and trade considerations or the politics of Turkey becoming a member. Turkey, for an initial price of three billion Euros, controls the movement of migrants into Greece, and therefore, into the EU.⁴² In 2016, the German Parliament, almost unanimously passed a resolution recognizing the deaths as 'genocide', with German Chancellor Angela Merkel's party supporting the resolution. The BBC noted that Parliament had focused the debate on German knowledge of the massacres and lack of remedial action.⁴³ There appeared to be a psychological crisis between German guilt and a possibly existential error in judgment as to Turkey's willingness to compromise. With Germany already overwhelmed with Syrian refugees, the outcome of this action remains to be seen.

The most illustrative example of an existential, political decision, however, is the choice of Israel to deny the Armenian Genocide. We can characterize Israel as a country fully armed and prepared for immediate response to aggression but with few unambiguous allies. We can also note that Israel, as well as Armenia, suffers both genocide survival and genocide denial. Regarding recognition of the Armenian genocide, Yair Auron elaborates, "There is no doubt that morally speaking, and Israel should be the first. Sadly, however... this is not likely to happen in the near future. The political establishment of Israel, from the left wing as well as the right wing, with a few exceptions, has decided to develop relations between Turkey and Israel. It was a geopolitical decision and strategy influenced by political and military interests...."⁴⁴

The Genocide Trial of Mengistu and the Antonov Airlift

Ethiopia subsumes politicide, the attempt to destroy a political group, into the definition of genocide by including political groups in its national law of genocide, even though the UN definition does not include political groups. The UN Genocide Convention mentions only national, ethnical, racial or religious groups and specifically did not include political groups. This confusion allows for certain legal possibilities, as follows.

After Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed, a socialist oriented committee, the Derg, came to power. The leader of the Derg, Mengistu Hailemariam believed in his socialist mission and believed that there were internal enemies who needed to be purged. Edward Kissi wrote, "Mengistu saw extermination of perceived enemies as necessary to ensure the unity of the Ethiopia nation."⁴⁵ Mengistu Hailemariam, was charged with genocide under Ethiopian law.

The Derg fell in 1991 and in order to absolve the new regime of guilt, Mengistu Hailemariam, and hundreds of others underwent a twelve year genocide trial. Because Article 281 of the 1957 Ethiopia Penal Code includes political groups, Mengistu could be and was convicted of genocide. We might here more accurately say that Mengistu was certainly guilty of politicicide, but not recognized as guilty of genocide outside the borders of Ethiopia.⁴⁶

In the case of the Mengistu trial, depending upon ones location, one could rename politicicide as genocide, or visa versa, and confuse the facts of mass death that occurred during the Derg regime. By charging Mengistu, the new regime could show that technical genocide might or might not exist, and that even if it did, they didn't do it. They could cover their own violent acts while claiming that they were working to improve Ethiopia and so deserved more funding.

The facts remain however. There was so much hatred and so much death during the regime of the Derg that it was easy to believe, if one only observed from a political viewpoint, that politics drove genocidal events. It was politics that motivated the charges and the outcome so that ethnic and religious groups were seen only in a political context. However, ethnic Oromo and other groups who have constantly been harmed by government policies might certainly disagree with their maltreatment either as an ethnic or religious, or political group. In effect, not seeing Oromo genocide was a denial subterfuge that permitted the new regime to appear to be truly concerned about the political atrocities of the past and to absolve themselves of similar new atrocities they were already committing.

A description of events that would show genocide rather than politicicide occurred late in 1984, when the Christian Relief and Development Association made the international community aware of the dire famine.⁴⁷ In order to keep financial aid flowing, the government announced a massive villagization and resettlement program. The tactic of famine murder could be changed to another program, forced relocation murder, sold to the donors and media as beneficial, but as a program that was a proven destroyer of people, would continue to kill target populations. Because enemy populations, like the Armenians or Oromos, can be forcibly displaced with very harmful outcomes, if one intended to overlook the ethnicity and religion of Oromos, and see only political resistance because of years of oppression, one could define the forced relocation as globally defined politicicide, but not as genocide.

The curtain of politicide, violence, starvation and death covered concurrent genocidal events in Wollo. Oromos from Wollo were forcibly relocated and came to much harm. This series of events should be treated separately, as genocide, despite the confusing presence other types of violent, destructive activity that is being used to deny and cover up the facts.⁴⁸ The New York Times reported on November 19, 1985 that a dozen Antonov transport planes were sent from the USSR to aid the suffering famine victims.⁴⁹

The planes were used to forcibly relocate Oromo people and the methods used in the transport process proves genocidal activity, complete with intent to destroy a group. Up to 400 Oromo people per flight from Illuababor, weakened by receiving minimal food and water, were literally jammed into the planes with sticks. "Those on the edges had to suspend themselves from bars running along the sides. The plane was then filled by packing more and more people in. Children had to be held above the adult's heads...The doors were then closed by force, crushing the people up into the plane...The flights lasted one hour and many people died. In one flight, four women miscarried..." It must have been understood that people would die, because stretchers were waiting to remove the dead. People were then similarly crammed into buses that were used for the rest of the journey, with more deaths reported.⁵⁰ Dr. Claude Malhuret, of MSF, asks, "if it really was the peasants well-being that the government was looking for, why use unbelievable transportation methods that in themselves cause so many deaths?"⁵¹

It should have been obvious to all that those transportation methods were not meant for the benefit of the starving victims and were not accidental, but intentional. Since the UN Genocide Convention was already in force, someone should have said, "GENOCIDE". The pattern of behavior shown by this program, and others, little known and now mostly forgotten, certainly fits the definition of the UN version of genocide and the model of denial. The next, we outline a similar forced relocation program, again with devastating results, which are described as human rights violations, even though many of those violations involve the right to live, and so should be renamed, at the very least, to murder. The Derg, unable to survive without Soviet aid, fell in late January, 1991, soon after the dissolution of the USSR in 1989.

The Omo Valley and the Addis Ababa Master Plan

In 2014, Ethiopia received about 3.6 billion US dollars per year, mostly from the World Bank's IDA, the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union and the African Development Bank, among others, in addition to grants and loans from other sources.⁵² This amount is over 50% of the annual budget.⁵³ We note that Meles Zenawi, former Prime Minister accumulated over three billion dollars by the time of his death.⁵⁴ David Steinman asserts that the amount of financial aid to Ethiopia is about the same as the amount stolen by Ethiopia's leaders since 1991, which is about 30 billion US dollars.⁵⁵

He charges, "When one considers that the regime's leaders are making their claims of economic success, covering up the extent of the biggest famine in the country's history, secretly trading with Al Shabab, embezzling \$2 billion every year, enforcing policies that have killed millions of their citizens through neglect and malfeasance, and have perpetrated outright genocide, it becomes clear that we've gained nothing that could justify our shameful complicity in this holocaust. Our policy is a strategic failure and a moral stain that history will judge harshly."⁵⁶

The need to maintain this financial aid, the requirement for atrocities to remain hidden and of the 'benefits' of hunger and forced relocations (villagization) were not lost on the new ruling elite who were even more intent than the Derg on destroying its citizens. The following are recent examples of the government of Ethiopia in its denial of intent to commit genocide by denying any intent to harm to the people, and are indeed, also examples actual complicity in genocide. It is important to note that the government of Ethiopia has blocked access to knowledge of the actual number of deaths caused by these policies, or the totality of damage to human capital.

The Government Narrative

A government of Ethiopia report, in 2014, described the aims of the government of Ethiopia in the Omo Valley. It says, "A firm resolve has been taken to carry out activities that could ensure sustainable development by changing the life style of pastoral communities...exposed to deep rooted food insecurity ... [to] ensure their food security through a voluntary, water-centered resettlement" to suitable areas. Once there, they would be given food and spice, social services, water wells, grain mills, irrigation pump generators, ponds, medical and veterinary services etc., all to be in place "well before pastoralist settlers are moved to their new villages..." Also, these undertakings would be "undertaken in such a way that it would not affect the basis of their livelihood."⁵⁷ None of these promises were kept. The Guardian commented that people were "being insensitively resettled" and that investigators were "not getting a clear picture from communities whose testimonies were translated by government officials."⁵⁸

The narrative of the government of Ethiopia routinely repeats that forced removal will improve the lives of the community and that the relocation really is voluntary. Yet previous programs have not been humane nor voluntary, and the outcomes of such programs, in Ethiopia and elsewhere, in both human and financial terms, have not been as promised. The 2016 report of the Oakland Institute describes the "harsh lessons" of previous similar Ethiopian projects. The repeated explanation from the government of Ethiopia is that such development will lead to financial benefit for many, but that is also not true, because, according to the Oakland Institute's 2016 report, "plantation agriculture has been less profitable than pastoralist livestock production in Afar, demonstrating the flawed narrative of Ethiopian officials and donor countries who continue to prop-up the country as a miracle of growth."⁵⁹

Frederic Mousseau, of the institute, advises that this information "raises serious questions about the choices made by the government and its donors."⁶⁰ We can see that the truth about mass death in the valley is as much about denial and complicity by the donors as it is about denial and cover up by the government of Ethiopia.

There are over 200,000 thousand people living in the Omo Valley, belonging to at least 12 ethnic groups. It could be said that Ethiopian elites consider the local peoples as less than human. Although the Amharic word 'anasa' is used to describe a person who comes from a numerically small group, it also means 'subhuman' and is used as a racial pejorative by state leaders regarding the peoples of the valley. We can find in 1957 an official report from the Governor of Maji Awraja which said, "The men don't put on clothes and they go about naked. When they go naked, it is difficult to identify them as human beings."⁶¹ Because of the past government policy of using forced relocation to destroy targeted groups, it would not be amiss to consider that the mass death now occurring in the Omo Valley, and elsewhere such as in the Gambella region, can be exposed as both genocide and genocide denial.

In 2010 and 2011, ambitious development plans were announced for the construction of the Gibe III Dam on the Omo River, for huge nationally owned sugar plantations and sugar factories, and for plantations on large tracts of land leased to Malaysian, Italian, Indian and Korean companies, for sugar, cotton, palm oil, maize and other crops. By 2014, satellite imaging was showing vast amounts of land cleared for planned agriculture. Indigenous people had been forcibly removed from their homes without compensation.

Because the people, such as the Bodi, Hamar, Karo, Kwegu and Mursi engage in recession farming for which they depend upon yearly flooding of the river, government promised to release sufficient water each year so that agriculture would not suffer. But that promise was not kept.⁶² Instead, the people were forcibly removed without compensation and without the means to sustain themselves. Sandra Postel urges the government to desist from its present path, "until it has remedied the hunger, destitution and displacement being wrought upon the tribal people...". She charges, "The forced resettlement of the indigenous Omo people leaves them with no sustainable means of feeding themselves...". She continues, citing an anonymous source, the people, "are too afraid to say the truth...but the truth is people are starving."⁶³

Little is known about the actual total number of dead and starving because of a lack of roads, a language and communications difficulty, lack of media freedoms including arrests and disappearances of journalists, and fear, intimidation and silencing of the local peoples involved.⁶⁴ One report documents that the Kwegu, a group numbering only about 1,000, have been unable to feed their children who are now being fed, temporarily, by the Bodi, another endangered group of pastoralists.⁶⁵ Another report identifies the deaths of dozens of people because of conflict between Ethiopian soldiers with mortars and the Hamar people. The government of Ethiopia imposed a news blackout on the incident, but rumors indicate that the cause of the conflict was rape of Hamar girls.⁶⁶

Lori Pottinger, head of International Rivers' Ethiopia program, said, " It doesn't have to be this way - Ethiopia has options for... pursuing developments that won't harm the people who call this watershed home."⁶⁷ An anonymous source from Benishangul reports that his people were forcibly removed to a new location where they cannot feed themselves. He says, "I cannot trust my neighbors or anyone else...I will be reported as a terrorist. The media is not free...most are afraid to tell the truth."⁶⁸

David Smith of *The Guardian* publicized the Oakland report.⁶⁹ And the government of Ethiopia denied these allegations and complained that they, "continue to propagate an image based on flawed methodology, built up from unverified and unverifiable information, with inaccurate and exaggerated accounts drawn from externally-based politically-motivated sources and seldom, if ever, checked on the ground" and that "Ethiopia does not engage in land grabbing."⁷⁰ The Oakland Institute refutes these excuses with , "Through our own research and on-the-ground fieldwork, we have witnessed the extent to which this so-called development is destroying the lives, culture, traditions, and livelihoods of many of Ethiopia's own indigenous and pastoralist populations."⁷¹

The Donors

Cover ups by the aid community began almost immediately. In January, 2012, representatives of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) went to the Omo Valley to investigate the situation. The investigative team heard allegations relating to forced resettlement, destruction of crops and food stores, the "siphoning off of food aid" and mass rapes of women, among other abuses. The report concluded that, "Although these allegations are extremely serious they could not be substantiated by this visit." The report suggested further study.⁷² Further investigations led to the same conclusion that they were 'not able to substantiate' charges of human rights abuses.⁷³

Will Hurd, the translator for the January 2012 visit, was disturbed by the lack of agreement between the tape he made of the visit and the conclusions of the subsequent report, so he published the recording. That led to further investigation by the World Bank, which admitted to serious problems with their development aid. Hurd asked and answered, "How can a USD 4.9 billion program be implemented and leave people starving? The answer, I think, is aid may not be the primary function of some of these organizations. Aid is often a way of paying a foreign government to provide a service for the country 'giving' the aid....Aid has a long history of murky dealings." And he demanded, "When are the DAG aid agencies going to start aiding the people of the Omo Valley, and Gambella, instead of participating in their demise?"⁷⁴

On May 21, 2015, the Bank would respond to Human Rights Watch charges that, "...in practice, the World Bank still uses the constraints of its articles of agreement (there is a non-political mandate) to avoid human rights issues that it does not wish to address" with, "we view the principles of human rights and development as mutually reinforcing, essential for sustainable development..."⁷⁵

Investigation by the World Bank led to a change in the name of its questionable Promoting Basic Services (PBS) program. The program would now be named Enhancing Shared Prosperity through Equitable Services (ESPES), Oakland Institute charged. "Rather than addressing the grave concerns raised about the program, the Bank, instead, chose to launch an almost identical program under a new name."⁷⁶

We note that in January, 2014, the US Congress voted to withdraw any aid funding in Ethiopia that included forced relocations.⁷⁷ However, this congressional law was violated by the US Treasury.⁷⁸ We also note that although the UK withdrew aid in February, 2015, for the failed PBS program which was organized by the World Bank, the total aid commitment "would remain unchanged."⁷⁹

The cat was out of the bag, but nothing changed.

It is obvious that donors were quite aware of the atrocities and human rights abuses, of the intentional starvation, and even knew about the theft and diversions of aid funding, because they were told. Reasons having to do with real politics kept them silent. The US considered Ethiopia to be of strategic importance in the Horn.⁸⁰ The donors however were forced into acting because their own citizens became aware of their complicity in massive human rights abuse and refused to tolerate additional aid. And yet, as one might expect, the funding changes that were made were superficial and did not stop the flow of aid, or the human rights abuses that it purchased. Donors still do not say genocide, but they are now concerned as about the appearance of their charitable activities as the ruling elite Ethiopians are concerned about the appearance of their genocidal acts.

As early as 2013, the Oakland Institute would conclude, "The indispensability of foreign assistance to the functioning of the EPRDF-led government is enough to establish donor complicity in the state's human rights violations."⁸¹

We must note again that these human rights abuses are so massive, involving so many deaths and repeating other programs with known similar outcomes that skirting the term 'genocide' appears to be denial of the obvious. There is a slow ongoing genocide in Ethiopia, involving the Tigrayan leaders as genocidaires, and including donors as complicit in both the genocide and the denial of the genocide.

Finfinnee (Addis Ababa), Oromia

In April of 2014, the Addis Ababa and the Surrounding Oromia Special Zone Integrated Development Master Plan, known as the Master Plan, was announced and touted as necessary to the further development of the economy and for organized growth of the capital city. Its stated purpose was to integrate the growing city with surrounding areas in order to improve the economy by the introduction of "industry zones."⁸² The World Bank Group was again involved.⁸³ This was understood by the local population to be a plan that would disposes and pauperize them, leaving their families suffering in dire straits, as had all other past government improvement schemes. It should not have been surprising that the combination of another massive, World Bank funded scheme in the name of 'development' combined with a savage response from government controlled forces was felt as an existential moment in Oromo history.

Shrouded in secrecy, the plan would lead to a massive "20-fold expansion of the boundary of Addis Ababa"⁸⁴ and would include 36 towns and 17 *Aanalees*.⁸⁵ One could question the necessity of this rather massive land grab, as a step by step approach should be less traumatic, but it would appear that, as the country destabilizes, government leaders are attempting to steal as much as possible, as rapidly as possible.

Bona Geshe, former instructor at the University of Gondar, School of Law, Ethiopia, explained the resistance, "It is not far-fetched to say that the implementation of the new integration plan will threaten the viability of Oromia as an autonomous state...if genuine development was envisioned, cities in Oromia can develop without requiring 'integration' into Addis Ababa."⁸⁶ Protests in the towns of Ambo, Nekemte, Tokeekutayu, and Jimma, among others, were met with security forces firing live ammunition into the crowds, killing , according to government officials, 8 people, and according to "various credible local sources", much higher.⁸⁷

Violence erupted again in late 2015, when a series of protests, which began in the town of Ginci. Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn promised that government "will take merciless legitimate action against any force bent on destabilizing the area."⁸⁸

Soon after, government announced a cancelation of the Master Plan in January 2016.⁸⁹ According to a university student, "Those announcements are for the outside world. It means nothing when the soldiers keep shooting us in the street, torturing us in the jails, and the government keeps throwing out farmers."⁹⁰ Indeed, Felix Horne explained that Human Rights Watch was not able to identify any tangible change in the security forces following the revocation of the Master Plan. Horne confirms the use of live ammunition against crowds, widespread torture in detention, forced disappearances, and the arrests, as of June 16, 2016, of "tens of thousands" of people.⁹¹

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn was interviewed by journalist Reed Kramer in March of 2016. Desalegn proudly stated, "Ethiopia is an island of stability within the Horn of Africa, which is a troubled region." He admitted, "Even though we are trying our best, we haven't addressed it properly. ... We have clearly identified why this protest has come about – unemployment and lack of good governance. "He said that there would be improvements, " We are on the right track." And, when confronted with international criticism about citizen's right to dissent, he flatly confirms that, "They (the people) can speak out. They can demonstrate. They can pressurize the government...and the people should resist whatever undemocratic means governments are using." He insisted that, "The resentments are subsiding." And, he assured the interviewer that government is attempting to mitigate the current famine.⁹²

This narrative of the need to control foreign and domestic terrorist elements, the concern about errors on the path to democracy, the minimization of the death toll of civilian protesters with lethal weapons, the promise to do better, and the threat of a destabilized Africa salved the concerns of the international community. Yet, the continuing barbaric acts against protesters gave the lie to future stability.

Protests in early August, 2016 led to deaths of dozens of peaceful protesters because security forces again fired live ammunition into demonstrators in 12 areas of Ethiopia.⁹³

Communications Minister Getachew Reda deflected the blame, and said "There has to be people responsible for organizing the demonstrations, so they are also responsible for the consequences."⁹⁴ The Prime Minister also explained police acts, "We don't know who takes ownership or is behind these protests, and sometimes they are organized by outside anti-peace forces with aims to destabilize this country... participating in illegal protests clashes with the government of Ethiopia against our country's constitution."⁹⁵

It was no surprise that a major intensification of violence would occur on October 2, 2016 during the Oromo's Irreecha (Thanksgiving) festival in the town of Bishoftu, where over 1,000 Oromos were killed and thousands wounded.⁹⁶ We propose that Bishoftu massacre was centrally planned in advance because of the massive army presence, because communications were cut hours before the festival and because journalists and diplomats were banned from the celebration. We note that the government gave a low figure of 50 deaths.⁹⁷ Ethiopia's Ambassador to the US, Girma Biru responded, "I don't think the government has overreacted, rather, the government was very tolerant."⁹⁸

Following the massacre, on October, 9, 2016 a state of emergency was declared.⁹⁹ Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn said it was because of damage to infrastructure and BBCs Africa editor, Mary Harper elaborates, "The protesters have been attacking foreign companies, threatening Ethiopia's reputation as a growing economy, ripe for international investment."¹⁰⁰

We need here to contrast the number of 11,607 people were arrested, according to government official Tadesse Hordofa, "in connection with the state of emergency,"¹⁰¹ with the estimate of "hundreds of thousands" from Human Rights Watch as discussed supra. This discrepancy is important because, the sexual and other torture that occurs in these jails ensures the destruction of human capital, those tangible and intangible resources that are essential to ensure strength in communities. The strength of human capital is as much of a concern to the stability of a group undergoing slow genocide as is the number of deaths.

Summary and Conclusion

The study found that genocide exists in Oromia and Ethiopia combined with pervasive local and global genocide denial. Indeed, the methods of denial used by the Ethiopian government resemble the Turkish denial of the Armenian genocide, among other cases. The study identified two main layers of denial: erasure and misrepresentation of events by the regime itself and denial by the foreign press and donors to the regime. Denial can happen at any stage of the commission of genocide, including pre-genocide, during genocide and after genocide. In the case of Ethiopia, denial occurs through all phases of genocide described by Gregory Stanton.¹⁰² We know that genocide and sophisticated genocide denial are unfolding against the Oromo and others in south in Ethiopia, but we cannot say for certain whether the the worst is yet to come. Either way, the study concluded that the global community is already complicit in the deaths of many. It would behoove the global community to absolve themselves of future genocidal acts inside Ethiopia by letting go of the myth of the Ethiopia government as "a helpful friend" and by replacing it with the truth that government officials are engaged in pervasive theft of aid funds and the corrupt use of such funds to finance state-led atrocities against disarmed and defenseless civilians.

At the present time there exists a militarized country at odds with its multiple ethnicities and with its neighbors on its borders. How many deaths can the TPLF Tigrayan ruling elite, combined with its global cronies, achieve before the civil war and the destruction of the Ethiopian state? Felix Horne warns, "Strategic relationships will become obsolete if Ethiopia plunges further into crisis, and all the signs are there."¹⁰³

Stability in the Horn has been squandered by fear of change. Although policy decisions should be informed by reality on the ground, not by the cover up of evil which inevitably leads to a future infused with protracted violence that has not happened. Yet, it might still be possible to rescue an inevitable descent into chaos by refusing to continue playing the game whose rules are written by Ethiopian government whose primary objectives are maintaining power and funding the failing state.

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¹⁰¹ AlJazeera, “Ethiopia State of Emergency Arrests Top 11,000,” *Al Jazeera*, November 12, 2016.

¹⁰² Gregory Stanton, “The 8 Stages of Genocide,”
<http://www.genocidewatch.org/images/8StagesBriefingpaper.pdf>

¹⁰³ Felix Horne, “EU Needs New Approach on Ethiopia,” *Euobserver*, October 16, 2016.