OROMO WOMEN IN THE AFTERLIVES OF EMPIRE; IMPERIAL SPATIALIZING AND GEOGRAPHY GURAACHA

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vorgelegt von/ by
Madeline Jaye Bass

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Erstgutachter/ Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Andreas Mahler

Interne gutachterin/ Internal examiner: Prof. Dr. Donna Landry

Drittgutachter/ External examiner: Prof. Dr. P. Khalil Saucier

OROMO-FRAUEN IM NACHLEBEN DES EMPIRE; IMPERIALE VERRÄUMLICHUNG UND GEOGRAPHY GURAACHA

ABSTRACT

Der Befreiungskampf der Oromo überschreitet die Raumzeitlichkeiten des Imperialismus, bewegt sich ungeachtet von Grenzen über diese hinweg, und lässt tiefgründiges Wissen widerschallen, auch wenn die übergreifende Gewalt weitreichend ist und sich überschneidet, in ihren strukturellen Formen labyrinthisch ist. Oromo-Frauen kämpfen als Mitglieder der afrikanischen Diaspora gegen globale *anti-Blackness*, gegen die *anti-Indigeneity* der kolonialen Herrscher in Äthiopien und gegen das Cisheteropatriarchat, das besonders Oromo-Frauen betrifft. Die vorliegende Arbeit unterbricht und bekämpft Narrative der Herrschaft, indem sie darauf besteht, den Geschichten des Widerstands und des Wiedererstarkens der Oromo-Frauen zuzuhören; dabei liegt der Schwerpunkt auf der Analyse von Räumlichkeit, d.h. auf der Art und Weise, wie sich bestimmte Positionen für Menschen an einem bestimmten Ort durch sich überschneidende strukturelle Formen darstellen. Die Arbeit ist an der Schnittstelle von *Black Studies* und *Critical Indigenous Studies* angesiedelt und verbindet die Diskussion mit drei Schlüsselkonzepten: *Black geography*, imperiale Verräumlichung und *geography guraacha*. *Guraacha*, Schwarz in der Epistemologie der Oromo, liegt jenseits des Himmels und steht für eine unbekannte, ungesehene Zukunft und Vergangenheit. Indem *black* einserseits dasjenige meint, das außerhalb der Möglichkeiten traditioneller Karten existiert, und *Black* andererseits in der rassifizierten afrikanischen Diasporagemeinschaft Verwendung findet, stellen *Black geography* und *Guraacha* die Befreiung der Oromo und das Denken außerhalb des kolonialen Jetzt in den Vordergrund. Die Arbeit beginnt mit einer Relektüre historischer Erzählungen, geht über zu Analysen des Oromo-Archivs und seiner Bedeutungen, unternimmt eine diskursive Analyse von Poesie und Musik und schließt mit ethnographischen Untersuchungen mit Oromo-Diaspora-Gemeinschaften in Europa. Die Ergebnisse zeigen die Notwendigkeit, die Bedeutung der Raumproduktion als Artefakt des Imperialismus mit wirtschaftlichen, politischen und soziokulturellen Implikationen neu zu überdenken. Diese Arbeit leistet einen Beitrag zur methodologischen und kritischen Theorie, indem sie die Verbindung zwischen indigenen Epistemologien und *Black geographies* als Praktiken der Befreiung stärkt. Die daraus resultierende Argumentation ist ein Plädoyer für ein radikales Überdenken der Praktiken zum Aufbau einer gerechteren und lebenswerteren Welt.

ABSTRACT

The Oromo struggle for liberation transcends spatiotemporalities of imperialism, moves across and despite borders, and echoes with deep knowledges, even as the encroaching violence is vast and intersecting, labyrinthian in its structural forms. Oromo women struggle against global anti-Blackness as members of the African diaspora, anti-Indigeneity by the settler colonial state rulers of Ethiopia, and cisheteropatriarchy with uniquely Oromo applications. This thesis disrupts and fights narratives of domination, insisting on listening to Oromo women's stories of refusal and revitalization with a focus on spatiality; the ways that intersecting structural forms present certain positions for people *in* place.The thesis is positioned at the intersection of Black Studies and Critical Indigenous Studies and links the discussion to three key concepts:: Black geography, imperial spatializing, and geography *guraacha. Guraacha*, black in the Oromo epistemology, is beyond the skies, representing futures and pasts that are unknown and unseen. Taking *black* to mean that which exists outside of the capability of traditional maps, as well as *Black* in the racialized African diasporic community, Black geography and geography guraacha prioritize Oromo liberation and thinking outside of the colonial now. The thesis begins with a re-reading of historical narratives, moves to analyses of the Oromo archive and its meanings, discursive analysis of poetry and music, and closes with ethnographic explorations with Oromo diaspora communities in Europe. These findings reveal the need for rethinking the meanings of space-making as an artefact of imperialism with economic, political, and sociocultural implications. This thesis offers a contribution to methodological and critical theory by strengthening the connection between Indigenous epistemologies and Black geographies as practices of liberation. The resulting argument makes a case for radically reconsidering practices of building a more just and livable world.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

1. **EPRDF**: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
2. **Gadaa**: System of governance used by the Oromo people, connected to the Siinqee institution
3. **Odaa** (*Ficus sycamorus*): Tree with a special role in Oromo political and religious ceremonies
4. **OLF**: Oromo Liberation Front
5. **Oromumma**: Oromo-ness
6. **Safuu**: Social order and balance
7. **Siinqee**: The women's institutions that are part of Gadaa rule
8. **TPLF**: Tigray People's Liberation Front
9. **Tumsa**: Solidarity
10. **Waloo**: Being together
11. **Waqaa**: God in the Oromo epistemology
12. **Waqqeeffanna**: Oromo Indigenous religion

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Oromo struggle for liberation transcends spatiotemporalities of imperialism, moves across and despite borders, and echoes with deep knowledges, even as the encroaching violence is vast and intersecting, labyrinthian in its structural forms. The primary concerns of this thesis are the resistance practices of Oromo women, whose positionalities are tempered and contested within this frame of knowing. Oromo women face global anti-Blackness as members of the African diaspora, anti-Indigeneity by the settler colonial state rulers of Ethiopia, and cisheteropatriarchy with uniquely Oromo applications. These violences refuse a simplistic explanation; rather they are bound up in legacies that originated hundreds of years ago. At times, this violence asserts itself so aggressively it seems to be the only story, sustained as such through international media, imperialist ideologies at home, and a world order still steeped in the afterlives of harm. This thesis disrupts and fights stories of naturalized domination in each of their iterations, insisting on the ways that Oromo women, in their Blackness, Indigeneity, femininity, and in their "ordinary" (after Savannah Shange 2019) lives, tell stories of refusal, resurgence, and revitalization.

The rise of the Abyssinian Empire and the subsequent iterations of governance that have emerged in its wake offer a particular example and concurrence of colonial and imperial violences in Africa. What makes the Abyssinian example extraordinary is that the colonizers and the colonized are both African peoples. Ethiopian state and Ethiopianist academic discourses tend to reject the legitimization and even existence of the Oromo struggle against colonialism. Instead, they insist

> What is typically understood as 'Ethiopian,' both within and without the country, is more properly that which is associated with the term "Abyssinian": a narrowly defined ethnic and religious identity emerging from the provinces of the geographically central highlands.
>
> (Nurhussein 2019:9)

However, a closer inspection, developed during this thesis, reveals that despite their landed connection, the Abyssinians used rhetorical, technological, and systematic forms of anti-

Indigenous and often anti-Black oppression to operate. Further, because this project is diasporic in nature I attend to Blackness as it is instituted beyond borders. Oromos are targeted more specifically for their indigeneity at home, but the way such attacks unfold mirrors and shadows colonisation and racial capitalism. Herein lies a seeming contradiction: what does inter-African violence teach us about global anti-Blackness?

Turning to logics, technologies, and ideologies of anti-Blackness elucidates this claim. "Culture is typically posited as the mechanism through which genetic differences operate" and "culture talk" obscures the social reality of those it purports to describe and hides the positionality of those who engage in such descriptions (Benjamin 2017:229). Ruha Benjamin describes "culture talk as a discursive repertoire that attributes distinct beliefs, behaviors, and dispositions to ethno-racialized groups" (ibid.). "Culture talk" as racial talk shadows Ethiopia's imperial impetus. The global Black diaspora lives, thrives, and converses together, while Ethiopianism as a statist ideology positions itself against it. The glorification of Ethiopia's African status at the expense of a critical unpacking of the way it refuses real African solidarity has been taken up in discussions such as Nadia Nurhussein's writing on Black land (2020), and, with more attention to the Oromo, through Asafa Jalata's writing on "the duality of Ethiopianism." Jalata frames Ethiopianist and Abyssinian ideologies as both "in and out of Africa," obfuscating ongoing harm of colonial violence through a manipulative representation of African pre-coloniality (2009). As he details:

> Ethiopian elites and their Euro-American counterparts have built Ethiopianism as a racial project, at the cost of indigenous Africans, such as Oromos. The participation of Habashas in the scramble for Africa and in the slave trade and the commodification of millions of Oromos and others encouraged them to associate themselves with European and the Middle Eastern peoples rather than Black Africans.
>
> (Jalata 2009:204)

The Oromo people, in Oromia and the diaspora, may be read, understood, and related to in myriad different ways: as Indigenous peoples, members of the African diaspora, settler colonial subjects, and a nation that is struggling against subjugation. The contrasts and at

times conflicts between these positionalities are further exacerbated by the forms of knowledge production which dictate the narratives and representations through which Oromo people are recognized. Oromo peoples are erased as Ethiopian im/migrants and refugees abroad and simultaneously portrayed as violent usurpers to the Ethiopian post-empire at home. This thesis, sitting amidst these contestations, hopes to understand and engage with the debate in different terms.

Saidiya Hartman asks, and encourages us to consider, how we might "rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated," how to "listen for the groans and cries, the undecipherable songs," whether these impossible stories are able to be constructed and resurrected from the ruins, and perhaps most importantly wonders what the stories afford anyway, and if they might provide a home in the world ([paraphrased] Hartman 2008:3). In this line of thinking and with this kind of practice, the intent is to "generate a different set of descriptions," and "imagine what could have been" (Hartman 2008:7). Resistance is dangerous for Black women because the world has been built on top of and in denial of our lives. In this vein, the intent is not to give voice to the dead, but to imagine and reckon with these precarious lives by rejecting the limitations of the historiography, as they mirror the limitations of social and cultural oppression that surround us (Hartman 2008:12). This questioning and approach formed the beginning of my praxis, of my evocation of and attempt to uncover freedom dreams embedded in alternative geographies. In the larger context of this project, with the language of imperial spatializing and geography guraacha, freedom dreams are a significant part of building decolonized, liberatory space. Looking for and imagining a beyond outside of the boundaries of the archive and the slave ledger is part of a refusal to allow imperial knowledges to be the only or the dominant way of knowing.

Seeking the forgotten but not foreclosed possibilities of marginalized peoples are what scholars and artists like Robin D.G. Kelley and K'eguro Macharia have called freedom

dreams. They are what Katherine McKittrick describes as taking place in the *rift*, as the necessity of "threading together multiple sources" in order to reimagine our worlds, signaling "the ways in which black people have always shared ideas with each other… in order to struggle against prevailing systems of knowledge that are beholden to and profit from racial and sexual violence" (McKittrick 2019:243). Elsewhere, McKittrick points out the ways in which Black women's geographies are not "simply subordinate, or buried, or lost, but rather are indicative of an unresolved story" (2006:xviii). Without intending necessarily to create a resolution, freedom dreaming seeks to learn more about what the story could have been, where it may have taken us. What is freedom for the settler colonial subject? How does freedom look from within the cage, a metaphorical cage built by the particular oppressive systems women all over the world face, and a literal cage like those built in Maekelawi[1] or Wollega, across the Oromo homelands? In Oromo terms and in Oromo lives, I wondered whether the beginnings of an empire, the fall of the emperor, the rise of fascism, the coming of a new regime: whether these instances had their own delayed moment of reckoning when people waited carefully in the interval between death and freedom. Did the nightmares they sustained have their own life and afterlives?

I approach these lingering traces of epistemological and political violence by focusing on their spatiality, the ways that intersecting structural forms work to present certain positions for people *in* place. Operating against and despite these ways of knowing, I also see spatiality as a site for counter-narratives, presence even in absence, and evidence of negotiations with and resistance to imperial pasts. Three terms are crucial for positioning this discussion: imperial spatializing, Black geography, and geography guraacha. *Guraacha*, the Oromo word

[1]https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/10/18/they-want-confession/torture-and-ill-treatment-ethiopias-maekelawi-police-station
https://www.refworld.org/docid/3f51f5364.html
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-justice-idUSKCN1VR22N

for black, as the unknown and beyond, allows for worlds that have not yet become corporeal, and remain unintelligible through the empire's eyes. I will gloss these ideas here, but a more extensive discussion will come in a later chapter.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND BACKGROUND

> Like any good introduction, this chapter might best be described as a "throat-clearing gesture"—the kind that introduces any inquiry with a series of queries and propositions that create an analytic space for thinking.
>
> -Tina Campt (2017:3)

Underlying the entangled meanings of geography and spatialization is a fundamental concern with the way Oromo people have been read and written in the sociopolitical past and present. In a more strategic sense, the erasure of Oromo women (embedded within but unique to the larger Black diaspora) drives my research practice and lived praxis in solidarity with the struggle. This project develops in an interdisciplinary context, situated within Black Studies and Critical Indigenous Studies and borrowing tools and ideas from Anthropology, Sociology, History, and Geography. However, it is the former two disciplines which are essential to understanding the intentions of this project and the positionalities that are core components of the arguments being made. A theoretical and methodological project that is grounded in Black and Critical Indigenous Studies comes with certain demands, demands for researchers and readers, and demands which articulate the politicized lives of the communities at the heart of the work.

Central to Katherine McKittrick's writing on Black geography, and underpinning many of her other discussions of radical geography and ways of knowing space, is the notion that Black geographic methods and Black geography as a way of viewing the world both seek to make clear and emerge from the "terrain of the struggle" (2006:6). This terrain is conceptual as well as physical; the texture of countermaps and the waves of the Atlantic. With this map and mapping as the starting point, I will begin with a broad overview of the

concepts and lived meanings of the afterlives of slavery and empire, as embedded in the theoretical context of Black and Critical Indigenous Studies. While in conversation with Oromo women and Oromo women's stories, I am wary of duplicating the type of patriarchal white supremacist logic that pursues homogenization, that insists motherhood is enough, or the only story, that a daughter is positioned only in orbit to the patriarch, that a person enslaved will only exist in relation to their master. These ideas subtend and support the writing of history; in the archives, in absence of context, they become much more violent. Instead, following Fred Moten, I wanted "to attend to the necessary polyphony. I don't want to represent anything and I don't want to repair anything but I do want to be here more, in another way" (2018:170). Being there, in the field and the archive, in the diaspora, in solidarity means asking questions that a document may not by itself be able to answer.

The decisions and patterns of behavior that allow for Oromo women to be erased and underrepresented throughout history are part of the imperial values present throughout Oromo historiography. The legendary Oromo scholar Martha Kuwee Kumsa has discussed at length the erasure of Oromo women (1998; 2020). Writing in 1998, Kumsa makes a strategic effort to foreground Oromo women whose stories have not been told, and places value on their work. Kumsa's ability to tell these stories in their particularity stems from her extensive lived experience on the front lines of the struggle, her years in prison, and decades of organizing in Oromia and the diaspora in pursuit of Oromo liberation. I write with gratitude towards her intellectual labor, and in conversation with her ideas. Through this introductory framework I intend to make clear that the metaphoric landscape of Oromo women's struggle is characterized by complex, intersecting forms of violence. With these facts in mind, on the ground, and surrounding us, we can see more clearly the challenges which demarcate the condition of Oromumma, or Oromo-ness, in the afterlife of empire. In the following chapter I will use this basic contextual understanding to construct an analytical framework that makes

legible the specificities of this terrain.

LAND, PLACE, SPACE

Although geographies, black, guraacha, and imperialized, are the focus of the argument, they are convoluted by other geographic ways of knowing. While pursuing a project that is both linked to and unbound by geography, contesting erasure as it materializes in physical spaces and narratives, I work with different formations of the surrounding world. These are differentiated as land, place, and space.

Land

Land here is sacred ancestor, and kinship relation, central to the epistemologies and ideologies of Indigenous peoples. While settlers and arrivants construct their own relationships to soil and topography, land in Indigenous communities is as much physical as it is metaphorically the body of the Native. As described by Rowe and Tuck, "Indigenous understandings of land predate and have codeveloped alongside and in spite of settler constructions" (2017:5). Tiffany Lethabo King, writing at the intersections and overlaps of Black and Native studies, identifies concerns about land and the nature of relationships to land as a concern of the flesh, expressed through Native genocide and Black fungibility (2019:54). This fleshy politics combines land as Indigenous kin with Black political attention to abolition (King 2019:67). Black and Indigenous people[2] understand land as a relative, with its own body, something that has its own autonomous positions even in the face of colonial attempts to tame it. From the perspective of the settler and in the process of conquest, land as deeply connected to Black and Native lives becomes a more sinister entity, perceived as hostile. Fanon describes settler views of land as "hostile nature, obstinate and fundamentally

[2] And Black Indigenous people

rebellious" which is then "represented in the colonies by the bush, by mosquitoes, natives, and fever" (1963:250). As such,

> colonization is a success when all this indocile nature has finally been tamed. Railways across the bush, the draining of swamps and a native population which is non-existent politically and economically are in fact one and the same thing. (ibid.)

In this description, Fanon shows how land in the eyes of the settler is irrevocably a part of the Native body, whether human or not. Settlers do not differentiate clearly between mosquitoes and native peoples, and see the structured settlement of the railway as similar to the subjection and subject-making of political structures for the Natives. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith points out, "Renaming the land was probably as powerful ideologically as changing the land" in its insistence on power and control (2012:53). This process of settlement and colonization mirrors the history of Oromia and the treatment of Indigenous Oromo people. The tension between Oromo conceptions of land, and relations to land, and Abyssinian settler institutions and infrastructure(ing) cannot be resolved within the Ethiopian settler colonial nation-state.

Place

I use the notion of place in quite straightforward terms here to describe a known site or location. Places are typically cartographically and formally represented, as with a city, town, or region. King defines places as "identifiable locations of activity that attribute role, stature, gender, and relationships among humans" (2019:88). While the naming of places may differ between groups, as with settler renamings of Native places, their location is generally fixed and agreed upon. Bishooftu is a place, a crater lake with significance in Oromo lifeways and religion, but it is also part of the Oromo *land*. One difference here is that places are more contained, and do not inherently possess relationships; the relationships come after meaning is strategically imbued through construction or gathering. This embedded containment is important however, as it allows room for critical Black interventions. While a

prison is a place, within these walls there may also be marginalized communities, sites of shared knowledge, and other forms of resistance and collectivity that refuse to let punishment by a genocidal state be the only potential to emerge. These connections bring to mind what Moten, following Black American author Amiri Baraka, calls place/meant (2017; 1969). It refers to the feeling of Black people alive in a place that has meaning for them, whatever that evokes in the moment (Baraka 1969:217). While places, like Baraka's settler colonial home, carry with them traumas and violent pasts, and may be indicative of a radical *dis*placement, place/meant demonstrates how the displaced and traumatized imbue, reimagine, or create new meanings within these sites. Place/meant as a process thus further fuels and supports the creation and imagination of what I call *space.*

Space

Following the process of place/meant, and the way meanings are made within a set area, the need emerges for another spatial indicator: space. Places can be compartmentalized, defined, and measured, but in my evocation, space refuses these quantifications. Space, while necessarily used to refer to the cubic meters and distances that comprise our world, is used with more intentionality here. Spatializing is the process of imbuing meaning into a place. As the following discussion will show, imperial spatializing turns places into parcels and projects of the empire; the meaning imbued turns land to factory, resource, commodity. Space, however, when in its originary form is "not bounded by geo-politics, but storied and continuous" (Goeman 2009:184). We may think of one counterpart of Indigenous' space as diaspora space, wherein citizens and subjects of empire find and build new meaning even in sites of removal and displacement. Place/meant may be seen as the process, but space is the end result.

This view of space is in direct contrast with "Western thinking" which views space as

"static or divorced from time" (Smith 2012:55). In relation to colonialism, the absention of Indigenous politics and relationality from places facilitates "the building of roads, ports and bridges, the clearing of bush and the mining of minerals" all of which involved processes of "marking, defining and controlling space" using particular vocabulary (Smith 2012:55). As Smith points out, this focus on hierarchical positionality between the center and the periphery served to turn lands with deep historical meanings into "terra nullius," lands that are empty, uninhabited, and unoccupied (2012:55). Within this project the process of adding meaning to a place and land that erases or denies previous constructs is named *imperial spatializing*. The recognition that ways of relating to land that do not require trade routes, that do not denigrate the presence of the bush, and that advise living with minerals which remain un-mined are also valid is an evocation of the spatial configurations of a place, requiring non-traditional methods to map.

In this thesis, I use *land* as a term for Indigenous lands, *place* as a recognition of transparently mappable locations, and *space* to describe a physical location that is imbued with complex, shifting meanings. Space and the way it is constructed and understood are the primary concern, the echoing refrain in the entire project. Specifically, as the title suggests, I explore space through the relationship between imperial spatializing and geography guraacha. These two theoretical concepts will be explored at length in a following chapter and illustrated through a wide range of examples.

BLACK, GURAACHA, ALTERNATIVE GEOGRAPHIES

Building a critical practice, with an attention to Oromo indigeneity and transnationality, what follows is the creation of a *Black Geography.* McKittrick identifies the need for creating lived geographies, which she describes as *demonic grounds*, that better elucidate the lives of the marginalized and the "absented presence" of Black women

(2006:xxv). The borderlands of the Horn of Africa are a clear indication of the colonial project: overly straight lines, an awkward bifurcation of Indigenous homelands at every direction, and the subsequent conflict that arises from these impositions. Decolonizing or disrupting this legacy therefore calls for the creation of a lived geography that, although taking into consideration the territorial features, also allows for a re-presentation of space and a mapping reflexive of the lived experiences and epistemologies of these peoples. *Black geographies* are identifiable in poetry, such as Wendy Trevino's 2016 *Brazilian is Not a Race,* creative non-fiction narratives such as Dionne Brand's 2001 *A Map to the Door of No Return* or Hartman's 2007 *Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route,* storytelling, and films; all types of creative expression that are produced by people who have been traditionally excluded from more "formal" cartographic practices. These geographies thus describe places and spaces in a way that the measurements of the colonial mapping project are unable to, bringing focus to the lived and imaginary "terrain of struggle" (McKittrick 2006:6).

The name or concept of a Black geography stems both from McKittrick and from Oromo epistemological understandings of Blackness, or *Guraacha*. In the Oromo traditional epistemology and religious understandings, Blackness is the all-encompassing divinity beyond the skies, and represents purity, holiness, and *future* (Dugassa 2012; Megerssa 2005). Thus, taking *black* to mean that which exists outside of the capability of traditional maps, as well as *Black* in the racialized African diasporic community, a *Black geography* is that which extends beyond the colonial lens and sheds light on the lived experience of a territory and its imagined potential.

Contrasting with these Black geographies will be an analysis of colonial narratives which are "organized according to systems of power-domination," what I call *imperial spatializing* (McKittrick 2006:6). Some texts of this nature include travel narratives (including historical accounts**,** official reports, and creative non-fiction) written by imperial,

colonial, or otherwise oppressive/privileged writers that focus on the homelands and lives of the people I'm researching and working with. The texts are thus selected with the intent of *re*writing or *re*righting their descriptions (Smith 2012:29). By contesting the legitimacy of these portrayals, primarily written by and/or for a white European or North American audience, I seek to create narratives that speak to local, embodied, lived Horn experiences. Black women's geographies "challenge us to stay human by invoking how black spaces and places are integral to our planetary and local geographic stories and how the question of seeable human differences puts spatial and philosophical demands on geography" (McKittrick 2006:146).

STRUCTURE

The discussion of geography guraacha and the transnational experiences of Oromo women unfolds throughout 16 chapters. *Chapter Two* is an introduction to the field; the intersection of Black Studies and Critical Indigenous Studies comes with certain obligations. This involves both a theoretical grounding and a contextualization of terminology. After positioning my work in conversation with the two fields I work with Hartman's idea of the "afterlife" to untangle further the colonial past from the colonial present. This discussion comprises the bulk of *Chapter Three*. Considering the "afterlives" allows for a deeper dive into the conceptual framework that defines the rest of the research, taking place in *Chapter Four*. Specifically, ideas of sovereignty and decolonization add a future temporality to the colonial now. This intersecting theoretical grid is implanted into space-making processes in *Chapter Five*, which outlines imperial spatializing, Black geography, and geography guraacha. Rather than separate the historiography of Oromia and the imperial conditions into its own chapter, I have chosen to weave the story from the pre-colonial to the imperial now as a series of *Interludes.* These are embedded into the contextual chapters that describe the theoretical basis for their unfolding; the discussion of Oromo women's institutions follows

that of Indigenous feminisms, for example. Before proceeding with the empirical data co-produced and collected with Oromo women as part of this project, *Chapter Six* explores the methodological strategies and grounding that dictated the way the data was collected. Following the geographic rendering brought to light by the theory, I turn to an analytical mapping, found in *Chapter Seven*. This model links themes that cross spatiotemporalities to their common sociocultural, institutional, and economic implications.

After this theoretical and contextual framework, the thesis proceeds to a detailed reporting and analysis of the data. The actual data that comprises the bulk of this thesis's empirical contributions unfolds in a somewhat unusual manner, as a series of vignettes and field notes. These link Ethiopia's settler present, Oromo people's interminable flight, and histories of conquest and resistance. The empirical data chapters are arranged with a nod to the transparency of geography, and to some extent temporality. I begin with the data that is the oldest and most concentrated to the Horn of Africa, *Chapter Eight*, *Travel Narratives as Imperialized Space*, which critiques the retelling of the life and death of an Oromo slave girl named Barraké, written by British author and explorer Samuel Baker and published in 1868. I move from this story of forced movement to *Chapter Nine, Geography Guraacha and Dis/place/meant*, which focuses in on Goree, Illu Abba Bora Zone, Oromia. This analysis of the city's geography contrasts imperial knowledges with Oromo musical narratives. *Chapter Ten, Guraacha Readings of Finfinne's Sovereignty*, looks to the center of the settler state, known also as Addis Ababa. In this chapter, photographic data is used as a way of understanding colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy as they interact with Oromo sovereignty.

Chapter 11 carries the discussion beyond the Horn in a path of *Guraacha Roots and Routes* written by Saaro Umar. Her poem, "geography test," brings guraacha thinking and Oromumma to sites of exile, disrupting nation-state knowledge. *Chapter 12* begins outside of

the Horn of Africa but demonstrates the challenges of connecting to it with an analysis of *Disembodied Borders and a Feminized Empire.* The technologies described here are a demonstration of how imperialism moves and makes space in insidious ways. *Chapter 13* settles into the diaspora with an unpacking of *Guraacha Archives in Oromo Europe.* Three fieldnotes link European institutions to Oromumma and guraacha knowledge. C*hapter 14* unfolds in two parts, comprising an annotated ethnography of an Oromo women's event in London, England, titled *"Being Human" in the Oromo Diaspora: Guraacha Annotations of Sovereignty*. The narrative begins with a detailed retelling which is then re-told through analytical annotations that connect the single evening to spatiotemporalities of Oromo lives beyond that night. The final set of empirical data comes in *Chapter 15, Hiriira Spatiotemporalities; Black Geographies in Post-Imperial Germany*. In this closing chapter I walk with an Oromo women's protest through Berlin, Germany in a journey that complicates ideas of race, citizenship, gender, and transnational Oromumma. The final chapter draws these ideas together into one cohesive discussion of geography guraacha as it moves through space and time.

INTERLUDE: OROMO HISTORIOGRAPHY

Pre-colonial Oromo

The Oromo people are Indigenous to the Horn of Africa, with a historic homeland that has been attacked and disfigured by nation-state borders since the imperial turn of the late 19th and early 20th century. The Oromo people practice a religion called Waqqeeffanna, organize and govern themselves by the Siinqee/ Gadaa system, and speak a dialect of the language Afan Oromo or Oromiffa. The nature of Oromo organization, religion, and culture prior to colonization are important to understand because these practices have continued meanings in current Oromo culture. Also relevant to these systems and cultural contexts are

their relationship to the notion of *Oromumma* or Oromo-ness; the traits, qualities, cultural inheritances, and connections that comprise Oromo identity across temporalities. While Oromia's size and Oromo people's different experiences with land, place, and imperialized spaces prevent making broad generalizations, the notion of Oromumma is a useful way of conceptualizing Pan-Oromo identity. Oromumma, or Oromo-ness, includes requirements

> that the Oromo national movement be inclusive of all persons, operating in a democratic fashion. This global Oromummaa [...] is based on the principles of mutual solidarity, social justice, and popular democracy. Oromummaa, as an element of culture, nationalism, and vision, has the power to serve as a manifestation of the collective identity of the Oromo national movement. The foundation of Oromummaa must be built on overarching principles that are embedded within Oromo traditions and culture and, at the same time, have universal relevance for all oppressed peoples. The main foundations of Oromummaa are individual and collective freedom, justice, popular democracy, and human liberation, all of which are built on the concept of saffu (moral and ethical order) and are enshrined in gada [sic] principles.
>
> (Jalata 2009:209)

As a critical aspect of Oromo transnationality and Indigeneity, the values of Oromumma in and beyond the institution demonstrate an alterity to the long lives of colonialism.

CHAPTER II: BLACK LIVES & AFTERLIVES: KEY CONTEXTS

The notion of slavery's life and afterlives, central to the argumentation of this dissertation, comes from the work of Saidiya Hartman. Her writing on the Atlantic slave trade in *Lose Your Mother* explicates the radical reverberations of slavery's violence for its descendants, and all the African diaspora. As she explains: "This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment" (2007:17). Ethiopia and other nation-states did not simply emerge from former empires and colonial holdings; they were often built on the backs of Indigenous nations, using the labor of enslaved peoples. In trying to understand the conditions of Ethiopia and the diasporic world Oromo people live in, we must also delineate the impacts of slavery and ongoing forms of colonialism in shaping this world. While I find value (alongside the scholars I think with) within Marxist thought, and more traditional political science perspectives, I continue to return to their shortcomings. Analyses which address the nature of colonial, post-colonial, capitalistic, and neoliberal nation-state formations in such terms often fail to look at the margins of these intersecting systems, to attend to the lives of Black and Indigenous women. Through these erasures and elisions, our understandings are constrained. Fred Moten urges us to "imagine what cuts and anticipates Marx, remembering that the object resists, the commodity shrieks," referring to the Black person made object, and the way that this object maintains a form of life (2003:12). The life and death of this object expands across and despite temporalities. Discourses of conquest "remain within the present" even though the empire and "its constellations have been naturalized by hegemony and even as its oppressive logics are expanded to contain more and more historical experiences" (Byrd 2011:xviii). The shrieking commodity, the transiting empire, the Black and Indigenous African diasporic woman as subject: these are aspects of a particular positionality, and one which cannot be sufficiently attended to without their (after)lives at the forefront.

There is an urgent need to address the lingering legacies of colonialism and empire and the effects on Black and Indigenous women. Furthermore, it is essential to frame these forms of violence as ongoing and still unfolding. Thus, I seek to move theoretically between and within the frameworks that Black and Critical Indigenous Studies have built; to construct my own form of Black Indigenous Studies, with careful attention given to the alteration of land relations caused by settler colonialism, and the anti-Blackness that underpins this world system. This theoretical entanglement echoes a distinction made by Patricia Hill Collins, who points out that "theories emerging from and/ or on behalf of U.S. Black women and other historically oppressed groups aim to find ways to escape from, survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social and economic injustice" (Collins 2000:9). This embedded aim is inherent to Black and Critical Indigenous theorization.

The attempt to convey the convergences and overlaps between Black and Indigenous studies further resonates with the scholarship of Frank Wilderson, though he separates the notion in his own theory; indigeneity focuses on "genocide as a mechanism for usurpation of cartography, of space" and violence against Black people is "a mechanism for the usurpation of subjectivity, of life, of being" (2015:25). For Black Indigenous people in the afterlife of empire, both of these hold true. As theoretical guides, both Black Studies and Critical Indigenous Studies prioritize liberation and radical undoing of the racialized colonial violence that has made our modern world. By putting them in conversation with each other I can make intelligible the way that the Indigenous epistemologies of the Oromo, which were so definitive in the justification of their ostracization, further complicate their positionality as Black African diasporic people, within and beyond the boundaries of the Abyssinian settler colony.

The intention of this chapter is to explicate the broadest conceptual framework within which this project is situated. This positioning serves to set the epistemological and

philosophical ground around terminology which cannot and should not be taken for granted. Specifically, I outline the way race and race-making, land, and relationality have been built over centuries of conquest and enslavement. I begin by thinking with Black and Indigenous studies and Black and Indigenous feminisms as a structuring force. In the following section I gloss and unpack the relevant forms of colonization, empire, and slavery and the corresponding creation of transnationality and diaspora, then make this process more concrete through an overview of Oromo history as an elision by the Ethiopian settler colony.

BLACK STUDIES FRAMEWORK

> I have always recognized that what was happening to my brothers in Algeria and the United States had its repercussions in me. I understood that I could not be indifferent to what was happening in Haiti or Africa. Then, in a way, we slowly came to the idea of a sort of black civilization spread throughout the world. And I have come to the realization that there was a "Negro situation" that existed in different geographical areas, that Africa was also my country […] That's what Negritude meant to me
>
> -Aimé Césaire (1955:92)

Black and African diasporic writers such as Frantz Fanon, Christina Sharpe, Frank Wilderson, Orlando Patterson, and countless others, have written extensively about the legacies of slavery and anti-Black violence and their continued influence on the way the world operates. The generative moment of these phenomena bears a priori discussion, however, as we come to see race-making as a project which was born of slavery and colonialism even as it has since exceeded their violence. Indeed, it was because of this imperialized origin that "Black, Blackness, and even the thing called Africa, cannot be dis-imbricated" from the "global consensus that Africa is the location of sentient beings who are outside of global community" (Wilderson 2015:20), and that Africa has been imagined as "the singular place on the planet where you go to turn human beings into objects" (Saucier and Woods 2014:61). Recognizing the unique position of Black and African diasporic peoples across the world is a way of remaining aware that while the Black body "is not the

most abject body," it remains a "template of how to produce abjection" (Walcott 2020:355). Wilderson explains this difference as the "difference between a sentient being who is positioned as a *being in the world* and one who is positioned as a *thing of the world"* which "marks every scale, from the body to the diaspora" (2009:123). A being in the world is recognized for their humanity and granted autonomy in accordance with this status, whereas the "thing" (the slave and its descendants) is the object and eminent Other from which beings and their lives are socially constructed. In this sense, "blackness is archived as a violent beginning" (McKittrick 2014:24).

Sharpe's work on "the wake" of the slave ship introduces the concept of residence time, which connects social sciences to forensic oceanography. Residence time is the amount of time it takes for an organism completely to leave the ocean's nutrient cycle (Sharpe 2016:40). The oceans and seas that separate continents and countries have a spiritual, political, historical, and violent presence in the lives and histories of African diasporic peoples. Most relevant to this discussion are the Atlantic Ocean as the "middle passage" connecting European slave traders to the markets in North and South America (Spillers 1987), and the Mediterranean Sea, which divides these same colonially constructed nation-states from their former subjects and markets in Africa (Saucier and Woods 2014; Black Mediterranean Collective 2021). Returning to the ocean as a residence, although the nutrients (the blood, the bones, the flesh) of the bodies of enslaved Africans thrown overboard in the middle passage, or refugees fleeing the Horn and failing to make it to Lampedusa, are picked off by sharks or other sea creatures within a few days, their essence and their atoms are processed and recycled continually through the food chain. As Sharpe explains, "Human blood… has a residence time of 260 million years. And what happens to the energy that is produced in the waters? It continues cycling like atoms in residence time" (Sharpe 2016:41). We are still living in this cycle, still waiting for the sharks that learned to travel in the wake

of the slave ships to shift their migration routes.

Thinking in residence time allows us to move outside of the Black Atlantic to the global and the international; we may think literally of the oceans and seas crossed and crisscrossing, overlapping and lapping around the lives of African diasporic people, and more abstractly of the wakes of these waters, theorized at length by Sharpe, and the trauma that this loss brought and brings (2016:13). Thus, residence time works as a global frame for imagining the alterity and subjection unique to the lives of Black diasporic people, and the legacies of dehumanization and commodification that we are still living through. This inheritance of racialized violence is what Sharpe calls the wake, what Hartman calls the afterlives of slavery (2007), what W.E.B. Du Bois targeted in his essay "The Souls of White Folk" (1920), what Wilderson's context of a Blackened life describes, and what a myriad of other scholars have designated with similarly rich concept-categories. Thinking with these concepts allows us to elucidate "the modalities of black life lived in, as, under, despite black death" (Sharpe 2016:22). This affirmative move sets the stage for a further examination of the role that anti-Blackness has in defining the possibilities for African and Black diasporic communities in the post-slavery era.

Forms of oppression engender and facilitate new violences as they evolve and react to forms of resistance. Katherine McKittrick writes at length about the brutalities of slavery embedded in the archive, and the ways in which they reiterate themselves in the present:

> black is naturally malignant and therefore worthy of violation; where black is violated because black is naturally violent […] where black is same and always dead and dying […] The tolls cast black as impossibly human and provide the conditions through which black history is currently told and studied. The death toll becomes the source.
>
> (2014:17)

Patricia Williams similarly conveys the way racism is transformed into the status quo; "it is deep, angry, eradicated from view but strong enough" to affect the way people move through the world, as they are "guided by an impulsive awareness" (1992:49). Orlando Patterson

describes slavery as a relation of domination with cultural, social, and psychological facets and three constituent elements: coercion, natal alienation, and dishonor (2018:2). The force of the coercion, the mark of dishonor, and the vast displacement of natal alienation mark both the slave and the descendants. These institutional dominations were perfected in the extreme through the chattel slave trade and extraction of life across the African continent. The elegance and efficiency of the demarcation against the body as the justification of the enslavement was a way of cementing the process of social death. While a "free" or fired worker remains a potential worker, a free slave would be rendered truly free (Patterson 2018:3). Through racializing processes, this freedom was foreclosed, indefinitely.

Black Feminism and Black Women's Studies

> When the experts (white or Black, male) turn their attention to the Black woman, the reports get murky, for they usually clump the men and women together and focus so heavily on what white people have done to the psyches of Blacks, that what Blacks have done to and for themselves is overlooked, and what distinguishes the men from the women forgotten.
>
> -Toni Cade Bambara (1970:2)

> Can I live? Where can I live? How can I live? Can I live and not, just, barely, almost, survive? What is living when that living requires that black girls and women be small, be half-living, be subordinated, be open to condemnation, abuse, and censure? What about the worlds they are making? Can you see them? Do you apprehend them and the beautiful lives that they make in the midst of deprivation and terror? Can you hear them—their sorrow and joy, their pain and refusal, and their insistent desires and political demands? What are the conditions, the grammars and the tenses, in which those expressed demands and desires might be heard and met not with force, but with care?
>
> -Christina Sharpe (2018:171)

Within the expansive violence of the world generated by slavery's afterlives, Black women's experiences require particular attention. Writing on Black women's labors, Hartman explains that "representing the slave through the figure of the worker… makes it difficult to distinguish the constitutive elements of slavery as a mode of power, violence, dispossession and accumulation or to attend to the forms of gendered and sexual violence that enable these

processes" (2016:166). The Black woman as the descendent of the shrieking commodity can never fit neatly into the status of the worker, no matter how fluid that category appears. Instead, we live within the "specter of a racial-sexual terror" (Woods 2013:123). More critically, "conventional political discourse" that obscures or leaves out the relationship between the "development of black feminist politics" and rebellion serves to raise "the leviathan of patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism to overshadow the work of black and female struggles" (James 1999:13). These struggles have historically become less easy to ignore, as they move toward

> a struggle for liberation: liberation from the exploitive and dehumanizing system of racism, from the manipulative control of a corporate society; liberation from the constrictive norms of "mainstream" culture, from the synthetic myths that encourage us to fashion ourselves rashly from without (reaction) rather than from within (creation).
>
> (Bambara 1970:1)

In her classic text on "Black feminist thought," Patricia Hill Collins explores intersectionality, referring to "particular forms of intersectional oppressions" and the *matrix of domination,* which "refers to how these intersectional oppressions are actually organized" (2000:18). Following Collins' language, it is possible to identify intersectionality as coming from lived experiences, whereas the matrix of domination plays out across it, in the varying strengths of the relationships. The expansion and nuance of intersectionality is complex, and worthy of its own exploration. For brevity's sake, and to maintain focus on Oromo women's experiences, we may read and frame intersectionality through Tiffany Lethabo King's defense and revival of it, rather than strictly through its foundational texts. King does a deft job of summarizing, historicizing, and pointing out the adaptations within intersectionality's meanings, calling for a reading of intersectionality as a discussion of "categories of the *subject* and the *human* as knowledge producers" (King 2015:127).

Riffing off Kimberlé Crenshaw's foundational essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1991), King describes how the introduction of intersectional

groupings of "*Black* plus *women*… produces a momentary epistemic crisis" (2015:128). This is because Black women represent a unique legal category, as their inability to represent either gender or race leads to the "discursive limits of categories that construct the rights-bearing subject before the law" (King 2015:128). Because the categorization of race and gender does not hold at the intersection, it becomes a "time-space of simultaneity" where "multiple movements are possible" (King 2015:129). In this way, an intersectional analytic does not limit itself to the space of Black women or fall short of potentially more fashionable approaches such as affect theory or supposed "subjectless" discourses. Instead it can be used, following King, as a tool to consider shifting power and "contingent conditions of possibility that create marginal groups" (2015:130). Elsewhere, Collins has noted that Black feminist thought in the settler colonial US environment is "fundamentally embedded in a political context that has challenged its very right to exist" (2000:4). Marginalization is enforced and upheld, reiterating and repeating harm against Black women. Black women thus "inhabit the social locations at which racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism (among other systems) intersect with and powerfully augment the ravages of life under capitalism, and vice versa" (Sexton 2018:5). As a result, "centering the concerns of black women and girls is not only a critical improvement but also a crucial precondition for true racial justice" (Sexton 2018:4). Such justice is alive and living, even as it remains contested.

INTERLUDE: OROMO HISTORIOGRAPHY

Oromo Women and the Siinqee System

The Siinqee (also called the siiqqee) institution was the counterpart to the Gadaa, used by the Oromo to govern themselves and maintain a political and social cohesion across a vast land area. The Siinqee institution is "one of the many built-in checks and balances" integral to retaining the egalitarian nature of the Gadaa system and responsible for placing limits on

systematic male dominance (Kumsa 2020:122). The Gadaa organized itself through male leadership in coordinated rotating systems of rule. The Siinqee was thus responsible for adjudication and legislation over certain complementary issues. These institutions prevent society's disintegration by ensuring that a "balance is struck between the power of male and female and everything that surrounds them" (Kumsa 1994:120). The Siinqee system and the feminist thinking and relationality which were both part of its construction and emerged because of its existence offer a critical starting point for understanding Oromo women's transnational lives.

An indicative example of Siinqee positionality as part of the Gadaa is its response to domestic violence and intimate partner violence. When accusations were made against men, women elders would gather at the house of the accused, each carrying the wooden staff that symbolized their community status (also called a siiqqee). This council of sorts would sit and surround the home in question, raising their voices in a chant called an iyya siinqee, until a resolution was made (Kumsa 2013). While the decision would be implemented, by whatever force necessary, with male support from Gadaa leaders, the final determination and process through which it was reached was solely the purvey of the Siinqee. As Kumsa describes, "Justice is served in quite an elaborate process where women enact power, ironically from spaces of liminality" (2020:127). Beyond the institutional power, the Siinqee also offers important "moral and ethical guidelines" through an extrapolation of its principles (Kumsa 2020:125).

CRITICAL INDIGENOUS STUDIES

The work of Jodi Byrd, Eve Tuck, Aimee Carrillo Rowe, and other Indigenous scholars provides useful insight into the way Indigeneity and Empire collapse into each other to create another type of afterlife. As Byrd describes, "For indigenous peoples, place, land, sovereignty, and memory matter. In a world growing increasingly enamored with faster,

flatter, smooth, where positionality doesn't matter so much as how it is that we travel there, indigeneity matters" (Byrd 2011:xiii). For African diasporic people, displaced from their Indigenous homelands, like the Oromo, this sovereign memory is obfuscated by Abyssinian state-making and the other post-empires they live in; it *matters* that we uncover it. The collapse of empire and rise of the nation-state are further problematized when encapsulated in the form of settler colonialism. Byrd notes that racialization and colonization tangle together as "concomitant global systems that secure white dominance through time, property, and notions of self" (2011:xxiii). Understanding the engagements of Critical Indigenous Studies regarding land, relationships, gender, and politics, particularly in their convergence under settler colonial systems, is a valuable intervention and accompaniment to the work being done in Black Studies.

In Tuck and Rowe's writing on settler colonialism and cultural productions, they provide a comprehensive overview of the particularities of settler colonialism, indigeneity, and the nature of decolonization. Describing the role of land within settler colonial systems, they explain:

> Land is at the crux of the relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers in settler societies. Ongoing occupation and settler pursuits of land are often made natural, logical, or invisible in settler societies. Settler societies often regard land only in the constructs of property or natural resource. Indigenous understandings of land predate and have codeveloped alongside and in spite of settler constructions of property. For Indigenous societies, land is peoplehood, relational, cosmological, and epistemological. Land is memory, land is curriculum, land is language. "Land" also refers to water, sky, underground, sea.
>
> (Rowe and Tuck 2017:5)

This passage illuminates the change from framing "land" as relation and language, as it is in Indigenous epistemologies, to the construction of "land" as property and resource which colonialism mandated. Focusing on settler colonial systems provides an example of colonialism's hauntings, an afterlife of the still-alive. By approaching this topic with the work of Indigenous scholars, we make room for "renderings of time and place which exceed

coloniality and conquest" (Rowe and Tuck 2017:4). The fundamental difference between settler colonialism and other colonial systems is this land relation. But, for Indigenous peoples, whose relationships to land are already divergent from the Western hegemon, this disruption bleeds into other facets of life.

Tom Holm, J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis differentiate between a "mechanistic" view, which sees land only as "equal to that which it produces or to what its actual market value might be" and an "organic" view, one found in Indigenous communities, where group relationships with their homelands go beyond valuation (2003:14). The latter formation is seen through the usage of environmental elements (plants, earth, water) during ceremonies, for example, and the potential links between religious guidelines and sacred places. In this organic view "Homelands are often considered home lands, and even when groups migrate or are removed from original territories the people continue to attach great meaning to them" (ibid.). Under colonialism, land is transformed from a home to a site of displacement. And, because of the deep resonations of these epistemologies, Indigenous peoples are also under attack. Mishuana Goeman describes this violence as "Colonial forms of amnesia that regulate Native women as absent bodies or as victimized or degenerative subjects depend on Native bodies' being out of place—that is, shadows and haunting presences of political and symbolic economies" (2017:114). In these careful explorations of Native peoples and indigeneity, the idea of land-as-kin is crucial to understand. This can be seen as the difference between Indigeneity and (lower case "i") indigeneity. While people from and of a certain place are indigenous, connected to a geographic place as a point of origin, they are not automatically Indigenous. This capital I-Indigeneity includes deep and specific bonds that live on in mountains, rush through rivers, grow in the shadows of the forest. This differentiation helps to clarify contestation over land in the Horn of Africa, as one example. The Abyssinian Empire and its Amhara inheritors are certainly indigenous to parts of the Horn, but their

approach and exploitation of the land foreclose their embrace of an Indigenous identity.

Indigenous feminisms

Settler colonial structures are directly connected to women's lives and create a unique set of challenges for Indigenous women in particular. Mishuana Goeman has noted that the "prescribed Western roles and gender hierarchies that undergird the nation-state" are indicative of a patriarchal form of citizenship, one that limits the potential freedom of Indigenous women alongside its disruptive land practices (2008:297). Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill describe this system specifically as "heteropatriarchy" and "heteropaternalism" and include the imperative need to dismantle it in their writing on "decolonizing feminism" (2013). Within settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, or "social systems in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural," form the dominant way of organizing society (Arvin, Tuck, Morrill 2013:13). For Indigenous women, and within Native feminist thinking, these systems are necessarily challenged by demands for more liberatory models and structures. Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill call this project a "rewriting," noting that if it is accomplished, feminist thinking would be better able to dismantle "not just heteropatriarchy, but also the settler colonial nation-states that heteropatriarchy upholds" (2013:28).

Indigenous feminism and frameworks for understanding the world that emerge from Indigenous women's perspectives incorporate critiques of race, gender, and colonization. Sarah Deer describes the challenges of pursuing justice in a system that has failed on multiple levels to honor identities of the native, women, mother, etc. (Deer 2015:89). Mishuana Goeman's call to reclaim Native cartographies and unmap settler colonialism is transformative in nature (2012). "Rather than advocating submission to dominant settler structures," Goeman describes the ways in which women poets from marginalized

communities engage with the "gendered geo-politics" of their communities to promote "broader forms of spatial justice" (2012:90). Indigenous women can counteract processes of spatial *in*justice that take place through ghettoization and erasure, and simultaneously write new worlds into being that better comprehend and support their lived experiences.

BLACK AND INDIGENOUS AFTERLIVES

Linking Black and Indigenous critical studies and feminist frameworks is one of this project's most important interventions. Neither frame is sufficiently able to accommodate and make legible Oromo experiences from home to the diaspora, taking into account the complexities of their relationships to land, the state, and the world around. Beginning with this theoretical foundation also supports the subsequent definitions and claims regarding colonialism, empire, and their long afterlives. Bridging Indigeneity and Blackness through a spatial reckoning resonates with the critiques undertaken by Sylvia Tamale (2020) and Tapji Garba and Sara-Marie Sorentino (2020). It is land, for example,

> that unites colonial projects of control and decolonial projects of reclamation: the fact of land (beyond or before ways of relating to land) is assumed, against both colonial (proprietary) and decolonial (relational) epistemologies. Land grounds both settler futurity and decolonial futures.
>
> (Garba and Sorentino 2020:768)

In relationality, past and present, both Indigenous and African diasporic experiences are faced with forms of strategically targeted oppression. As defined succinctly by Collins, oppression "describes any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society" (2000:4). Oppression is necessary to maintain hierarchies, and these hierarchies of nation-state rule are embedded in and born of the ultraviolent hierarchies of colonized/ colonizer, settler/ native, and free/ slave. This system, "dependent on difference and differentiation… is recycled and reproduced so that the empire might cohere and consolidate subject and object, self and other, within those transits" (Byrd 2011:221). These cycles and reformations create ever-evolving structures that

are consistent only in their oppressive tendencies.

Oppression is a hidden, shadowy, lurking, and lingering force, weaving a connecting thread across marginalized perspectives. Framing Blackness and Black life as worthy of violation is both a result *of* and a reaction *to* the originary violence against Black livingness in the lives of slavery and empire. This self-sustaining oppression serves to limit possibilities for liberation even as it builds stronger and deeper limitations across societal structures. paperson carries this language into the settler colonial ghetto, linking to the work of Patricia Williams (1992) seeing *her shape*, the ancestor, as always guided by, in relation to, and working against the power of *his hand*, the forces of oppression (2010). These metaphoric explorations express the violent poetics of oppression in its myriad different forms. As a set of relationships and way of relating, such oppression is indicative of violence in metaphoric and corporeal forms. As Tryon Woods describes, in conversation with Hortense Spillers, the sociopolitical condition

> represents for its African and indigenous peoples a scene of actual mutilation, dismemberment, and exile that both explodes the prevailing assumptive logic of gender categorization itself as the necessary corollary of the slavocracy and underscores the essential bodily disintegration attendant to the captive black body.
>
> (2013:125)

As the mutilation continues, and treatment for past wounds remains out of reach, we remain constrained by the afterlives of slavery and empire.

CHAPTER III: COLONIALISM AND EMPIRE (THE LONG AFTERLIVES)

While the preceding chapter has outlined the way I situate and understand the context of the Oromo woman's experience, broadly, there is still some terminological grappling to take place before focusing on the geographic context of the Horn of Africa. In particular, there is a need to unpack and enter the debates about labeling and usages of imperialism, colonialism, and other descriptors for the larger structural systems at hand. Thus, while the previous theoretical context focused more on epistemologies and ideologies of violence, this section looks more strategically at the practical and structural unfoldings. The purpose of this elucidation is not to take a formal political science approach to the naming and nuance of imperialism and colonialism per se, but rather to identify the way these forms of oppressive governance reflect ideologies of cisheteropatriarchal anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity. To follow paperson's work, colonialism and its heirs create certain "exercises of power" and "practices of freedom;" as they state: "colonization is not over, we are intimate and complicit with it, yet we act, dream, and live in ways that are not limited by its horizons" (paperson 2010:7-8). Examining these intimacies and moments of complicity sheds light on the agency of the oppressed, as well as the nuances and embedded technologies of power and their politicizing forces. It is necessary however to ground this thinking in the originary facts of Blackness and race making. As Woods explains, "The fungibility and social death of blackness, essential to the structure of the modern world, distinguishes the fundamental deracination of the enslaved even from the displacement and oppression of the colonized" (2013:129). Colonialism and imperialism are used quite interchangeably throughout this thesis. This is not to deny their differences, but to recognize their similarities. I will thus begin with a brief discussion of their varying meanings and implications.

IMPERIALISM AND COLONIALISM

Imperialism and colonialism are thought of here as an interlocking system of

oppression and injustice. They operate distinctly, move through the world in different forms, but work best when they are together, reinforcing each other. The key difference between the two is in some ways a matter of naming; there does not seem to be an obvious consensus in what triggers a shift in labelling. Scholars from imperialized and colonized places have generated many useful distinctions, at times reflexive of their own ethnic, racial, geographic, or sociopolitical standpoints. By way of review I will explore, briefly, some of these definitions.

Colonialism is "crude imperialism" according to Kwame Nkrumah while neo-colonialism is "rationalised imperialism" (1969:13). Nkrumah wrote from Ghana, speaking on colonialism with the deep knowledge of someone who dedicated his life to its undoing. His focus on neocolonialism is relevant to the position of his home nation and the temporality from which he wrote. Writing from the settler colonial USA in a more recent time, Indigenous scholars Holm, Pearson, and Chavis make the following distinction:

> Imperialism is nothing less than an economic policy under which a given state seeks to control resources—human or otherwise—outside its own territorial boundaries. Colonization is the physical occupation of territories by an imperial state done to manage this economic policy.
>
> (2003:17)

Focusing on the relationship between economics and territory is one way to elucidate the complexities of colonialism.

Frantz Fanon, among his many interventions, describes the unadulterated violence which underlies colonial activity, writing that "Colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence." (Fanon 1963:23). This colonial poison has been "distilled into the veins of Europe" through each instance of violence conducted and violence accepted according to Aimé Césaire (1955:36). Césaire's names some of colonialism's most decisive actors: "the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant," all of whom share the "appetite and force" of the colonial society

(1955:33). This list of seemingly incomparable professions reveals how colonial violence is made banal, integrated into the hearts and minds of even those who would not see themselves as part of a colonial project.

The spatiality of empire and colonization is a long-contested issue. Luwam Dirar describes some of the debates which unfolded during the Bandung Conference, among and between leaders from the Global South. Exemplifying these contestations, Dirar focuses on a discussion wherein the assembled powers "provided an imaginable understanding of colonialism with the same assumption that only a foreign or western ruler from across the ocean qualifies as a colonist," which generated debates "over who counted as the colonist" (2017:357). Some focused on colonialism's forms, "which treated the identity of the colonialist as a predefined actor" whereas others framed colonialism as "amorphous and pervasive," and thus encouraged an attention on its "manifestations" (ibid.). Quoting former Premier of the People's Republic of China Zhou Enlai, Dirar lists these manifestations as occurring "in the political field, in the military field, in the economic field, in the social field, in the cultural field" (2017:359).

Colonialism is given a distinct spatial character in the work of Neil Smith and Cindy Katz, who describe it as "predicated on the deliberate, physical, cultural, and symbolic appropriation of space" (1993:69). Spatial relations become a juridical issue that requires management. The territorial element to colonization (while not seemingly demanded of imperialism) is explored in Edward Said's work as the "practice, theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" (1993:8), and in Bagele Chilisa's evocation of "invasion and loss of territory accompanied by the destruction of political, social, and economic systems, leading to external political control and economic dependence" (Chilisa 2011:27). Exemplifying imperialism's aterritoriality is its economic reach, further explored below.

With violence as the commonality and jumping off point, the empire is built and solidified in a multitudinal way. According to Chilisa

> One can distinguish between different but intertwined types of colonialism—namely, political colonialism, which refers to occupation and external control of the colonies, and scientific colonialism, which refers to the imposition of the colonizers' ways of knowing—and the control of all knowledge produced in the colonies.
>
> (2011:27)

In this project I identify sociocultural, economic, and institutional categories. Chilisa's "political" falls within the latter two categories, while the notion of the scientific falls within what I name the sociocultural. Unpacking the shifts in labels between different spatiotemporal positionings is an interesting endeavor, but beyond the scope and focus of this work. As such, drawing from these overlapping and perhaps competing perspectives, I offer the following definition: *Colonialism* and *Imperialism* are spatial, juridical, ideological, and economic processes, founded on dehumanization and exploitation of racialized others and operationalized through an interconnected network of economic, institutional, and cultural forces. Violence and racialization are at the core even as the relentless pursuit of profit and social control can at times obfuscate this ideological underpinning. Practically, I conflate the two in recognition of their similar origins, meanings, and usages.

In many ways, colonialism and colonial relationships as traversing domains is best summed up by Césaire's famous assertion: "colonization=thingification" (1955:42). This thing-making is simultaneously cultural in nature and economic in implementation. Although only certain (racialized) groups were targeted for thingification, it was this thing-making process that spurred forward and defined economic institutions. Chilisa, for example, describes scientific colonialism as an ideological project that is reflected in institutions: "Under the guise of scientific colonialism, researchers travelled to distant colonized lands, where they turned the resident people into objects of research" (2011:27). Colonialism and colonial practices are that which turn the indigenous person into an "instrument of

production," worthy of subjection and violence (Césaire 1955:42). Following this analysis, global capital, as the basis for capitalism and colonialism, is described by Denise Ferreira da Silva as "the expropriated productive capacity of slave bodies and native lands" (2020:43). Establishing these economic forms relied on colonial constructions and institutions. "The colonial world is a compartmentalized world" that reorganizes society with a particular "geographical configuration and classification" (Fanon 1963:3). The colonial institutions are "represented by the barracks and the police stations," and the "spokesperson for the colonizer and the regime of oppression, is the police officer or the soldier" ((Fanon 1963:3). That the convergence between imperialism and colonialism creates a vast structural network of force is a unifying factor in these definitions.

Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism is a particular form of colonial exercise in which the land itself is a main target of violence. Settlers arrive from their metropoles, take over land and space, and do not leave. Settler colonialism, speaking broadly, "brought the world, its peoples, and their own structures of power and hegemony to indigenous lands" (Byrd 2011:xxvi). These heteropatriarchal, colonial power structures became the norm of the settler colony as it transitioned into the nation-state. This transit of empire creates discourses that "depend upon sublimating indigenous cultures and histories into fictive hybridities and social constructions" while simultaneously oppressing and restricting Indigenous peoples' economic growth and structural power (Byrd 2011:xxxiv). Settler colonialism is indicative of the empire's afterlives in the most visceral way; though the empire is dead in name, the nation-state is haunted by its presence.

The most well-known examples of settler colonies are perhaps the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and Israel, with Ethiopia as an overlooked but significant case.

As explained by Evans, Genovese, Reilly, and Wolfe,

> settlers' seizure of Indigenous peoples' homelands evinces a high degree of uniformity. Incursive would-be settlers seek to remove Native peoples from their land and replace them on it. Natives seek to repel them. Ubiquitously, the issue is resolved in violence.
>
> (2012:2)

paperson positions settler colonialism as creating a system wherein "people are arranged—raced, classed, gendered, sexualized, dis/abled, il/legalized" (2014:116). More specifically, in paperson's definition, this arrangement takes place in a way that determines relationships to land along the lines of power and control, indigeneity, and enforced landlessness. Also useful to extract from paperson's framework is the relationship between ongoing settlement and conquest, and ghettos. The ghettoization or ghetto colonialism that takes places at this intersection between displacement and dislocation is useful to understanding the control and governance of a city such as Addis Ababa, a settlement on indigenous homelands (paperson 2014:116). Settler colonial states and structures "imagine a homogenous stable present space developed for the good of the majority, even while they rely on forgetting the violence it took to produce the nation-state and the violence and fear it takes to sustain the current sociopolitical order" (Goeman 2017:114). These examples share the influx of a population with some intent of cultural and political reformation, a violent approach to relations with indigenous peoples, and the ongoing denial or misconstruction of wrongdoing, as evidenced by the nature of governance. Ethiopia, in the wake of Abyssinian imperialism, shares these same traits.

INTERLUDE: OROMO HISTORIOGRAPHY

Colonization, state formation, and the rise of the Abyssinian Empire (1800s-1970s)

The ascent of the Abyssinian empire in the second half of the nineteenth century marked a change in the overall governance of the Horn and an irreparable alteration to the lives of the Oromo. Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa describe the early 1800s as the era of

"Abyssinian confederation," during which various coalitions and alliances led to the "reunion of the Axumites (or Tigrays)" as well as a more active institutionalization of the Orthodox church (1990:75). The combined forces of cultural homogeneity by way of religion and increasing militarization along the border lands set the stage for colonization. The motivations for colonization were embedded in these cultural discriminations, and the kingdom's "access to Oromo resources shielded her from the twin disasters of drought and continuous war which plagued the north" (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990:100). The ideological underpinning of this exploitation is described as Ethiopianism:

> Ethiopianism shifts back and forth between claims of a "Semitic" identity when appealing to the White, Christian, ethnocentric, occidental hegemonic power center and claims of an African identity when cultivating the support of sub-Saharan Africans and the African diaspora
>
> (Jalata 2009:189)

Aided by European warfare technology (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990:95) and fueled by a desire for Oromo goods, the Abyssinians had occupied and colonized Oromia almost entirely by the 1880s (Hassen 2002:17). Under the rule of Menelik of Showa, the Abyssinians brutalized Oromo people in pursuit of complete conquest. In addition to physical and sexual violence, the empire destroyed or outlawed indigenous Oromo practices like the *Chafee* and confiscated Oromo land (Hassen 2002:18). According to some reports, Menelik at some point "possessed 70,000 domestic slaves" and actively participated in the slave trade, which routed through Oromia into trade pathways to Sudan and beyond (Hassen 2002:19). Although "the shadow of European colonialism passed over the bulk of the African continent, the Ethiopian state achieved by arms and statesmanship a measure of independence" (Robinson 1985:55). Menelik's era was also the start of the *Nafxanya- Gabbar* feudal land system.

Under the Nafxanya system, Oromo people were forced to work as laborers on their own land, while paying taxes to Habesha settlers (Gemeda 2002). This process resonates with Césaire's theories, as colonization and colonial activity are "based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt" (1955:41). Furthermore, this style of settlement and

occupation fell in line with Menelik's intent to "be recognized as a legitimate colonial power," by following European mandates for occupations (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990:103). Despite its unparalleled brutality, Menelik's conquest escaped condemnation as the Oromo were made to appear deserving to be conquered (Lata 1998:135). These colonial foundations built an Abyssinian nation which relied on silence, violence, and suppression in order to function. Under the rule of Haile Selassie this system was made automatic, built to repeat and reinvigorate itself through circular logics.

The complexity of Blackness and race in a context with two African peoples is clarified through this ideological attention. Despite foreign or international imaginings of race that would conflate the two peoples, the Habesha insistence on itself as a superior Other ignited a race-making process. This follows Cedric Robinson's descriptions of "racialisation" (1983), as well as Ruha Benjamin's "culture talk" (2017), as sociocultural practices are linked to appearances. In the Ethiopian context,

> After colonizing the Oromo and other nations with the help of European technology and expertise, Abyssinian colonial settlers in Oromia and other regions justified their colonial domination with racist discourse. [...] Ethiopian racism and White racism have conveniently intermarried in the U.S. policy formulation and implementation in Ethiopia. When policy issues are discussed on Ethiopia Semitic civility, Christianity, antiquity, bravery, and patriotism of Amharas and Tigrayans are retrieved to valorize and to legitimize Habasha dominance and power. Moreover, the barbarism, backwardness, and destructiveness of Oromos and others are reinvented to keep Oromos and others from access to state power.
>
> (Jalata 2009:196)

Guluma Gemeda describes the rule of Haile Selassie, beginning in 1916 as centralizing and systematizing the "means of economic extraction" and the "imperial administration" (2002:52). In addition to land use and abuse, which extended to mass industrialization in partnership with foreign investors (related to today's land grabs), Haile Selassie also institutionalized cultural erasure in the state, a process that has been called Amharization (Bulcha 1997). Suppression of the Oromo language paired with laws against its writing and speaking were a major part of Selassie's rule (Tafa 2015). This cultural violence is

characteristic of the Selassie era moves in tandem with the process of colonialism and formation of the settler colonial state discussed previously.

The formation and implementation of rule in Ethiopia relied on ideological framings that centered whiteness and Eurocentric Christianity. Haile Selassie did not consider himself to be Black. Further, his rhetoric consistently framed his own empire and rule as elitist, out of Africa (Jalata 2009; Yates 2013). The Emperor positioned himself, and the Ethiopian nation-state as an extension of that self by seeking to claim "a sovereignty that trumps any other existing sovereignty" (Nurhussein 2019:11). "Habasha elites have claimed that they have a superior religion and civilization, and even sometimes have expressed that they were not Black and saw formerly enslaved or colonized Africans as baryas (slaves)" (Jalata 2009:197). Furthermore, "In Ethiopian discourse, racial distinctions have been invented and manipulated to perpetuate the political objective of Habasha domination of the colonized population groups" (Jalata 2009:201). As Robinson describes of the Italian-Ethiopian conflict, "both Italy and Ethiopia were *empires*" and "in both instances, imperialism was rationalised on the grounds of superior culture and racial stock" (1985:53). Habeshas imagined themselves to be "civilized Caucasian," while the southerners were "primitive Blacks" (Yates 2013:86). These foundational elements of Abyssinian state culture remain relevant to understanding Ethiopia today.

SLAVERY AND EMPIRE

> People often assign a certain cinematic quality to conflict, war, and revolution. Such idealized notions make it hard to think strategically in the here and now. White supremacists and the state are murdering us here and now. Prisons, detention centers, and police raids are confining and torturing us here and now. This, right here and right now, is what struggle looks like.
>
> -William C. Anderson (2021:120)

With the clock set to residence time, slavery's life continues to reinvent itself in the "disappearance of the known world and the antipathy of the new one" (Hartman 2007:18).

Writing elsewhere of this (after)life, she notes that the distinctions between slavery's past and present/ presence hinge upon redress and repair that has yet to come (Hartman 2002:758). Fanon warned of this resetting, describing the ways in which "Racism bloats and disfigures the face of the culture that practices it. Literature, the plastic arts, songs for shopgirls, proverbs, habits, patterns, whether they set out to attack it or to vulgarize it, restore racism" (1964:37). The "flawless logic" of racism and anti-Blackness allows it to reimagine itself in the post-empire and the nation-state (Fanon 1964). Through these reinventions, the "time of slavery" has yet to come to an end (Hartman 2002).

In the era following directly after slavery's formal juridical end, Du Bois's writing on anti-Blackness and racism offers a way of bridging temporal frames. In his discussion of the *Souls of White Folk*, he describes the theory of colonial expansion:

> Bluntly put, that theory is this: It is the duty of white Europe to divide up the darker world and administer it for Europe's good. This Europe has largely done. The European world is using black and brown men for all the uses which men know. Slowly but surely white culture is evolving the theory that "darkies" are born beasts of burden for white folk. It were silly to think otherwise, cries the cultured world, with stronger and shriller accord. The supporting arguments grow and twist themselves in the mouths of merchant, scientist, soldier, traveler, writer, and missionary.
>
> (Du Bois 1920:1)

What Du Bois makes clear is that it is the racial, rather than the merely ideological, which unifies, motivates, and makes permissible Europe's actions permissible in the Global South. European, white supremacist thinking and rule, entrenched in the market, academy, church and beyond ("*merchant, scientist, soldier, traveler, writer, and missionary"*) are at the very core of global rule (Du Bois 1920:1). Further relevant to Du Bois is the analysis conducted in work such as Rinaldo Walcott's *The Long Emancipation* (2021) which makes clear that a juridical or legal framework did not translate to a societal shift, repair, or reparations for the depths of this horror.

Bringing this history into the contemporary moment, P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon Woods' 2014 exploration of the "Black Mediterranean" connects the threads of Du Bois with

the tapestry of Europe as the post-empire. Focusing on the policing of migrants and refugees moving from Africa to Europe, they make clear that "any discussion of policing today that does not ground itself in the historical context of slavery and colonialism is imagining a world that is not, rather than dealing with the world as it is" (Saucier and Woods 2014:60). The world "as it is" is one in which "violence against the black body is gratuitous, not contingent, instrumental or incidental: it is punishment for *being"* (Saucier and Woods 2014:61). This ontological argument speaks directly to Wilderson's writing, in which he makes clear that "violence against black people is ontological and gratuitous as opposed to merely ideological and contingent" (2003:229). The exploitation of Black labor and the hyper-regulation of Black lives that goes along with this exploitation make up the very core of societies in the Global North. Understanding anti-Black violence in this frame forces a shift from viewing policing as a necessary institution, for example, to recognizing the force of social policing and its reverberating violence. Returning to Moten, and his shrieking commodity, we can stiuate the boundaries of Black diasporic life within and against the world that slavery built. Thus, it becomes clear that the afterlives of slavery have created the conditions for what Wilderson describes as "a Blackened life;" "the structural violence of a life positioned, paradigmatically, as an object in a world of subjects" (2009:123). I sum up and condense these vast and insidious evils as slavery and empire's *afterlives* (after Hartman 2007) as a way to move deeper into the specificities of space-making.

In political terms, Nkrumah refers to post-slavery state formation as "neo-colonial," identifying "a state where political power lies in the conservative forces of the former colony and where economic power remains under the control of international finance capital" (1969:8). Nkrumah's primary focus was on the political and socioeconomic elements of state rule after colonialism's formal end, and he described the political path from the colonial into that of the neo- or post+colonial (the term follows the writing of la paperson, with the + used

to stand in for the ongoing arenas of colonial activity (2010:8)). This process begins with a "sham independence" leading the colonial power to use a policy of containment that relies on "arsenal of alliances, its network of military bases, economic devices," and "the psychological weapon of propaganda" in order to legitimize the form of rule that colonialism initiated (Nkrumah 1969:8). This propaganda work determines that capitalism and the free market are fair and productive systems, that colonial powers are trustworthy partners and advisors, and that the political and cultural divisions under colonialism are the only acceptable path (Nkrumah 1969:9). As the post+colonial state builds itself under the colonial power's watchful eye, it is encouraged to retain as much as possible from the former model. These relationships and structures are obfuscated by the state-building process.

Kelley, in the introduction to Cesaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* portrays the Global South as follows: "[W]hile colonialism in its formal sense might have been dismantled, the colonial state has not. Many of the problems of democracy are products of the old colonial state whose primary difference is the presence of black faces" (in Césaire 2000:27). Kelley goes further to say that "The official apparatus might have been removed, but the political, economic, and cultural links established by colonial domination still remain with some alterations" (ibid.). Sarah Deer, writing about rape and legality in the settler colony, explores at length the systems that support, surround, and sometimes perpetuate sexual violence. Colonial constructs and rape "share a common history and language of dehumanization, power, dominance, and conquest" (Deer 2015:51). Wendy Trevino also addresses the continuities between colonialism and violence, describing them as "cruel fiction/ maintained by constant policing, violence" (2016:16). These cruelly coherent fictions create systems and structures that operate by way of violence and erasure. This organizing model, "dependent on difference and differentiation… is recycled and reproduced so that the empire might cohere and consolidate subject and object, self and other, within those transits" (Byrd 2011:221).

These cycles and reformations create ever-evolving structures that are consistent only in their oppressive tendencies.

As Byrd states, for Indigenous people and arrivants in settler colonial spaces, "post" represents a condition of futurity that has not yet been achieved" (2011:xxxii). While I may agree with the nomenclature of the post-Empire, in cases where the colonial construct itself has not been demolished or repaired the implication of an ending is a misnomer. This recognition of complexity relates to Sharpe's explanation of life in the aftermath of slavery, wherein Black diasporic people are constantly "inhabiting *and* rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives" (2016:18). The simultaneity of inhabitance and rupture is characteristic of movement and transit within the physical and psychic bounds of the (post)colonial world and the ongoing traversal of its afterlives.

MOVEMENT, MIGRATION, DIASPORA

> With this context in focus, what is most troubling for me about the Nigerian woman languishing in a British or Italian prison is not her supposed 'criminality,' or the prejudicial operation of 'justice,' or even the political economy of globalization that conditioned her migration from her homeland, although certainly the latter two issues are matters against which to mobilize. Rather, what concerns me is 'the epistemological violence of the existing map' on which her subjectivity appears under erasure, as always and already captured flesh– a cartography that makes her twenty- first century migration into the Western prison a Middle Passage *redux* (Rodriguez, 2006; Wilderson, 2010, p. 123).
>
> -Tryon Woods (2013:122)

Though the violence of empire and its afterlives is overwhelming, all-encompassing, suffocating, it does not fully encapsulate the forms of resistance that Black diasporic people build and rebuild, despite, within, and against it. These resistances are elucidated through study of movement and diaspora. Moten calls these forms of resistance the "gift of constant escape," a diasporic life that is always in the dialect of home and homelessness, always preceding migration and held captive by movement (2018:158). Paul Gilroy's 1993 study of the *Black Atlantic* is one the best-known texts conceptualizing global Blackness and diaspora

groups. From Gilroy's work emerges the concept of *rooted routes,* referring to the way that journeys, while creating their own cultural nuance, are always grounded in a priori ways of living and knowing. Gilroy discusses the movement across the Atlantic as creating identities that are "always unfinished, always being remade," which is echoed in Avtar Brah's *cartographies of diaspora* (1993:xi). With the knowledge that "nation-state citizenship for black people anywhere in the diaspora is a fragile and mutable condition," a focus on the diaspora beyond nations allows for more practical forms of solidarity (Davies and M'Bow 2007:21). While colonial forces sought displacement (bringing enslaved people *in*) and post-empires often strive for immobility (trapping former subjects *out*), both of these processes relate to controlling movement for African diasporic peoples. Moten notes that "the problem of the state emerges as a set of questions of travel" (Moten 2018:196). The solution to this state-centric problem can be found in the radical transnational lives of people in the Black diaspora. Writing about transnational formations and diaspora, Kamari Clarke points out that the Black diaspora "exists in the social imaginary and within the cartographies of struggle" (2010:57). These "cartographies" build upon a question posed by Carole Boyce Davies and Babacar M'Bow; regarding (Black) Caribbean resistance: "Why should we give up a continent in exchange for an island?" (2007:41). The diaspora as an island, and its exchange with the homeland, are a way of demonstrating this refusal.

Diasporic thinking and potentiality are a crucial part of the interventions made by the Black geography and geography guraacha. Diasporas are exemplary forms of unmappable or remapped spaces. Cultural hybridities (after K'eguro Macharia) refuse static binaries and singular representations. Black geographies are fundamentally a project of Black diasporic peoples, and the place/meant of these peoples is a diasporic project regardless of the fictivity or acknowledgment of these distant kin. Macharia describes these diasporic hybridities and overlaps as speaking to the queer potential of the diaspora, opening up what he calls "more

capacious models of blackness" (2019:19). Increased capacities make necessary space for the inclusion of a "strategic coalition of diverse interests" across the diaspora (2019:21). As Macharia notes, fictions need not be made explicit to be powerful; we are moving together in this coalition whether or not we stake a claim to this identity.

The theoretical and historical overlaps between Oromo and Black diasporic feminism and women's experiences are visible in multiple dimensions. Both Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins and Oromo theorist Martha Kuwee Kumsa talk about musicians and poets as critical leaders in the community, in Collins' work on Black women intellectuals (2000:17), and Kumsa's discussion of musical troops embedded in the Oromo Liberation Front (1998). While diaspora conditions would change the existence of certain musical groups for example, the ability to convey leadership, intellect, and radical thinking from a creative musical space is a shared experience.

The relationship between the Black diaspora as a movement, and movement within and across other diasporic spaces also bears further explanation. This relationship points to the intersections and competing influences of racism, ongoing colonialism, and its capitalistic co-conspirators. As explained by Stuart Hall:

> These antagonisms are a product of huge, planned, and unplanned world migrations—the greatest and most constitutive cultural fact of the late modern world, the planned and unplanned, forced and unforced movements of peoples, taking up hundreds of years later after that first forced migration of slavery with which modernity began. Here we are in late modernity, and what is happening is exactly the same kind of proliferation of movement as peoples. They are torn apart by poverty, by drought, by civil war, by the international arms trade, and they are moving, moving, moving from their settled homes to somewhere else.
>
> (2021:335)

This nuance is made clearer when framed in specific examples, such as that explored in Tryon Woods' critique of human trafficking; Black diasporic peoples, and women in particular are seen as

> a problem because they have left their space *not* because in so doing, in migrating, they have encountered conditions that violate Western standards of human

> decency or 'human rights.' The black migrant is seen as threatening the degeneration of Western civilization, and is criminalized not so much for what she has or has not done, but rather for who she is *not*– a human subject in the anti-black world– *and* for what she has done as a result: act as if she were one. (2013:131)

While an Oromo person who becomes part of the diaspora is now in a different place, the influences of anti-Blackness and anti-indigeneity still define in some ways their ability to move and build space. Another way to describe diasporic belonging and movement is through the invocation of the "otherwise," as in the edited collection *Otherwise Worlds* (King, Navarro, and Smith[3] 2020). Speaking through the framework and language of the Black diaspora is a way of accounting for the foreclosures, impossibilities, and "cultural interruptions" of slavery and colonialism which brought new "attachments, subjectivities, and identifications" to Black peoples (Walcott 2020:349). Diaspora studies, and in particular Black diaspora studies are a way of looking at the ways Black people enter a "revised Euro-Western body politic" that allows them both to confront and engage with the violence of the nation-state (Walcott 2020:352).

INTERLUDE: OROMO HISTORIOGRAPHY

Revolutionary Era (1970s-1991)

As Haile Selassie continued his brutal reign, he was met by increasing opposition. Over his four decades of rule, despite the disruptions of war and European incursion, Selassie concretized the settler colonial state. By the 1970s, at the end of his rule, a famine coupled by increasing organization from student groups and ethnic-based liberation parties compounded into a coup, and the emperor was deposed in 1974. This change in governance was initially met with cautious optimism by the Ethiopian people, as restrictions were loosened on

[3] I take seriously the claims that Andrea Smith has falsified her Indigenous identity (Reported by *Inside Higher Ed* in 2015 and more extensively in a 2021 *New York Times* article: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/25/magazine/cherokee-native-american-andrea-smith.html). I do, however, believe the insights of the other scholars are still valuable.

language and forms of expression, and minority ethnic groups were given a more equal voice in government. This well-earned optimism would be short lived however, as the overthrowers, renamed as the Dergue regime, soon launched into a period of rule which is known in Ethiopian history as the “Red Terror.”

The immense violence of this era included renewed suppression of cultural expression, forced enlistment of peasants for wars on several borders, land grabs, resettlement programs, and countless other forms of state-sponsored violence. In response to this violence, and to the inherited trauma of colonization and settler colonial rule, the Oromo resistance movement was formalized as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The OLF engaged in an armed struggle against oppressive state forces, however it also fought an institutional and cultural war for equitable access to rights and/ or autonomy. This includes supporting literacy programs, building health clinics, and establishing refugee camps for children fleeing the Dergue.

On top of the forced displacement and movement at home, the Dergue era also led to a swift rise in emigration from Ethiopia; their pseudo-socialist rule gained them allies along the Soviet bloc, opening pathways to exodus and in countries like Slovakia. Furthermore, increasing attention to the Dergue’s cruelty within Ethiopia led to routes to citizenship and refugee status in western nations. While Ethiopia and the Dergue used international military support to suppress their own people, hoarding supplies amongst the elite and failing to mitigate a major famine, Ethiopians fled borders in every direction. Camps alongside the borders of Eritrea, Sudan, and Somalia became sites of increased liberation front organizing and recruitment, as documented by Thomas Zitelmann 1994. By the late 1980s the tenuous grasp the Dergue had on state power was shattered, and the 1990s saw the rise of a (re)new(ed) Ethiopian state. However, as the Dergue overthrow demonstrated, the violent roots of state formation set conditions which, if reconciliation continues to be ignored,

prevent any long-term stability.

CHAPTER IV: SOVEREIGNTY (AND THE SOUL)

While the preceding chapters sought to explore the making of modernity through the paths of imperialism and slavery, the generation of the "afterlives" we live within, this theoretical section is more forward-thinking. Taking up the conditions as they are, two diverging points offer a way to engage with alterities and futurities: decolonization and sovereignty. The former term is of value here primarily because of its direct connection to the entangled legacies of violence we are working within. Decolonizing processes remind us of the presence of the colonial now. Sovereignty, however, is unbound by coloniality. Sovereignty exists prior to the imposition of the empire, and remains embedded within ways of knowing, living, and relating, even if it is continually misunderstood and misidentified by the post-imperial powers.

DECOLONIZATION, LIBERATION, EMANCIPATION

> the essential thing here is to see clearly, to think clearly—that is, dangerously—and to answer clearly the innocent first question: what, fundamentally, is colonization?
>
> -Aimé Césaire (1955:32)

> what's the plan? how long is the dreaming going to last?... i don't trust dreams that don't allow the possibility of nightmares
>
> -Joy James, quoted in dee(dee) c. ardan's 2021 poem "freedom terrors"

Identifying and making sense of the world beyond forms of violence is the work of the decolonial imaginary, a radical vision and way of thinking that is built in the worlds of Fanon, Hartman, and others. Fanon is one of the earliest and best-known writers on decolonization, explaining that "decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder" (1963:36). Similarly succinct, Denise Ferreira da Silva calls decolonization "the end of the world as we know it" (2020:49). Hartman demands a justice that is "less concerned with issues of heroic action… than with the inadvertent, contingent, and submerged forms of contestation" that fill the lives of Black

women (1997:62). Despite the overwhelming power and presence of anti-Blackness, Black women refuse to "exhaust all possibilities of intervention, resistance, or transformation" (Hartman 1997:56). These disorders and disruptions, the liberatory pedagogies and practices which survive the lives and afterlives of empires, are essential to transforming the system as it is.

Decolonization in the settler colonial context is best encapsulated in a footnote of da Silva's discussion of the Dead, through the writings of the Zapatistas. In this description, she clarifies not only the nature of the colonial but also the mode for and challenges of enacting the decolonial. She remarks that a call for decolonization is a call

> for the return of the total value extracted under total violence, which includes the very American (Indigenous) and African (enslaved) lives that were taken as well as the pasts, presents, and futures that were no longer because of their obliteration. Most important, because the Dead (these lives) remain outside the scenes of economic and ethical value, there can be no hierarchy… of suffering attached to the demand.
>
> (da Silva 2020:50)

da Silva allows the immensity of death to take priority. For the Oromo, colonial death-dealing attacked their language and religion, displaced them as refugees and exiles, and turned their home into a factory. Colonialism sought to imprison Oromia. Reaching this decolonial horizon is a project of solidarity, shared love, and collective dreams for freedom.

The decolonial project is thus one in which imagination and new visions are a major part of putting its transformative power into action. Daniel Heath Justice (2012) describes this as the "transformational imaginary," Fanon makes reference to the decolonial sight of the native (1963:46), Sharpe outlines the process of *aspiration,* of "keeping and putting breath back in the Black body" (2016:113), Kelley speaks of those who "imagine a radically different way of living, who dare to invent the marvelous" (2000:28), Tuck and Yang (2012) make it clear that decolonization is not a metaphor, and Garba and Sorentino, in conversation with this un-metaphoric analysis, emphasize the need for slavery's abolition in this future world (2020). With these notions, the radical change that any decolonial, transformative,

liberatory life-giving project requires are brought to the surface. Decolonization is always an intersectional project, even if it is addressed one realm at a time. We must take the risk of "putting flesh on its imagined bones," and consciously push "collectively into the not-yet-known because the now known is so deeply unsatisfactory, to put it that way, and antihuman" (Walcott 2019:404). While colonialism and colonial knowledge systems seek to place bodies out of time and place, a decolonial project creates a new relational logics and conditions. Decolonization "infuses a new rhythm… with a new language and a new humanity" (Fanon 1963:2). This newness is part of a truly revolutionary, reparative struggle. The aim of the revolutionary struggle is a full social, political, and economic decolonization and the institutionalization of a more just system (Nkrumah 1969:16). This revolutionary impetus addresses the "refractory alternative sovereignty that persists in its midst though grounded independently of the settler social contract" as "Indigenous societies have been conquered and contained within settler society but have not been eradicated" (Evans et al 2012:3). As sovereignty is fractured and cobbled back together, a decolonial project must disrupt and reset these bones.

In this sense, I would not frame decolonial thinking as necessarily idealistic, peaceful, or full of an immediate joy. As Césaire directs, the "problem is not to make a utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the past, but to go beyond" (1955:52). I believe decolonization is messy, disruptive, labor-intensive, requires compromise, and is a long struggle in response to evolving and ongoing forms of conquest (King 2019). Liberation is a "demand and not a prayer," and addressing this demand is a complex and multifaceted process (Fanon 1994:100). This is where the risk comes into play. As Wilderson describes of the current world system, "I do believe there is a way out. But I believe that the way out is a kind of violence so magnificent and so comprehensive that it scares the hell out of even radical revolutionaries," what he further describes as an "epistemological catastrophe" (2015:30). In

a less dire description, Wilderson quotes Saidiya Hartman, who notes that "A Black revolution makes everyone freer than they actually want to be" (ibid.). I find it more productive to think through and with transformative intent, taking on the project of "complete disorder" (Fanon 1963:2) with an afropessimist lens, and looking with da Silva towards the end of the world. Decolonizing work takes place every day and in myriad different ways because the process of conquest itself is still happening. As Walcott describes, "To claim that we can diversify, achieve equity, indigenize, or decolonize without taking on the social, cultural, political, and economic arrangements of whiteness is to enter the terrain of lies" (2019:398-9).

The decolonial imaginary works in reframing the past and creating conditions for the future. As McKittrick writes of the historical narratives of enslaved people, there is a need to "imagine those lives that are so inconceivable, so unworthy of documentation, so radically outside our archives, that they are merely psychic impressions of life and livingness" (2014:22). Reading for and trying to dream the freedom dreams of the absented presence of former slaves opens up new spaces and ideas of futurism. Although I invoke, spend time with, and think alongside the value of decolonization as a specific form of radicalism, I do this with the condition that any decolonial or liberatory project also acts to unmake the world that slavery built. Fanon writes that because of colonialism's fundamental inexcusability it cannot be adapted or alleviated; "[n]o spectacular undertaking will make us forget the legalized racism, the illiteracy, the flunkeyism generated and maintained in the very depth of the consciousness of our people" (1994:101). There is a risk in taking an analytical stance that "engulfs slavery by having decolonization stand in for the totality of struggle" (Garba and Sorentino 2020:765). Restated, any discussion of the decolonial is incomplete without a discussion of the *lives* that remain; as Moten says, "we are irreducible to what is done to us" (2018:196).

An example of a Black life despite and against this embedded violence is provided by Black American writer Cortney Lamar Charleston, in his poem "It's Important I Remember That They Don't Have the Tools to Critique Me," a title which in itself is quite illuminating. Charleston recalls being taught the skill of "domesticating rage, confining it inside the margins of the flesh" in order to survive in a violent world (2019). In searching for an escape, he notes that "legal fluency seemed/ the only option for release from this burden because it's the language/ my nemeses speak in" (2019). This language of the nemesis is the language of whiteness, the way of thinking and working in the world that acts as "the foundation and barrier that preempts nonwhite others from the structural arrangements that currently govern human life" (Walcott 2019:394). Whiteness, the structure, the logic, and the phenotype, is the twin face of anti-Blackness. Charleston refuses to forget the power of his Black life, makes clear that he has sets of "tools" that are invisible and unexplainable to those in power. These tools, part of "a nation's worth of people surviving subjugation," are part of the decolonial imaginary, the freedom dreams and visions of the oppressed (Charleston 2019). White supremacist thinking and systems create violent conditions, but from within this underground, marginal, and ignored place, Black life emerges, reinvigorates itself, and thrives. Attention to this marginal, secret power is a project of Black studies, and an essential piece of Black *survivance*. I also think that pessimisms do not preclude or prohibit the futuristic, liberatory alterities that I hope to find. There is a particular decolonial imaginary that I am looking for and working towards, and it will only arrive after a process of repair for historic harms.

SOVEREIGNTY

> Given its dominance and its limits, sovereignty remains a central site of intervention in critical intellectual and political projects, for those whose freedom it enables as well as for those whose freedom it circumscribes or denies. Moreover, law is not the only terrain on which to think through, imagine, and

enact other ways of living justly together.

-Evans, Genovese, Reilly, Wolfe (2012:1)

The concept of sovereignty as it relates to Indigeneity is complicated, particularly in settler colonial states like the USA or Ethiopia. In these contexts, the colonial group attempts to enforce itself as the only "pure" or "true" sovereign body, and all other forms of governance or attempts to hold power are dismissed. The settler's style of nation-state sovereignty is expressed "in the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die," a necropowerful force (Mbembé 2003:11). I understand Oromo liberatory movements as a fight for sovereignty that pushes up and against the state's deadly homogeneity, creating instead a sovereignty that is found "through relation, kinship, and intimacy. And in an act of interpretation" (Byrd 2011:xvi). This sovereignty is best described, after the work of Indigenous legal scholar Sarah Deer, as a "sovereignty of the soul" (2015).

The notion of a sovereign soul, and the necessity in connecting the "soul" of a community with acts of harm committed against individual members emerges from Deer's work with Indigenous communities and violence against women. Deer, writing about the "beginning and end of rape," uses the soul to describe the "deep, fundamental aspects of identity" that connect Indigenous peoples (2015:xvi). Acknowledging the soul of an Indigenous nation recognizes that "forms of violence manifest as systemic yet invisible structures that accomplish the trauma of violence on a large scale" (2015:xvii). The soul is that which is affected by this damage even if the harm comes in ways that are not elucidated through governmental discourse. In trying to explicate the notion of the soul I am reminded of the poetry of Fatimah Asghar: "my people my people I can't be lost/ when I see you my compass/ is brown & gold & blood" (2018). The compass of blood, a compass directed by forces that cannot be neatly split into cardinal directions, is a guide driven by the soul, and its directionality is its own autonomous force.

Bringing the soul into the otherwise lifeless (and life-taking) sovereign form

moves against ways of knowing and analyzing indigenous peoples that have a hyper-focus on what Deer calls "victimization data," including surveys and government documentation which report primarily on women's experiences with violence and crime (2015:3). Deer argues, in response to this data collection trend, that in order to understand harm we need to see more than the numbers, remembering that these data sets are in fact people's lives, and that rates of violence alone are not sufficient to speaking to the way people move through the world in pursuit of reparation and liberation (2015:9-10). The data needed to make this fundamental change are forms of data that see and speak to the harm committed, to the souls of individuals and networks of kinship they are connected to.

Sovereignty in a form that speaks to the soul is also present in African diasporic theorizing, as in da Silva's writing on the limits of racial justice (2013). Da Silva seeks to explicate violence as a part of our ongoing colonial and post-slavery configurations, within which the male body remains the primary form through which sovereignty's juridical, economic, and ethical forms can be comprehended. Da Silva asks, "what might one find if the sexual female body is deployed to guide a reading of… Colonialism, Capitalism, and Patriarchy, upon which ethico-juridical structures, such as the human rights framework, do their work?" (da Silva 2013:48). Da Silva further clarifies that in this situation she does not approach the "sexual as a social category" as this referent is overrepresented in framings of "black and female bodies" but speaks only to "one partial engagement with a rather complex matrix" (ibid.). This matrix takes the sexual as merely one part in the analysis of women's political movements but evokes the sexual body as it remains a "signifier of excess" and "determinant of value" within "colonial and national (postcolonial) economies" (da Silva 2013:49). Even though women are given no place in these national accounts and governing architectures their existence continues to expose

"the violence of racial/ colonial subjugation" (ibid.).

Embedded in da Silva's understanding is the specific way that these determinations and sovereign formations develop within the trajectory from slavery and colonialism into its afterlives. This attention to the Blackness that already lies within the political in order to address racial violence goes against the grain of a political analysis which rests on the presumed certainty of the state. Putting the analysis of colonialism "in another place (the colonial land)" and on another body, "the laboring bodies (the Slave's and the Woman's) that enabled its assemblage" is a way of avoiding a reckoning with the lived experiences and afterlives of the originary harm (da Silva 2013:49). Women's sovereignty from da Silva's perspective is by its nature a rebellious, resistant form.

Expanding on this point, da Silva points out that the masculinized understanding of sovereignty has opened up "the possibility of exploring the female body as referent of unregulated and unrepresentable desire" (2013:48). The presumption in this description is that desire is a form of sovereign behavior and signification, evidence of the possibility for two forms of bodily excess, violence and the erotic. Violence, as evoked here, is a mode of expressing just anger against forms of harm, hearkening back to Fanon's famous writing "on violence." The erotic is a bit more complex to unpack, and its definition brings us to the writing of Audre Lorde (1978), as well as the critical Indigenous studies of Melissa K. Nelson (2017). Lorde's concept of the erotic intends to introduce the spiritual emotional side of life firmly into the political realm. The erotic functions by "providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person" (Lorde 1978). This sense of sharing and relationality is friendship and solidarity more than intimacy.

Bringing the erotic and sensuality into the geographic is a way of recognizing what is already there, that "geography, the material world, is infused with sensations and

distinct ways of knowing" (McKittrick 2006:ix). Starting with the soul could in this sense be understood as its own kind of erotic act, a way of beginning the conversation by prioritizing deep knowing and relationality, one that seeks to understand and through understanding build a force of love. I search for sovereignty in the space created by da Silva's discussion of unregulated femininity and its soulful sovereign potential. Staying with da Silva in the "desire" of the Black woman is part of the pursuit for a "radical praxis" that works against the "effects of subjugation" which mark the nation-state (2013:56). I bring these theories together with Deer's in order to activate the sovereign soul. Through moments of relationality and resistance I attempt to add clarity to meanings of sovereignty as it is lived and realized.

Questions of the political here are also questions of what it means to be sovereign. In both of these frameworks, I step outside and beyond the evocations of these terms that have been steeped in imperialistic theorizing. The primary point of departure perhaps is through the perceived inevitability of the nation-state form. Conversations about sovereignty which begin with the presumption that hegemonic and hierarchal forms of rule are the best, or even only starting point, set up a future system that is remade in this image. This image reflects colonial violence and logics of slavery. Indigenous sovereignty emerges from within a context where "recognition of Indigenous rights is predicated on the cultural authenticity of a certain kind of Indigeneity," one which is consistently and repeatedly undermined (Barker 2017:3).

Sovereignty should be theorized as a form of relationality with particular land-based implications, even as these linkages remain unarticulated or illegible to the state. Barker includes in her theorization of Indigenous sovereignty an explicit reference to "peoples whose territorial rights have been stripped from them," adding that "land-based knowledge and relationships are not predicated on recognition by the state" (2017:5).

Similarly, Byrd describes how the "emphasis in international law on nation-state formations predicates that indigenous peoples remain still colonized liminally within and beside the established geopolitical and biopolitical borders and institutions… as stateless entities" (2011:xix). In this sense, a sovereign soul allows a theoretical misdirection; rather than getting caught in questions of b/ordering and internationally acknowledged "ownership" over the land, the Indigenous soul has a relationship and is subsequently held accountable to certain non-human entities.

Sovereignty as a form that is both of a political nature and always above and beyond that which is political in a strictly statist sense offers an appropriate contextualization for the geographic questions and conversations in this thesis. I would posit, for example, that the acceptance of the (b)ordering of the Horn of Africa, at its origin and in its current upholding, is an imperial legacy that offers an impenetrable physical challenge to liberation practices of all the nations and nationalities whose lands it crosses. The sovereignty of the Oromo cannot be understood in isolation from its Somali neighbors, for example, whose own homeland is split into the nation-states of Somalia and Somaliland, as well as Ethiopia's Ogaden Somali, and pastoral borderlands in Djibouti and Kenya, where Somalis make up significant populations. A sovereignty of the soul both accepts the circumstances as they are and refuses to let them tell the only story. As the Horn is, the borders tell an imperialist narrative dreaming of a people, whose own sovereign soul lives on in myriad forms. As an alternative storytelling, the dismantling or disregard for these borders elucidates a more clearly defined picture of these Indigenous experiences than is otherwise possible.

Questions of sovereignty also take place in a system with "such severe conditions of repression and illusion that reasonable responses embody radical and revolutionary theory and struggle for systemic changes" (James 1999:17). I evoke forms of sovereignty

primarily in ways that disregard or move outside of the nation-state form. As a necessary act by Indigenous peoples in settler colonial societies, Native sovereignty and self-determination express "the need for Native societies to restore the health and prosperity of the people using historical Native ways of governing" (Lee 2008:98). This sovereign practice is not "a quest for power and money" but the act of "reclaiming Indigenous intellectual, political, and geographic space" by prioritizing and invigorating relationality (Lee 2008:99). Lee further clarifies that both "self-determination" and "being Indigenous" can be equated with self-sufficiency (ibid.).

Sovereignty, as described by Holm. Pearson, and Chavis' "peoplehood" model is possessed inherently by people who are "united by a common language and having a particular ceremonial cycle, a unique sacred history, and knowledge of a territory" despite disruptions to these traits (2003:17). Dissecting sovereignty as a principle of Indigenous existence where peoples can determine the course of their future and repair the harms of their pasts, rather than a strictly defined legal framework, is part of the shift from statist and nation-statist approaches to more liberatory decolonizing organizations. This chapter has meant to clarify and elucidate my critical conceptual framework. In other words, when I use terms like sovereignty, empire, and decolonization, the claims come from within this philosophical framework and set of related ideas.

INTERLUDE: OROMO HISTORIOGRAPHY

State re-formation in the shadow of Meles (1991- 2018)

The extraordinary violence of the Dergue era had a distinct influence on Ethiopian politics and state-making after revolution, even though the regime was overthrown in the early 1990s. There was a visceral fear of returning to the imperial hierarchy, and peoples like the Oromo and Tigray who had been excluded from power sought to leverage their role in the

revolution for a more equitable form of governance. The early years of state re-organization, known as the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, included several national meetings, and progressive feelings. However, by 1994, progress had halted, and a centralized party system, ethnic in name and operated by those war veterans loyal to the nation-state, was quickly implemented. In this reshuffling, the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front seized a majority of seats in upper governance, and their own Meles Zenawi rose to power. The Meles Zenawi era is characterized by sham elections, suppression of free speech, mass violence, and state rule consolidated in a system run by Habesha supremacists.

Until his death in 2012, Meles was widely known to the Oromo people as another would-be dictator with blatant anti-Oromo tendencies (Arriola and Lyons 2016). Through his contributions "new concepts were progressively added to the core tenets of ethnic federalism and revolutionary democracy, borrowed largely, but selectively, from the models of the developmental state" (Gagliardone and Brhane 2021:190). Leading up to the 2005 elections Meles declared a ban on "demonstrations and outdoor meetings," a law which critics charge was arbitrary, subjective, and malleable at the hands of a violent state (Aalen 2006:252). The developmental state was increasingly turned neoliberal, linking state economic success with national policies, to the detriment of the citizenry (Aalen 2014; Gudina 2011; Hagmann and Abbink 2011).

A few key events, and their reverberations, led to major shifts in the nature of the Oromo struggle, in addition to characterizing the rise of what might be called the #oromoprotest movement, or the digital organization for Oromo resistance. The implementation of the Addis Ababa Master Plan (AAMP) in 2014, the Olympic finish of Feyisa Lilesa in 2016, and the Irreecha Massacre, later that same year, each significantly affected the Oromo struggle and its global presence. Furthermore, they each represent a moment in the Oromo struggle wherein political, cultural, and economic violences intersect

to create conditions of Oromo life that are precarious and untenable.

While reporting of the event is heavily contested, by the more modest accounts 250 ethnic Oromo people were killed in a single day while celebrating Irreecha, the Oromo Thanksgiving, in Bishooftu, just a few hours south of Addis Ababa (HRW 2017). This event shocked the country into crisis. Protests broke out across the country, and the then-Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn declared a State of Emergency. Utilizing a combination of internet and communication shutdowns and military force, the protests were eventually dampened. But the violence enacted to make this possible, coupled with the traumas of the AAMP and Irreecha, continued to circulate. Speculation on social media and my personal experiences suggest that the mass arrests and violence had a direct impact on increases in young people joining the fight for Oromo liberation. As these youth were subject to state violence in their towns and at their schools, the liberation struggle seemed to be the only home for many young Oromos. The Qeerro/ Qaree or young men/ women's movement orchestrated an increasingly organized protest movement across the government, including widespread stay at home strikes, which culminated in the resignation of PM Hailemariam Desalegn in 2018, and the beginning of the Abiy Ahmed regime.

CHAPTER V: THROUGHLINES: BLACK GEOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE

An understanding of the "terrain of the struggle" (McKittrick 2006) connects the afterlives of slavery and empire, the specificities of the Abyssinian empire, and the resistance practices of Oromo women within these contexts. The usage of this "terrain" is largely metaphoric; understanding the impacts, grammars, and histories of current violence. However, this project also focuses on the meanings of diaspora and indigeneity, both of which involve a more literal relationship to land. Both of these "terrains" are represented by the concepts of imperial spatializing, Black geography, and geography guraacha. The Ethiopian state, as described above, is a settler colony, and the Oromo are Indigenous people who are struggling against ongoing imperialism enacted by this state. In this sense the crucial relationship, or the crux of the relationship, is that of the land. Diaspora positionalities, whether created autonomously or through displacement, similarly have roots in this originary Oromo route. It is due to these legacies that the need for the work of Katherine McKittrick, and the entrance of Black geography as a project of liberation emerges. Black geography, and Oromo notions of *guraacha*, allow us to map the world as it is, as it could be, as it never was, as it might have been, the skies above and beyond the unsatisfactory and unlivable world that Black women inhabit. The tendency may be to reject this thinking as overly romantic, but there is a very practical essence with direct consequences on the forms of governance and relationality that demarcate our everyday lives.

Dis- and relocations create conditions wherein Indigenous people must continually "unmap settler spaces and find new ways to (re)map our communities" (Goeman 2009:179). The need for unmapping can be thought of undoing and denying the state's ability to delineate and define the way people connect with space and place. For Indigenous peoples, their a priori connections to land are often incommensurable with the commodification and dehumanizing tactics of the nation-state, creating an ongoing conflict. Goeman describes the

necessity for nation building in a way that "conceives of space as not bounded by geo-politics, but storied and continuous" (2009:184).

Black geography and imperial spatializing are not the terms of a dialectic but two offerings in an infinite number of ways of reading and understanding a space or people in place, with interpretations that contradict, counteract, and conflict with each other. By allowing for these multitudinal and overlapping meanings I move away from static binary thinking and into a more generative other space. Geography guraacha offers a crucial insight into understandings of Oromia, by reading Oromo peoples lives and afterlives in relation to their Indigenous lands and lives. This reading may not be the only salient critique to consider when, for example, policy decisions are made regarding land use in contested borderlands. Though certain geographical features are neatly defined with distinct historical meanings to Oromo communities, the fluid and mobile nature of southern Oromo settlements lends itself to a reading that considers geography guraacha alongside Somali-specific readings. The intention is to legitimize and encourage spatial relations outside of the static statist model, and in doing so begin to deconstruct and dismantle the forms of harm embedded within it.

IMPERIAL SPATIALIZING

The commodifying, dehumanizing, and violent tendencies of the empire, as discussed at length above in the terms of the afterlives of empire, are described here as *imperial spatializing*. Mishuana Goeman explains *imperial spatialization* as "discourses that ensconce a social and cultural sphere, stake a claim to people, and territorialize the physical landscape by manufacturing categories and separating land from people" (2008:296). In terms of mapping, borders and physical boundaries of space are "drawn through legislation, social policy, and public narration" (Goeman 2009:171). McKittrick understands the space-making of the empire as creating "transparent space," physical and material geographies that are made knowable, and "bound up with ideologies and activities that work to maintain a safe

socioeconomic clarity" (2006:5). This categorical clarity is one of hierarchy and enforced difference. Imperial spatializing forces Indigenous people and arrivants, the descendants of slaves, alike into ostracized, ignored, marginalized, and disrupted positions, both in physical places like cities and within larger society (Byrd 2011:xix). In the nation-state after empire, the practices of "vanishing, classifying, objectifying, relocating, and exterminating subaltern communities, and desiring, rationally mapping, and exploiting the land and resources" are examples of imperial space-making (McKittrick 2006:95). Furthermore, imperial spatializing uses what Fanon describes as the "colonial vocabulary," which transforms the individual into "those hysterical masses, those faces bereft of all humanity, those distended bodies" that the colony is able to write and erase (1963:43). Within this research, I understand *imperial spatializing* to be discourses, physical places, and land relations that are indicative of the violence of the empire, colony, and neoliberal/ capitalist nation-state.

Using a more traditionally geographic framing, Goeman describes at length the relocation and remapping that the empire seeks to implement. These types of projects are a detrimental "spatial reconstruction" where it is "not just the individual that feels displacement, but also the community, who has lost a connection" (Goeman 2009:178). This connection between community and land/ space is denied by the empire in order to justify its extractive cartographic knowledge. McKittrick illuminates the way that racism and sexism produce geographies that are entangled with "disempowerment and dispossession," where "violence operates across multiscalar discourses of ownership" (2006:3). Along this same vein, writing on the "incompleteness of conquest" as a cartographic act, Tiffany Lethabo King describes the ways in which the movement of Black people is seen as a violence or danger to the plantation landscape (2019:75). Maps made to depict this world create certain types of knowledge in building a "recursive feedback loop that justifies and legitimizes itself;" maps become sites where Black fugitivity and Indigenous resistance are both

represented and subdued (King 2019:75). King elucidates the imperial nature of cartography, and the way conquest ideologies continue to reinforce themselves through mapping and subsequent projects of governance, noting that "Colonial European scales disaggregate space into reservations, nation-states, continents, hemispheres" (2019:10).

Imperial spatializing uses a wide range of processes and relationships as it enacts violence. In fully spatial terms, processes and justification behind various forms of containment and displacement, as described above, are a common example. In more subtle terms, notions of time and linearity of history and counting are their own form of space-making. Evans et al. note that "the frontier is a line in time as well as space" (2012:12). Mark Rifkin's text *Beyond Settler Time* is also an examination of this phenomenon (2017). "Settler time" is a way of "narrating, conceptualizing, and experiencing temporality" that implicitly neutralizes the imperial interests and institutions of the "shared present" (2017:viii). Rifkin instead calls for "conceptualizing and tracing modes of Native time that exceed the terms of non-native mappings and histories" and allow for "temporal tensions" (2017:ix). This shift in frames of reference and permissible dualities and connections are part of a project of "temporal sovereignty," which includes time "as narrative, as experience, as immanent materiality of continuity and change" (2017:x). Rethinking time and its weighted materiality reveal the way that epistemologies of past and present in Ethiopia, for example, are central to the myth-making of the empire and nation-state in continuation of the Solomonic Dynasty and legacy of Christianity (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990; Legesse 1973). Rifkin re-reads time in much the same way as Goeman, King, and McKittrick re-read cartography.

As McKittrick discusses, part of the work of Black geography is understanding how non-hegemonic frames of time are linked to uses and beliefs about land. In her work, Canada's refusal to acknowledge their slave-owning past leads to erasure in the future/ present, what she describes as *surprise* about the "ongoing black refusal of a passive

relationship with space and place […] beyond practices of domination" (2006:92). Time measurements have their own way of marking and making particular spaces. Using settler time or imperial linearity normalizes certain narratives, histories, and relationships. Using a sense of time and counting that is based in Indigenous epistemologies instead allows for a re-imagining of what is considered past and historic and facilitates more radical or livable futures and presents. This attention to livability and alternative ways of knowing the world thus brings us to a way of spatializing this thought: Black geography.

BLACK GEOGRAPHY

In conversation with the notion of residence time, the afterlives of slavery, and the broader framework outlined above, McKittrick's notion of *Black geography* (theorized with Clyde Woods 2007 and developed further in her 2006 text) in many ways speaks directly to/ against imperial spatializing As she makes clear, "absence and elsewhere are, in fact, critical sites of nation" (McKittrick 2006:103). Black geography thus works around and through the limitations implemented by the colonial past and ongoing imperialism to create a pathway for conceptualizing experiences that cannot be mapped and bound by colonial cartographies. Black geographies may be thought of as the liberatory approach to world making; they capture the elusiveness of resistance by showing an alterity and un-institutionalized institution that cannot be contained in four cardinal directions, a kilometer, or a heaven above with a line to get in.

McKittrick, throughout the text of *Demonic Grounds,* builds a rich and multilayered description of Black geography. Reading and writing Black geography means working to identify or elucidate a "sense of place" that is influenced by "unspeakable (unmapped) and speakable (mapped) displacements" (McKittrick 2006:105). The speakable, mapped displacements are those of the imperial spaces, discussed above. While transparent spaces and imperial maps of the settler colony city only take note of population demographics and

the stories of the settlers, Black geography demonstrates a refusal of Black erasure (McKittrick 2006:92). paperson's "ghetto land pedagogy" is another type of Black geography, used to think through the entanglements of different post-imperial pathways and the intersections between Black diasporic and Indigenous lives (2014). paperson contrasts settler notions of belonging with the stories of land beyond "cartography's spatial analysis" to include a "temporal analysis implied by Indigenous struggle and Black resistance" (2014:115). The stories in the land and the Black lives on the margins reframe our ideas of spaces to include the absences of the imperial archives. Black geography and Black geographic knowledge attend to the erasures and misunderstandings that characterize narratives of Blackness. Black American poet Nikki Giovanni laments these mis/representations, saying

> I really hope no white person ever has cause to write/ about me/ because they never understand Black love is Black wealth/ and they'll/ probably talk about my hard childhood and never/ understand that/ all the while I was quite happy
>
> (1968; 2005:12)

Black geography is also a necessary diasporic response to overly-nationalized and nation-state based forms of belonging and kinship. Black American organizer Fred Hampton described this divisionary approach as such: "Instead of me goin' to the gas chamber, I'll go to an African section of the gas chamber" (Hampton 1969). Hampton's "gas chamber" is both a literal reference to Nazi internment camps, and a reference to structures like police brutality and racism which have a particular violence in Black diaspora communities. Claiming African diasporic identity without attention to systematic struggles shared by Black peoples across nation-states is at times an ineffective way of organizing and struggling for liberation. As Moten questions, "What if what remains of value in Afro-American thought and life is the example of *life in statelessness* and not at all some supposedly triumphant emergence into citizenship?" (2018:211). Following this logic, for Black diasporic peoples, Black geography opens up a way of knowing and understanding the stateless space in a

generative way. It accepts the lack of state not as a hindrance or limitation, but as its own terrain of struggle, with its own routings and routes forward. Sylvia Wynter, in conversation with Katherine McKittrick, makes similar claims about geography not as a strictly statist project but as a discipline and way of knowing the world that is steeped within these logics:

> This is going to be related in a sense to what you call geography. But then geography will not exist as a discipline *by itself* anymore. A part of it will be physical geography—what was the Earth like before we came on the scene, even before any living beings came? And then, as all forms of biological life exploded, how did our later auto-instituting of ourselves as uniquely hybrid living beings bring this new form of specifically humanized geography into being? But geography will no longer be an *in-itself*; geography also becomes part of the study of our planet's overall self-organizing environmental-ecological system.
>
> (2015:17)

Organized in the afterlives and in the struggle, Black geography opens more expansive epistemologies of space and place.

GEOGRAPHY GURAACHA

Black geography is a particular form of geography, the field of study, expressed through alternate means. Geographic work connects space, place, and the body. Geographies are Black because they are produced and lived by Black people. They are not always *against* the empire, but they are despite, between, underneath, within, and beyond it. They have an inherent sense of resistance only because of the necropowerful forces they exist within. This positioning leads to my turn to the specific, to notions of geography that are not only Black and blackened, but guraacha. This is both a translation and the beginning of a diasporic conversation. Guraacha geographies connect Oromo lives and lifeways from the pre-colonial into decolonial horizons, to land relations and practices that are unbound by nation-state borders. The risk of essentializing is a concern, one made more salient by my non-Oromo identity. I hope to use geography guraacha and these examples to be illustrative but by no means all-encompassing.

The notion of guraacha, as I employ it here, provides a way of complementing and

stretching McKittrick's writing into Oromo worlds. At the most surface level, *guraacha* is the Afan Oromo word for the color black. Looking at guraacha with a more Oromo-centric attention means giving attention to the belief systems and epistemologies that characterized pre-colonial lives. In the Oromo traditional understandings, black is the all-encompassing divinity beyond the skies, and represents purity, holiness, and future (Dugassa 2012; Megerssa 2005). Some prayers of the Waqqeeffanna belief system, the Oromo traditional religion, begin with references to guraacha as the "Black God," as discussed in Bokku (2011). There has also been some work from non-Oromo scholars to invoke the importance of guraacha, most notably in Dei's writing on the decolonial politics of Blackness (2018:125). I see a *geography guraacha* in the threads of Oromo transnational life which together form the complex tapestry of Oromo existence. Fully comprehending guraacha is helped by Gemetchu Megerssa's discussion of Oromo religious epistemologies and the notion of ayana. As he describes in Bartels:

> Everything has a twofold nature: one part we see with our eyes, the other part we do not see with our eyes but by our hearts. This invisible part of them we call 'ayana'. You will never understand us unless you realize that we see everything in this way.
>
> (1983:112)

The ayana of the world is a guraacha knowledge, unseen and perhaps unknown to outsiders. As a non-Oromo researcher, my own ability to comprehend or apprehend the ayana of Oromia may be prohibited. Proceeding with guraacha with this same perspective necessarily demands prioritizing and focusing on Oromo ways of knowing and describing. In Megerssa's dissertation, he captures the notion of guraacha as I hope to use it by referring to the notion of absolute origin, shadow, mystery, and what is not yet revealed:

> This Creator is also frequently referred to as Waaqa Gur'aacha, usually translated as the 'Black God'. This qualification stands however for much more than colour. Gur'aacha refers rather to the idea of absolute origin: Waaqa as the ultimate source of all things. It is that which is in its original state, or put in the words of an educated Booran, 'that which has not been interfered with' (A. Jirma, personal communication). It also carries the sense of mystery, of that which is still in the shadow, or not yet revealed.

(1993:96)

Gadaa Melbaa says that guraacha stands for the unknown, God and the future (1988), and there is also a reference in Ton Leus and Cynthia Salvadori's dictionary of Borana cultural terms that contains the phrase "guraatti lafee Waaqaa," which they translate as the dark blue sky is the bones of heaven (2006). In Daniel Kelbessa's work there is the discussion of Waaqa guraacha living above the seven skies:

> The sky is thus one among the particular manifestations of *Waaqa*. Some informants underscored that although they could not identify the exact location of *Waaqa*, they show the palms of their hands to the face of the sun in supplication. They think that *Waaqa* is everywhere. *Waaqa* is not only imprisoned in the sky but also *Waaqa* is always with us and is quite accessible although we don't see Him.

(2010:65)

Guraacha and its essence are embedded in and influencing each aspect of Oromo transnationality. Further, guraacha as an organizing epistemological concept within Oromo lifeways and worldviews helps to clarify the ways space is known. Guraacha is always beyond the visible, an echo of Oromo elsewheres. Kuwee Kumsa's analysis of Oromo symbology offers a long description of Guraacha, worth quoting at length:

> Gurracha [sic] [Black] symbolizes the future, the unborn children, unborn children of the unborn children, unmade stars and planets, unopened seeds and unopened seeds of the unopened seeds. Black represents the interwoven ends and beginnings [...] Black symbolizes the unknown, the ineffable and the unknowable. Whatever is tentatively and cyclically known is known only in hindsight, as in the proverb: beekanneen gaafa jalaa bahan [knowing is after surviving]. Black represents the various layers of knowing and not knowing, including the ineffable. Black represents the spirit, the pure, the holy, the sacred – Waaqa. Black represents God. [...] Black symbolizes the spirit of uncertainty, not knowing, and vulnerability. The pitch black night is the path of God where people tread in blind trust. Black represents the dark space of peace and tranquility in deep space that, ironically, holds together the disparate agitations and movements of all the brilliant cosmic bodies.

(2013:85)

This rich vision of black and blackness is a way of bridging the multiple layered identities of the Oromo people across borders. Blackness as it echoes from Africa comes to characterize the community in the diaspora. More complexly, Blackness as an imposed way of Othering was both an attack by the state and a hidden source of deep strength.

In the afterlives of empire (Hartman 2007), with the clock set in residence time (Sharpe 2014), there is a pressing need to reformulate the assumptions and ideologies that are embedded in the world. These ways of knowing have unique harms for post-objects and settled subjects like Oromo women. Using Black geography as a framework allows us to elucidate and unpack the ways in which this violence is enacted, the interaction between different domains of rule, and the paths of resistance created within this system. In the following chapter these nuances will be outlined and discussed at length. This analytical model serves to support the later exploration of both forms of containment and displacement, described here as *imperial spatializing*, and the otherwise and beyond of this world, in the language of a *geography guraacha*.

INTERLUDE: OROMO HISTORIOGRAPHY

The Abiy Ahmed Era (2018- present)

As embedded in the prior analysis, the historiography of Oromo-Ethiopia relationships may be grouped in a few approximate eras: Siinqee/ Gadda, colonization and state formation, revolutionary era, and state re-formation. Each of these eras contributes in some ways to the current state crisis. Given the nature of this project, there is neither the time or space to grapple with all these nuances; the primary focus on Oromo women demands closer attention to their lives and otherwise worlds rather than extensive meditation on the evils of elsewhere. Abiy Ahmed's rule has facilitated current immigration patterns which have a direct impact on diasporic movement and community organization.

The appointment of Abiy Ahmed, an ethnic Oromo, to the position of Prime Minister was unprecedented in Ethiopian history. However, in a more global and critical sense, his appointment represents a co-option of the Oromo resistance movement and an attempt to appease dissent without making real changes. The election of Barack Obama as President of

the U.S.A. has been described as a similar phenomenon; a charismatic leader with the right ethnic background to distract from ongoing institutional harm. While Abiy took several important, albeit superficial, steps towards repair, his rule is characterized by the same violences and disparities of his predecessors. A declared welcoming of alternative political parties brings internet shutdowns across the areas of Western Oromia where organizing has started to take place, the repatriation of Oromo liberation fighters was followed by their mass arrests, loosened restrictions on expressions of dissent were met with violence against musical performers, and countless other examples. The postponement of the election, prior to the onset of the pandemic, was also troubling to Oromo people at home and diaspora activists. More recently, the assassination of Oromo singer Haacaaluu Hundessaa in 2020, and the arrest of major Oromo political leaders, followed by protests and subsequent police violence, have created uncertain and unstable conditions.

While offering a full analysis of Abiy's rule in the current era is impossible because of the contemporaneous moment of my writing, evidence offers a warning of what may come next. Fatality tracking by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data group, which triangulates reports of violence across different sources, and shows the patterns of relationship between actors, separates their data collection around Ethiopian police and military violence into two phases, one prior to, and one beginning with the rule of Abiy Ahmed. Comparing these blocks of time is a worrying final product, with comparative rates from nearly 20 years of previous rule and the first few years of Abiy's rule.

This brief historical overview demonstrates how the Abyssinian Empire continues to reproduce itself, with a clock that ticks on in *residence time*. An Oromo Prime Minister can by no measures be equated with reparation, justice, repair, or redress for Oromo people, despite the peace prizes thrust upon him. Even if one is expected to be satisfied with the limited and superficial moves he has taken, the continued celebration of Menelik and Haile

Selassie, and the refusal of the state to acknowledge the role of Oromo slaves in the defeat of the Italians in the late 1880s are a few examples among many of simple steps he could be taking towards a more positive direction, options he disregards. The more immersed you become in Oromo history, the more troubling the current system of governance appears, as its tactics and strategic suppression follow in the footsteps of past violence. The Oromo diaspora has been formed and organized in relation to these shifts in Ethiopian state development.

CHAPTER VI: METHODOLOGIES, FIELDWORK, DATA COLLECTION, AND DATA ANALYSIS

In this section I will detail the methodological plan and analytical tools used in this thesis for gathering and co-producing empirical, ethnographic knowledge. Methods are not a neutral innocent choice. Methodological decisions reflect the researcher's personal identity, relationship to participants and the academy, and the nature of the data produced. I will thus begin by clarifying my individual positionality, the school of thought my methodological decisions are justified by and aligned with, the specific strategies used for fieldwork and data collection, and some background on source selection. The general concern of this research project is to explore and better understand Oromo people's relationships to space and place, in a global context of violent intersecting oppression. While this is in many ways a geographic concern, the "black" geography used here requires attention to sources and ways of knowing that move beyond the spatial, and the methodological guidance reflects this impulse. In order to address the questions of imperial spatializing, Black geography, and geography guraacha that this study is centered around, I use a combination of qualitative methods including sensory ethnography, focus group discussions, and critical discourse analysis. I borrow (or perhaps "steal" as Harney and Moten suggest 2013) these strategies from disciplines across the social sciences and humanities. Through this disciplinary convergence I seek to refute their "disciplining" powers. As elaborated on below, the academy and scientific epistemology that these methodological tools emerge from cannot escape the fact that they often exacerbate the very forms of harm they are seeking to study.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

My positionality as a researcher is embedded within my methodological decision-making and source selection, and a crucial element in addressing the use of autoethnographic methods. The sociocultural and demographic conditions which frame my research work also

impact the way my research has unfolded. As described by Bagele Chilisa, the "researcher's perceptions of reality, what counts as knowledge and values, have an impact on the way research questions are conceived, research approaches, data-gathering instruments, analysis, and interpretation and dissemination of research findings" (2011:21). My reality and view of values and knowledge are shaped by these demographics just as much as my relationality and location. This explanation and exploration are requirements for researchers, according to Bejarano et al, wherein they must recognize "the privilege their colonial heritage bestows and to dismantle the subject/object dichotomy on which all modern science is founded" (2019:8).

Most specifically, I am a Black woman, a dual citizen of Austria and the United States of America. The duality of an immigrant upbringing and the "arrivant" (after Jodi Byrd who reads the term from Kamau Brathwaite) nature of my family's past simultaneously affect my relationality to the settler colonial U.S.A. The racial environment and impact of a Black European identity also contribute to my ways of knowing and seeing. In both formations, a juridical and cultural Otherness demarcates my relationship with the nation-state. While I use rigorous theoretical study to ground my claims, I also believe that lived experience is indeed a further form of study, one that, when combined with academic grounding, strengthens my claims.

My specific relationship with the Oromo people and Oromo studies should also be contextualized here. I lived in Western Oromia from 2014-2017 and conducted interviews with members of the Oromo diaspora in North America in 2018-19 as part of the Peace Corps' Master's International program and my M.S. degree in Sociology. I am near fluent in the Oromo language, with some geographic limitations (having lived solely in Western Oromia, I have lower fluency levels with Eastern and particularly Southern dialects).

Beginning in 2014 with the launch of my upper-level graduate research, I worked with Oromo communities in a variety of ways including education, youth empowerment

programs, and translation support. During the research and data collection for this European-funded MOVES thesis, I worked closely with Oromo diaspora organizations in Western and Central Europe, most significantly, the Oromo Horn von Afrika Zentrum in Berlin, Germany, the Oromo Relief Association (ORA) British and German branches, and the Oromo Women's Association of the United Kingdom. I also formed close ties with the ORA Ethiopia branch. These formal relationships were accompanied by personal relationships with members of these organizations and in the larger Oromo diaspora, as well as Oromia. My use of ethnographic methods is indicative of these affiliations and collaborations. Other links with Oromo organizations include academic associations, though these connections did not have a major influence on my research as such but aided its dissemination.

GROUNDING: DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGIES

In designing and selecting the methodological tools for this research project, I was inspired by the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *decolonizing methodologies* (2012), Katherine McKittrick's *Black geography* (2006), Eve Ewing's (2018) discussion of *liberatory pedagogies*, and the epistemologies and specific struggles of peoples from the Horn of Africa. The impetus of each of these methodological schools and research approaches can be understood by way of the same basic claim:

> current academic research traditions are founded on the culture, history, and philosophies of Euro-Western thought and are therefore indigenous to the Western academy and its institutions. These methodologies exclude from knowledge production the knowledge systems of formerly colonized, historically marginalized, and oppressed groups.
>
> (Chilisa 2011:21)

Chilisa identifies a number of research paradigms that dictate both the methodological approach and the overall philosophical base of knowledge itself. A Euro-Western system way of thinking is "indigenous to the Western academy and its institutions," reflective of "Western hegemonic research practices," and operates "with the values and belief systems"

of elites and former imperialists (2011:23). The issue of Western hegemony, in a broad sense, is revealed through notions of ethics, objectivity, understandings of truth as a moral category, and more practical approaches to data and collection. The process of decolonizing these data collection practices focuses instead on respect, equal rights, naming and claiming, and legacies of colonization, all concerns that relate to the dismantling of imperial legacies in each of their occurrences (Chilisa 2011:24).

Through a decolonizing approach, methodological and philosophical, people living in the wake of colonialism can better understand "the history of colonization, imperialism, and their new form, globalization" and thus better "take into account the past and the present as a continuum of the future" (Chilisa 2011:29). The notion of the decolonial in reference to academic research is of course slightly ironic; the imperialism of the academy has been underscored at length in pieces such as paperson (2010), Harney and Moten (2013), and in my own work with Peter Teunissen and Daniel Cordoba (2020). In its academic ubiquity, the colonial form "continues to endorse a model of scholarship in which the lives of cultural others constitute the legitimate objects of scholarly inquiry and to practice forms of research that distribute power upward, from those being studied to those doing the studying" (Bejarano et al 2019:3). Any moves towards decolonizing and decolonization remain in conversation with the very colonial institutions the research takes place within. Indeed the "academy is structured to defend the colonial approach to scholarship and to privilege those who collaborate to maintain it" (Bejarano et al 2019:4). Using decolonizing as an action verb, following Smith and Chilisa, is meant to underscore that this research work is only a small step in a much larger alteration to the university as an institution (or perhaps a deconstruction of the institution altogether).

All the approaches identified to answer my research questions are either rooted in the lifeways of Horn peoples or have been previously used or recommended by Horn, Black, or

Indigenous researchers. This selection is a key part of what Smith identifies in the very conceptualization of a decolonial research project. Smith identifies "imperialism, history, writing, and theory" as four often overlooked aspects of the research process that despite being constantly present in the lives of indigenous peoples and contributing heavily to the "underlying assumptions, motivations, and values which inform research practices," are not often given careful attention (2012:21). More specifically related to research design is Smith's assessment that research projects in support of marginalized peoples that seek critically to analyze structures do "not help people to improve their current conditions. It provides words, perhaps, an insight that explains certain experiences – but it does not prevent someone from dying." (2012:3). With these points in mind, I understand a few colonial-era processes to be complicit in the deaths and debilitation of Horn people and thus pay specific attention to their dismantling. Following Smith, I address Imperialism, History, Writing, and Theory in my methodological decision-making processes as well as my research work.

I approach *Imperialism* by questioning the legitimacy of colonial mappings and the conventions of data collection that maintain researcher-subject hierarchies. *History* is incorporated with attention to the oft-erased resistance of the marginalized and the legacies of violence that remain. As Hartman advises, this attention involves "turning to forms of knowledge and practice not generally considered legitimate objects of historical inquiry or appropriate or adequate sources for history making and attending to the cultivated silence, exclusions, relations of violence and domination that engender the official accounts" (Hartman 1997:11). Further, a critical attention to history-making shows both the data and difficulty of "history" as such (Bambara 1970:2). As poet Danez Smith writes "history is what it is. it knows what it did" (2016).

Writing is addressed through the selection and privileging of certain texts and textual narratives, recognizing that "the lived experiences, oral traditions, language, metaphorical

sayings, and proverbs of the communities that you research are concepts and theoretical frameworks that can inform the research process" (Chilisa 2011:32). Further relevant to writing is the way terms are used and explained. In this project, I make a crucial differentiation between indigenous in this sense, as in born of a particular place or people, and (capital I) Indigenous. Indigeneity written as a capitalized, proper noun, is used to refer to knowledge systems and people with kinship relations and sacred histories connected to particular geographies. Oromo Indigenous religion describes relationships of kin and community to certain bodies of water, for example. This differentiation offers a way of legitimizing other relationships, while foregrounding the role of the nonhuman in delineating Indigenous formations.

As a methodological and linguistic decision, this attending to both the indigenous and Indigeneity opens up a decolonial approach that can be adapted to a range of philosophies. In building a *Theory* and theoretical model, I remain in conversation and draw inspiration from anti-colonial thinkers. This intersectional approach thus borrows aspects from Sociology, as well as more loosely from Critical Indigenous, Geography, and Literature Studies. As Evans, Genovese, Reilly, and Wolfe explain, the "ability of disciplines to speak with each other is essential to understanding the past and how it both enables and fetters the pursuit of justice in the present" (2013:1). Each of these contentions shares an attention to the way power may be (re)distributed across the research process.

MATERIAL SELECTION

While the methodological praxis, form of analysis, and theoretical groundings are also highly influential, it is also necessary to elucidate the source material itself, how the conclusions I have drawn came to be, the means of selection, and the way these items relate to the larger project. Incorporating lyrical, textual, and photographic data as source material follows the work of theorists and practitioners alike, who point out the ways in which Black

culture can only ever be fully understood or made sense of by distinguishing its "outputs" from amidst the violent colonial inputs within which they are produced. Cortney Lamar Charleston reminds us "a nation's worth of people surviving subjugation is more science than/ art anyway" (2017). Fanon, writing for the African revolution, cautions that "Racism bloats and disfigures the face of the culture that practices it. Literature, the plastic arts, songs for shopgirls, proverbs, habits, patterns, whether they set out to attack it or to vulgarize it, restore racism" (1964:37). Amiri Baraka goes further, with his writing on the Blues Aesthetic providing useful context for making sense of the way the productions of Black people are ever reflexive of our histories. As he notes, the "Blues as a verse and musical form is one thing, but what needs to be gotten to here is the whole, the aesthetic overview, the cultural matrix that the Blues is but one expression of" (1991:102). Baraka describes Pan-African culture as comprised of "polyrhythms," an "acknowledgement of several levels or sectors or 'places' or life *existing simultaneously"* that run deeper than "only music, the clothes, body or hair adornment, graphic or verbal arts of the people" (1991:104-105).

DATA COLLECTION

Alternative maps

The overarching methodology is a toolset I name "alternative maps" and it builds on work conducted by McKittrick in her text on Black geography among other studies. Black geography, as put forth and described at length by McKittrick, is not contained as a single methodological form. Rather, Black geographic methods are ways of questioning space and spatial knowledges that evolve in relation to each other.

The role of geography in qualitative practice is underutilized, as discussed at length by Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie. Though place is a linkage across theories it is rarely engaged with sufficient complexity. Instead, the "where' of qualitative research" becomes lost among questions of transnationality and global flows (2015:633). Tuck and

McKenzie propose instead a practice of "critical place inquiry" made up of a "set of concepts, practices, and theories which move beyond understandings of place as a neutral backdrop, or as a bounded and antiquated concept, or as only a physical landscape" (2015:635). "Turning toward place" demands closer engagement with the role of "land, water, environment," "ongoing displacement and dispossession," and "acknowledgement and reparations based on these histories" (Tuck and McKenzie 2015:635). The key facets of this methodological approach with relevance to this project include "understanding places as both influencing social practices as well as […] (re)shaped through practices," conceptualizing the dynamic relationship between time and space, addressing the spatial and place-based nature of colonialism, including the non-human as part of the land "as they determine and manifest place," and taking "seriously the conceptual and empirical contributions of Indigenous epistemologies of land" (ibid.). As specific examples of mappings which move beyond statist and static forms, the work shared through the Decolonial Atlas collective, such as Micronesian stick charts, provide a concrete alternative. More poetically and metaphorically, I recognize the poetry of May Ayim ("borderless and brazen" (1990) and the visual ethnography of Asli Duru's walk down the shore (2020), as mapping projects with specific geographic and spatial aspects.

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

The following three methodological tools all fall under the general label of ethnography. I do contend that, like other scientific data collection, "anthropology remains Eurocentric, even as many individual anthropologists in their work struggle against Eurocentrism and its consequences" (Bejarano et al 2019:3). Despite this history and ongoing taint, I feel that ethnography offers pathways for producing narratives that express more fully than other disciplinary routes the transnational relationalities built by the Oromo people.

Sensory ethnography

Sensory ethnography, as I use it, involves attention to the scene beyond the visual. Some of the more straightforward forms of sensory ethnographic data collection include photography, video prompts, and an analysis of scents and sounds. Within this thesis project, these sensory engagements will be described (such as photographs of a diasporic space), compared, and combined to create a more holistic understanding of how home, movement, and diaspora spaces are lived for Horn peoples. I understand sensory ethnography, following Kathryn Linn Geurts (2003), Sarah Pink (2012), and Paul Stoller (2012). Pink describes sensory ethnography as "based on an understanding of the senses as interconnected and interrelated," not simply focused on a particular sense organ (2012:3). Though related to more common ethnographic tools and disciplines, sensory ethnography has a particular use in understanding places, spaces, and imagination. Pink specifically differentiates sensory ethnographic knowledge from more general participant observation by conceptualizing the interview itself "as a multisensory event" (2012:3). In my attempts to construct or understand diaspora, using a sensory approach has the potential to unlock diasporic linkages that a question-and-answer form would not elucidate. Geurts writing on "embodied consciousness" in a Ghanaian migration context is an example of this kind of work (2003). Stoller also notes that sensory descriptions have certain weight in transnational contexts and serve to improve "the clarity and force of ethnographic representations but also the social analysis of power relations-in-the-world" (2004:817).

Autoethnography

Autoethnographic exploration and methods are interspersed throughout this research project. In line with questions of researcher positionality, the role of the researcher is made explicit throughout the work. In a more critical vein, autoethnography also interrogates social

relationships that I am caught up in. Autoethnography in more informal terms is reflected in Zora Neale Hurston's writing on memories, and the way they temporalize and add interpretive power to memories (2006). This methodology is similar to what Elliot Honeybun-Arnolda calls "spontaneous prose" which draws on literary tradition as a way of informing note-taking and personal reflection in the field (2019). Through the initial act of auto-reflection and then analysis of the note-taking and observational process, researchers can think through and better process overlapping occurrences.

ANNOTATION

This methodological tool is a speculative revisioning of data collection. I understand annotative practice in the traditional organization of the term, a way of noting, commenting on, or critiquing a source. Annotations personalize a text, interjecting the participant as an author and commentator in conversation with the original material. Annotations may be corrective or questioning, a series of question marks scribbled in the margins of the page or section of text crossed out. Annotations may be dreamy or imaginary, linking the material in sight to dreams of an elsewhere. Annotation puts trust in the annotator as a legitimate and knowledgeable expert. In practical terms, Annotation is used in this thesis to critique and contextualize ethnographic data.

ARCHIVAL WORK

One set of sources which I use throughout my work also draws upon particular methodological tools and ways of working: the archive. I posit, thinking with scholars such as Saidiya Hartman, that there are ethical frameworks that accompany archival research. When I refer to the archive or archival documents, I refer primarily to the Oromo Horn von Afrika Zentrum in Berlin, Germany, and its collection. I have discussed the Oromo Center in another paper (Bass 2020). To contextualize the text and collections, the Center was built in 1985 in

the Wedding area of Berlin, Germany. The archival collection, developed by Taye Teferra Guma and managed currently by Aster Gemeda, includes journals and other publications produced by Oromos during the Ethiopian civil war of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. These range from the journals of the Union of Oromo Students of Europe and North America to careful documentation of deaths during conflict and photographs of aid distribution in the deserts of Sudanese refugee camps.

Archival methods are also applicable to source materials and discussions of the "archive" as it refers to the larger body of knowledge and historical artifacts that comprise Oromo institutional existence. With this latter archive, that of the institution, I keep the work of Hartman in mind as she points out that "writing the history of the dominated requires not only the interrogation of dominant narratives and the exposure of their contingent and partisan character but also the reclamation of archival material for contrary purposes" (1997:10). Further, as she asserts, documents "although claimed for purposes contrary to those for which they were gathered, nonetheless remain entangled with the politics of domination" (Hartman 1997:11).

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The final method, which can be loosely understood as critical discourse analysis, is a way of contextualizing texts, films, and other sources, with attention to the actors and their distinct power relations. I understand these texts and their usage by following Eve Ewing's constructs of poetry's liberatory potential. Ewing describes poetry as "a tacit recognition of the fact that worthwhile knowledge can be derived from one's own experiences," "a manifestation of women's (especially Black women's) pragmatic strategies for navigating a patriarchal world while simultaneously valuing our own inner lives," and a means "through which we imagine ulterior lives of liberation" (Ewing 2018:198). Ewing further notes that poetry is a way of uniting the "tripartite entities of language, idea, and action," thus adding a

"useful third party to the dialectical paradigm of empirics and theory: imagination" (2018:199). Though poetry is only one type of source, the general focus on these "manifestations" and their legitimacy is also demonstrated in analysis of other genres of writing and film. Returning to Ewing's point about imagination, incorporating creative works is a way to tap into the decolonizing potential and existing decolonial imaginary that exists in diaspora space. To play off an example used by Ewing, while interviews may serve to find out *what is,* looking at alternative and more indirect forms of expression may be a better way of finding out *what may be* (2018:199). Discourse in my usage follows the description provided by Stuart Hall, of discourse meaning "not a set of textual pyrotechnics but rather an overall view of human conduct as always meaningful" (2017:31). This method is most visible in the analysis of Saaro Umar's poetry found in Chapter 11.

CHAPTER VII: ANALYTICS OF (BLACK) SPACE AND PLACE

In this chapter I explicate an analytical framework, understanding spatializing as a lived experience that is comprised of specific economic, sociocultural, and institutional domains. Assessing and understanding these elements and their relationship connects the intangibility of space-making to the concrete historical and material conditions that contributed to their formation. This analytical model translates the theories described in previous chapters into concrete terminologies that unify the overall argument.

ANALYTICAL MODEL

The basic structuring and terminology of the model both draw heavily from the work of Erik Olin Wright and his conceptualization of class consciousness. By reading Wright within the context of Black diasporic thinking, I seek to turn his basic structure into a more intersectional framework, and more effectively highlight strategies of resistance. I will thus begin by summarizing the central aspects of Wright's work and model, then proceed into my adaptation of it and the primary divergences. The model and table of corresponding terms can be found below.

Wright defines a *class structure* as the organization of relationships, embedded in systems of direct and indirect power, which determine group interests (1997:378). A structure might include, for example, the cultural norms that define a particular place, influenced by pop culture, historical traumas, and other intersecting relations. Wright identifies three "modes of determination," which describe or explain the way particular structures interact with each other: limitation, selection, and transformation (1997:387). *Limitation* is the process of imposing limits or boundaries which thus delineate the (im)possibility of certain practices (ibid.). *Selection* is understood to be the "limits within limits," and emphasizes the interaction between distinct structures seeking to impose their own limitations, as well as the response (Wright 1997:388). The third mode of determination, *Transformation,* refers to

practices which act to transform (and presumably improve upon) the imposed limits (ibid.). These modes of determination are the forms of power relations between structures. For example, a neoliberal economic system places *limits* on cultural expression, but a radical reorganization of an institutional structure could act to *transform* neoliberalism's power.

Structures are thus connected directly to what Wright names *class location*. A "location" is positioned within a set of relationships and encompasses an individual's particular subjection or resistance to larger mechanisms (Wright 1997:376). A *location* is the space created by the broader structural (economic, political, cultural, etc.) elements. Locations set limits on the credibility of theories and values; they add the adjectives to different types of consciousness (Wright 1997:390). Location can thus be thought of as the set of conditions that define a group's position in society; the precarious citizenship status of the refugee is a *location* with economic, institutional, and cultural structures surrounding it. Wright applies the term *class consciousness* to the "central tendencies" of a collectivity or organization (1997:382). The elements of consciousness include "beliefs, ideas, observations, information, theories, preferences" which are part of the way individuals or groups make decisions, even if they are not verbalized (1997: 383). Thus *consciousnes*s, by Wright's definition, is not inherently radical, or liberatory; it is merely the shared beliefs or feelings that influence a certain group. Instead, Wright makes clear that consciousness needs an adjective (pro-, anti-, etc.) in order to be placed into a particular typology. For the purpose of this work, I have largely understood group consciousness through the evocation of Oromumma; the underlying experiences, contexts, and interpretations which make up Oromo-ness. This typology of consciousness, embedded in Oromo epistemologies, may be seen as somehow inherently pro-Oromo, but is also a more general referent.

While Wright's work is critical to understanding the processes at play, I make some alterations the better to situate this understanding in "residence time," with attention to the

way anti-Blackness and colonial ideologies are still primary driving forces of the entire process (Sharpe 2014). Though I follow Wright's frame of *modes of determination* to look at the relationship between structures, I focus on a few of the primary structures, named here as *economic, institutional,* and *sociocultural*. In understanding the way that the three structures operate, I diverge somewhat from Wright by formulating that they impose *reciprocal limitations* on each other. This is to say that no domain is consistently limiting the others, rather they serve mutually to limit and alter each other. There may be particular examples wherein one domain is overwhelmingly the source of oppression, but in general terms the three areas are deeply intertwined.

Furthermore, while I agree with Wright's premise that groups select from within limits, I understand these "selections" to be *negotiations* wherein decisions are made to negotiate or survive within necropowerful forces. Negotiations are sometimes instances of seeming neutrality, or places where forces work almost equally in both directions. Sharpe, for example, differentiates between experienced, recognized, or lived subjection and living *in* subjection (2016: 4). Recognizing the oppression around you and its structural existence (lived subjection) is a necessary precursor to transformation, whereas living *in* subjection only leaves room to negotiate with what is around you. Understanding these interrelated processes as creating a type of "location" points to their theoretical positionality within a series of relationships

STRUCTURES

> In the newest language of the social sciences we might say that governance is generated by a refusal among biopolitical populations. Or perhaps by the self-activity of immaterial labor. But maybe we would like to say it is provoked by the communicability of unmanageable racial and sexual difference, insisting on a now unfathomable debt of wealth.
>
> -Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013:53)

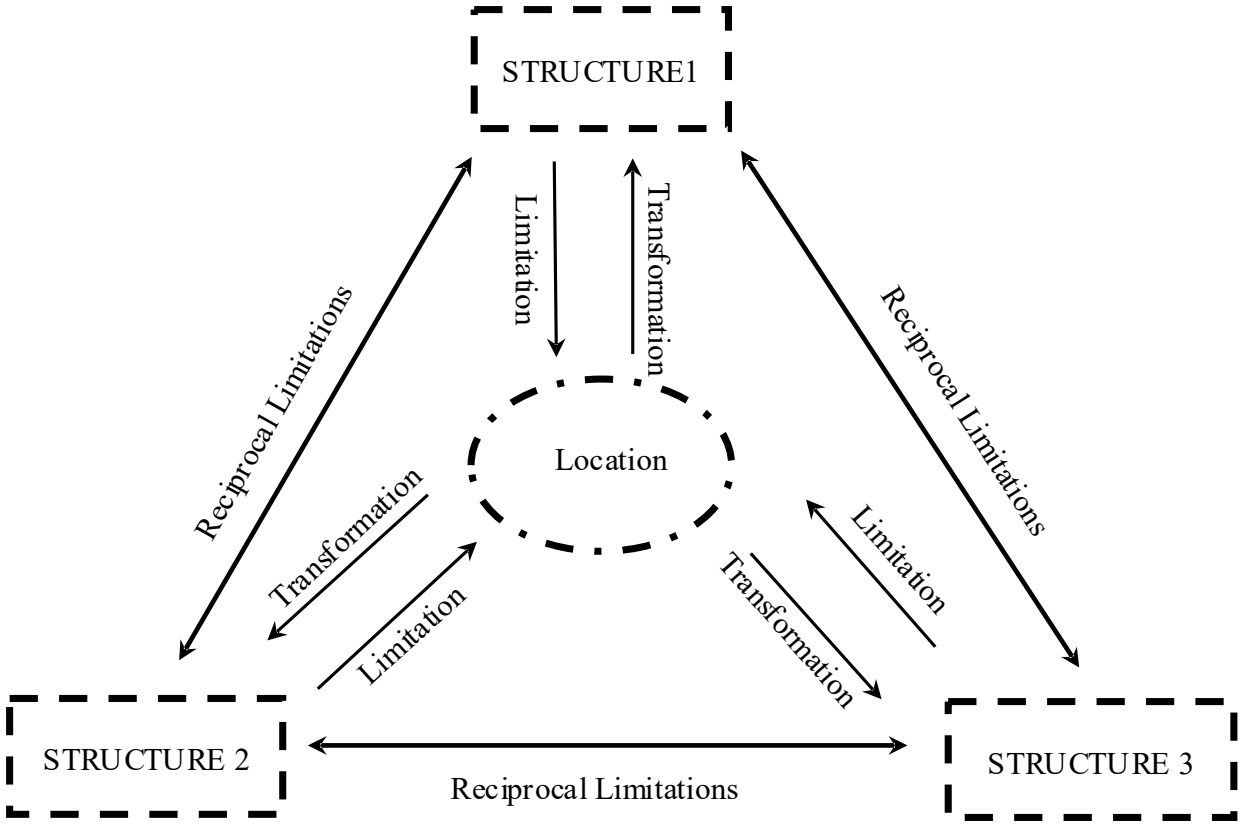

Figure 1) Analytical model

There are three structures which interact and intersect to determine the positionality and location of the center of the model: institutional, sociocultural, and economic. These structures organize relationships and work to determine group interests. These distinct forms are similar to a distinction made by Denise Ferreira da Silva between the juridic, economic, and symbolic "architectures for the expropriation of the productive capacity (the productive potential) of occupied lands and enslaved bodies" (2014:83). Analyzing the domains as separate entities is a way to explicate their nuances, not deny their connections. I follow what Stuart Hall calls the "sociological" approach wherein the structural aspects of society are "complex ensembles, composed of several different structures, none of which is reducible to the other" (2017:197). Further, as Audra Simpson notes, "Structures move through time and place and if you pay close attention, you can actually *see* structural activity" (2016:web). In

this section, the structural forms and their moves between oppression and liberation will be explored.

INSTITUTIONAL DOMAIN

The institutional domain has been explored, to some extent, in Chapter Three in the language of colonialism and empire. Rather than repeating this discussion, this section addresses the institutional elements that institute and uphold systemic violences. This domain encapsulates the ordering forms, bodies, and policies that govern and organize society including systems of education, infrastructure, police, and laws. Framing this domain as institutional, rather than merely political or juridical, opens possibilities for understanding the way oppression is enacted and disseminated, as well as the way resistance takes shape. The primary organizing concepts within this domain are *necropower* or *necropolitics, bureaucratic terror,* and *institutionalization of relations.*

Institutional oppressions

> The paradox of political corruption is that it is the modality through which brutal institutionality is maintained.
>
> -Denise Ferreira da Silva (in Harney and Moten 2021:7)

> One need not harbor any racial animus to exercise racism in this and so many other contexts; rather, when the default settings have been stipulated, simply doing ones job—clocking in, punching out, turning the machine on and off—is enough to ensure the consistency of white domination over time.
>
> -Ruha Benjamin (2016:148)

Achille Mbembé's work on *necropower* begins with a disclaimer distancing his concept and the corresponding politics from more traditional accounts that "locate sovereignty within the boundaries of the nation-state, empowered by the state, or within supranational institutions and networks" (2017:11). While the role of the state does come into play, turning away from state-centric relations makes more lucid the way the human body is

"inscribed in the order of power" (Mbembé 2017:12). Necropower is the institutional control over the bounds of life and death, the judication of who can live. It also shows the limitations and excesses of politics, remaining nonchalant "toward death even as it seeks out killing as a primary aim" (Puar 2017b:35). In less extreme forms of institutional rule, there is still a strong presence of subordination and control. Mamdani describes the re-organization of nation-states after colonialism as undertaken with the recognition that that if native resistance "could not be smashed frontally it would have to be fragmented through reform" (1996:90). This fragmentation can also be seen as the moment of the colonial reshaping itself into its post+ colonial form (drawing on the work of la paperson, the + in the term post+colonial indicates the "place, people, or cultural arena where colonial activity or duties are carried out" (2010:8)). Even after the colony's end, settlement made a life after the colonial moment an impossibility. Institutional forms guided by oppression use liberal notions of false equality to operate, failing to give attention to notions of reparation or justice. These subordinating practices, wherein social life is captured and comprehended as a governing or institutional form, are named here the *institutionalization of relations.* Prejudice becomes hidden under bureaucratic neutrality.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore's "fatal couplings of power and difference" are another way of critiquing such institutional overlaps (2002). In these doomed and dooming relations, racism takes a spatial shape, turning into a "death-dealing displacement of difference into hierarchies that organize relations with and between the planet's sovereign political territories" (Gilmore 2002:16). As Gilmore notes, even when the state attempts to negotiate with its violences, or the "good times," it "remedies exclusion by recognizing the structural nature of racism and institutionalizing means for combating its effects" (2002:21). These "remedies" include voting rights and bans on more formal types of discrimination in public sector work. However, these remedies are reformist at best, and when "bad times" come are easily shifted

into formalized inequality and repression (ibid.). A further institutional issue, used to limit the autonomy and potential freedom of marginalized people, is *bureaucratic terror* and subordination through institutional roadblocks. The seemingly quotidian nature of paperwork, data collection, and statistical representations have real impacts on those on the margins. For marginalized peoples in these post-empire states, bureaucratic terror takes the form of Moten's institutional "wilderness," which is structured and structuring, even as it appears untamed and unplanned (2018:xi).

Institutional resistance

Organized resistance to institutional violence captures the liberatory potential of institutions and modes of organization, and uses this potential to rethink sovereignty. Byrd notes that "interpretation is an act of sovereignty" as practiced by the "imperial hegemon that uses juridical, military, and ontological force to police interpretation and interpellate what is and is not seen, what can and cannot be said" (2011:222). From the positionality of the marginalized, "sovereignty is found in diplomacy and disagreement, through relation, kinship, and intimacy" (Byrd 2011:xvi). Through these more fluid and intangible modes of relation the interpretive potential is not only limited to those with state-sponsored sovereign power. Instead, a liberatory institution is sovereign in its ability to prioritize and legitimize community, relationality, and mutual engagement as key principles in governance and determinants of sovereign rule. Angie Morrill, Eve Tuck, and the Super Futures Haunt Qollective describe this type of indigenous justice-seeking as *shady sovereignty* (2016:7). Shady sovereignty goes beyond the nation to put in action "a stateless and constant form of passage. A passage that is always passing" (Morrill, Tuck, SFHQ 2016:8). In this shady, haunted space, sovereignty is worked for and waited for, it is passed along. In the nothing-space, the "aching archive," resistance grows alongside the power structures that suppress it

(Morrill, Tuck, SFHQ 2016:2). Such forms of shady resistance practices work towards the abolition of frontiers, the abolition of the colonial zones, and the removal of the physical limitations imposed by settler rule (Fanon 1963:41). There can be no reforming of an institution built upon and sustained by violence; it is only through its destruction and disordering that we can fully imagine its otherwise. Institutional transformation requires facing the "problems of building, of organizing, of inventing the new society that must come into being… In every *wilaya* [Algerian Arabic word for province], cadastral plans are drawn up, school building plans studied, economic reconversions pursued" (Fanon 1964:103). These plans are reparative restructurings and create the foundation of transformative institutions.

To conceptualize and recognize African diasporic institutional forms is evocative of a process that Nikki Giovanni calls *certification* in her description of the "Black university." The Black university is a place "where Black people gather" and where "feeling and information are being transmitted" (2005:168). This structure is built and formed through mutual understanding and *certification*, a process that resonates with other forms of community building. As she describes:

> Ever try to organize in a Black neighborhood? The first thing that must be done is that you must live there, as the residents live there. […] The first thing the residents want to know is how long you been here; how long you gonna stay? That's asking you for certification. When you want to join church they ask, when did you find Jesus? They ask you to certify yourself. (2005:168)

The Black University, as such, is in conversation with Fanon's building processes, and indicative of an act of sovereign institutionalizing. The creativity of this knowledge resonates with Loyd Lee's analysis of sovereign institutions. Lee imagines a reimagined juridical structure that "incorporate[s] some historical aspects of governance along with using the creative mind to imagine a government that encourages harmonious cooperation, coexistence founded on respect for autonomy, and the principle for self-determination" (2008:106). The value of these institutions is the way their organizing power allows socially marginalized

groups to find ways of socially and emotionally structuring their lives, providing services, and uplifting the collective. Institutions in this sense offer a type of "home" or attachment that supports those living in legacies of violence and segregation (Ewing 2018:128). Within these certified institutions marginalized community members find a love and "a version of oneself—a self understood to be a member of a community, living and learning in relation to other community members" (Ewing 2018:131). As a transformative move, the reorganization and community that come from these autonomous spaces challenges the brutal normalization process of other juridic forms and offers more relational alterities.

SOCIOCULTURAL DOMAIN

Across the three domains, sociocultural structures can be the most challenging to unpack, as they operate without clearly elucidating the boundaries and limitations they operate through. The theoretical discussion of Blackness, Indigeneity, and feminism conducted in Chapter Two offers an introduction into these structural forms they perpetuate and condition the larger context of the research. Oppression in the domain of the sociocultural is subtle, nuanced, and shifty; it changes its name and face, and rewrites the words as soon as they are put on paper. Key facets of the sociocultural, as I understand them, include tradition, practices, lifeways, language, religion, and shared inheritances. They also resonate with what Stuart Hall describes as "discourse," encompassing "that which gives human practice and institutions meaning" (2017:31). These embedded values and ideas are expressed and understood for their discursive impacts. Discourses as sociocultural practices create a "*system of meaning,* a way of organizing and meaningfully classifying the world" (Hall 2017:33). A shared cultural inheritance, for example, may include a connection to particular land with religious connotations or a shared trauma of forcible expulsion. Frank Wilderson understands the realm of the "civil," a related construct, to include private associations, ideological connections, and the "terrain" of positionalities (2003:229). Cultural

norms and structures are guided by interlinked epistemologies. Though there is some globality to notions of race emerging from slavery, the national, regional, ethnic, and other nuances and meanings are best expressed collectively as a "grammar." Hortense Spillers describes an "American grammar" comprised of "dominant symbolic activity" and a "ruling episteme… grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation" (1987:68). The American grammar has relevance to the larger notions of an insidious global white supremacy that haunts the afterlives of slavery and Blackness in the diaspora.

In a related framing, Denise Ferreira da Silva writes of a "twentieth-century political grammar," made up of a "regimen of specification governed by the notions of race (scientific signifier) and nation (historical signifier)" (2015:33). Both this particular nation and its relatives begin with a "rupture" of "massive demographic shifts" and "violent formation of a modern African consciousness" (ibid.). Grammars are evoked by Spillers to understand how captive Africans were "culturally 'unmade'" in the "*nowhere"* space of the Atlantic (1987:72). Spillers' discussion delves carefully into the making of gender in particular, and the way culture connects "historically ordained discourse" to "*representational* potentialities" (ibid.). Further, within these "public discourses," "social and human differentiation" are disappeared in favor of a personhood that was reified in the "juridical codes of slavery" (Spillers 1987:78). In the case of oppressive structures, limits are imposed in racialized, gendered, and violent ways. For the Black diasporic person, civil society is characterized by a "grammar of suffering […] that cannot be spoken because the gratuitous terror of white supremacy" relies on the "irrationality of white fantasies and shared pleasures" (Wilderson 2003:230.) This is the white supremacist and anti-Black nature of civil society in the afterlives of empire. Made more specific, these terroristic and terrible fantasies are made into material facts through practices of *cultural imperialism* and *other-ing*.

Cultural imperialism works, in part, by creating an "atmosphere of myth and magic"

that is transformed into an "undoubted reality" (Fanon 1963:55). This atmosphere or social order makes it both permissible and logical for certain practices and forms of behavior to be promoted at the expense of others. Groups that are subjected to cultural imperialism and oppression thus face "paradoxical oppressions:" either they are forgotten entirely, "stamped with an essence" that defines them as remarkable or deviant or boxed in by stereotypes that "so permeate the society that they are not noticed as contestable" (Young 2011:55). Whereas cultural imperialism seeks to position the individual inside a cultural framework that is irrelevant or outside of their lived experience, *Other-ing* (similar to the economic work of marginalization) seeks to erase them entirely. da Silva posits that the "other" may be understood through the equation of the "racial body= value + excess" (2013:49). This racial body as Other emerges from the "indirect three-way conversation about slavery, blackness, and violence" and lingers at the center of the modern cultural matrix (ibid.). Further, the implications of this equations are scenes of violence that must be practically and discursively navigated; understanding and taking seriously their harms without getting lost in the rehearsal (da Silva 2013:50, with a discussion of Saidiya Hartman's 1997 book *Scenes of Subjection).* The Black Other is a "body that can only signify the juridico-economic architectures of Slavery, Patriarchy, and Capitalism" (da Silva 2013:52). This signification as an always-Other is embedded into the force of cultural imperialism

Patricia Hill Collins' concept of "controlling images" and the archetypes of Black women are an example of the exclusionary nature of Other-ing (2000:69). By forcing the customs and epistemologies of people into the Other, those people can be erased and forgotten. Through these tactics of erasure, omission becomes a practice and pattern of oppression (Collins 2000:5). Other-ing as a form of cultural exclusion and silencing is what Donna Baszile describes as a "white supremacist (patho)logic; they don't have to silence you, because you are willing to do it for them and on account of them" (2018:272). This silencing

takes place in daily lives as well as in the narratives and archives. Byrd describes how cultural imperialism and Other-ing work together to create "cultural productions and political movements" that are born of the "violences and genocides of colonization" and perpetuate their harms (2011:xii). Thinking back to Hall's discourse, cultural values become intangible and obfuscated methods for imperial forces to maintain structures of oppression. Cisheteropatriarchal knowledge is a highly present form of such control and logic. These features work within the "discursive machinery" of imperialism to "confront, contain, and abject difference and alterity" (Byrd 2011:148). It is with this turn that we connect with Hall's "discourse," Wilderson's "grammar of suffering" (which draws from Spillers), Baszile's (patho)logic, and Collins' and da Silva's Other. Thinking alongside these pieces and following the language of Spillers, I use the idea of "grammar" to express the kind of sociocultural ordering and structuring patterns that maintain and justify societal inequalities.

Sociocultural negotiations

In between grammars of Othering and oppression and a more transformative sociocultural structure, a *blues epistemology* emerges. As a liminal but important mode of moving out of oppression and transforming the conditions of oppression, the *blues* are a site where negotiation and potential transformation take place. More specific to African diasporic people, the notion of a *blues aesthetic* (Baraka 1991) or *blues epistemology* (Byrd 2011) presents the potential to deny cultural imperialism, othering, and silencing. It is also a way of *reclaiming* the outsider position as a way of resisting its oppressive tendencies. Byrd's definition of this epistemology connects slavery and its descendants with American Indians, forming a "radical reimagining of how peoples exist relationally within the place-worlds located in the stories we tell and the songs we sing" (2011:122). As a way of knowing the world and each other, this blues epistemology leaves room for grievability while articulating

its own type of sovereignty away and beyond the nation-state. Baraka sees the blues aesthetic as always a Black aesthetic, a "cultural matrix" for the lives of African diasporic people (1991:102). This cultural matrix negotiates with violences and refuses subjugation, even if it does not target directly the originary structures.

Sociocultural transformations

While sociocultural structures are subjected to ongoing and constantly evolving forms of oppression, there are also strengths through which communities and peoples work to transform their conditions. Gerald Vizenor crafted the concept of *survivance*, survival and resistance, to encompass cultures that go beyond a response to violence to act as an "active repudiation of dominance" (1998:15). The active nature of this process points to transformative power of survivance. Vizenor goes on to describe the "estates" of survivance; the ways in which Native people exert their sovereignty. These include artistic and imaginative creations, and the claiming of names and genealogies, practices that work directly against imperialized erasures (1998:88). Vizenor explains that "Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion" and "the continuance of stories" (1998:85). Survivance can also be thought of, following Baszile, as a "pedagogy of self-love" which works as a redemptive counter-narrative that can deconstruct, heal, and transform (2018:270). The pedagogy of love reclaims the power of the self, as it has survived and resisted.

These forms of expression unite a marginalized group and deny the suffocation of the empire. As a way of complementing survivance and addressing some of the more aesthetic, artistic, and performative practices of culture, which also hold a transformative power, and echoing Giovanni's idea of "certification," I use the notion of *reclaiming*. Reclaiming follows Collins' analysis of Black women's self-definitions as a counteractive measure and refusal of

oppressive cultural frameworks (2000:10). Reclamation is also evoked in Audre Lorde's writing on the transformative power of reclaiming emotions, and the way this acts as a resistance to hegemonic violence. Her discussion of *symphony* and *cacophony* carefully untangles the process through which marginalized peoples may disrupt a grammar of violence and transform their conditions:

> Women of colour in america have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of its service. And I say *symphony* rather than *cacophony* because we have had to learn to orchestrate those furies so that they do not tear us apart.
>
> (Lorde 2017:29)

Women orchestrate and turn a force of violence into something that maintains a symphonic melody and a song worth hearing despite systemic attempts at silencing. This reclamation takes the liminality of silencing and transforms it into an intentional assertion of life and livingness. This symphonic orchestration, despite and beyond the silencing attempts of hegemonic cultural norms, and the antiblack ideologies which define the Global North, generates transformative, liberatory power.

ECONOMIC DOMAIN

> Here one is then obliged to agree that race relations are directly linked with economic processes: historically, with the epochs of conquest, colonization and mercantilist domination, and currently, with the "unequal exchanges" which characterize the economic relations between developed metropolitical and "underdeveloped" satellite economic regions of the world economy
>
> – Stuart Hall (2021:199)

Economic structures are central to the operations of the post-empire nation-state. Most broadly, the systems of capitalism, settler colonialism, neoliberalism, and their many intersectional relationships make up a global system of economic oppression that continues to mutate and evolve. The oppressive economic strategies employed by former empires bear a striking similarity to the neoliberalism of nation-states, and the capitalism of settler colonies.

I deconstruct the ways in which economic structures are used to create, delineate, and restrict group identities in order to flesh out the overall working of the domain. The economic domain, as I operationalize it here, unfolds through forces of *exploitation*, *marginalization*, and economic *asymmetries*.

Wilderson describes the two faces of oppressive capitalist white supremacy as two dreams, that of "worker exploitation" and of "accumulation and death" (2003:233). For the purposes of this project, I name these two processes *exploitation* and *marginalization.* *Exploitation* as theorized by Wright is used to describe the interests of the elites, wherein the "material welfare of one group of people causally depends on the material deprivations of another" ensured by way of asymmetrical relations of exclusions and the appropriation of labor (1997:10). Wright expands this exploitative relation to include any productive resources of the oppressed, including their talents. It is also important to understand is that in an exploitative relationship the "exploiter *needs* the exploited" and depends upon the work they extract from them (Wright 1997:11). This resonates with Katherine McKittrick who, drawing on the work of Sylvia Wynter, notes that the "Middle Passage and plantation systems transformed—or more specifically converted—the enslaved into units of labor," which were then brought "not to inhabit (people, settle) the land but to mechanically produce monocrops and fuel the economic system" (2021:154). The resulting labor system "benefited from, and calcified, their nonpersonhood" as exploitable object (ibid.). Demarcating a group of people as slaves or enslavable and utilizing their labor was a key part of the construction of the physical and social infrastructure of much of the Global North. The essential distinction between this and other types of oppressive economic politicization, such as marginalization, is this *need.*

Moving to what Wright describes as "nonexploitative oppression" elicits the idea of *marginalization*. Under a system driven by marginalization, "the oppressors would be happy

if the oppressed simply disappeared" (Wright 1997:11). The European genocidaires of North and South America would have been better able to fulfill their instinctual greed if the resource-filled lands they came across were uninhabited. As Wilderson describes, capital and exploitation were "kick-started by the rape of the African continent" rather than its destruction (2003:229). Thus, turning to marginalization, or the idea that the only good X (ethnic group) is a dead X, we see the extreme end of the Other. Frantz Fanon notes that in the economic substructure, the "cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich" (1963:40). For the non-white citizen, subject, and native, the consequences of economic oppression are multiscalar and wide-reaching. In such an exploitative system, where gold is the "actor, director and producer" of global social relations, "humanity is reduced to the level of a thing" (Dorfman and Mattelart 1991:65).

Given the international rule of capitalism and neoliberalism, and rising shifts towards the latter, African diasporic peoples are left *negotiating* (to return to the theoretical spectrum from limitation to transformation) within structures of economic violence. One passage by Patricia Williams is particularly illustrative of the way economic asymmetries create complexities that need to be grappled with:

> After the Civil War, when slaves were unowned—I hesitate to use the word emancipated even yet—they were also disowned: they were thrust out of the market and into a nowhere land that was not quite the mainstream labor market, and very much outside the marketplace of rights. They were placed beyond the bounds of valuation […] they became like all those who cannot express themselves in the language of power and assertion and staked claims—all those who are nevertheless deserving of the dignity of social valuation, yet those who are so often denied survival itself.
>
> (1992:21)

This economic "nowhere land" encompasses Black labor as both inclusive of and beyond the Black corporeal form. Black people as property and as producers of property are in both directions excluded from full status, from a wholeness. P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods' discussion of Nicolas de Genova in their work "Ex Aqua" is a salient example of an economic critique that addresses the way *asymmetry* is historically rooted, as they identify the

shortcomings of traditional Marxist perspectives in comprehending the experiences of Black migrants (2014:59). While neoliberal capitalist commodification of daily life has seeped into global ways of thinking, knowing, and relating, the unique commodification of the Black body and the Indigenous homeland, so definitive in constructing the world we live in, existed on a scale that cannot be reconciled with a more rigid economic frame. As described by da Silva, "the total value produced by slave labor continues to sustain global capital" (2014:82).

David Harvey does a thorough job of outlining the nature of neoliberal thinking in the Global North, describing it as a "solution to capitalism's ills [that] had long been lurking in the wings of public policy" (2005:19). He also explains the ways in which the neoliberal turn depended on uneven geographical developments to progress and solidify as a global system (Harvey 2005:87). However, incorporating the Southern perspective, after Raewyn Connell and Nour Dados allows for a better conceptualization of how this type of exploitative economic governance is rooted in racialized power dynamics, especially in former colonies (2014:122). Asymmetrical labor relations, linked to "asymmetrically raced black nonbeings and raced white beings" were essential to the plantation economy and life beyond it (McKittrick 2021:155). Invoking economic *asymmetries* as such is not an observation of a trend so much as an indictment of a structural feature; oppressive economics are structured by and rely on such unevenness.

Economic liminalities

> The act of charity underlines the moral superiority of the givers and justifies the mansion to which they return […] If the bourgeoisie now control the capital and the means of production, it is not because they exploited anyone or accumulated wealth unfairly […]It was always the ideas of the bourgeoisie which gave them the advantage in the race for success, and nothing else. And their ideas shall rise up to defend them.
>
> -Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart (1991:69)

Non-profits, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and government aid are

interlinked forms of economic practices and systems which are liminal in nature. The former two bodies are "a 'third sector' (neither state nor business)" whose formations helps elucidate the liminal space where full limitation and oppression are met with some potentiality for transformation (Gilmore 2017:45). I follow scholars such as Tiffany Lethabo King, Ewuare Osayande, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, among others, by unpacking the ways aid and philanthropy do little to dismantle the hierarchies of exploitation and marginalization that allowed such wealth to be accumulated.

"Progressive philanthropy" as it is described by King and Osayande, provides "cosmetic adjustments to make capitalist foundations appear progressive" while remaining "complicit in supporting systems of oppression, exploitation, and domination" (2017:80). Further, and more dangerously, through such practices "white people and white institutions continue to control the wealth gained through the exploitation of people of color" as the "status quo is maintained within a white supremacist framework" (ibid.). These economic strategies and relationships are reformist, upholding the limitations of capitalist hierarchy while modifying minor aspects of their character, yet still liminal, presenting the material for co-optive strategizing from the undercommons. The harm (and potential) of these progressive organizations is also identifiable within programs of international aid initiated by wealthy nations. Non-profits and aid initiatives are welcomed into economies because of their "efficiency (read: meager budgets) and accountability (read: contracts could be pulled if anybody stepped out of line)" (Gilmore 2017:45). While offering some practical benefits to people in need, these economic relationships allow elites to obfuscate their exploitative strategies (the originary source of the wealth). Further, progressive or charitable acts push forth social values which remain tied to market productivity and enforced compatibility with the values of capitalism. The idea of "global homocapitalism" as explored by Rahul Rao, is indicative of such pseudo-progressive practices.

Global homocapitalism, employed by groups like the World Bank, tackles social injustice to advance the interests of the market, using the "deployment of economic carrots (the promise of growth) and sticks (the withdrawal of capital)" (Rao 2015:38). The campaign against homophobia is the latest iteration of a similar program for women, a "gender regime" which combined "greater female employment in the market" with a commitment to "liberate traditional gender relations," relations which would then lead to a more "efficient allocation of labour resources" (Rao 2015:39). The seemingly progressive programs, targeting primarily poor women, contributed to their earning potential only in ways which did not disrupt the exploitation through which the wealth was acquired. More women and queer people on the factory floor, but the same abhorrent conditions. As Dian Million points out, "humanism and humanitarianism" are "forms of neoliberal governance" with a tendency to further "the aims of racial capitalism and settler colonialism" (2020:393). Aid programs alleviate the immediate stresses placed on marginalized peoples to prevent them from "organizing to dismantle the very systems of oppression that allow this owning class to accumulate unearned wealth" (King and Osayande 2017:85). The hope for liminality that I offer lies in the potential economic co-option and use of these reformist projects for more generative ends.

Economic transformations

Moving to more transformative economic structures, it is productive to begin with *appropriation*, the way in which the labor and lives of the oppressed are used or politicized (Wright 1997:12). In an oppressive economic system, labor and value are appropriated and used to advance elite interests. Alternatively, appropriation also offers a way for understanding the way life and labor can be reclaimed, decommodified, and modified towards a "productive" end that is community centric and nonhierarchic. This sets the stage for the disruptive powers of decommodification.

The notion of decommodification can be explained as a reversal to the way that "[Black women] operate in the teeth of a system for which racism and sexism are primary, established, and necessary props of profit" (Lorde 2017:27). Decommodification is a means for the marginalized and exploited to re-appropriate their autonomy, their labor, and their productive potential into a system which no longer depends on hierarchal and exploitative relations. John Vail describes decommodification as an agenda that would "reduce our individual and collective dependency on the market" as well as "lessen our societal subjection to market discipline" in the broadest sense (2010:313). Decreasing the impacts is not the end step, however, as Ashok Kumbamu discusses; rather it takes place necessarily alongside "militantly challenging political and economic forces that have vested interests" in maintaining such exploitations (2009:347).

Manuel Prieto positions Indigenous resurgence and reclaiming of land as a unique part of the larger move towards the "anticommodification" of nature (2022). In his work, Indigenous identity "is a relational process of struggling and articulating place-based identity by contesting commodification" (2022:489). A place-based identity as such works to "subvert the trajectory and outcome of the commodification process" (ibid.). Amidst this subversion and resistance, it is important to posit, as suggested by Gerardo Otero and Heidi Jugenitz, that Indigenous struggles for autonomy and relational sovereignty are non-capitalist but not necessarily *anti*-capitalist (2006:135). In both types of movement away from capitalist logics, whether the more neutral non-capitalist or an explicit anti-capitalist stance, however, economic resistances "aim to decommodify nature and labour power" (ibid.). Enacting anticommodification programs is part of the pursuit towards a fully decommodified social, juridical, and most importantly economic realm.

Fanon designated transformative economic moves as a form of "disalienation" through the recognition of "social and economic realities" and subsequent destruction of

world's materialist constructions (1986:15). Denying the commodification of human relations is essential to economic resistance. Writing elsewhere, Fanon included boycotts and actions that "bring pressure to bear on the forces of colonialism," as essential to refusing the colonial attempts to turn the nation into a market (1963:66). It is this transformative process which challenges the "legitimacy and necessity of the monopoly of wealth" creating the condition for liberation that will "liquidate the economic base of the bourgeoisie and abolish private property" (Dorfman and Mattelart 1991:67). While other forms of transformative economics exist, I utilize decommodification and disalienation as terms that capture at the widest level a necessary revolt against the oppressive forces of exploitation and marginalization.

CONCLUSION

Putting these analytical frames to action is a way of linking the diverse data sources that make up this thesis. Within my analytical model, I understand Oromo people's locationality as their spatial position within sets of relations; the way they (re)/interact with structures that surround them. The model can thus be used to make sense of the way diaspora positionality, movement, and migration create structures that transcend formal state borders. Restated, the colonial roots, imperial pasts, and afterlives of empire which have set the stage for these Black geographies may elucidate international similarities that formal cartographic and demographic frames could not capture. Guraacha as an epistemological element joins the structures and operates with Oromumma. This spatializing moves diaspora communities beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, further strengthening the explorative powers of Black geography.

CHAPTER VIII: TRAVEL NARRATIVES AS IMPERIALIZED SPACE

In this section I will analyze a travel narrative from the pre-colonial era in order to uncover the way imperial grammars work to delineate the meaning of particular relations to place and space. More specifically, I will read this story as one produced contemporaneously with the British expedition to Abyssinia, though not necessarily connected to it. Amidst an international political crisis, how were the Oromo people framed and discussed? And, how do these framing and discussions mis/represent Oromo sovereignty? Analyzing the imperial entanglements of the British Empire in Abyssinia sheds light on some of these relations and their imperialized ideological underpinnings.

TEMPORALITY: TEWODROS AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE

The British expedition to Abyssinia, as it came to be known by imperial historians, occurred during the rule of Tewodros II, the king of Abyssinia from 1855-1868, before the consolidation of the Abyssinian Empire and colonization of the southern nations. At the height of his power, Tewodros had over 50,000 soldiers in his army and an "imposing collection of heavy guns" (Caulk 1972:610). His rule was driven by the notion that "armed might was right, and that there was no political problem which could not be approached through the use of mass, concentrated force" (Reid 2010:51). This attitude characterized his relationships with the neighboring kingdoms, and he was in constant territorial defense against competing military forces in the area like the Tigrean ruler Bezbiz Kasa and Menelik of Shoa (Caulk 1972:611). By the late 1860s his artillery was depleted. During these smaller wars, Tewodros appealed to various international foreign powers for assistance, including the British, with whom he was in close contact, for additional support in pursuit of a hegemonic rule over the area. But, there was an "apparent lack of interest in Tewodros' struggles on the part of the British Government," and some bureaucratic fumbling led to a failure to respond effectively (Reid 2010:56; see also Rodger 1984 for a more detailed discussion of British

governance). British interest in the area was driven by "the need to protect the short route to India" (Rodger 1984:131). Thus, while it was not a strictly imperial pursuit, it is rightfully considered to be part of Britain's imperial history. This underlying imperial nature is important to make note of, as it also relates to the actions of the travelers and missionaries of the era.

The tense situation in Abyssinia reached a boiling point when Tewodros, frustrated by the lack of British support, was further insulted by Stern, an English missionary who had written a book "containing derogatory remarks about the king" (Youngs 1994: 26). When the British consul for Abyssinia, Captain Cameron, visited Tewodros in 1862 he was promptly imprisoned, followed by a group of others in 1864 (Youngs 1994:26). In response, in "one of the most expensive overseas military operations mounted by the Victorians" the British sent 42,000 men to confront Tewodros (Reid 2010:56). By the time the British arrived, Tewodros' "painstakingly assembled artillery neither killed nor frightened anyone" (Caulk 1972:613). With support from other Northern emperors the British reached and breached Tewodros' stronghold. Propelled forward with "material supplies and financial supported obtained in India," the British used their superior technological equipment to overthrow the struggling Tewodros (Youngs 1994:26). In the end, Tewodros committed suicide rather than be captured by these foreign imperial forces, using a weapon that was itself "given to him as a present from Queen Victoria" (Youngs 1994:36). This "expensive little war" has been dismissed in British writing as little more than a "lavish and triumphant picnic" for the army (Rodgers 1984:129). Within Abyssinian history, however, the death of Tewodros paved the way for the rise of Shoa, and the final consolidation of the Empire occurred in the decades following.

In his discussion of British travelogues from this era (1850-1900), Tim Youngs points out that even though "[s]cientific and technological progress and class tension and shifts in Britain" led to a "change in attitude towards Africa and Africans," this period still produced

particular harmful tropes about African peoples (1994:6). Youngs also refuses to describe these texts as purely non-fiction, as they continue to portray the "sense of the land as enchanted and bedevilled," and mirror the languaging of "quest romances" (1994:10). Youngs points out themes of "voyeuristic eroticism" (1994:18) and anti-Blackness (1994:19) among British narratives of the years leading up to the expedition, exacerbated by international events which "contributed to a hardening of nationalist and racist sentiment" among British people (1994:24). This contextualization is important to acknowledge alongside the Abyssinian perspective because it demonstrates the complexity of the imperial entanglements in the area. While the Abyssinians were fairly well-armed, particularly when compared to their neighbors in the Horn, they were struggling against better-armed European imperial forces. These relationships and violent ideologies would be mirrored in Abyssinia and Ethiopia's later pursuits and engagements with Southern nations like the Oromo, where the Northerners typically held onto far superior stocks of weaponry.

SOURCE SELECTION

The text used for this analysis shares a temporality with the British Expedition to Abyssinia, even if the author was not directly connected to the mission. As described above, the British campaign is a potent example of the messiness of imperial entanglements, as the British determined that the operation would be run by the Indian Army, who at the time were among their colonial subjects. In this sense, the British imperial spatializing and way of knowing the world stretched its empire across the Global South. This critical analysis seeks to unpack how Oromo people are read and written in this imperial tongue. After reviewing broadly the texts from this time period, one manuscript was identified for further analysis as it featured extensive time spent with an Oromo woman; Samuel Baker's exploration of the Nile Tributaries, which took him across several different parts of the Abyssinian empire and Sudan, includes among his traveling companions an Oromo woman named Barraké. Baker's

descriptions of Barraké are examined here in order to explore the way his understandings of space, race, and their interconnections, are rooted in imperial ways of knowing. These ideologies serve to make claims about Barraké, and thus Oromia, which inscribe and reinforce imperial thinking, including the presumed supremacy of the Abyssinian Empire, the presence of anti-Blackness, and the embedded cisheteropatriarchy, shared by both the British and Abyssinian empires, which denies women full personhood.

BAKER

Sir Samuel White Baker has been described as "one of nineteenth-century Britain's most renowned explorers" (Livingstone 2018:1) and an "uncompromising man of adventure" (Wisnicki 2010:25). In addition to his text on the Nile, he wrote fictional adventure tales (1868) and an account of Lake N'yanza (1866). The text analyzed here is his *The Nile Tributaries of Abyssinia: And the Sword Hunters of the Hamran Arabs, 4th Edition* (1868). We may speculate that the timing of the book's republishing was meant to coincide with increased British popular interest in Abyssinia, though the original was published just one year earlier. Baker's intent on the voyage to Abyssinia was to explore and "examine carefully" the various tributaries of the Nile River (Baker 1868:303). In addition to his careers as author and "explorer" Baker was also known for his prowess as a hunter, earning an entry as one of the "Great hunters in history" in the *Sports Afield* almanac, and referring extensively to various hunting expeditions in his text on the Nile (Casada 2005:42; Baker 1868).

Some descriptions of Baker list him as an abolitionist for his work to end slavery in Sudan. I am not interested in exploring the possibilities of this "abolitionist" identity in the context of a man whose own interactions with a woman he "purchased" leave him scarcely able to claim the name even in the most liberal evocations. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore has stated regarding abolition, it "requires that we change one thing, which is everything"

(2019:web). Though he may have worked at later stages in his life to change some things about the systematic slave trade in Sudan, his active participation in imperialist projects, as exemplified in part by his degradation of Barraké, influenced his way of thinking, writing, and reading people and places. Abolition may have been the goal, but it certainly was not the lived practice or daily reality.

BARRAKÉ

We first meet Barraké in Chapter 11 of Baker's text. She is described as "about twenty-two years of age, brown in complexion, fat, and strong" (1868:294). Baker is introduced to Barraké when he enters the slave market Katariff (likely modern-day El-Gadarif, in the state of Al Qadarif in Sudan) looking to find a chef to join his travelling party. Throughout his various references to her, Baker reads, names, and portrays Barraké with the language and tools of his own empire, without a regard for her own culture or viewpoint. It is not that his descriptions are entirely without usefulness in representing her, a figure otherwise lost to written history, it is that they are only useful in relation to a normative standard embedded in violent white supremacy. Baker clarifies that he is no slave owner, that his purchase of Barraké is intended to buy her freedom. But "as it was a large amount that I had paid, I expected she would remain with us as a servant until our journey should be over" (1868:295). The difference between a purchased servant and formal slave is a distinction without a difference except in a colonial tongue. In practice, this woman is the property of another person, regardless of the terms and conditions. While Baker's clarification surely appeased his own moral sensibilities, and followed the British "abolition" policy of the era (I use abolition in quotes here to question the nature of abolition within a system that has yet to produce full freedom or repaired its carcerality and violence), it is a far cry from a noble or just action. Whereas elsewhere Baker claims that "English ideas were equally unsuited to the climate and requirements of the people," in this instance, with his purchase of and

expectations for this Oromo woman, he reveals a thoroughly imperial English way of thinking (1868:285). Barraké is placed in the narrative as an object, and this framing of her life experience perpetuates and naturalizes imperialized ideologies of ownership, labor, and difference.

Baker begins his depiction of Barraké by noting that while she is "powerful-looking" she is "decidedly not pretty" (1868:295). The source of this ugliness seems to come from her hair which is "elaborately dressed in hundreds of long, narrow curls," looking as if she "had been recently under the hands of the hairdresser" (1868:295). Though this initial language ("elaborately dressed," "under the hands of the hairdresser") would seem to imply that her hair contributed some form of beauty, or would at least warrant a subsequent acknowledgement of local standards of beauty, Baker takes a different approach. Her hair instead draws ire, even though it is in this description that he at least acknowledges her humanity. The oil and grease on her head, likely surrounding each carefully coiled curl and indicative of a common technique for moisturizing curly hair across the African diaspora, is beyond comprehension to the extent that it becomes nearly a deformity.

Although Baker comes into contact with Barraké because he needs her labor, specifically her skill as a bread baker, he dedicates nearly seven full lines of text to describing the appearance, scent, and color of her hair. This hyper-focus on physical appearance, coupled with the particular language with which he describes it, are clear examples of an approach to ethnicity that relies on colonial ideologies. A woman enslaved is powerful, fat, and strong; Baker's horse, described elsewhere in the text, is given much kinder, more appreciative language. He writes that the "Arab horse is among its brethren, the high-bred and superlative beauty of the race" (Baker 1868:34). In another example, an "Arab girl" who survives a near-drowning is described as "a fit subject for the Royal Humane Society" (1868:279) – in other words, an animal. The deeply interwoven beliefs that a woman's

physical appearance is an essential aspect of her character, and the quick tendency to dehumanize any woman who is not appropriately beautiful is a classic tenet of sexism and patriarchal ways of approaching the world (Arvin, Tuck, Morrill 2013). Furthermore, this framing is indicative of a form of cultural oppression which politicizes Barraké by denying her (narrative) access to a full humanity.

BARRAKÉ'S AFTERLIVES

While less specific to Oromo lives in the Abyssinian context and more generally an example of the world in the lives and afterlives of slavery, another anecdote of Baker's is useful in understanding the imperial space-making he participates in; his description of Barraké's confusion over the terms of her purchase. In the process of translation, Barraké is temporarily under the impression that she has been sold into marriage, and that she will become Baker's spouse. She reacts to this news with joy, going so far as to embrace him, which he rebukes. He assesses her confusion as such: "never having been free, she could not understand the use of freedom" (1868:297). This sentence contains within it hundreds of years of imperialism, violence, subjugation, and enslavement. It calls to mind the archival work of Katherine McKittrick who finds in a slave ledger a girl who "says she was born free" (2014:17). Unlike McKittrick's source documents, Baker does not bother to ask or care for Barraké's past and does not leave narrative room for her history. Baker is blind to the decolonial imaginary, unable to conceptualize a world unlike the one he lives in. He is free, and with his freedom he sets the terms for other people's lived and dreamed freedom. According to his descriptions, Barraké has never been free. As the manuscript later describes, she dies while still in his employment; in his eyes, she will never be free. He imagines that what he sees and thinks he knows of her life is all that can be seen or thought. Barraké does not have the "happy rights of a free-born Englishwoman, who can heal her broken heart with a pecuniary plaster" (Baker 1868:297). All she has to give is her labor, and all she is worth is

thirty-five dollars, placed in two neat piles on the table of her former master.

Barraké does not make it to the end of Baker's narrative. In her death, though, evoking Hartman's notion of grief, which is rendered "interminable" by the aftermath of slavery, there are some cracks in the imperial structure (2002:758). In a section titled "Barraké poisons herself," Baker describes returning to the camp after a hunting trip to find that Barraké has fallen ill (1868:249). The illness is attributed to an overconsumption of the fruit of *Balanites aegyptiaca,* also known as the Egyptian Balsam, desert date, or soap berry tree, among other names. Baker claims that despite being cautioned, she had "taken a fancy that she was determined to gratify" (1868:249). He does not dwell long on her illness or her health beyond this explanation. There is a certain level of condescension throughout this description. Baker finds it necessary to point out that she "had been cautioned" not to eat the fruit by the "Arabs and ourselves" (1868:249). He fails to recognize the lack of trust Barraké would likely have felt for these strange men, one of whom (Baker himself) held her as property and was openly repulsed by her presence. Baker has no thorough knowledge of Barraké or her cultural background, and thus his claims and descriptions of her experiences are characterized heavily by his own (imperial) heritage.

In Baker's closing description of Barraké, narrating her death, the tensions between her humanity and his insistent dehumanization of her become most palpable. The illness which resulted from eating the fruit led to several bouts of dysentery and a "congestion of the liver" (1868:289). Despite weeks of care and effort, including feeding her "the entire produce of the goats, hoping that the milk would keep up her strength," Barraké dies (1868:289). Baker proceeds to bury "the poor creature," not dwelling with any reflection on her death, and the entire camp moves on (1868:289). This abrupt death, with no description (and thus likely no presence) of any burial rituals or funeral rites, betrays Baker's underlying ideology and imagination of Barraké. Though her labor, and thus her value, are worth weeks of special

care, when her labor is lost, in death, she becomes once again a “creature” (Baker 1868:289). Hartman evokes this dehumanization quite directly as she points out the “social foreclosure of grievability and bereavement” for Black and African diasporic peoples (2002:760). The inability or refusal to connect the human to the Black woman is quintessentially colonialist and imperialist, particularly as emerging from the white European setting. By describing Barraké’s life exclusively in these terms, Baker shows how even the outlawing of slavery is not enough to ends its life or stop the development of its afterlives. The naturalization of Black woman as slave, and the image of subservience which followed, even during periods of liberalization and partial abolition, are rooted in this white supremacist thinking (Hartman 2002).

Further illustrative of Baker’s imperial tendencies is his trip to a second slave market later in the journey, despite his decrying of the institution. Here he finds other enslaved Oromo women, the beauty of whom he describes at length, going so far as to call them “the venuses of the Galla” (1868:349). These women were to be sold as wives, a higher status than Barraké’s, and thus are given a much kinder description than that afforded her. Because of their beauty, Baker says that they “are useless for hard labor,” better suited to share their “natural grace and softness” with the Abyssinian traders and managers of Turkish harems who purchase them (1868:349). Baker does not justify or explain his incursion into the slave market (even as a supposed abolitionist), and makes no references at this time to Barraké despite the similarities between his first encounter with her and this meeting of her kin in an Abyssinian market, and despite the recent event of her death. This, again, speaks to the way Baker is constricted by his imperialized perspective, and the way he spatializes and understands Oromo lives from within this viewpoint.

Baker, despite his interactions with various Oromo people throughout the text, and the long time he spends with Barraké, at no point seems able to conceptualize the peoples as

Indigenous to the land or give this relationship any further meditation. His thoughts are always focused on accumulation (of knowledge and of goods), and he relates to the other peoples around him only with this ideology. At some point, he bemoans the lack of settlement on Abyssinian frontiers, hoping for an era where "security [is] insured to the new settlers" and the area is "peopled and cultivated" (Baker 1868:529). This peopling would lead to economic opportunities and trade never seen before, according to his descriptions. Deeply entrenched in this exploitative, imperial thinking, which imagines people and places as mere commodities, Baker fails to imagine a life otherwise, or a piece of land with its own non-economic significance.

BAKER'S IMPERIAL SPACE

If we take the space-making of Baker as transparent and legitimate, we remain bound in an idea of Oromia and Oromo women that is imperial in nature. They are allowed access to space, even to their homeland, only as wives or slaves. They come from markets, like animals, and when they die, they are unceremoniously buried, more concern given to their consumption of goat's milk than their own life passing away. This depiction renders Oromia a land of ghostly shadows, women in the margins of society, in the deserts and market stalls of the imperial city.

In an optimistic reading of Barraké's story, I could be tempted to follow the work of Hartman, her confabulation to perform an imaginative retelling of Barraké that regenerates her humanity, or what her Oromumma may have meant. The maps and descriptions of Baker's route allow us to identify other foods Barraké may have eaten along the way, ones that gave her life and reflected a loving relationship with the land. We could dream of her youth before capture, of the green hills of Oromia where she spent her childhood, the singing and laughter that preceded the terror of enslavement. The temptation to rewrite or underwrite Barraké's story in a more hopeful tone, however, also troubles me.

My desire to imagine an otherwise for Barraké is confronted by my recognition of the interminability of her condition, how enslavement begat empire begat nation-state, how the sites of slave markets are reimagined by the presence of refugee camps, how the desert route of an Oromo woman in the confines of a tremendous evil is now redirected towards EUrope, British enslavers exchanged for traffickers and coast guard agents, autonomy and sovereignty of the Oromo woman an unknown enterprise. An imaginary otherwise of a world without this harm does not serve adequately to memorialize Barraké, to respect all that she had, all that she could never hold on to. Instead, I close by conceding this narrative space to the victor, the empire.

CHAPTER IX: GEOGRAPHY GURAACHA AND DIS/PLACE/MEANT

While the bulk of this project grapples with space-making in more abstract and fluid ways, this chapter takes a more direct approach by looking at a singular city, Goree, from two viewpoints or ways of knowing: historical and musical narratives. The first discussion takes up a broad understanding of Goree over time while the latter rereads this perspective from an Oromo rendering. This search for Black and guraacha geographies relies on the idea of dis/place/meant and visitation. Goeman uses the notion of a map of difference to describe spaces of containment and (dis)placement which emerged and were constructed "in the wake of colonialism" (2009:184). To understand the relationship between imperial spatializing and geography guraacha I will explore the tensions and interrelations of dis/place/meant in relation to Goree Town. *Dis* as an evocation of use and transformation, *Place* referring to Goree in a measurable and counted way, and *Meant* as more than a place, including how it is experienced and felt. *Place* is read here following Katherine McKittrick's notions of "transparent" space, assuming certain types of knowability, a spatial organization that coheres and rationalizes itself, and a way of knowing that is materialized by way of maps, patterns of infrastructure, transport routes, city plans, census data and other ways of understanding that can be filtered through a socioeconomic clarity (2006:5-6). *Meant* is the implication and referent of meaning, feeling, lived experience. This inflection more accurately follows Fred Moten's 2017 reading of Amiri Baraka's 1969 notion of *place/meant*, of the meaning imbued into space by necessity or as the unintentional byproduct of diasporic livingness. As Moten shared in an interview with Nehal El-Hadi, the term place/meant involves a:

> … play of meaning and location, and that way in which it indexes, that at the same time meaning can have a dislocative effect. It's almost as if in a weird way when you put that *a* in it, it almost makes it substitute for that *d*, *i*, *s*. Displacement. It's that movement. And I always felt that this notion of the contrapuntal is not only about the idea of a multiphonic, multivoiced kind of music, but also the ongoing place/meant or displacement that difference or, as

> Glissant might put it, multiplicity, implies and requires.
>
> (2018:web)

By allowing for multiple meanings to be embedded in a place, and for these meanings to both be connected to and in tension with the placing or placement of the peoples, place/meant opens new possibilities for understanding and mapping the world.

The prefix dis- in the notion of displacement takes on its own life here. *Dis*-, as an expression of negation or absence (which, as McKittrick notes, is its own nation 2006:103), removal, expulsion, separation, the intensification of an already unappealing state, an away from or outside of; each of these facets has relevance here. Without heading too deep into linguistic analysis, we may think of cover and coverage conveying safety and security, warmth, an embrace, while *dis*covery is the legacy of colonial violence, a false newness painted on an a priori practice. Dis/placement encompasses and facilitates containment in relation with expulsion—keeping in what you fear, removing what you hate. Goree, when read through its overall dis/place/meant, reveals the underlying forms of geographic violence that come to be embodied by and in indigenous land in the hands of the empire. Goree's dis/place/meant is a reading of and in some ways against the imperialized spatializations and space-making tendencies. More specifically it is a reading that pays attention to the blackened geographic potential, and the beyond and above guraacha space. The challenge in writing and reading for this liberatory potential is that in this case the realization of a decolonial imaginary is expressed in a language that I am in some ways unable fully to convey.

VISITATION AND PRESENCE

Understanding and seeking to map Goree's dis/place/meant begins by necessity with an exploration of my own place-ing and presence, and the way meanings emerge from this move. My positionality can be simultaneously troubled and explained through the notion of "visitation" as described in the piece "Before Dispossession, or Surviving It" by Angie Morrill, Eve Tuck, and the Super Futures Haunt Qollective (2016). To describe my presence

as visitation is to name my positionality as among those "fugitive outsiders," living in the "residue horror that colonialism creates," as something that can "reinforce connections, create new ones, disrupt expectations;" as "not settling" and "not colonial exploration" (Morrill, Tuck, SFHQ 2016:17). In this sense, I was a visitor as an invited guest, but also as a haunting and symbolic legacy of the world that colonialism and imperialism built. My citizenship, my race, my racialization, my symbolism, and my signification may be considered in some parts a legacy of European slavery, ongoing USian imperial activities, and the undercommon undercosmopolitanism of the Black diaspora.

This latter term comes from the work of Moten, who uses undercosmpolitanism to explain the lives of Black diasporic people after they have been "circulated" and "moved" (2018:195). This transnational movement, and international recognition of the forces influencing these moves, exists underneath and against traditional (white) cosmopolitanism. While slavery and its afterlives attempt to delineate in an "attempt to regulate" the dispersion of Black peoples, these undercommon (following here Stefano Harney and Moten's 2013 text by the same name) sensibilities escape simple meaning (2018:195). The underlying histories haunted me, creating a fugitive presence in my present, at the same time as I embodied them and performed my own haunting visitation of Oromia. They also represent a refusal to collapse into the "research and development arm of governance," which seeks to "bring to blackness what it is said to lack" by holding onto a co-creating community that is not neatly understood in imperial languages (Harney and Moten 2013:56). In Goree, I was "sometimes outsider and always fugitive," my visitation created new connections and "disrupt[ed] expectation" (Morrill, Tuck, SFHQ 2016:17). My visitation was not an extractive visit or exploitative exploration, but somewhere in between. By acknowledging the liminality between my own experiences with empire and work in service (or at least salaried by) the empire, I hope both to justify and problematize the meanings I connect to the place.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GOREE TOWN; GOREE AS A DIS/PLACE

Goree Town is the current capital of Ale Woreda, located in the center of Illubabor (or Illu Abba Bora in Afan Oromo) Zone, Oromia, Ethiopia. It has a longitude and latitude of 8°9′N 35°31′E. At its highest points, it stands at more than 2000 meters, nearly a kilometer higher in elevation than the neighboring Eastern town of Mettu, which is the current Zonal capital. Traveling the opposite direction, the "elevation drops… from ±2000 m in Gore (Illubabor) to less than 500 m in Gambela in the south" (Wubneh 2016:445). Unique in the area, Goree is classified as a tropical highland, which translates into this extreme elevation accompanied by 11 months of near-constant rainfall. Even in the dry season, when the rains slow to once or twice a week and the grass dries up, the trees and shrubbery are evergreen with lush flowers sprinkled in between. This surrounding green is the "richest forest-type in Ethiopia, with over 100 tree species and a diverse understorey" (Birdlife International 2020). During the rainiest times of the year, in the middle of summer, you may go days without seeing the sun, as the climate shifts in between a damp, heavy fog, and marble-sized hail. On milder days, this rain is peppered with intermittent hours of rich sunlight, quickly drying shallow puddles and providing a brief interlude to look out at the view, or buy the fruits of the rain's labor on the slippery mud of the market road.

Goree first rose to prominence in the late 1800s and early 1900s, coinciding with the rise and solidifying of the Abyssinian Empire. Beke described the area surrounding Goree as a "vast forest, through which the caravans going to [Kaffa] must pass" (1843:255). This deeply forested area was known to local merchants as "impervious to the rays of the sun, which is not seen, they say, for four or five days successively" (Beke 1843:255). Illubabor was colonized and forcibly incorporated into the Abyssinian Empire alongside areas like Kaffa and Wolaita, during the "early 1890s" (Reid 2011:88). Mohammed Hassen describes Illubabor has having an important role in regional trade during the second half of the

nineteenth century, carrying "slaves and ivory" to Arab and Abyssinian markets in the North, and Shoan markets to the East (1983:474). In 1910, while nearby Jimma was struggling for forms of autonomy in Abyssinia, Goree and the region of Illubabor were under the control of "Ras Tessema Nadew, son of the emperor's tutor, who had over 30,000 soldiers under his command," and was one of a number of other "powerful Abyssinian governors in the region" (Gemeda 2002:55). During this same time, there were "at least a dozen foreign trading firms" established in the area, dealing mostly in coffee commerce (Gemeda 1996:176). Goree was also of importance because its access to "Anglo-Egyptian (Sudanese) trade through Gambela and the Baro water transport system made it an important source of imperial revenue" (Gemeda 1996:264). It was chosen as a location for the Bank of Abyssinia in the 1920s, selected as an ideal middle point between British-controlled Sudan and the market in Jimma (Schaefer 1990:225). Schaefer points out that Menelik, who was ruler of Ethiopia at the time, was "infatuated with the instruments of modernity," and considered a Western model of banking one of these tools (1990:182). Goree was placed within the empire through the creation of institutions of extraction and subordination.

In the same era, Goree's relationship with the Empire became more formalized as Haile Selassie's regime took advantage of its strategic geographic position and began to develop imperial infrastructures (Gray 1970:36; Zitelmann 2005). Writing about the era near the end of Selassie's reign, Getahun Benti describes Illubabor as an area "settled by the naftagna[4] where concentration of holdings was very high" through the 1960s and 1970s (2000:111). During the fall of Haile Selassie and rise of the Dergue, Illubabor is named as one site of multiple massacres of Oromo civilians by Ethiopian state security forces who intended to signal that they were "prepared to take the war [for state power] to the whole community" (Reid 2011:187). The Dergue era was also responsible for violence targeting the

[4] Armed settlers brought in from the Northern areas

land of Illubabor. Part of this destruction came from the influx of forced resettlement program, which was responsible for the uprooting of "3000 hectares of virgin forests" (Kelbessa 2010:57). Kelbessa also notes that during the Dergue rule "there were five sawmills, which are partly responsible for deforestation" (2010:57).

Directly to the West of Goree is the Gumaro Tea Plantation. On the right day and from the right part of the town you look directly down onto these rolling hills, emerald come to life, glinting faintly in the afternoon sun. The plantation was formally established by a "Lebanese expatriate" and a Belgian in 1957 (Kelbessa 2010:157). As the plantation expanded over the years, "hundreds of Oromo small peasant farmers were evicted from their traditional homes" (2010:157). To this day, the "biggest employers in the area are the coffee and tea estates," and the Gumaro Tea Plantation is the largest, and oldest in the country (Ambaw 2020; BirdLife International 2020). It began its operations at the bequest of Empress Zewditu, during the era of advanced Abyssinian Imperialism in the early 1920s (Ambaw 2020). The shift from coffee to tea was triggered by a Catholic Canadian Missionary, Father George Holland, "who procured a small quantity of seed from Kenya in 1927" (Coultas 1968:20). Tea was favored for its relative ease of harvest and growth, and its cultivation was pushed by foreign collaborations, as detailed at length in reports such as that cited by W.H.W. Coultas, the "Tea Adviser" to the Ministry of Overseas Development in the United Kingdom. In Goree, Governor General Ras Nadew and the "British Consul General" Captain Erskine "arranged for a consignment of 11 boxes of Tea seed (approximately 1,500 seeds) to be sent to Ethiopia from Southern India" (Coultas 1968:20). Gumaro's proximity to Goree is also of importance in terms of governance, as the town inside of the plantation, Onga, is under the jurisdiction of Goree as the Woreda[5] capital. The two towns also share a secondary

[5] *Woredas* are districts in Ethiopia. Oromia is the regional state, Illubabor is the zone, Ale is the woreda, and Goree is the city inside it.

school for grades 11 and 12, which is located in Goree Town. As such, the imperialism which has demarcated Goree throughout its past was facilitated and interconnected with the plantation industrialization of Gumaro. This land use practice is described by Sylvia Tamale as "eco-colonial:"

> Since formal independence, several African countries have also entered into what can only be described as "eco-colonial" pacts that involve multinational corporations taking over huge tracts of land for so-called developmental projects. Such agreements involve mining or converting forestland into plantations of sugarcane, tea, etc., processes that have led to the transformation of the environment and social livelihoods around the continent.
>
> (2020:34)

As Tamale points out, tea is one of the hallmarks of these practices, performed under the guise of development with questionable actual impacts on the lives of local people. The aftermath of this eco-colonialism includes increased justification and institutionalization of settlement. These large land areas require labor forces; either the local community has the capacity to refuse such subjection and the imperialist relies on imported labor, or the entirety of the labor force is imported as a furthering of the cause of settlement.

Goree can feel isolated, almost lonely, sitting above the thick grey and white clouds that wait each morning for the rolling sun to burn them off. This isolation also gave me the feeling of containment and a sense of insulation. There is a moment, when you drive east from Gambela, winding up and through mountain roads, that the elevation changes and shifts in location become visceral. It can be hard to locate or predict, until it hits you. At some point the heat relents, the air becomes cooler and wetter. The curves of the road are soon hidden by leaning trees and overgrown jungle. The last 700 meters or so are a fairly direct climb, and the town remains invisible until you suddenly happen upon her, as the road finally settles out, flags waving on the roundabout ahead. This sensation, as experienced on a fully paved road (built with support from foreign investors), seems to be inherent to Goree itself. One can imagine a similar feeling when making the steep climb on horseback, and even on foot there

is a distinct shift, looking up the hill, when you see the center of town looming ahead. From the highest peak, the edge of Goree's city center seems to be just across the road, the peaks and hills disguising the distance and its toll. When the fog is low any movement from within it feels disruptive and disturbing, as if coming from an underground cellar you didn't know existed, creeping up from the outsides. The surrounding green is always just around the corner, below the market road, sandwiched in between two neighborhoods, acting as a border fence around the high school, and a vanguard force on the side of the Council building. Currently, Illubabor as a region contains "half of the remaining forestland" in Ethiopia (Kelbessa 2010:50). Even in primarily geographic terms, using language that is just as easily coopted and utilized in imperial understandings (longitude, climate, elevation), Goree still evokes deeper feelings and sensations that shed light on alternate ways of knowing the town.

The varying imperial and imperialized presences in Goree throughout its written history exemplify the way space is shared and known in imperial languages. It is also a demonstration of the way differences are written, mapped, and enforced to maintain and exacerbate hierarchal difference. Even now, the Goree road represents a key transition point as the roundabout in the center of the town offers three possibilities: West into Gambela, South towards Masha, or East back into Oromia. While it might be seen as facilitating relationships and connections across peoples, this junction is also a frequent parking place for military vehicles, with troops passing through, coming and going in all three directions. From an imperial perspective, Goree seems to be more prominent as a site of *dis*placement. The majority of writing which mentions Goree in any capacity does so in relation to other legacies of the Abyssinian Empire. These narratives emphasize its economic potential (Beke 1843), its role in trade and industry (Hassen 1983), and its positionality within intersecting imperial influences (Schaeffer 1990).

I found that reading about Goree's history while living there sparked a particular type

of haunting or ghostly feeling that I was not quite able to put into words. A thrill of knowing, of the instant visual recognition of the space in question, the ability to recreate the scene may be one way of describing it. There is a local myth that Haile Selassie walked here, on this stone, before fleeing the country and incoming Italians. What if he had twisted an ankle, instead, and waited a few more days? What if he was startled when taking in the view, and stumbled down one of the steep cliffs, disappearing forever? What if he was so taken by the local beauty that he extended his trip, met a nice Oromo neighbor and realized that these people are not so bad after all, that he should revoke his condemnation of their language, religion, ways of knowing? These alterities and alternative futures fizzle and bubble up at the edges of my psyche when walking down those roads, looking out at the endless verdant fields. In pursuit of these decolonial or at least decolonizing meanings, I thus sought to understand the other side of the mapped difference; the shared meanings and symbolism of Goree as a place that defies these imperial mappings.

PLACE/MEANT

There are not many detailed Oromo-authored descriptions of Goree despite (or perhaps, because of) its illustrious imperial past. Asafa Jalata mentions it briefly as a garrison town amongst other "urban centers" (2010:55). Bonnie Holcomb and Oromo scholar Sisai Ibssa refer to an "Oromo rebellion in Illubabor" but do not provide further context (1990:290). Other Oromo scholars, such as Guluma Gemeda and Mohammed Hassen (cited above), mention it only within the context of other narratives. Milkessa Edae Tufa and Fesseha Mulu Gebremariam describe some Indigenous healing practices in Illubabor, but it is not made clear if these are present across the Zone, or from where the informants were drawn (2017). The work of Daniel Kelbessa is a useful contribution; though it focuses on comparing Illubabor and Borana Zones more generally, three of his informants for the project come from Goree (2010). Describing the "recent past" of Illubabor, Kelbessa relays information about

religious rituals involving particular prayers and ceremonies around a few sacred trees (2010:75). These practices include anointing trees with butter, and sitting under them to pray for protection, prosperity, and peace (Kelbessa 2010:75). Later in the passage, though, Kelbessa points out that this institution and many of the rituals have "totally disappeared" in the area, which he attributes to violence during Haile Selassie's regime when a Christian priest "launched his devastating campaign" against the institution (2010:75).

Among these examples, there is a dearth of first-hand Oromo narratives in which the author goes into detail in analyzing Goree's place/meant, or positionality within the empire. As such, to attempt to understand the meanings and cultural values attributed to Goree from an Oromo-centric viewpoint, I am relying on an Oromo music video, its lyrical content, and the images shared as source data. The song selected for analysis is a way of connecting my own visitation with the Goree's deeper meanings. I have a distinct memory of the first time I saw the video, sitting in Illubabor with a few friends. The reason the song, and the memory, continue to stand out in my mind was it was a rare example of Illubabor represented in popular media. Jimma is well-known as the kingdom of Abba Jifar, and regions like Arsi and Bale have a more storied history in the Oromo resistance past, as some superficial examples. A quick search of Oromo music from various regions on YouTube, home to thousands of Oromo music videos across different channels, results in a significant disparity between Illubabor and other regions. A search for Jimma Oromo music, for example, finds songs like Abbush Zallaqa's "Jimma" (2012), or Saliha Sami's song by the same name (2013). Looking for representations and narratives of Goree or Illubabor, and re-living my visitation to the area, the song selected for this analysis is called "Shurrubbeekoo" by Oromo singer Biruk Tesfaye.

A GURAACHA BRAID, A GURAACHA MAP

Tesfaye visits Goree at several points in his roughly five-minute song, and its name is

mentioned throughout the song in a refrain among other towns in Illubabor. The mood of Tesfaye's song is primarily a celebration of Illubabor's natural beauty, with the Oromo cultural qualities of the place woven in less directly. The song opens up with the declaration that Illubabor is a green country (*biyya magarisstu),* accompanied by opening shots of the Soor River, and some of the forests found alongside the main through road. Our first images of Goree come at the 2:21 minute mark, as the camera pans up the main road, showing in the background a Muslim-owned shop (identifiable by the crescent moon decorating the top of the roof), a mobile phone shop, and several stores with jars of honey for sale in the window. The angle then switches back to Tesfaye himself, who faces West, the same buildings visible in the background, and a larger tree-topped hill looming in the far distance.

After an interlude of dancing and a few moments in neighboring Mettu, Tesfaye moves to Goree's roundabout at the 3:25 mark, standing directly in the middle of the downtown area. During this segment, the video editors used an editing effect to make the background hazy, so that only the Oromo flag painted on the roundabout is visible in the background. From this angle, the viewer can see the blurred shape of the Orthodox Church directly behind him, as well as the cobblestone road that leads North towards the British Council building. Through an analysis of this specific location as the artist's primary evocation of Goree, we may draw a few tentative conclusions, and identify some of the differences, and similarities, between imperial maps and Oromo re-mappings. But these understandings are further strengthened by a corresponding analysis of some of the lyrics.

The song "Shurrubbeekoo" is performed as a love song to Illubabor, in many ways. The title literally translates as "my braid," which speaks to the local cultural practice of braiding (as highlighted throughout the video), as well as culture in a deeper sense, evoking the imagery of the braid as the heart and soul of a place and culture. In Tesfaye's references to his "braid" the image shown is just as likely to be the video's female protagonist's braids

or a clip of the forest. Furthermore, the narrative of the song uses the refrain of "shurrubee koo" to weave together the rest of the story, which shares some beloved features and famous history of the area. These accentuated points differ from the narratives of Goree that come from imperial standpoints.

While the video production dwells longer in urban centers, Tesfaye's lyrics instead discuss Onesmos Nasib, born in Hurumu Town, and known for being the first person to translate the bible into Afan Oromo ("*biyya Onesmos Nasib, Hurumu dawate*"), the Soor River, and the importance that Illubabor holds for his Oromo people. In one line, Tesfaye says "*biyya uumman qofa, Waaqni kan badhasse,*" which we could translate as "It is a divine country, Waaqa awarded it." The Afan Oromo word *uumaa* has several intersecting meanings, translated generally as creative or divine, with different suffixes transforming it to mean natural (*uumama*), organic (*uumamaan*), civil (*uummata*), or peoples (as in *uummata-ispeeni*, meaning Hispanic or peoples of Spain). As another example of the complexities of uumma, in a song by renowned Oromo singer Ali Birra called "Bareedu Umma," Birra sings of the health of the world and blessings of god, evoking a very natural and spiritual notion of "umma." By drawing on these intersecting meanings of natural, sacred, and organic, Tesfaye demonstrates a reclaimed approach to understanding Goree. In this sense, he moves away from imperialized narratives and presents a transformative, and hence politicized, sovereign understanding of Goree and Illubabor.

Reading Goree through Tesfaye's mapping of Illubabor illustrates the differences between an imperialized space, and a space characterized by livingness and resistance to violence. Despite its overwhelming size and corresponding employment power, Tesfaye makes no references to Gumaro and the tea production there. The commodification and exploitative framing which have demarcated Goree in non-Oromo writings is absent in Tesfaye's telling. In the few urban settings, particular those with strong heritages and

indications of modernization if not colonization, the camera focuses on cultural artifacts like the Islamic crescent moon on the side of a building, or the Oromia flag with its Gadaa colors. Furthermore, even while lingering in these city scenes, Tesfaye's lyrics do not prioritize the urban or urbanized. Instead, he evokes the long history and spirit of different places, all of which are connected and interwoven, braided together in meaning. In Tesfaye's reading, Goree is not contained or limited to its imperialized earning potential, nor does its geographic difference translate into a cultural divergence. Instead, the meaning of the place is embedded in live histories of the peoples across Illubabor. Goeman identifies these types of mapped meanings as working to heal some of the imperialized presentations (2009). Similarly, King points out that healing and accountability present in Native and Black artistic works are part of separating the meanings from the imperial understandings and grammars of conquest (2019:49).

In these different ways of mapping and understanding space, possibilities for space-making come to the forefront. While not explicitly a form of decommodification, celebrating and acknowledging conceptualizations of Goree Town which refuse to prioritize its economic history are still an essential part of transforming the overall narrative. More importantly, the musical narrative of Tesfaye, and other Oromo singers, is part of the larger work of reclaiming their culture, their heritage, and their relationships with Oromia amidst generations of Abyssinian and Ethiopian imperialism.

RE/PLACING MEANINGS

The two readings I conduct of Goree Town and the tensions of dis/place/meant link to the broader questions I ask regarding sovereignty and geography. The empire and nation-state leak into the archive and history books, limiting our ability to understand places fully, or forcing an understanding that reflects an imperialized sensibility. Contesting the sovereignty of this state-centric way of knowing, reading people and places through Oromo music videos

offers a soulful space-making. Guraacha geography, as sung and shared in these forms, is full of relationality. The waterfalls of the Soor river are relational to the Oromo people who live around the banks, up and downstream. As a “visitor” I use Black geography to push back against singular statist narratives that offer an imperialized stasis in lieu of real engagement. Engaging further and reading geography guraacha allows for a further upheaval of these imperial legacies.

CHAPTER X: GURAACHA READINGS OF FINFINNEE'S SOVEREIGNTY

Figure 2) Finfinnee, Ethiopia, overlooking the African Union, Heineken building, and a feeble stream

In the image I capture the sun shines through a large cloud cover, the last few hours of the late afternoon. On the left side of the picture a beige building stands above its humble neighbors, the Heineken beer company label and red star logo in large script running vertically up the side. The houses it looks over are not quite visible, but the tops of tin roofs peek out, and a few rusted satellite dishes are scattered around. In the background of the image, in the center of the frame, the African Union makes its presence known, as the distinct angle of its tower pierces above the surrounding area. The sharpness of the point is imposing, almost aggressive in its shaping, and it stands out of place among the other structures. In the image's foreground, a murky river trudges upwards and out of sight. The waters are dark, a

blackish brown color, and a white foamy substance is streaked across the surface, appearing to be either soap or something more sinister. It reminds me of a childhood trip to the beach when, having missed the announcement about a recent oil spill, I spent hours fascinated by the thick white foam that washed ashore and failed to dissolve, the tiny fish that washed up in its wake. The toxicity is not readily apparent, you simply have the feeling that something is not quite right. The river's right bank, visible from this position, is covered with trash, shiny metallic bits and ripped pieces of plastic caked in mud.

The street that this river runs next to, the place where this image was taken, is a busy, four lane road in a fairly posh part of town. It sits just a few blocks away from the embassy for the Vatican, for example, and many international staffers for diplomatic missions or NGOs live in the area. The United States Peace Corps, the organization I worked for at the time, is headquartered a short walk down the road; this river runs next to their preferred hotel for organizational meetings. The vast majority of staff members of such bodies, foreign and local, forego the public transit that runs on this road throughout the day and either drive themselves or hire private taxis. The most elite of these are chauffeured around everywhere, either in private vehicles or the white Range Rover which has become synonymous with international aid in Africa. These elites do not experience the sensory elements of this photo, the sensation not caught on film.

Standing on this bridge, when the wind comes at just the right angle, you begin to cough and choke on the stench of the river. The garbage that lines its banks flows, begrudgingly, with the water downstream. The picture was taken during the rainy season, July, when the rains come daily and sometimes for hours on end. The water levels are high, even as they slog slowly downstream with their rotten cargo. On drier days, in other seasons, you occasionally see women upstream, on the other side of the bridge, washing clothes. The "liquid gold" of water retains its value even in this putrid form, and the work of the soap and

the scrubbing has to suffice for a form of cleanliness. It seems that the trees lining the river, despite the water's inhospitable appearance, know something that these women know, that we may not easily comprehend as the outside viewer. The murkiness of the water, the ghostly presence of industry, the lingering stench of state violence and disregard for those suffering under it, are embodied by this river. And yet its use as a giver of life, as something that can sustain and support growth, remains intact. This river practices a form of resistance, in some disembodied form, even as the industry and petty politics seek to deny it.

BACKGROUND

This photo was taken in Finfinnee, Ethiopia, the nation's capital city in mid-July 2014, and in it we see a new-old vision of the city within the settler colony. Three features of the cityscape stand out as the incarnation of a sovereignty denied and attacked: the Heineken building, the African Union, and the polluted river flowing below them. Turning to da Silva's expression of the triad of oppression we may see these as the embodiment of Capitalism, Colonialism, and Patriarchy. Heineken as the capitalist behemoth, the African Union building as an expression of settler colonialism, and the river as an embodiment of patriarchal relations with the land. By looking at the transparent space (after McKittrick 2006; the notion that what we see is natural or right) these features operate in, and further interrogating their meanings in the context of Oromia and Oromo histories, I assess the subtle and expansive shape of attacks against Oromo sovereignty over time, and the imperialization of the space. Beginning at the source of Oromo sovereignty, Oromia, in a settler colonial city that has worked at every level to deny any sense of Oromo past or present, I use this example to describe the violence that Oromo people face, a violence which follows into the diaspora. Before conducting the analysis, I will detour briefly to contextualize the history of the city itself in the long colonial march of Ethiopia.

Finfinnee, known in the settler colonial state language as Addis Ababa, is understood

in the Oromo epistemology as Oromia's *haandhura*, or bellybutton. It sits on the Indigenous homelands of the Tuluma Oromos in the nation's center, simultaneously the center of the settler colonial state. Finfinnee and the surrounding areas are high in elevation and rich in resources. The settler name of Addis Ababa translates to New Flower, a reference to the promise of beauty and wealth to be extracted from it. Menelik, then the King of Shoa, established Entoto, the mountains above the city, as his administrative capital in 1881 (Pankhurst 1961:105; Tufa 2008). After realizing it was unsuitable owing to the challenges of its elevation and difficulty of access, he moved to the warm springs just south of the area, encouraged by his wife Taitu (Pankhurst 1961:106). Menelik reportedly told Taitu to "Begin by building a house," after which he would give her a city purged of all the Oromo people who lived there, and then an entire country (Pankhurst 1961:106). These origins point to the colonial perceptions of Oromo land and people, little more than an obstacle to a political modernization project.

During the city's construction, Menelik made use of foreign experts and skilled laborers to construct his ideal nation-state, including technological advances in plumbing and architecture (Pankhurst 1961:108). Of interest to note in this initial founding, with direct relevance to our modern image, is that one major benefit of this innovation, according to the imperial description, is that "people were no longer seen going to the river to wash their clothes" (Sellassie 1930, cited in Pankhurst 1961:109). The modernization project of the settler colonial forces that took them up and away from the riverbeds has resulted in a country where marginalized people remain suppressed in a colonial form, restricted from accessing rights.

Further exacerbating the violence of the settler colonial city-making was the mass deforestation project it included, with reports that the "immense consumption of firewood for heating and cooking rapidly exhausted local supplies" to the extent that the surrounding areas

were almost entirely treeless (Pankhurst 1961:110). Though Menelik rectified this mistake, the decision to use imported Australian Eucalyptus trees has wrought a different type of devastation, as the invasive species chokes out native trees and causes soil instability in areas prone to rainfall owing to the tree's inability to attach roots properly in a non-arid environment and its general unsuitability for the local ecosystem (Pankhurst 1961; Tufa 2008:35). While this long description of Addis Ababa is a useful contextualization, it cannot be left unremarked upon that the author's mother, Sylvia Pankhurst, was a close confidant and friend of Haile Selassie.[6] This influence undoubtedly colored the younger Pankhurst's analysis and attempts at objectivity.

In a more critical view Asebe Debelo and Teshome Sobaka assert that since its establishment, Addis Ababa has taken the form of an "ever frontier making city" (Debelo and Sobaka 2022:4). Debelo and Sobaka form this description by reading the development of the city through each iteration of governance, noting the patterns of land appropriation that have evolved and advanced in their displacement tactics over time. Critiques such as Debelo and Sobaka's echo and resonate with Getahun Benti's critique of a text by Peter Garretson which proposes to be a definitive history of Addis Ababa from its foundation (2000). Benti stresses the role of military and foreign relations in establishing Addis Ababa, something seemingly excluded by Garretson's reading (2000:144). More critically, Benti's reading urges us to take stock of the imperial entanglements that established the city, as "Addis Ababa was for the Amhara, the creators of the empire, what Nairobi was for the British, and its growth owes

[6] Elleni Zeleke offers the following description: "Sylvia Pankhurst was a good friend of Haile Selassie. Moreover, the Ethiopian Observer, which she edited until her son took it over in 1962, was uncritical of Haile Selassie's regime. Indeed, we can be sure that everything she wrote was intended to support Haile Selassie's regime, and in particular its modernization program" (2010:133).

more to the forces of imperialism and world economy" than other factors (ibid.).[7] With these critiques we can see Finfinnee not as an innocent "wandering capital" as described elsewhere (Horvath 1969), but as one of many imposed assaults on Oromo sovereignty, in pursuit of settler colonial state formation.

TRIADIC OPPRESSION: CAPITALISM, COLONIALISM, PATRIARCHY

The capitalist and parasitic relationship between Heineken and Ethiopia has co-opted local and national beer-making culture into a systemized and neatly branded industry. Local beers that come under Heineken's control are re-launched with special deals in major cities, and restaurants in the diaspora typically feature these offerings (beers like Oromia's *Bedele,* and Heineken's own *Walia* are all examples) (based on personal observations in several major Ethiopian cities as well as restaurants in the Western United States and Germany). This capitalistic expansion of an existing practice has homogenized local culture into a national industry, and Heineken has a majority position in the Ethiopian market (Christensen 2014). Since their arrival in 2011, and the privatization of the industry, Heineken has staked its claim as a majority owner and powerful influencer on local farm production as well as final distribution (Tefera, Bijman, & Slingerland 2020).

The coloniality of the African Union comes with its acceptance of the sovereignty of Ethiopia itself, despite the nation-state's long documented history of violence against indigenous people. The African Union organizes itself through nation-state relations in a way that reifies colonial era borders and knowledges and reaffirms Indigenous exclusion. This is because Ethiopia, like other "African colonizing powers," was "able to legally characterize the pursuit of independence as acts of terrorism, rebellion, and secession instead of

[7] Benti completed his own analysis of Finfinne, addressing failures such as Garretson's, in his book *Addis Ababa: Migration and the Making of a Multiethnic Metropolis, 1941-1974* (2007).

decolonization" (Dirar 2017:356). Approaching African inter-state relations with the beginning belief that the states themselves bear the legacies of their colonial powers makes clear the need for fuller indigenous inclusion. This critique is leveraged further in Luwam Dirar's discussion of the similarities between the Bandung Conference and the formation of the AU. Dirar says that both failed fully to address "Third World oppression" imposed by states like Ethiopia, opting instead to prioritize a "political statehood that precluded victims of Third World colonialism from defining their political future" (2017:358). The attention to political statehood allowed the organization both to condemn colonialism and fail to distinguish "between forms and manifestations of colonialism" implemented by their own members (ibid. 360).

An alternate example, the operation of vast reservations across Namibia, enclosure and denial of land rights for indigenous people in favor of the descendants of European settlers, calls into question what an African state owes to the people of Africa itself, and what it instead offers and performs for Northern nations. The African Union's decision to build its headquarters within the supposedly stable lands of Ethiopia, in the heart of the stolen settled Indigenous homelands of the Oromo, provides at least some evidence of the colonial connections that these nation-states and the larger governing body are, as of yet, unable to reckon with. Following Dirar, critiquing the coloniality of the AU "is not to doubt the commitment of the African Union and its members for liberation of colonized people" but rather to acknowledge the way that it "created a new African elite that employed concepts of territorial integrity to determine the legitimacy of independence or secessionist movement" (2017:364). The risk posed by this latter tendency is that decolonization pushed for by peoples like the Oromo is seen as a "threat to territorial integrity" rather than a re-drawing of what the territory itself may mean (ibid.).

The patriarchal power of pollution becomes evident within a larger conversation

about Indigenous feminisms and more specifically speculative ecologies and Ecofeminism. The work of Bettina Escauriza is one demonstration of this alternative. The linkages between patriarchy and the destruction of Indigenous homelands are put forth by Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013) in their discussion of the term cisheteropatriarchy. Paying attention to the way land is distributed and used reveals practices that Sylvia Tamale describes as "eco-colonial," allowing for extractivism under the pretense of development (2020:34). More broadly, *ecofeminism*, which analyzes the "parallels between the treatment of women and that of nature," is embedded in critical Indigenous epistemologies and conversations around sovereignty (Plumwood 1986:120). Opposing and suppressing this sovereignty, patriarchal view contribute to exploitative engagements with land.

AGAINST OPPRESSION: OROMO ECOSOVEREIGNTY

Ecofeminism as a specific field of study offers varying sets of perspectives on viewing the entanglements between the treatment of women and nature (or women *as* nature) under imperial conditions. From Indigenous epistemologies, the relationships between women, gender more broadly, and nature may be better framed as scales of space that begin with the body. Goeman identified individual bodies and communities of social bodies as one scale, the social body of the entire Native nation or the national body of the nation-state as another (2017:101). These scales of space are not disconnected, as the settler colonial would have you believe. Rather, even the body itself is "a geography connected to other geographies under the structures of settler colonialism" (Goeman 2017:102). Social justice demands repair and healing for all peoples just as spatial justice demands liberation from containment for all bodies. While not conflating attacks against women and land, approaching Indigenous sovereignty as a spatial question is a more "soulful" (returning to Deer) reading of what it means to live, and live freely. This is further clarified through an analysis of ecologies that

welcomes the potential of eroticism[8] and care.

Eco-eroticism as it emerges from particular Indigenous frameworks insists on the interrelationships and synergies across nature, asking that humans pay closer attention to the "sensuous interaction with the material fabric of life" (Nelson 2017:234). Nelson specifically links patriarchy and heteronormativity to forms of harm against the earth as an issue to be addressed in the work to reclaim a more equitable relationship (2017:235). Writing on Anarchoindigenous ecologies, Escauriza describes a concept of the natural that sees each piece not as a singular aspect, but "rather as something whose existence radiates outward to encompass concepts beyond both its form and which is conceived as a process of transformation" (2018:89). In an Indigenous ecology there is a principal need to see that the future of trees (or rivers) is also that of the earth, and to recognize that attacks on its sovereign right to survive and thrive cannot be allowed to stand, legally, philosophically, politically, or socially. In Indigenous homelands, places "defined by ways of being," territories and borders cannot express the reality, and it is "not easily mappable or fixed" (Escauriza 2018:98). In a sovereign and respectful ecology,"[r]esistance has a spatial dimension (a territory in which one can be free) and a temporal dimension (the future, in which one is free)" (Escauriza 2018:98).

In the Finfinnee pictured above, the spatiotemporality is one of oppression, where freedom is far from here and the future does not appear close on the horizon. The Abyssinian post-Empire sees Finfinnee as a resource for raw materials, "as opposed to a multitude of individual beings" engaging with and connected to the earth (Escauriza 2018:98). Making

[8] The implications of the "erotic" here follow the work of Audre Lorde and her essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," first published in 1978. This frames the erotic as "an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives."

space for Indigenous ecological epistemologies, in their sovereign and soulful expression, opens new opportunities for "Indigenous epistemologies to make real change in the world" (Escauriza 2018:102). Expressions of eco-eroticism are in direct conversation with Lorde's erotic, and each of these formations is an expression of *waloo*[9]. Through this relationality, the triadic forms of oppression are rendered untenable; they cannot be contained by or manage to contain the sovereign soul of the Oromo.

GURAACHA READINGS

In Oromo epistemologies "water is symbolically regarded as the source of all life" (Kumsa 1997:121). Individuals deprived of this *hara* (the specific term for a body of water), are also seen to be "deprived of all the basic rights including the right to her/his life" (Kumsa 1997:121). This particular *hara* is polluted and despoiled, but it is still a source of some life, a thicket of green trees clinging to its banks. Recentering the life and livingness of the *hara* is an attention to the entirety of the Oromo soul, and a recognition of epistemological traditions that define it (Megerssa and Kassam 1996).Within the settler colonial space, acts of violence against the land and against the Indigenous body work in tandem. However, "the generality of antagonism is structured and obscured by the genocidal particularity of the settler's antiecological antiblackness" (Moten 2018:73). Rhetoric of settlement, development, and growth all work to disguise the way these progressions deny the sovereignty and destroy the sovereign body of the Oromo. The transformation and mutation of this river represent an attack on the Oromo ecology and simultaneously an attack on the Oromo as the Black(ened) other. The *hara* that this river came from provides what it can to the trees and people it feeds,

[9] "Literally, *waloo* means being together, holding together. *Waloo* signifies Oromo women both as the floating glue that holds together the entire Oromo society and as the stewards for the day-to-day care and maintenance of egalitarian checks and balances of *safuu*." (Kumsa 2020:126)

and the women who receive what they can from this river embody these pre-colonial sensuous relationships.

Another relevant aspect of Oromo epistemological frames that the picture demonstrates is the responses to *safuu*, disruptions to social order. Ecological destruction is decried across Oromo social and cultural practices. Critical to each aspect of religious practices are elements of respect for the land, gratitude for its offerings, careful measures to return anything taken and avoid extraction (Bartels 1983; Megerssa and Kassam 2020; Melbaa 1988). In order to bring this world into balance and repair, the disrupted *safuu* must be addressed. In this case the pollution and development that have clogged the river are contested by the land itself, the trees that push out between the piles of trash.

I am not interested in blaming local people for the existence of this waste or their role in contributing to it. Generations of poverty and colonial violence have made their mark on the lifeways of the people whose homes we see displayed above**,** and this warrants some suspension of judgement, a moment of grace. These are people living in places that "have been fucked up through no fault of our own in a thousand different ways for seven different generations and that takes a toll on how we treat each other" as Indigenous poet Leanne Betasamosake Simpson described in her *Islands of Decolonial Love* (2013:85). The toll of this mistreatment, a violence that is reaffirmed and strengthened daily by the suffering of capitalist extraction, places constraints on the way people relate to and treat the land, what their options are. A critical attention would be better directed towards the city infrastructure that failed to account for waste management, or the settlements and modernization programs that continue to expand the city. While subjects and citizens of the Ethiopian settler colony suffer, Oromia works back towards her originary form, the land's growth itself a form of resistance. Though the empire's violence may not make possible a thick-trunked fruit tree or

Odaa (*Ficus sycamorus)*, the polluted ground proves its negotiation skills by showing that it is in fact still alive. This proof is guraacha in nature, part of a geography of liberation.

CHAPTER XI: GURAACHA ROOTS AND ROUTES; SAARO UMAR

In addition to guraacha geographies of place and space, we can also come to geographic knowledges through poetry and imagination. Paul Gilroy's 1993 conceptualization of roots and routes, which is further taken up and expanded by Fred Moten (2018), is a poetic way of understanding the existence and output of Black diasporas. The relation between the essentialized unknown heritage of the roots and the complex violence of the route produces creative works that are unique to the Black and African diaspora. While experiences of refugee flight, displacement, and other forced migrations are not always racialized or specifically the result of anti-Blackness, the world in which these routes develop and the disparities that demarcate certain paths are irrevocably so. With the clock ticking forward in "residence time," as anti-Blackness and slavery continue to characterize international relations, diaspora arts are a way of excavating some of these bodies from the salt, and the wild violences of the nation-state (Sharpe 2014). And, as with archaeology, this excavation process is characterized and rendered distinctive by the individual carrying it out. A particular individual rooted route is built by poetic archaeologist Saaro Umar. Umar, an Oromo woman living in Australia, writes through an explicitly and outspokenly Oromo diasporic perspective. Reading her writing as a geographic practice shows a guraacha map that moves beyond anti-Black roots to create more liberatory routes. Her 2019 poem, "geography test" will be analyzed at length here for its portrayal of diasporic reckonings of Oromo life and histories that emerge outside of imperial ways of knowing.

GEOGRAPHY TEST

Umar begins the poem by describing an "archivist" who "enters the room with a bag of oranges" (2019). She brings these oranges to her father, who is "facing the open window" and looking out at the skyline, in a city that is left unnamed. As he steams and steeps the

dried khat[10] into tea, she describes to the reader his childhood in Oromia "cutting leaf & cane" before heading to university. It was in this pursuit of knowledge that he "swallowed the language of three colonizers," part of the struggle which seems to have led him to this room and this window, away from that childhood land. Umar's poem is rich with descriptions of a diasporic life colored by Oromumma, the overlaps between the nation who forced her father to keep his Afan Oromo "hidden in the secret of his cheeks," and the skyline they currently look over. By moving across these places, Umar creates an Oromo geography that writes their story in place on their own terms, taking note of what is most essential, without needing the permission or language of either nation-state.

Umar uses the notion of transit to mark a turning point in the poem's narrative from her exploration of her father to her own experience. This section of the poem deepens the roots of these diaspora routes, placing Oromo experiences and "ceremony" (following King 2019) on either end of this discussion. As she writes:

afaan oromo he
kept
hidden in the secret of his cheeks

she thought
everything unknowable stayed
hallowed in transit

the crackle of scalded onions
& oil
her aunty covered in gold & satin

The hallowed status of the "unknowable" is a route inflected with trauma; the secrets of her father, the language he can share suppressed beneath the violence that he cannot. As the section begins with the language as a secret, it seems to follow that what is "unknowable"

[10] Khat (*Catha edulis*) is also called jimaa (Afan Oromo). It is native to the Horn of Africa where its leaves are picked and ingested as a stimulant, by Muslim communities in particular. It is typically chewed in Ethiopia, where the leaves grow wild, but available to the diaspora community as a dried leaf that can be steeped into tea.

may include things known, and sacred, but unable to be shared. We may infer that these hallowed and consecrated secrets are carried like precious cargo and baggage along the route from the originary homeland into the diaspora. Tiffany Lethabo King's notion of ceremony is a useful complement to this explanation. Ceremony "brings to fruition things that cannot yet name (or escape signification)" within ongoing forms of conquest (King 2019:204). Furthermore, ceremonial work and practices (like the "aunty covered in gold & satin") are a way of sharing sacred knowledge and recognizing intimate connections (King 2019:205). The construction of alternative institutions is a process of re-organizing and claiming sovereignty in lives and communities facing overwhelming violence.

Umar places us (the readers) in motion with her usage of the word transit, and her routing in the next stanza remains diasporic and transnational. Family, foodways, and the invocation of the ceremonial "gold & satin" all add richness and detail to the picture of Oromo life without requiring a physical location. While those things that cannot be known or perhaps cannot be shared (the colonial violence that silenced her father's language) remain sacred and revered on the move, Umar also seems to imply that this mobility and movement are ongoing. The route has been set in motion, and Oromo lives transit on. In these movements, Umar is both acknowledging the separation from the physical space of Oromia (whose essence is "unknowable") and opening up space for the route itself to have a meaning, and for places to move off of the imperial maps they are bound by.

In the close of the ceremony, once the khat has been turned into tea, Umar turns to narrate the implications of what has been just unleashed; "they say the leaf of God/ conjures old ghosts/ but he weathers the nightmares/ for the memories." Khat as a "leaf of God" is a particular phrasing, attuned to Oromo transnationality and cultural hybridity. The leaf is "of" the Oromo god just as all else falls under the domain; Waqaa guraacha is everywhere, nowhere, and beyond. Who, then, are these ghosts? What substantiates the nightmares? How

blessed or cursed are these memories? Umar does not linger long in the speculation of these ghosts and nightmares. It is left, in this instance, in the realm of Waqaa, beyond naming. Memories, however, add a geographic specificity to the ceremony and narration. Umar speaks explicitly here, in the lines which precede the long stanza cited above, describing her father as the "eldest of twelve" and the "first from his village/ to enter university." These, presumably, are memories. What follows are swallowed secrets. The reader is left to question, if this memory is perhaps also scarred by the dream turned nightmare.

After this narrative turn, we remain in motion as Umar shares the story of a doctor's visit when she has a vision of "Odaa Nabee," a tree with importance in Waqqeeffanna mythology, "etched onto ceiling." We begin with the presumed dullness of the doctor's office, bringing to mind clinical white paint, the adjustable bed, walls papered with health advisory posters devoid of personality. In its place, Umar sees roots spreading, a larger-than-life sycamore fig tree growing before her eyes. The anonymous, mundane international location and occasion of a doctor's visit are instead shaped by the mountains and "blackened roots" of a particular Oromo space. This office is transformed, and imbued with an Oromo sovereign spatiality, and Umar narrativizes it as a geography guraacha. In this sense, she works to reclaim and reanimate the survival (or survivance, survival as resistance) of her relationship with these Oromo cultural artifacts. While her father was forced to keep his mother tongue hidden in his youth, swallowing colonial thoughts to stay alive, his daughter brings Waaqa to life in her mind. Roots of Oromumma show up in the routes and transit of diaspora. Bringing the reader on this route, Umar closes the poem by returning to "the archivist" protagonist and her father, whose tea has finished steeping.

Sitting down with his khat, he opens an atlas and asks her: "where is your country?" In return, she "draws her/ finger to the/ middle of her chest" and "gestures to the back of her mouth" and says "in here." Umar's closing line, her place/meant (after Baraka 1969, imbuing

meaning into a location) of her home country, evokes a geographic sensibility that cannot be encapsulated by demography and mapping. As she gestures to the back of her mouth, "her left palm remains/ on breast," on the "middle of her chest." When she says "in here," the placing of the country is not clearly defined. Instead, Umar opens up several routes to this end, and in some ways refuses a definition. We may follow her gesture of pointing, connect her mouth and voice with her father's swallowed Afan Oromo, with the khat leaves he is steeping in tea. We know that she has "gaps in her teeth," and orange juice on her chin. Even before responding, Umar shares a moment of hesitation, as "her tongue loops/ the enclave of her cheeks." What this enclave holds in place or keeps out, perhaps, are the words "she hasn't yet learnt" to know the meaning of. Read through the initial gesture towards the mouth, Umar's place/meant of home country seems to connect back to earlier experiences of Oromumma, lived and felt through language and food. When read alongside the second motion, that of the palm on her breast, of her finger "etching circles onto skin," the meaning of the home country, or of the roots of her route, expands. In the context of this "geography test," as the poem is titled, we can feel the entire notion of nation in motion. Oromumma as the spirit of a nation is transnational rather than static and bound. It is hidden to those who do not know where to look yet constantly present for those who live it. While her father flips through atlas pages, Umar, "the archivist" feels the presence of history instead of cartography. Her home is being made and lived within both forces.

CONCLUSION

Umar's writing evokes a geographic knowledge of Oromumma, and of the positionalities of Oromo women. In Umar's poem, the diasporic Oromo life can be made legible as a geography guraacha. The places are distinctly Oromo because of Umar's conjuring into being of Oromumma regardless of how they are mapped, what the atlas would say. We may also conclude that in her portrayal of these small gestures, acts like "breath,

inhaling, exhaling, smoking, and speaking" become their own forms of recuperating community and mediating colonial delineations of knowledge in space (Goeman 2009:176). Reading Umar's work as a complex geographic rendering opens up further understandings of how space is made and lived through in the Oromo diaspora. Her narrative is guraacha in its transnationality, living both within and far beyond the bounds of what can be seen and touched.

Umar challenges us to overlay banal spatial reckonings (the doctor's office) with the fantastic, mountains and trees etched into a ceiling. Geographies of indigeneity are also grappled with, made complex through the traces of displacement. Umar offers us mappable geographic spaces but refuses their transparency by interjecting Oromumma. This is a further indication of her soulful sovereignty. While movement from her father's homeland to the location of her writing in settler colonial Australia, complicated by refugee legal status and the liminality of this "arrivant" positionality within such a nation-state form offer a number of intelligible ways of placing her experience (cities on maps, ledgers of refugee re/settlement, rates of migration flow), Umar refuses steadfastly to be so easily incorporated into these imperial entanglements. She maintains Oromo sovereignty as it hides in the deepest pockets of her father's cheeks, steams up from the khat steeping in the terra-cotta bowl, etches circles onto her skin, and flourishes inextinguishably inside of her.

CHAPTER XII: DISEMBODIED BORDERS AND A FEMINIZED EMPIRE

The following narrative is an autoethnographic report of my experiences attempting to communicate with friends in Oromia while working on my thesis in Europe, in the midst of a global pandemic and Ethiopia's civil war. The geographic terrain separating the two locations is transparent and spatialized; deserts, oceans, and mountains that serve to further complicate the juridical borders. Imperial spatializing, however, moves above the physical and into the digital space, through the erection of what I name *disembodied feminine borders*. These borders refute the transparent meanings of territorial separation by identifying the creation of barriers in the intangible arena of cyberspace. Such a fluid and difficult to grasp bordering practice, in addition to embodying imperial legacies, also points to the value of Black geographic knowledge. Black people, the "absent" site of nation (after McKittrick 2006), are typically restricted from full state access and targeted in extra-juridical ways that are not defined by the state.

ETHNOGRAPHIC ANECDOTE

I sit down and recharge my Skype account. It costs .096 cents a word to send a text message to Ethiopia, but the calling rates depend on the time of day. I carefully dial the +251, 9, the rest of the number. I hear the beginning of the phone trill before a woman's voice answers: "Sorry. The subscriber's phone you've dialed is switched off."

Redial.

A different woman this time: "Sorry. The network is busy now. Please try later."

Redial.

Another woman, or at least a different tone of voice: "The number you are dialing is…" the voice interrupted by an odd clicking sound before it repeats itself.

Redial.

The faint sounds of crickets in the background of the call, in the space before the ringing begins. "Sorry." I click off before the sentence can finish.

Redial.

The disembodied voice returns. Her voice is tinny, scratchy, high-pitched, scratched and

pitched through the network lines. The same quiet crickets. Maybe a different set of crickets, a different listening post.

Redial.

It's nighttime in Oromia. My failed calls are placed from another continent, a strange land. I've added the appropriate number of hours, math-ing and mapping our time zones, making sure that they'll all be home, school over for the day and the shop closed.

Redial.

Sometimes she says the sentence in Amharic first. Usually its English. I don't have a caller ID set up in my Skype account, and I know that the call comes through, when it actually goes through, as "No Name." I pause to wonder for a moment about Skype's security apparatus, or relationship with Ethiotelecom. How it only knows that I'm calling from the outside and defaults to English sometimes, what is different about the times when it doesn't.

Redial.

There are no costs subtracted from my calling card if the calls don't connect. I am not charged for these brief interactions with these disembodied women. Free apologies on behalf of the Ethiopian state. In the seven years I have spent attempting calls, from inside and outside of the country, the voice and the script have remained unchanged. Sorry, sorry, sorry. One with every redial. One for every number I call: the daughter, the sister, the mother, the neighbor. A sea of oral sorrow.

Redial.

One ring, the odd trill of Skype's internal server, the hint of the beginning of a real dial from Ethiotelecom's end, a momentary sign that the call might be going through. A quick cut-off: "Sorry."

Redial.

Sometimes the calls go through in a shadowy form, despite the disconnect on my end. I receive 10 state apologies and they receive 10 missed call notifications, calls that they never had the chance to answer. The women's voices begin to put me on edge, feeding intro my frustrations. Their "sorry" sounds insincere. I imagine her smirk as she repeats this feeble apology, over and over again, shutting the digital door in my face.

Redial.

The subscriber I have dialed is switched OFF. Her voice lilts up at the end of the sentence, conveying the sense of finality, discouraging me from trying again. I read the news earlier today, I saw that there were more protests down the hill, another youth killed in the streets, another disappearance. This would not be the time to switch your phone off.

Redial.

Sorry. So, so sorry. This disembodied voice speaks for the entire nation-state, the nationalized state-owned phone network that has monopolized all channels of communication. The news I read was from a Twitter feed, a brave bystander with access to a VPN, maybe a state traitor who used their privileged network connection to post the image or share the story. It was confirmed and triangulated by experts and insiders with more sophisticated technology than I have. I only have a Skype card, charged for at least an hour's worth of conversation. I run through the upcoming conversation in my head as I try again.

Redial.

She apologizes once, sharply, and then cuts the call off, unwilling to indulge in my practice conversation. I mumble greetings to myself when I type out another number, "Akkami?" "Fayaa dha?" "Naguuma?" "Nagaa galata Waqqa" "Maatin akkamure?" "Hundu nagaa dha" "Jirtu?" "Jira, jirra" "Essa badde?" "Jira!" A few seconds of crickets is all I get.

Redial.

Sorry! I will not hear what would come after these initial hellos and pleasant greetings. I will not have the chance to ask again "Nagumma? Nageeya jira?"to find out if there really is peace, if things are a dire as they seem. I cannot cross the border or breach the wall. All of the numbers I know have been switched off, simultaneously. The network is completely busy, somehow. This is what I am led to believe. The network is by no means "busy" censoring and silencing an entire region, certainly not an entire nation. This is what I am skeptical of, what I have lived through. The suppression of an entire state expressed in the cold tones of this bodiless feminine figure.

I switch my phone off.

ANALYSIS

In addition to the problematics of the physical state borders of the Horn of Africa, the Ethiopian state also uses less corporeal forms to enact division and restrict relations. In this case, the border is a digital one, a cyber divider erected by the nation-state and enforced by a team of disembodied feminized border guards. This implementation is made possible through the state's ongoing monopoly over telecommunication networks which provide it complete control over phone and internet connections (Grinberg 2017; Workneh 2018). What does it mean for Ethiopia state networks to rely on a woman as their primary agent of digital border

enforcement? In a country with relatively low internet connectivity and network reach, the phone line is the supreme means of communication, and the first to be attacked (HRW 2014, 2015; ACLED 2018). In times of even mild conflict or agitation, the state's immediate response has been to shut off network access to the affected areas. When powerful people come to town the process is repeated. These shutdowns may last for the duration of an event or for months on end. This problem is aggravated by Ethiopia's history of strategic underdevelopment; areas like Western Wollega face restricted access to data and telecommunication resources even in peaceful conditions, and in the protest movements from 2014-2018, reigniting in 2019, the area was targeted for a nearly total blackout. I understand this process as the erection of a type of border, a communication blockage established with a team of women as the face of the wall.

Technology and state surveillance pose threats to sovereignty whose impacts cannot be fully comprehended on the global scale. Social media, security and anti-terrorism operations, even more seemingly innocuous advancements such as biometric data for refugee management; each of these has direct links to forms of increasingly nuanced and widespread forms of oppression (Benjamin 2017; Grinberg 2017). Within Ethiopia, rumors of drone tracking, cell phone hacking, and the usage of Israeli malware have all been reported in recent years, likely made worse by Abiy Ahmed's past connections to the state security institution. Under EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) rule state agencies "operationalized multiple scales and processes of surveillance to simultaneously expand and more flexibly delimit digital usage" (Grinberg 2017:437). While Abiy Ahmed "initiated a significant process of reform," rising protests in 2020 led to the "resurgence of older forms of repression, including internet shutdowns" (Gagliardone and Brhane 2021:187). These advanced mechanisms all work to keep information bifurcated and divided and prevent outside sources from receiving the full story on the ground. The erection of a digital border

through the closure of cell phone networks is a lower tech solution, more immediately damaging to individuals in rural areas, with a much wider overall impact.

DIGITAL BORDERS

Understanding Ethiopia's digital bordering through its control of communication technology is clarified through two separate but related constructions: the Ethiopian diaspora's digital influence on Ethiopian politics, and digital borders as a practice emerging distinctively in the Global North. As posited by Gagliardone and Brhane,

> When the internet started to be employed as a space to discuss Ethiopian politics, debates were rapidly captured by the polarised tones that had characterised the press. Platforms such as Ethiopian Review, Nazret and Ethiomedia, all launched by Ethiopians in the diaspora, hosted articles that equally could have appeared in the newspapers printed in Addis Ababa. (2021:188)

Imbricated diasporic and national-level ideologies and political approaches are reflected in digital discourse. These transnational links served to reinforce and strengthen networks of communication. However, the latter construct, the erection of digital borders rather than transnational pathways, offers a shadowy contrast to Ethiopia's own bordering; while Europe and EUrope specifically rely heavily on data *collection* in order to enforce and monitor movement, Ethiopia relies instead on data *withholding*, refusing access on any scale[11]. Through both forms of manipulation, sovereignty is kept in check, communication is made difficult or impossible, and the borders of the nation-state (or the European Union as a conglomerate of these formations) are reified and strengthened. Ruha Benjamin describes race as a type of technology, both metaphorically, and as a real, material conduit "by which past forms of inequality are upgraded" (2016:149). While subjugation is not the "explicit

[11] Manipulating state-owned internet and connection in order to cut off access was a feature of the former EPRDF-TPLF coalition (Ayalew 2017) as well as Abiy's Prosperity Party (Gaglione and Brhane 2021; Wilson, Lindberg, Tronvoll 2021). Groups like NetBlocks and the ACLED have documented ongoing blockages.

objective of science and technology," the close links between containment and development reveal the carceral nature of technoscientific progress (ibid.).

Ethiopia's technological advancement has in recent years been largely restricted to military and carceral gains. Strategic underdevelopment of communication technology prohibits local communication, and its "insistence on a monopoly telecom regime" has prohibited its own international growth and development (Adam 2019:8). Ethiopia's phone system is antiquated and held tightly in the grip of the state, but the technological capacity it does have is being leveraged towards exclusion. Speaking of "digital racial borders," E. Tendayi Achiume argues that "digital technologies mediate enjoyment of fundamental rights as states and private corporations rely upon these technologies to deliver essential goods and services" (2021:334). These technologies unfold in a way that mirrors Benjamin's discussion, reifying "direct, indirect, structural, and institutionalized forms of racial and xenophobic discrimination" (Achiume 2021:335). As well as a way of racializing, the state could be accused of anti-indigeneity, and well-established anti-Oromo sentiments. Ethiopia's borders are a concrete limitation on self-determination and independence, maintained "to the detriment of victims of intra-African oppression" (Dirar 2017:362).

In an Internet campaign by pro-state diaspora activists, social media users refer to themselves as the "Cyber Army of Ethiopia," adding the catchphrase "Everyone is a diplomat of his country" (Twitter 2020). This "Social Media Army" as such was announced as an intended outcome by the EPRDF in 2016; coming as such from a close link to the Prosperity Party it resonates with the current strategies (Abraha 2017:308). The EPRDF's main objective behind social media manipulation was "to promote and maintain the legitimacy and superiority of developmental democratic thought—the declared ideology of the ruling Party" (ibid.). This rhetoric echoes in the current campaign, which was reposted by Neamin Zeleke, a pro-state activist, Executive Director of Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT),

and a formerly prominent member of the opposition party Ginbot 7. Neamin is one of the most vocal pro-Abiy activists in the diaspora, and he often exploits his connections to digital media through ESAT and the website Borkena, as well as his 140,000+ Twitter followers, to push state propaganda. If an individual who is in close connection with statist narrative production holds the power of the cyber border and cyber state in such esteem, it seems practical to assume that its operation is carefully and intentionally upheld. The campaign is part of a trend in which "digital technologies are mobilized explicitly" in service of discrimination and exclusion (Achiume 2021:335). If we take their supposition further, another site of diplomatic contention emerges in the digital space of the telephone line. The state's diplomatic representation during our phone-bound border crossing is an all-women's army. This, too, is worth exploring, for the decision offers insight into the way women figure and do not in the state's (sovereign) representations and enforcement of its self/ body,

The secondary form of manipulation that digitized borders and bordering create, that of data collection and experimentation, becomes more prominent once the physical bounds of the state have been breached. Conducting intensive ethnographic research with Eritrean and Ethiopian diaspora communities in Belgium, Petra Molnar writes of the ways refugees feel the coldness and dehumanization inherent to computers, while these machines simultaneously make decisions that dictate their every move (2022). Digital borders also "have the effect of enhancing the racialized operation of borders by bringing greater precision to the reach of racial borders" (Achiume 2021:335).[12] In Ethiopia specifically, data collection is an open secret. The government has collaborated with the USA National Security Agency, and

> the largest telecommunication provider in the country, offered a customer management database, which, in addition to collecting records of calls made in

[12] Achiume's discussion was also taken up during a joint panel of the Promise Institute for Human Rights' Race and Human Rights Reimagined Series featuring the author, Mizue Aizeki, Jaivet Ealom, and Petra Molnar, moderated by Stacy Wood (https://youtu.be/mmX2ISl9bLU)

> Ethiopia, could allow access to the content of text messages and phone call audio[13] when needed.
>
> (Gagliardone and Brhane 2021:196)

In the lengthy description of Ethiopia's digital rights and civic spaces, cited above, as well as other information and technology writing (Nyabola 2021; Palvia, Ghosh, Jacks, and Serenko 2021), the phrase "technology landscape" is used to convey the overall field of digital technology in a certain area. This converging field of infrastructure, rights to access, availability, and development among other aspects, is gripped and strangled by the state. Just as with their physical borders, Ethiopia's primary concern in the bordering practice is "control and security" (ibid.). While attention is paid, rightfully so, to the physical crossings and movements taking place, understanding the bordering of this techno-landscape better elucidates Ethiopia's practices as a form of imperial spatializing (Lemberg-Pedersen & Haioty 2020; Pelizza 2020; Quinan 2017; Saucier and Woods 2014).

GENDERED TECHNO-BORDERS

The feminine gendering of robotic voices is not a new phenomenon; it is something heard at the self-check-out at the grocery store,[14] and from the all-knowing phone assistants

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[13] The whisper of crickets in the background of my Skype calls float somewhere in between a misconception, paranoia, and an accurate capture of state surveillance

[14] I am reminded of a character in David Foster Wallace's 1987 novel *The Broom of the System,* Melinda Sue Metalman née Lang, who is defined throughout the text for her career as "the voice" of various automations. She is introduced in the following excerpt as such, and it becomes a point of contention later as she and her husband (the character called Lang below) divorce, and he remains surrounded (in his car, at the store) by her voice. We see how the woman becomes defined only by her voice, and how this voice is quickly dehumanized into a machine, a haunting:

> "Mindy does have a career," Lang said after a moment. "Mindy is a voice." […]
> "You ever been in a grocery? And when you pay for your items and all at the cash register, the girl pushes the items over the scanner thing, that beeps, and then this voice in the register says the price? Or do you have one of them late-model cars that says to please fasten seat belts when you didn't fasten your seat belts? Melinda Sue is the voice in things."
> "That's Mindy Metalman?" I shopped. I drove a late-model car.

Siri and Alexa used by tech giants like Apple and Amazon in their surveillance/ communication technology. This feminizing has been documented at length in works such as Yolande Strengers and Jenny Kennedy's *Smart Wife.* which calls for a "feminist reboot" of smart home devices to consider this gendered relation (2020). Strengers and Kennedy use the term "smart wife" to capture the robotic and internet-connected, and evoke "wife" to "refer to an enduring archetype in the collective psyche—one who can take on all forms of domestic work within the home" (2020:11). Ethiopia manufactures kinship, or at least relationality, through the imposition and upholding of the nation-state and its borders. This domesticity is maintained in part through capture, and the borders erected to encapsulate this home are upheld through the "smart wife" of the cellular service network. In this instance, the disembodied form is gendered to enact these same processes, albeit with different results. Condensed to a series of short audio clips with a distinctly feminine pitch and tone, Ethiopia's digital border is feminized, but to what ends?

One argument for such gendered representation is the illusion of progression, the presumption that a select few women in visible elite positions corresponds with a higher societal status. This seems feasibly to follow Ethiopia's state policies, even if my understanding of their positions in this realm is conditioned by exposure to the development sector which favors performative activities as evidence of movement towards gender equity (connecting back to Rao's 2015 analysis of homocapitalism). To restate; Ethiopia and its international governing and non-governmental partners have seemingly put more emphasis on women's empowerment and gender-specific support, but in ways that have not significantly altered key metrics of inequality like Intimate Partner Violence nor disrupted historic ideologies of feminine marginalization. Strengers and Kennedy posit that feminized assistants reinforce gendered images of women as subservient, but in the case of this digital

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"Mrs. A. S. Lang herself, now," said Lang.

border guard the logic does not fit; she is the one with all the power (2020).

An alternative analysis, in a more generous reading of the state's intention, might take the decision to use a woman's voice in this position to present a type of soothing or comforting affect/ effect (both the presentation of a certain emotionality and the presentation of a certain emotional result), playing off the stereotypical mother/lover role of Ethiopia's patriarchal worldview. In this approach, state suppression is meant to be smoothed away by the femininity of the network blockage, the intended tone one that is modulated and sweet. It may be just to my ears and through my connection that the short sentences come off as grating and insincere; maybe this reflects my own frustration more than the reality.

With regard to the specificity of the question of sovereignty, the gendered bordering of Ethiopia's phone lines represents an interaction absented of *waloo* or *tumsa* (being together in solidarity). The disembodied figure is further complicated by the evocation of a sovereign soul; what makes this voice an empty shape while the soul is a rich conceptualization of transnational and intergenerational connection? I would argue that the ethos of the soul is one of care and relationality, a link to a community or formation that has been built through trust and shared experiences. The soullessness of this digital border guard comes from our mutual distrust, the rotating series of excuses we are given, even in moments when we know with all certainty that she is lying. To see a cell phone in hand, lights on, sounds chirping out, and be told that it is switched *off* is to be faced with the indifference of the nation-state. Having a monopoly on the means of communication, as Ethiopia and its puppet company Ethiotelecom[15] do, allows the nation-state to make a border that cannot be breached in any feasible form, creating a complete global blockage. News gets out, but only through secretive backroads.

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[15] Ethiopia nominally deregulated the telecommunications sector in 2019 (Workneh 2020) but it has continued to manipulate and restrict access in a way that reflects its overwhelming control.

BLACK GEOGRAPHY, GREY BORDERS

Borders are easily understood as a "transparent," visible, and easily read geographic concern, one which conditions and affects the way people move through and understand their relationships with space. Black geography and geographic sensibilities are inherently a refutation of these transparent bordering practices, however, as they create unbordered forms of nation in transnationality and statelessness. The transnationality of Blackness is part of what underwrites William Anderson's thinking on abolition. As Blackness is already taken as a non-state or non-citizen identity, the bordering practices and passport privileges granted for Black people cannot keep up with the great weight of anti-Black restrictions. Or, as Anderson puts it, Black people are "stateless within the borders of the empire, states, and nations that dismiss us" (2021:23). African diasporic people and the descendants of slaves especially have long innovated and organized cultures and social forms that are unintelligible to state structures of surveillance and control. Technology, in its ubiquity, sets up new challenges to access, but it does not necessarily render useless more analog resistances. Under the Dergue rule, Oromo liberation fighters set up shortwave radio stations in places such as Somalia; the Sagalee Billisumma Oromo, or Voice of Oromo Freedom, still broadcasts around the world today. Communication between oppressed peoples is passed along, in whispers and shortwaves, sliding over and squeezing through borders. These slippages further delegitimize the border in any of its forms, showing the ways Oromumma asserts itself transnationally.

Because the Oromo are treated as extra-state or sub-state citizens, not quite worthy of full access, they are subjected to geographic containment through physical and digital borders. These extra-state positionalities make them particularly vulnerable to the subordination tactics of digital technologies (Achiume 2021). I do not subscribe to the notion that these borders can be feminized, nor that they should be. They are too steeped in imperialism to be reformed, and ongoing attempts to modernize their enforcement and

existence simply reify this original violence. Adopting a Black geographic lens allows for the recognition that these forms of bordering are not new, nor have they ever succeeded in full suppression. In my anecdote I express defeat, taking no comfort in the cold mocking tone of Ethiopia's digital border guards. On another night, I might keep trying until I slipped through, scraping scraps of news from whatever corners of the internet allow it, taking solace in the community of diaspora. The stink of desperation emanating from the state even through the phone line is perhaps an odd sort of comfort as well, knowing that they fear even the sounds of a potential Oromo liberation. While they have succeeded in erection of the border, the Blackened statelessness and guraacha transnationality of Oromumma disrupt the imperial state.

CHAPTER XIII: GURAACHA ARCHIVES IN OROMO EUROPE

The following field notes come in a set, tied together by a certain spatiality, what may be called the European archive. Their contents comprise a type of ethnographic exploration into the archives themselves, the meanings of the materials as data, and my own meaning-making (or perhaps *visitation,* turning back to the SFHQ 2016). Layering symbols, meanings, and the transnational implication of learning and recognizing these Oromo materialities in Europe (and, more specifically EUrope) is a further engagement in Black geography. Further, the Black geographic knowledges that come out are predictors of futurities and liminalities of guraacha lifeways. Here I analyze 'the archive' primarily in the form of a fixed, static location, the Oromo Horn von Afrika Zentrum in Berlin, Germany, also known as the Oromo Center. But I will also employ the term as a broader way of naming the European epistemologies of Oromia and the Oromo people.

By naming these collective and disparate institutions as a singular archive I want to grapple with and trouble the general trends of meaning-making as a spatial project in Europe. The origins of certain images and forms of representation in travel narratives and misguided, anti-Indigenous historiography are glossed in the chapter examining Samuel Baker's accounts of Abyssinia**.** These racist images were a source of contestation and critique that dominated early conversations by members of Oromo youth organizations. The growth of Oromo Studies through student unions in North America and Europe was critical to the Oromo liberation movement at its origins and maintains relevance today. Oromos in Germany were major contributors to these movements, and their labor materialized through the establishment of the Oromo Center and its archive. Exploring the way that Oromumma as a transnational identity operates in Europe, I explore three field notes. Together they form an incomplete ethnographic look into the Oromo archive and its space-making.

Figure 3) Logo of the journal Oromtitti

FIELD NOTE I: OROMTITTI AS SIINQEE SOVEREIGNTY

This drawing is captured from the front cover of a journal called *Oromtitti*, published by the Union of Oromo Women in Europe during the 1970s and 1980s. The journal name suggests that the figure it displays is Oromtitti herself, the Oromo woman (the diminutive addition of titti is a way of feminizing or familiarizing a noun). The woman is standing in front of a tree, its shape seemingly the image of an *Odaa* (Sycamore) or *Qilxxu* (Oak) tree, and there is an *urjii* (star) overhead. Her facial expression is drawn without much detail, a stern look faintly conveyed, but the top of her head is lined with rows of neat braids. Her left arm hangs down, revealing an image of a pointed object hanging just behind her shoulder. The visible tip appears to show us an *ulee*, and from the power that the woman wields we could further assume it is a *siiqqee* stick. In her right arm, extended high over her head, is an object that appears at first glance to be some sort of dagger. I check my assumption with a

former member of the journal's executive committee, who tells me that it's actually a small bomb.

Analysis

Each of these aspects of the image works in relation to each other, to the Oromo women who produced the journal, and transnational Oromumma to express a particular type of Oromo feminine sovereignty. The soul of *Oromtitti*, as we see it here, is one filled with a deep ancestral knowledge that has informed her modern, ongoing struggle against violence. To explicate this meaning, I contextualize the image within the journal that produced it, the sociopolitical climate of the time in Oromia, and some notes on the nature of national relations in the country of the journal's publication, Germany.

The image comes from the front cover of the journal *Oromtitti*, produced by the Union of Oromo Women in Europe (UOWE) in 1980. The UOWE was first founded in 1977 alongside other diaspora organizations of Oromo people across the world. The UOWE was the representative of a network of committees and groups across Europe, primarily located in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. The journals and cultural outputs produced by this group were primarily printed in London, England, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, and Berlin, Germany. *Oromtitti* and their sponsoring organization, as well as many other journals of this era, were at some point in their production considered to be official organs and publications of the Oromo Liberation Front. Thus, the journals featured discussions and commentary on organizing strategies, analysis of political events, and reports from the frontlines of the liberation fight in the Horn of Africa, with a lens that was both diasporic (writing of they/ them) and transnational (writing from the view of us/ our). While many of the publications from this period, particularly those with socialist or leftish viewpoints, discussed what was called "the women question," and tried to identify roots of misogynistic and sexist harm and

to dismantle it, the key distinction is that *Oromtitti* was run, written, and edited by women.

Oromtitti reveals the ways in which diaspora facilitated a return to Indigenous culture that the "home" nation-state had denied. Each of the aspects of the logo displayed above brings a meaning beyond its physical form. The rows of braids on top of the woman's head are known in Afan Oromo as *shurrubee.* Each area of Oromia has particular braiding styles, and the significance of braiding as both an aesthetic and a community practice are such that that the word for braid can be used as a term of endearment or sign of deep affection. The inclusion of the shurrubee on *Oromtitti's* cover woman creates a face, even in a simplistic cartoon form, that connects instantly with deeply rooted Oromo cultural traditions regardless of place.

Of further significance in the image is the sharpened stick visible just over the woman's left shoulder, which we may see as an *ulee* or more specifically a *siiqqee*. *Ulee* is the "collective term the Oromo used to refer to those sticks that are purposely cut and fashioned for specific social, cultural and religious functions" (Kumsa 1997:120). The *siiqqee* represents one variation of this, referring to a fashioned stick that is given to a woman on her wedding day. The tree which the *siiqqee* is cut from is itself is a signifier of "the basic human rights to which an individual is entitled for as long as she/ he lives," and because of this origin part of its purpose is "to be used as a weapon to fight against any force that threatens the basic rights of a married woman to her life" (Kumsa 1997:121). According to Megerssa's account of the *siiqqee*, it is given from mother to daughter, a symbol of the ties within the family and across all women (quoted in Kumsa 1997:122). The *siiqqee* has important ritual use in Oromo indigenous culture, including a mobilization and inspiration during collective labor and a way of demonstrating their spirituality and relationship with Waaqa. (*Oromtitti* 1986)

The inclusion of the *siiqqee* stick in this diasporic image of the Oromo women

hearkens back to a deep, powerful past and present part of Oromumma. In their evocation of the *siiqqee*, the creators of *Oromtitti* speak to their community across the world, treating their dispersal as a mere diversion, something that poses no threat to their ability to uphold all forms of *tumsa*[16]. This stick is provided to women as a signal of their inclusion into the *Siinqee* system, and thus represents, in part, forms of law that were under the *Sinqqee's* control. An example of these powers includes accusations of domestic violence, in response to which women would gather around the house of the accused, sit in council and carry out justice. Although Gadaa governance was largely suppressed under colonialism, the power of the Siinqee rule is reflected in modern Oromo cultural practices. During events such as Irreecha, the Oromo Thanksgiving, women lead the people in song and chants, with respected elders holding on to their own Siinqee sticks (Kumsa 2013). The *siiqqee* demonstrates the power of Oromo women, a power that comes from the earth and world around them and ensures their right to exist. This artistic choice carries across temporalities, letting us know that the Oromo woman we see is an elder, with experience giving guidance and council.

The *urjii* or star that is placed above her head is symbolic of the system of time-telling and the calendar also used under the Gadaa/ Siinqee system. Asmarom Legesse's work offers perhaps the most detailed description of this relationship and its use in organizing Oromo life (1973). Gow argues that the *urjii* was first "popularized by the OLF" and "conveys the idea of a guiding star for the nation" (2004:307). The Odaa tree (*Ficus sycomorus)* is one of the most recognizable symbols of the Oromo transnational struggle. It has deep meanings within Gadaa and Siinqee institutional operations, and within Oromia, Odaa trees are home to all significant cultural events[17]. The Odaa adorns the flags and logos of the Oromo Liberation

[16] Tumsa is literally defined as solidarity, but includes the exact empathy needed for struggles (Kumsa 2020:125)

[17] I presume it is an Odaa, drawing on the most common signifiers of Oromo culture. Other trees are also symbolic for the Oromo, as discussed by Kumsa 2013, among others.

Front, Oromo journals and creative outputs, and was even co-opted by the Ethiopian state-sponsored party OPDO in their emblems. Though subtly behind her, almost more of a cloud than a distinct tree, the addition of the Odaa is a way of reiterating the connection to Oromia.

Taking the image of *Oromtitti* and placing it back on the cover of its namesake journal forms its own kind of map, an expression of Oromo sovereignty, and a sovereign soul. Through these symbolic gestures, we can connect the German diaspora and archive where the journal was produced to Oromia in the pre-colonial era and colonial present. This map is not disrupted by changing borders or political pursuits. It is a way of showing clearly some of the boundaries and guiding lines of Oromumma, pieces of a historical past that will not be erased and which show the Oromo experience more accurately than the colonial formation. Through subtle artistic choices, like the inclusion of *shurrubee* and the carefully placed *siiqqee*, the *tumsa* of the Oromo liberation struggle is put on display. For the uninitiated, they see only the power of woman; in a guraacha reading of the image and its geospatial linkages, we make a critical connection of *tumsa* across the Oromo diaspora.

FIELD NOTE II: SOVEREIGN SCRIPTS

In the grainy image, a young girl looks away from the camera and into the distance, her small hand cupping her chin. A scarf is loosely wrapped around her head, one end floating away as if lifted by an unseen wind. Her long-sleeved dress has been scrunched back slightly at the wrists, showing a cuff that seems to have come undone, suggesting she has been active, the aftermath of moving the sleeves away for neater access to her hands. Her left arm, hanging down by her side, holds on to a small book. Its pages are similarly disheveled by the wind that tugs at her scarf, and a few loose sheets of paper are peeking out from where they've been placed. Her eyes are cast upwards and away from the sun (judging by the glint of light on her cheeks) and her young face has a shadow of a wrinkle on her forehead, almost as if a frown is soon to come. Her hands take us from the presumptive frown to perhaps a

more positive place, the gentle cupping of her chin and the book by her side hinting that she may be lost in thought, taking a pause on her windy walk to consider something beyond this moment. The surrounding area is little more than blurred glints of light, a stretch of flat, dry land. The hazy background takes us, with her, almost anywhere, and the simple dress and scarf carry no temporal bearings. In this snapshot, of a young Oromo girl living in the early years of a civil war that would have devastating consequences for her home nation, all we can take as a concrete assessment of her current condition is the book, a sign of a young woman with a kind of power (of text, of literacy), or a power soon to come.

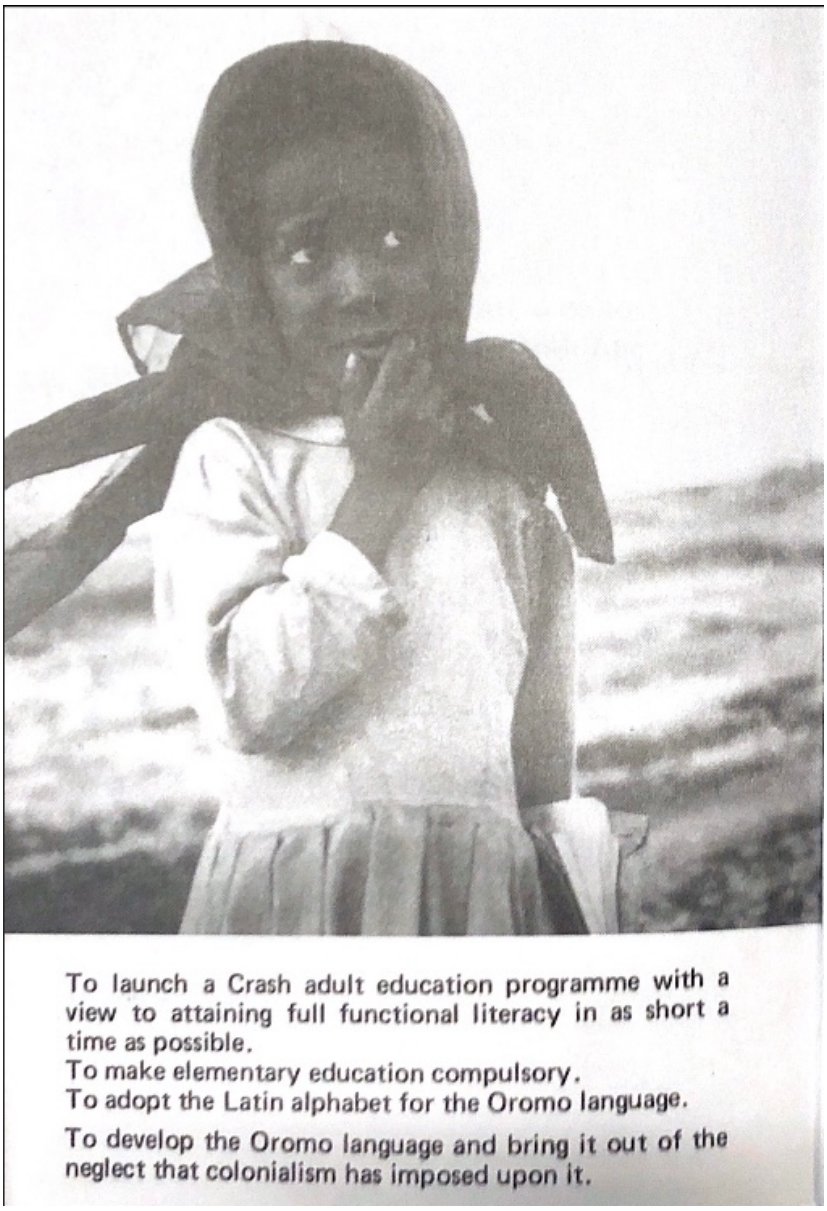

Figure 4) Image from the Seensa Barnoota Oromiffa; Barnoota Duraa: Fidala

Analysis

This image comes from the front cover of a text produced by the Oromo Liberation Front in 1979 entitled *Seensa Barnoota Oromiffa; Barnoota Duraa: Fidala (Historical Education in Oromiffa; Early Education: Fidel).* The pamphlet cover is bright red, and the logo of the Oromo Liberation Front, an Odaa tree and star surrounded by two branches, sits proudly at the top. The text is less than twenty pages long, and its intention, as suggested by the title, is to teach individuals who are literate in the Fidel, the Semitic script used for languages such as Amharic and Tigrigna, to read and write in Afan Oromo (also called Oromiffa). The text was produced at a significant sociopolitical moment both for the Oromo resistance movement and the larger history of the Horn of Africa. The end of the 1970s were a time of extensive political upheaval for the peoples and nations of the Horn as Ethiopia scrambled to reorganize after the deposition of Haile Selassie. The promise of young Marxist movements was still alive in the hearts of revolutionaries, and the era of a bastardized socialist view which had transformed into a "Red Terror" was echoing in the capital city. The socialism used by the Dergue regime was nominal at best, and beyond some promising land distribution practices the group fell quickly forward into fascism.

In the specificity of the historiography of the Oromo struggle, the publication of Oromo texts, and a wide scale Oromo literacy program was the result of a revolutionary struggle against a state that had attempted to institutionalize a complete cultural destruction, with language being the primary target. Haile Selassie's laws and policies surrounding Oromo language use have been described at length by Mekuria Bulcha (1997), Mohammed Hassen (2002), and Abiodun Salawu and Asemahagn Aseres (2015). It is important to note that even in areas or eras where discrimination against Afan Oromo was not legally prescribed, the language remained largely incompatible with the script used for state-sponsored language. Afan Oromo is spoken with long vowel sounds and explosives that Fidel

either does not contain (as with Ch) or cannot express. The absences of these distinctions can significantly change the meaning of the word or distort a sentence beyond meaning. In my own experiences in Oromia as a second-language speaker and English teacher I quickly learned that a failure to differentiate between sounds would render the common names Chala and Chaltu (Afan Oromo: Caala and Caaltu) unrecognizable to their owners. Differences such as *raffu* (cabbage) and *raafuu* (to sleep) point to moments of oral comprehension that are disrupted by an inability to produce the right vowel length. If the written form cannot capture these subtle vowel forms the meaning is rendered unintelligible. In a very practical and apolitical sense, the Oromo language is incompatible with the Fidel script. The issue thus generates the need for an alternative, following Oromos' incorporation into the Ethiopian state, which was rendered immediately difficult by Haile Selassie's language and cultural policies.

Despite the riskiness of the projects, Oromo scholars had made attempts to create a textual form for Oromiffa across the colonial and state formation eras. The greatest breakthrough in the process of developing the Oromo language would end up being the death of the Emperor. The fall of the monarchy and dissolution of much of the legal framework used by the monarchal state created opportunities for the formalization and distribution of the Oromo language in the Horn for the first time. Amidst its more harmful decisions and policies, the Dergue's position on language growth and the shadowy political scene of the era allowed for the Oromo to organize and produce a fully realized Qubee script.

The relation between the Oromo Liberation Front and sociocultural practices like the Qubee literacy campaign is a foundational element of the Oromo liberation movement. The Oromo Liberation Front was founded in the context of the revolutionary upheaval sweeping Ethiopia, but from its earliest years its priorities also included reparative work for Oromo communities at large. As a revolutionary organization that also had deep cultural, emotional,

and social ties to Oromo people, the OLF's decision to produce and distribute a literacy text is consistent with their general approach towards liberation work. The Qubee campaign resonates with what scholars like Ruth Wilson Gilmore or Rinaldo Walcott would describe as abolition work, a radical undoing of the violent past. The photograph borrows meaning from this historical moment of the OLF's founding, but it also opens up space for a larger interpretation.

The decision to use a young girl as the face of the Qubee literacy campaign may speak in some ways to the effectiveness of Oromo women in leadership positions. Scholars such as Kumsa, journals like *Oromtitti,* and even reports from OLF congresses during this era signify from their internal positionality the OLF's failure to include equitable gender representation and women's leadership. I would argue, however, that there are two points of comparison through which to understand this assessment. In comparison to the values and practices of the Gadaa Siinqee system, which had gender equity established in each level, the OLF's gender values were (and in some ways remain) insufficient and subpar. In comparison with the hyper-masculinized embodiment of both the Ethiopian state under Haile Selassie and the rule of the Dergue which followed, I posit that the OLF was still comparatively an improvement in its gender policies and politics.

This argument aside, the choice of a girl is further complicated by the age of the subject. She is cropped such that there are no objects of comparison, and even the size of the book in her hand is not clearly defined. She is certainly not yet a teenager, and something about the thoughtful worry in her eye makes me both hope and fear that she might be as young as she seems. The hope lies with a girl who is learning to love her language in a written form, expressing herself in a textual way for the first time, thinking deeply of the stories she wants to share. Gaining this gift at such a young age points to a future filled with greatness, the realization of something better. The fear stems from a young child in the midst

of the grief and trauma of war, one who may have seen and heard the unspeakable, words of violence that echo in her ears even as she takes her ABCs in. The small text does not provide clues to the young girl's identity, and other than the year of its production and the year of the OLF's establishment, we cannot neatly define a geotemporal position for her concerned face. Archival documents from the Oromo Relief Association from around the same time period report on a joint school built by the two groups in the "liberated areas" around Hararghe in 1977, though the exact date may be an inaccurate post-mark. From what we can see of the blurred background behind her the land is flat and treeless, supporting the idea that this may be located in the dusty plains that line the lowlands in this region.

In a 1993 report from the Dhideessa camp, it was revealed that 500 children who had been enrolled in an OLF school were tortured and denied access to medical treatment on the grounds that they were "not ill but that the problem was connected with their political attitude," according to government officials (Taera and Schmitt 1993). While nominally a refugee camp, Dhideessa was better described as a "concentration camp for former OLF fighters" (Zitelmann 2021, personal correspondence). These children had never participated in an armed struggle, but for the crime of their vulnerability, that their status had forced them into refugee camps operated by OLF affiliates, they were severely punished. I connect these instances, despite the temporal gap between them, to foreground a pattern of violence emerging during state formation that saw Oromo education as a primary target, and the risks associated with Oromo literacy.

The paragraph-long description below our protagonist does not speak to her existence in any particular way, but the impact of Oromo literacy on a young woman is implicit throughout the text. It purports to represent the start of a "Crash adult education programme" that will bring "full functional literacy in as short a time as possible," help to "make elementary education compulsory," and bring the Oromo language "out of the neglect that

colonialism has imposed upon it" (OLF 1979:2). Though the text starts with adults as the focal point, their involvement is more of a bureaucratically necessary task to be completed than a structural requirement. The suggestion of speed speaks also to the urgency of the conditions in which the learning takes place, conditions in which language learning is linked to the revolution that is simultaneously being written (for the first time!) in Afan Oromo. The subject of our attention is part of the second goal. Though framed through the organizational pursuit of compulsion, in an educational context compulsory education is more commonly associated with the provision of wide-scale youth learning which provides societally defined basic knowledge. The young girl who contemplates life (as we contemplate her) is part of this elementary educational program, a participant in this learning project.

The final sentence points most directly to her subject positionality and the points of oppression that may mark this moment. Colonialism, as described by Oromo scholars from this era and into the current day, was the impetus of the Abyssinian Empire and the Ethiopian settler colonial state. Colonialism's destructive tendencies are most visible in its attacks on Oromo culture and organizations, namely language, religion, and the Gadaa/ Siinqee system. Embedded in this systematic destruction, and with a gendered lens we turn our attention towards the Siinqee and what women lost in its uprooting.

The expressions of sovereignty I read in this image are soulful and speak to the loving *waloo* relationality that Oromumma includes. In the face of a Gadaa/ Siinqee system that had yet to be rebuilt and the patriarchal power of the Ethiopian state, women lost their institutional guarantee to have a voice within the community and act as conduits of representation and agency. This could be understood as a disruption to safuu, to the harmony and balance of the natural world. Our young protagonist stands in the sun and faces the wind, in relationality and *waloo* with the world around her. We cannot define from this image alone where she is or what she has seen, but we can use *guraacha* geographic methods, placing the

text into a time and space of the Oromo liberation struggle, to connect her on a plane of *tumsa* with the Oromo community at large.

FIELD NOTE III: THE LIMITS OF THE (IMPERIAL) MAP

In summer 2021 the peoples of Ethiopia were faced with famine, locust plagues, rogue militias, and innumerable other tragedies, triggering mass flight and displacement at alarming rates. The federal government was engaged in an increasingly violent civil conflict with the Tigray Defense Forces, the armed wing of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, representing the Tigrayan ethnic group from the North of the country. The Tigrayans were making demands about their sovereign ability to rule, and the conflict took center stage amongst the Horn's other atrocities.

During this same period, I was working as an intern for an NGO located just outside of the capital city of a Western European country. The organization is dedicated to facilitating the processing and integration of refugees into the national host society. In one of the first days there I was asked to complete a fairly banal task: take a list of contact information and place a reminder call to all of the individuals named, confirming their participation in a focus group to be operated by a large governing refugee body. During the call I was asked to write the names of each individual who would attend, their preferred language (a choice between the national language, Arabic, and English as a neutral third choice), and their country of origin. While not actively conducting research during this task, Ethiopia remained ever on my mind, and I smiled when I came to the names attached to this nation-state. I was surprised at first even to see Ethiopia included on the list, as the vast majority of other participants and individuals receiving support from the organization were from further North, fleeing from the violence that rippled across places such as Syria and Iraq. Buried in this bureaucratic list, I was further surprised to see that although the nation-state of Ethiopia provided the only geographic indication, the names made space for an

alternative mapping.

As I looked down the sheet in front of me, the names linked to the Ethiopian state contained an undeniable Oromo presence, evidence of a generational Oromumma that was not restricted to these state borders. There were religious names, primarily Muslim, instances when it was only the third name of the grandfather[18] that shared its Oromo-ness. Several names reflected the social conditions in which the individuals were born, names such as Strength and Patience corresponding with a childhood in the Dergue era.

In another city, on another continent, in 2018, I met an Oromo university student with a somewhat unusual name, not following the -ee and -tu endings that most non-religious Oromo girl's names have. She told me she was named after the city in Oromia that her parents had fled from. Three years later, in a German archive, I saw her name, the name of the city, in a report by the group Oromo Ex-prisoners for Human Rights. I learned that the city was also the home to an EPRDF detention center. The document was dated 1994, within a few years of her birth. The fleeing, the journey, the arrival, and the relationship to the homeland were all encapsulated in her name. Even in its technical map-ability and the pinpointing of its geographic location, the city and the story were made more complexly transnational as they emerged from the archive. The European refugees I called in that NGO office brought their Oromumma with them across space and time, just as her name formed its own kind of map, a sovereign reclamation of a place that has meaning beyond the site of departure.

Analysis

These brief moments in time, and the relationships which came from them, are

[18] Naming traditions in Oromia, as with most other Horn peoples, do not make use of a family name. Instead, the first name is followed by the father's name, then grandfather etc. These names are typically given complementary meanings, forming full expressions.

indicative of the state bureaucratic framework's inability to make Oromo transnational experiences legible. The sovereign decision-making process of organizations and statutes initiated from bodies like the United Nations remain embedded in epistemologies that cannot read or make space for the "soul," or for ways of knowing and relating that refuse or are denied formal recognition. While bureaucratic processes demand streamlined services and clearly contained data collection, these processes emerge from and support the homogeneity of Western epistemologies. Confined to the language of the state and what it legitimizes, Oromo people become continually rendered bureaucratically invisible, erased. Through engaging with Oromo people and the *waloo* relationality that comes from these engagements, Oromo presence is reinvigorated, or least dragged back into the light. This recognition is also an act of *tumsa* from my end, an attempt to stretch my organizational access into a place that prioritizes lived experiences at the community and individual level, a refusal to let the state tell the only story.

Oromo sovereignty is suppressed by the nation-states of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa more broadly through the activation and implementation of borders, divisions which arbitrarily divide the Oromo nation into parcels and pockets, which have turned the mobile grazing lands of Oromo and Somali pastoralists in the South into sites of conflict. Oromos bear their nation-states on their backs in their engagement with bureaucracy, but they do not let the label of Oromo forsake them. With *obsaa* and *abdii* (patience and hope or dreams, two common Oromo boys' names), Oromo people refuse to subsume themselves. Names are selected with care, connecting to the generations before, and they tell a story that sounds like sovereignty.

Through a deeper assessment of this moment, the question of sovereignty may also be confronted, the uncovering of a sovereign Indigenous soul, and the way that it remains both under attack and "unconquered and unconquerable" (Byrd 2011:xvi). We may return to

Byrd's reminder, that sovereignty is found even "in an act of interpretation" (2011:xvi). The first reading of the list identifies Ethiopia at least as the culprit, a land of violence and imposed vulnerability that has forced its citizens to flee across every border, traversing the deserts of Sudan and into Egypt, where they staked the legal claim to asylum. These "Ethiopians" forego the supposed safety of state borders for a precarious international voyage, the promise of Europe as the promise of a place that will at least let them live in peace. The violence follows in this state shadow however, as Ethiopia lingers on in their new homes.

If we read this list of names as a "transparent" space-making (after McKittrick 2006) of refugees in this European country, our fixation on the Ethiopian state has certain uses. It points out the harm generated from the nation-state and the expulsion and flight that this has caused. However, the conflation of dozens of ethnic groups into a single state problem ignores the different rates of harm enacted. Certain communities face extraordinary levels of violence, and these attacks target people for their ethnicity as well as their geospatial locations. Reading the list with *waloo* in the forefront reveals how Ethiopia's violence has unfolded in particular places, and the reverberating impacts of this in the formation of Oromo diasporas. The names and their Oromumma provide a guide for reading against the necropowerful state sovereignty and into the ways the Oromo soul has enacted its own sovereign resistance.

CONCLUSION

The institutional structure of the European archive, confined as such to libraries and museums, is expanded in meaning to include archives from the margins. Further, the archival collections grow and stretch in meaning beyond cataloguing. In both instances Black knowledge refutes an imperial narrative of restriction and homogeneity for one of

transnational fluidity. These movements, and their ability to cross borders through story, memory, and physical relocation, are not only Black, but also indicative of the Oromumma and guraacha geography of the Oromo diaspora. This geographic knowledge institutionalizes the culture and presence of Oromo Europe.

CHAPTER XIV: "BEING HUMAN" IN THE OROMO DIASPORA: GURAACHA ANNOTATIONS OF SOVEREIGNTY

This snapshot of a story interweaves geographic knowledge and relationships and expressions of sovereignty in ways that are complex, easily obfuscated, and in need, at times, of translation. The event in focus was co-hosted and co-coordinated by the Oromo Women's Association UK and me as part of the Being Human Festival. In this narrative, I offer an ethnographic description of a single event, retold from the perspective of a participant. In the following section I will engage with an annotation of the ethnographic anecdote. This annotative practice reads and writes me into the event, as well as providing deeper meaning into the spatial relationships taking place outside of the specific geography. Through this dual approach I have sought to convey both the "public (knowable) and unresolved (unfinished/intersected)" readings of what was taking place (McKittrick 2006:70). What remains unresolved are the larger harms and violences that have brought us here, but this resolution is beyond the scope of this work. Through the ethnography, the annotation, and the contextualization, I identify statements of sovereign aesthetics in the nonplace of the Black diaspora, the place/meant of the Oromo diaspora, and their convergences.

In this analysis, the time and place of the initial encounter form the first layer: the writing of the anecdote and its narrative form. The contemplation of interaction and imagination and habitation is the subtextual annotation, the footnotes and short phrases that accompany them. The third layer is the critical explorations of these annotations. Throughout this annotation and analysis, sovereignty, geography, and the ways these formations engage with one another are called into question. Geographic displacement, for example, alters but does not destroy Oromo sovereignty, especially when that sovereignty is (re)understood as a sovereignty of the soul.

PROCEDURAL NOTES

This chapter unfolds in two parts: first, an ethnographic narrative of an Oromo women's event, retold and annotated by way of commentary and additional thoughts in the footnotes. In the second part, these footnotes are extended further with more nuance, context, musings, and details. The narrative, in isolation, provides one perspective on the story. The short-form footnotes provide the first layer of annotation, the beginning blackening of the geographic retelling. In the closing section, the layers of Black geography, imperial entanglements, and the guraacha resistance practices across these spatial formations are the primary focus. This stylistic model shadows Katherine McKittrick's 2021 text *Dear Science*, which urges us, in part, to question ways of conveying textual information. Further supporting this idea is that annotative practice, communication through foot- and endnotes is its own kind of inter-scholarly communication style.

I have chosen to retell the ethnographic anecdote through the second-person narrative voice for a few reasons. First, I felt that this style both reflects my re-reading of the event after its conclusion, by way of photographic and video recordings, and incorporates my own semi-outsider positionality. Choosing to retell my own recollection through the perspective of a participant helped to frame these relational networks beyond my own position within them. As in travel narratives, I wanted to place the reader in the scene. In my experience of the evening, I lived through each of the described events in pieces and parcels, from different angles. When I entered the hall, for example, I had the banners in my hands, and I did not see them hung until I went outside to take them down. Through my narrative alteration I gave these banners a fuller life. Further, I would argue that in some ways ethnography is always a project of altered perspective. The retelling of ethnographic stories inevitably involves a shift in perspective between what was lived and observed and how this information is transferred, what exactly is included. From sets of field notes, photographic and visual data, and my

recollections, I had a holistic but somehow disjointed frame. Triangulated, pictures revealed details I had missed just as my notes and memories filled in gaps where photographs weren't captured. The narration as a decision reflects an instinct that emerged with my retelling; it just felt right to describe it this way. The gap of the voice seemed to capture the differences in identity formations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAME

A few central concepts are (re)invoked here to understand and read through this ethnographic anecdote and subsequent annotations. The overall project remains a study of Black geography, building meanings of Black life beyond that of the imperial understanding. These concepts support the elucidation of guraacha lifeways in the diaspora.

Performing Black geography

Where Black geography comes in, geography guraacha follows, or arrives alongside. We re/present ourselves in pursuit of repair. Following the writing of K'eguro Macharia

> the black diaspora is a s/place from which to contemplate the relationship between deracination and encounter, to focus on how black individuals from across the world interact with each other: how we imagine worlds, inhabit ungeographies, and produce fugitive temporalities, not simply 'other' or 'alternative' or even 'counter' modernities but different configurations of time altogether.
>
> (2016:184)

In this geographic approach interactions and productions are fugitive, radical, and resistant. As Moten asks, "What's the relation between the logic of reparation and the logic of representation? And what does that relation have to do with telling the truth, or the story, or the whole truth, or the whole story, with truth telling as a way of making whole?" (2018:167). Performing Black geography is also what McKittrick refers to as a type of geographic poetics. Thinking through geography as a poetry and performance that builds up and makes legible the Black diaspora helps to clarify practices both aesthetic and banal. The richness of

a singular performance is textured by its roots and routes (after Gilroy 1993).

Sovereignty performed

The idea of an aesthetic and performative element to sovereignty could be approached from a number of different angles. I might understand sovereign performance as the notion that sovereignty must be performed and displayed in certain ways in order to be understood, recognized, and legitimized by other sovereign bodies. These same formations are described by Amiri Baraka as the Blues Aesthetic or the Black Aesthetic. Sovereignty used here turns back to Deer's usage of the sovereign soul, including "deep, fundamental aspects of identity" which cannot be articulated clearly from outside perspectives (2015:xvi).

Sovereignty as a cultural and artistic practice, and performance as a place where sovereignty can be identified are discussed at length in the work of Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor. Vizenor describes "estates" of survivance as the means for Native peoples to exert their sovereign power. These include artistic and imaginative creations, and the claiming of names and genealogies, practices that work directly against imperialized erasures (1998:88). Indigenous aesthetic creations reveal "memories, and not mere comparatives or performative acts" (1998:183). Vizenor also links indigenous sovereignty to "traditional food sources," "dreams and memories," and "myths and metaphors" (1998:184). The artistic estate of sovereign power includes performance and artwork, both with cultural praxis and significance and aesthetic or creative meaning. At times where written sentences may offer Indigenous people only "aesthetic silence," sovereignty is expressed through "the tease of native creation" (Vizenor 1998:66). A sovereign aesthetic is the expression of an identity that has otherwise been denigrated or called into question. Using sovereignty as a way of addressing performance, focusing on aspects like the use of color for decoration, or descriptions of certain foods, acknowledges that the subtleties of these expressions do not

discount their radical praxis. As Evans, Genovese, Reilly, and Wolfe point out, sovereignty "like the devil, is in the details" (2012:4).

Dis/place/meant

The notion of dis/place/meant, a theoretical conglomerate, was used in an earlier chapter for an analysis of Goree Town, in relation to processes of meaning-making, visitation, and the imperial nature of the existent spatiality. The core concept, evident in the spelling of the latter section of the word, comes from the poetry of Amiri Baraka, re-read in the work of Fred Moten. The splitting of place + meant recognizes the meanings imbued in a place, the way places come to have meanings through the way they are experienced by displaced people, even in places they were never meant to be in. As described by Moten, place/meant allows for a "play of meaning and location, and that way in which it indexes, that at the same time meaning can have a dislocative effect" (El-Hadi 2018:web).

I would like to return to dis/place/meant here as a way of recognizing the Oromo diaspora and larger Black community in London itself. Edmonton, an area with significance to the event owing to a geographic coincidence, is also a visible symbol of Blackness in Britain (if not explicitly Black Britishness). The meanings of this dis/place, the meanings generated via displacement generate a formation of diaspora that is perhaps *in* but not *of* London (riffing on Stuart Hall who riffs off C.L.R. James). Hall's evocation of the phrase comes as a direct response to James's transnational life from the Caribbean to Europe and North America. The in-ness refers to "someone formed through and through in a relationship in colonial dependence, subalternity and 'otherness' to Europe" (2021:375). These people, in but not of, living in Hartman's afterlives of slavery and Sharpe's wake, "live our intimacy with Europe, as well as its impossibility as 'fate'" (Hall 2021:376). Hall describes this category of subjecthood and lived experience as a conscription, referring to the way that the

colonial and racial legacies have had a hand in movement and knowledge production, particularly in the space of the Black diaspora. I understand the first section of dis/place/meant to convey the same movement-by-force.

ETHNOGRAPHIC ANECDOTE: "COOKING UP OROMO CULTURE"

You approach the location of the night's event, a community center and hall on the cusp[1] of Finsbury Park, Northeast London.[2] There is a bus stop around the corner, an underground station not much further down the road, and the streets are lined with cars in all directions. The hall sits on a sleepy side street of an otherwise bustling neighborhood. Families with young children walk past and you see several small groups dressed in their Sunday best. The front of the Hall is adorned with a banner made from a shiny white plastic. In the middle, a pencil drawing of a young girl smiles down at you[3]. She is surrounded by a broad green tree[4], the rays of a sunbeam visible in the far back.

When you cross underneath her to enter the hall, you are hit immediately with an undefined food scent: savory, notes of spice, a rich swirl of flavors. There is music coming from a door at the end of the short hallway. You move towards it, drawn magnetically forward, following the sounds of life. When the door swings open, you step into a snapshot of another world, or at least another city. The music catches your attention first, a warm and welcoming rhythm. A kind of cheerful pop song plays, a man's melodic voice interspersed with a chorus of horns and a reedy flute sound, the lyrics flowing out in a language you don't recognize.[5] There is a smokey haze in the air, but from the back of the room where you stand, you cannot quite place the scent or its source. A small group of children scampers around you, giggling as they cross your path, swatting a balloon in the air.

1. *Two parks, two stories.*
2. *A (brief) Black geography of Edmonton*
3. *The Oromo girl is Dutch, the Dutch girl is Oromo*
4. *Thick, sturdy trunk and broad green leaves in an Oromo context; an Odaa*
5. *Rest in Power to Haacaaluu Hundessaa*

Across the room, visible just above a banner that twins the one you saw outside, a large structure made up of red and green balloons arcs over the front of the stage.[6] Though you can't spot it quite from a distance, the room is ringed with small, framed photographs, covered in some parts by the decorations. A closer inspection reveals that these photographs and short biographies have something in common: they each feature a Black person from the United Kingdom. Although the evening's events take place in November, after the official celebration has ended, they are a remnant of Black History Month.[7]

In the center of the room several tables have been pushed together, covered with an overlapping set of red and green plastic tablecloths. Laid out on the table are dozens of dishes full of food: plastic tubs piled with carefully shaped bites of *Cuqqoo*, next to a metal bowl of *Cacabsa*, a rounded container covered in animal hide opens up to reveal *Akaa'i*, banana leaves unfold to display *Godoree*, the list goes on.[8] You are greeted in English by a woman wearing a white dress, or a white and green dress, or a white and red and black striped dress[9]. She offers you a plate, points you towards the open seats, places a cup of *buna* or *daadhi*[10] in your free hand, smiling the whole time. When you sit, you are given a pamphlet which is decorated, again, with the smiling girl visible on the banner, the same broad green tree stretched out behind her.

The front side of the pamphlet contains short descriptions of the Oromo people, their history, their present, and the diaspora community with whom you are engaging.[11] The depiction is broad, general, a few paragraphs attempting to encapsulate generations and centuries. The back of the pamphlet features descriptions of two ceremonial occurrences, presumably to come later. With the distracting hum of the event around you, you may only bother to skim the text, not

6. *Red, green, and yellow have labyrinthine layers of significance amongst Ethiopian peoples, nations, and nationalities*

7. *The United Kingdom's celebration began in relation to the United States' version, transatlantic and transnational celebrations of Blackness*

8. *Food names as expressions of foodways*

9. *White is the constant counterpart*

10. *Coffee and honey wine*

11. *Full text available in the following section*

absorbing much of the story. Lining the pamphlet, as with the banners in front and back, are a series of tiny logos. Held at arm's length, they could be abstract decorations, a set of mismatched shapes and colors. A closer look reveals the logos for a number of prominent, prestigious institutions: the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the British Academy, the University of London School of Advanced Studies, the MOVES European Joint Doctorate, and the University of Kent.[12] The atmosphere in the room is homely, warm, but these logos are the indication of the larger circumstances, a less inviting environment. You eat, and are encouraged to eat again, eat more. If you started with *buna* you may be offered *daadhi* now. Perhaps you drink both, cups full and refilled. If you've come alone, you may start up a conversation with one of the women who welcomed you earlier. If you've brought a friend, she'll still stop by and check in on you, make sure you're eating, enjoying yourself.

12. Elite institutions have deep pockets, and deeper demands

Eventually an announcement is made, the group is asked to circle around the center table. One by one, the women (wearing their white and green, white and red and black, white dresses) describe foods they've made or brought, listing also the alterations and substitutions, the significance of the comestibles outside of the plate. This food[13] is a root, boiled and prepared in approximation of a food from home, a food we can't get here. That food, the one found at home, is used as a medicine, drought-resistant and full of nutrition, growing wild in the highlands. This one, this substitution, is fine, the taste is good, it suffices. It is not medicine, but it makes a decent dish. The ingredients for this dish, plated carefully on a silver platter, were shipped in, last week, fresh from the village, a village in another country. The tragedy of a funeral required a last-minute trip home, and the unexpected outcome of this journey is shared with you tonight. You couldn't find this type of food here,

13. This is Ancootee

otherwise; it's not imported to any of the local shops. The list goes onthe menu is long and intricate. No food has a simple story, there is a nuance to preparation, acquisition, distribution.

As a formal presentation, the texts of these short speeches are informative and richly descriptive. You learn a lot while you stand around the laden table, tempted to get a second plate. The subtext to what is being shared is perhaps not immediately obvious. There is something dancing around the edges of the narratives that has not been made explicit. There is this group of women, here, foods from another continent, the distance between these places, a question of how these roads were traversed, why this community was formed, why here, why now.[14] Your plate is full, and the music is dancing around you; your comfort does not urge you to reckon with such critical questions. The subtext remains subliminal, for now.

After you've returned to your seat and consumed the contents of the plate piled with the few dishes you missed on your first round your attention is called again, this time to the front of the room. Soon the whole group, a group of around 30, is crowded around the "stage," an area demarcated by the structure and shape of the balloon arch. A small stove, single burner, has been set up, and on top of it sits a pot of water coming to boil. At stage right a young woman with a black hijab, wrapped also in a white blanket, gently holds a sleeping baby. You are informed that an Ulma Bahaa will be performed, a type of baby shower or christening process.[15] The information from your table pamphlet is coming to life in front of you. Two women join hands and begin to scoop beige flour into the pot of water. Soon there comes a song, clapping, rhythms echoed from across the group of women. The audience is invited to participate in part, stirring the barley flour into the heated pot using a sanded wooden stick,[16] struggling to move through the thick fluid. The dish you are helping prepare is a porridge called

14. British pasts and presence in the Horn of Africa

15. Well, we called it an Ulma Bahaa. But it was actually a bit more than that.

16. Also called an ulee, not just an ordinary branch from an ordinary tree

marqaa.[17]

The narrative story of the Ulma Bahaa is given more depth and detail. As the marqaa thickens and the songs continue, two women begin to perform a dance-fight. They sing as they joust, thrusting towards each other with slabs of salt. Eventually one outsteps the other, the long fabric of her dress (white and green) flapping forward as she snaps the salted stick of her opponent. The crowd cheers. The song changes in tone for a while until the two grasp hands and pull each other in for a dancing hug. As the women conclude their song, the audience participant at stage left continues to stir the marqaa, still struggling to incorporate the flour. Amidst all these activities, the clapping and laughing of the crowd, the rhythms of the songs, the use of a liquid which has been steeped in green leaves to anoint the forehead of the young family, the baby hardly stirs. He keeps his eyes open, blinking up at his mother before slipping into slumber, but he is quite undeterred by the surrounding sound.[18] When the salt is broken, and the last notes of song have rung out, the audience applauds and returns to their seats.

The performance has offered a slice of Oromo life, a peek into an intimacy you would not otherwise have born witness to. Even as an approximation, there was a sense in the room of what the "real" version might look and feel like. The intention of this activity, according to the information you've been given, is to bring the mother into the new family, and re-welcome her to her community in this new role. As an outsider, audience member, observing without fully participating, you've also been caught up in this constructed kinship. As a non-relative[19] you could still clap with the rhythm, celebrate the salt fight, struggle to stir the marqaa. Even at your most distant you have walked briefly in the footsteps of an Oromo family, and seen more closely how women in particular fit into this

17. Marqaa from the inside out

18. Oromumma or something like it

19. Gudda guddifachuu, growing Oromos

equation.

Your attention is called to the front of the room a third time, eyes directed to center stage. You might have checked your paper quickly before leaving your seat and surmised that this performance will be of the Aseenna.[20] The introduction confirms your guess, as you hear a brief contextualization of what will unfold, a script read off by another woman in another white dress (white and red and black). You are told that Aseenna is a marriage practice used in various regions of Oromia, generally viewed as a successful way of making a match. As the description continues, there is movement on the stage.

20. In this author's opinion we have saved the best (most unique, remarkable, unconventional) event for last

A young woman walks in, stage left, and begins tossing green grapes around.[21] As she moves through the space and scatters the fruit[22] she repeats a few lines of song to herself, a rhythmic chant. You learn from the narrator that she has entered the home compound of the man she would marry, that the fruit and song have together conveyed a proposal. By the time her short song ends, a man and woman have taken two seats clustered together on the stage, "entered their home," and they smile at their guest before asking her to declare her choice of husband. A lighthearted drama begins to take place, as our protagonist slinks across the room, pausing at a few options, studying carefully the sons she might marry. With a flourish she finally points him out, and the parents rejoice, clapping and ululating[23] in response. The son smiles, the parents are pleased, and the would-be bride/future daughter-in-law reciprocates the joy. Someone else enters from the audience, "a community elder," and blesses the couple, solidifying their partnership. The couple is adorned with cloth, approximation of the ceremony's request for the pair to be "dressed in cultural clothes," and the Aseenna is completed. You are given a brief closing context from the narrator, offering some insight into what you may not

21. Green grapes are not indigenous to the United Kingdom

22. Iddii is indigenous to the Horn of Africa

23. The word ululation is almost an onomatopoeia for the "elelelee" sound

have realized: Aseenna is seen as a form of empowerment, a way of offering Oromo women autonomy. Though it is not the only Oromo marriage practice by any means and does not exist in isolation from the misogyny and danger of other options, it exists, still, as an option, an alterity. You take a seat, managing to find the only open chair in a room that has slowly filled up over the course of the evening.

For the fourth and final time, your attention is called to the front of the room. The program is ending. The subtext of the night is brought up and outward, you are given the final context clues to the event you have enjoyed. This was a cultural celebration;[24] clearly. This was meant to teach you in some ways about Oromo culture as shared by Oromo women in the UK diaspora; clearly.[25] These Oromo women, here, come from a place where cultural celebrations have not always been possible, welcome, permitted. That place, there, Ethiopia, has declared another State of Emergency.[26] These women fear every day for their loved ones, living under a genocidal regime, stuck inside a nation-state that has been built around their exclusion. It is explained simply and directly, and the missing pieces fall into place. They are eating that alternative food, here, because it was no longer safe to be there (to grow, to cultivate, to harvest, to share, to eat). They are approximating this event in this way because for so long they were not even allowed an approximation.[27] The diaspora community, this group of women in their white and red and green and black dresses, has come here today at least partially in flight, circling around orbits of displacement. The warm sounds of music floating in the background, the cheerful decorations, the smiles and shared plates, all are evidence of a culture that has survived something vast and horrible. The beautiful melodies disguise but do not erase the hardships of the past or present moment. You might close your eyes for a moment to process this, a

24. The political meanings of the cultural may not be immediately clear

25. Transnational gestures of resistance

26. The State of Emergency in Ethiopia, 2021

27. The state of emergency is Ethiopia, long before this

confusing confluence of emotion.

The women begin to clean up and head out. They are still laughing and smiling in their small groups, hugging each other goodbye.[28] They do not share your confusion. They have lived with this concern, the fear and terror and nervousness that come alongside relationality with a people at war, for their entire lives. The horrors of the everyday violence that displaced them, that re/placed them here and placed this event on your radar is exhaustive and exhausting to the point of banality. They cannot cry every day about these crimes, and they chose not to perform their sorrow tonight. In song and dance, rhythms and clapping, food and drink, they have shared an Oromia that exists *despite* that harm, an aesthetics of resistance.

28. If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution (Goldman 1934) or Hard Times Require Furious Dancing (Walker 2010)

"BEING HUMAN" IN THE OROMO DIASPORA: ANNOTATIONS

Full List of Annotations

1. Two parks, two stories. One reflects the event inside, the other the image of its suppression.
2. A (brief) Black geography of Edmonton
3. The Oromo girl is Dutch, the Dutch girl is Oromo
4. Thick, sturdy trunk and broad green leaves in an Oromo context; an Odaa
5. Rest in Power to Haacaaluu Hundessaa
6. Red, green, and yellow have labyrinthine layers of significance amongst Ethiopian peoples, nations, and nationalities
7. The United Kingdom's celebration began in relation to the United States' version, transatlantic and transnational celebrations of Blackness
8. Food names as expressions of foodways
9. White is the constant counterpart, the other colors have spatial specifics
10. Coffee and honey wine
11. Full text available in the following section
12. Elite institutions have deep pockets, and deeper demands
13. This is Ancootee
14. British pasts and presence in the Horn of Africa
15. Well, we called it an Ulma Bahaa. But it was actually a bit more than that.
16. Also called an ulee, not just a branch off an ordinary tree
17. Marqaa from the inside out
18. Oromumma or something like it
19. Gudda guddifachuu, growing Oromos
20. In this author's opinion we have saved the best (most unique, remarkable, unconventional) event for last
21. Green grapes are not indigenous to the United Kingdom
22. Iddii is indigenous to the Horn of Africa
23. The word ululation is almost an onomatopoeia for the "elelelee" sound.
24. The political meanings of the cultural may not be immediately clear
25. Transnational gestures of resistance
26. The State of Emergency in Ethiopia, 2021
27. The state of emergency is Ethiopia, long before this
28. If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution (Goldman 1934) *or* Hard Times Require Furious Dancing (Walker 2010)

ANNOTATIONS EXPLORED

1. Two parks, two stories. One reflects the event inside, the other the image of its suppression	*You approach the location of the night's event, a community center and hall on the cusp of Finsbury Park*

Google Maps offers quite divergent descriptions of the two areas that Elizabeth House, the site of the event, rests in between, Finsbury Park and Highbury. Highbury matches the first syllable of its name in terms of elitism and perceived privilege. The "Quick facts" description provided by the mapping site identifies the area as the home of Arsenal Football Club's stadium, adding also that "Upscale restaurants cluster near Highbury Corner, with artisan food stores, cafes, and global eateries in the village-like area on Highbury Grove." Finsbury Park seems to be more closely connected to what I have come to know of the area and its surroundings, including the small Ethiopian shops we pass on the trip in, or the Somali man who wandered by and saw our banner. Google Maps matches this lived vision, naming Finsbury Park as a "busy multicultural neighborhood," and highlighting its busy streets and reputation as a "major transport hub."

2. A (brief) Black geography of Edmonton	*Finsbury Park, Northeast London*

I came to know Edmonton from three distinct positionalities: popular culture, lived experience, and factual reckoning. I begin with this imagery as an introduction to how Edmonton can be read through Black geographic methods, and as a way of setting the larger staging of the event. In my first introduction to this corner of the city, the Edmonton "Green," was used as the background of a song which became popular in the months leading up to the OWA event, during the Summer and Fall of 2021. In fact, the opening image of the video is a section of the Edmonton rail station, the first few letters of the name trailing off to the right, but visible within the classic circular logo of the London Underground. The song is called

"Body" by UK-based drill rappers Tion Wayne and Russ Millions, and the version in question is a remix, featuring a number of other well-known or up and coming rappers. Five of the seven guest artists on the song are Black British, and the two primary artists are children of immigrants, respectively Nigerian and Caribbean. As the music video accompanying the song shows, and as I subsequently learned, they share a spatial linkage to this northern corner of London.

The song itself is undeniably catchy, evidenced by its place on top of the 2021 charts in the UK, Ireland, and New Zealand (Ainsley 2021). Each of the verses offers a different take on the same theme, some gentle misogyny laid over a staccato beat and throbbing baseline. Two lyrics repeat and echo across the song, both a type of chorus and a bar spliced into some of the artists' verses: "English girl called Fiona, African girl Adeola." The rhyme is crafty, it eases off the tongue in each of the English dialects of the seven guest artists. Russ Millions, one of the two original artists on the song, has a slightly tinny high-pitched voice, but you hear the laughter underneath each time he repeats it. Echoing around this element of the audio is a dark bass line, and even without an exploration of the lyrical content, the miming of guns being fired throughout the video matches this darker energy more than any flirtatious whimsy.

There is an (academic) urge to critique the song, on several levels. The lyric in question is its own minefield of contentious content but that would certainly not be the only cause for criticism. The conflation of the entire continent as a comparison to a tiny nation (Africa and England), the objectification of racialized women which repeats throughout the song, the capitalistic glimmer of over-consumption, any of the classic reproaches levelled at rap music around the world. However, this entry point does not offer a productive outcome. Without a more serious understanding of the sociocultural and political conditions that the art emerged from, I do not feel that any opinion I offer would be worthwhile. This unworthy

critique would depoliticize the Black British aesthetic and in doing so "disconnect it from the real lives… and instead make an offering to the seizers" (Baraka 1991:109). Instead, I treat this as an immersive experience, a way of learning one way of living in London, as a life in the African diaspora.

In this relationality, as I came to know the song and the place and then learn the place away from the song, I recognized the tune as a snippet of a culture I had not yet come to learn. I appreciated drill music as a Black British art form that speaks to our transatlantic connections and divergences. I smiled when the protagonists of the video smiled, enjoying the twinkles in the eyes of the groups of young men dancing, play-fighting, showing off their newest (sponsored) shoes. I read Edmonton first, then, in a Black (British) geographic reckoning. Hometown pride, dancing in the streets, bringing back your riches to show off to the friends and family who have been there; the kind of life kids dream about. This reckoning points out the ways in which "local-contextual black geographies hold in them the ability to destabilize places—and times—outside the historically dispossessed body" (McKittrick 2006:69).

In my second entrance into Edmonton, on the ground and in the neighborhood, staying with a friend while we prepared to work, I found the area to be vibrant and full of life. It felt like home for an American stranger, a place where I could disappear into the crowds of shoppers, where no commuters gave me a second glance, blended in enough that an elderly Black fellow on the bus leaned in to commiserate with me about the group of youths wearing their Covid-19 face masks incorrectly. He seemed surprised when I laughed back in my heavily accented English, the flat California vowels, revealing a distance that he hadn't seen. His surprise was somehow spatial, he leaned to me across a bus row and unknowingly also across the Atlantic, a separate site of Black displacement. This area of London, in my limited experience of the city-at-large, spoke to me with a smile. I liked Edmonton as I lived through

it, and with my own Black geographic reckoning I demarcated the space as a diaspora hub.

In the third reckoning, following the spatial knowledge provided by the state, the feelings I assigned to Edmonton were put into relation to the reality as written through institutional means and governmental sources. This geographic reading was the least satisfying and the most predictable. The Edmonton Green Ward has a population that is 60% Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (after the UK's labelling system) with nearly half of the residents (46.8%) born outside of the UK (Knowledge and Insight Hub 2021). The research that followed my time in the "field" also revealed a layer to Edmonton I had been blissfully unaware of: its spatiality and framing as a site of violence. Surely this can't be divorced from the Blackness of the population.

Crime statistics reflect policing and surveillance more than actual frequencies of crimes committed in a certain area. Police gather reports of crimes associated with neighbors, real or imagined, then increase their patrols, finding more crime to apprehend or fabricate; the cycle continues (James 2000; Loyd 2012; Rodriguez 2006). In the internet era, with the media institution in bed with the police state, crime reporting is a hot commodity. The public relishes a scandal, eagerly awaiting a new villain. It seems to find too many of them in Edmonton. Through the imperialized spatialization, "The data, the survey, and our imaginations set forth the stories we end up telling about ourselves and each other *in relation to* the legacy of black dispossession, suffering, and human devaluation" (McKittrick 2006:68). This focus on Edmonton is a snapshot into the larger community lives of Black Britain, a rich topic outside the scope of this work.

3. The Oromo girl is Dutch, the Dutch girl is Oromo	*In the middle, a pencil drawing of a young girl smiles down at you*

The banner features three images stacked on top of each other: a girl, a tree, and a sun. Each piece draws on, or takes directly from, a symbol with high relevance to the Oromo

people, and real lived connections to Oromo transnational lives. The young woman is displayed in black and white, a hand-drawn sketch. She's perched on a small stool, perhaps a tree stump, leaning on a long staff that stretches from the ground up above her head, gripped at the midway point. She peers back at the viewer with a quarter turn, a cheeky smile with a glint in her cartoon eye. An armband on her wrist and the careful line drawing of braids on top of her head are the only elements with a cultural specificity, identifying her as Oromo. The simple sketch was borrowed, without permission, but with insistence on a shared goal, from a Dutch Oromo journal produced in 1984, titled only "Oromo" with a subtitle indicating that it was prepared by the Oromo Komitee Nederland. She symbolizes and is evidence of transnational Oromo women's organizing and resistance practices.

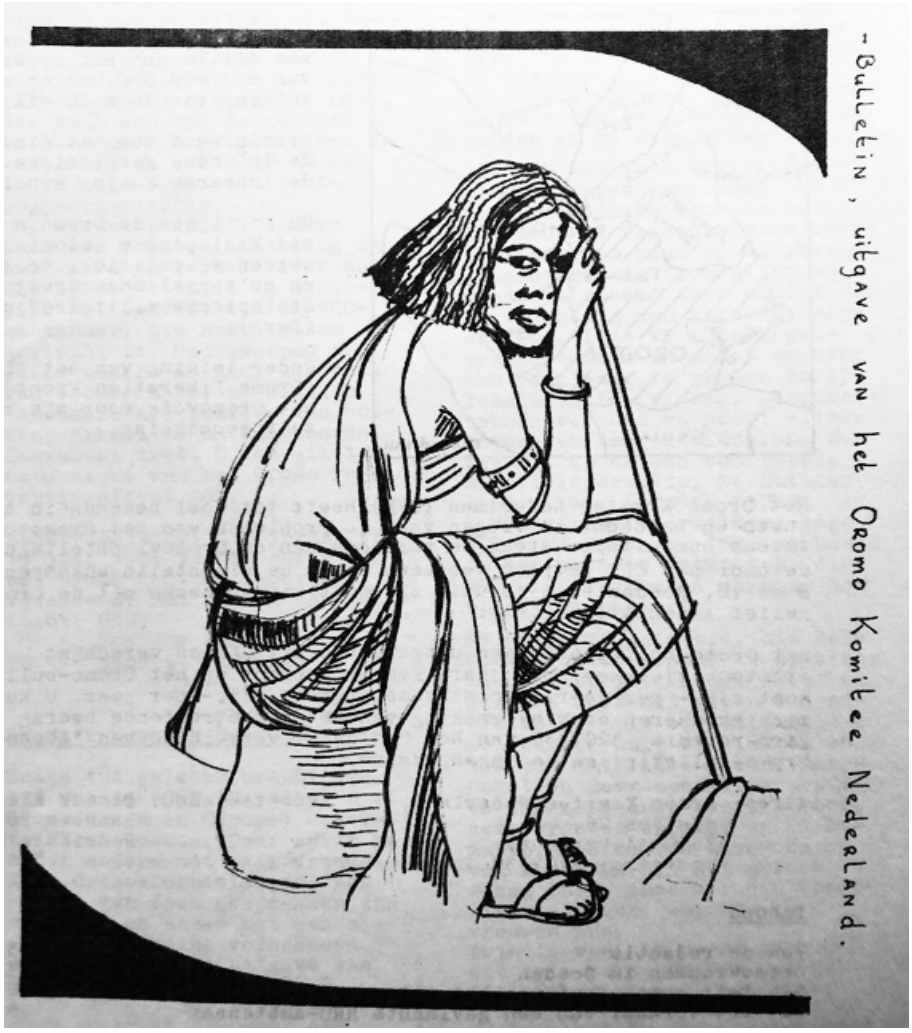

Figure 5) Cover of the Bulletin of the Oromo Committee of the Netherlands

4. Thick, sturdy trunk and broad green leaves in an Oromo context; an Odaa	*"She is surrounded by a broad green tree"*

The tree in the background is meant to be an Odaa (*Ficus sycomorus*), a proud sycamore fig, standing guard and surrounding our protagonist. The Odaa tree and its rich symbolic value, as well as its use in Oromo symbolism through flags, are discussed in the Hiriira chapter. Just behind the tree, faint and opaque, a yellow sun peeks out and around. The sun signals back to the OLF flag, but also has a more practical purpose: there was an aesthetic need or push for a complementary shape and the star seemed to be too laden with meaning.

5. Rest in Power to Haacaaluu Hundessaa	*"A kind of cheerful pop song plays, a man's melodic voice interspersed with a chorus of horns and a reedy flute sound, the lyrics flowing out in a language you don't recognize*

The artist of choice for the evening was Haacaaluu Hundessaa. Over a year had passed since his assassination, but the impacts are still felt, reverberating through the Oromo community. Critical Oromo scholars Ayantu Tibeso and J. Khadijah Abdurahman offer an extended insight into Haacaaluu's life and afterlives, and the ongoing significance of his music in Oromo transnational lives:

> In his song "*Maalan Jira*" (meaning "do I even exist"), Oromo singer Haacaaluu Hundeessaa taps into a rich oral archive, rejecting the dominant scripts of Ethiopian history for Indigenous counter-memory […] These relations of domination are neither exceptional nor solely of the past: they represent the experiences of most colonized peoples in Ethiopia. "*Maalan Jira*" unsettles how conquered peoples and their memories of and within the Ethiopian Empire are disappeared by Ethiopian exceptionalism.
>
> (2021:46)

Memories are made and remade in perpetuity, from Oromia into the diaspora. Haacaaluu's living insights strengthen the multilevel meanings of cultural artifacts.

6. Red, green, and yellow have labyrinthine layers of significance amongst Ethiopian peoples, nations, and nationalities	*"Across the room, visible just above a banner that twins the one you saw outside, a large structure made up of red and green balloons arcs over the front of the stage"*

The usage of colors to convey particular meanings in the orbit of Oromo and larger Horn of Africa politics is worth describing more fully, as their use in this context links back to processes past and presently unfolding. Most saturated with ongoing meaning: black, white, red, green, and yellow. The first three colors are tied exclusively to various Oromo institutions, while the latter three together must be contextualized. Oromia as an Ethiopian federal region and nation is identifiable by the Gadaa colors in the flag: red, black, and white. The "true" usage of the Gadaa colors is contested and reveals complex forms of signification. Kumsa says the three colors are a codification of Oromo cosmology, noting that in "some areas white, red and black represent the three life-giving liquids in Oromo life— milk, blood and water" (2013:83). However, she also describes their symbolism as extending the past (white), to the present (red), and the future unknown (black) (ibid.). These meanings point to the importance of ordering the colors in certain ways so as to maintain this significance. The three colors are prominently featured in cultural clothing in some parts of Oromia and are generally understood in the Horn context connected to Oromo culture.

However, these same colors have been coopted and arguably bastardized by the Ethiopian state, used as the flag for the Oromo People's Democratic Organization party (in coalition with the EPRDF) and the Oromia federal region. The order in the Oromia state flag moves from red, white, to black at the bottom, with a version of the Odaa tree in the center. This flag represents the kind of mistranslations that take place when Indigenous cultural artifacts are read as imagery and ornamental aesthetics rather than as signs of substance. In the decision to work in service of the settler colonial project rather than maintain a stake in the fight for justice or liberation for the Oromo people, state collaborators lost the core values of what they stole.

The mutation of Gadaa symbolism, as well as the continued significance of the Oromo Liberation Front (who use the three colors in their flag, with red and green being the

most prominent) as a vanguard for the Oromo people, necessitates some acceptability of red, yellow, and green. The immediate issue comes back in Ethiopia, as both the current nation-state flag, the former imperial flag, and the nationalist anti-federal groups use these same colors, with mere alterations to the order and central symbol. Goshu Tefera and Peter Castro explain that the "colors green, yellow, and red have long appeared on Ethiopian banners and flags, with red representing the blood spilled for country, the yellow representing harmony, and the green representing hope and fertility" (2016:15). Tefera and Castro go on to describe the flag's transition during imperial times, the Dergue, and the EPRDF regime, as well as the associated policies, often linked to color choice. Amhara nationalists in recent years, especially visible alongside the civil war in Tigray which began in Fall 2020, have embraced the imperial flag as their primary signifier. As reported by Moges Teshome,

> As recently as on the 20th of January 2020, the symbolic value of a flag led to an ethnic clash […] The bone of contention was about the legitimacy of the flag used during the celebration. The current flag has been practically rejected by the Amhara people and other pro-unity groups and the Orthodox Church has always been using the 'original Ethiopian flag' (green-yellow-red colors without any other symbols or marks on it).
>
> (2021:30)

Removal of the green from the tricolor set brings you to the Tigrayan colors, red and yellow, displayed on their flag by way of a sideways yellow triangle and matching star set on a field of red, a color combination also used by the Amhara state. The difference between the Amhara state (presumably in support or at least recognition of the federalist system) and Amhara nationalist groups (tending to be anti-federalist and in support of homogenization of Ethiopia towards a return of the pre-federal system) is the color green. In the end, red and green are the preferred options for the evening's decorations, a way of balancing these complex and convoluted imaginaries. Having been raised in a USian context, brainwashed by decades of over-consumptive capitalism, I realize I've ingrained red and green in pair as a symbol of Christmas. Although many of the event attendees are likely Christian, notably the large group who showed up after Sunday service, this holly berry combination does not come

up in conversation.

7. The United Kingdom's celebration began in relation to the United States' version, transatlantic and transnational celebrations of Blackness	*Although the evening's events take place in November, after the official celebration has ended, they are a remnant of Black History Month*

Both events owe their lineage to Black American scholar Carter G. Woodson and his originary idea. However, the UK edition is credited more specifically to Ghanaian activist and organizer Akyaaba Addai-Sebo (Doharty 2019). It was decided to have it take place in October to coincide with the launch of the academic year and is meant to spark a "period of self-examination of the responsibilities we owe to each other" as well as a "constant reminder to European society of their abiding duty" (Addai-Sebo 2012:8). In a more localized transnational sense, Tiffany Florvil's analysis of the formation of Black History Month in Germany and the networks of activists and scholars who made the event possible further supports such unbordered Blackness (2020).

8. Food names as expressions of foodways	*plastic tubs piled with carefully shaped bites of Cuqqoo, next to a metal bowl of Cacabsa, a rounded container covered in animal hide opens up to reveal Akaa'i, banana leaves unfold to display Godoree*

- *Cuqqoo* refers to small cookie-like formations made from roasted barley and butter.
- *Cacabsa* is the name for a dish of small pieces of flatbread, cooked up with oil and berberre (powdered spice used widely in Oromia and Ethiopia) until slightly crisped. It is sometimes also served with eggs, or honey instead of the spicy red seasoning. The name is also its description: *Cabuu* is to be broken, *Cabsuu* is to break, *Cacabsa* refers to something broken into pieces.
- *Akaa'i* is eaten widely in Ethiopia, known as *kolo* in Amharic. It is typically made up of

roasted barley seeds, chickpeas, and a small scattering of peanuts. *Akaa'i* is another example of a name and adjective in one, literally meaning "fried."

- *Godoree* is the Oromo name given to the root known in English as Taro[19] (presumably after the Hawaiian term), scientifically called *Colocasia esculenta*.

9. White is the constant counterpart, the other colors have spatial specifics	*You are greeted in English by a woman wearing a white dress, or a white and green dress, or a white and red and black striped dress*

The colorways of artifacts with Oromo cultural significance, as touched upon above, have varying meanings across Oromia and the diaspora. Identifiable from the photographs are a few distinct regional attires. Wollega is known for its green and white. The East and Southeast, places like Hararghe and Arsi, feature bright colors and patterns. Other areas use a simple brown as the clothing of choice, adorned with small white seashells. Based on my observation at diaspora events in Central/ Western Europe and the United States, white, accompanied by either green, red, or black, seems to be the most common choice.

10. Coffee and honey wine	*She offers you a plate, points you towards the open seats, places a cup of buna or daadhi in your free hand, smiling the whole time*

Buna is coffee, made in a way that is fairly standard across Ethiopia. The beans are washed and roasted dark, until they are well-blackened. After roasting, while still smoking, the plate of beans is passed around the room. Everyone present takes turns wafting the smoke towards their face, breathing deep the rich smoky smell. There are regional differences in some steps of the coffee ceremony, as well as different processes for adding things like milk,

[19] Annotated annotation 8A: Hawaiian sovereignty remains under constant assault by the U.S. settler colonial state, but even in its aggression it cannot entirely erase the traces of the nations it sits upon.

sugar, salt, or butter, but the roasting seems to be relatively uniform. The other common mechanism for service is the *jebena,* a clay pitcher in which the coffee is cooked. Further symbolism exists in the way the coffee is poured and consumed. We don't follow those procedures during the event, nor do we have enough jebenas to confine the coffee brewing process exclusively to this mechanism.

Daadhi is known in Amharic as Tejj, a fermented honey wine. Fermentation and brewing of this sort are common across Ethiopia. Further, although "there are minor changes in the process in different localities, the basic steps are similar throughout the country" (Fentie, Emire, Demsash, Dadi, Shin 2020:3). The transmission and sharing of food practices and food cultures in areas with cultural convergences are difficult, if not near impossible, to untangle. While the imperial aggression is certainly responsible for some formations, it cannot erase these potential collaborations and convergences. A geography of food and drink creates a space unbound by nation-state borders where peoples may join together, sharing in fulfillment.

11. Full text available in the following section	*The front side of the pamphlet contains short descriptions of the Oromo people, their history, their present, and the diaspora community that you are engaging with*

The pamphlets featured the following description, the specific text prepared to convey meaning, and fit neatly on a single page:

> The Oromo people are indigenous to the Horn of Africa, with a homeland that stretches across Ethiopia. Their language is called Afaan Oromoo, and they historically governed using their own democratic system called the Gadaa Siinqee. In the late 1880s, the Oromo were colonized and subjected into the Ethiopian Empire. Their indigenous governance and religion were banned, their language was made illegal, and vast areas of their land were taken by state forces.

Prior to colonization, Oromo women had societal power through the Siinqee institution. Under the Siinqee, Oromo women legislated over domestic issues, managed resources, and were key decision-makers. This was closely linked with Waqqeeffanna, the Oromo religion, with deep connections to the land and the natural world.

Food practices are one example of how settler colonialism, climate change, and other forms of harm have disrupted Oromo culture. Indigenous plants like *buna* are difficult to grow or access, pastoralists in the south have had a border placed in the middle of their grazing lands, leading to political conflicts, and issues such as drought and famine are on the rise, disproportionately affecting women. Despite these challenges, Oromo women continue to fight for their rights and their culture.

12. Elite institutions have deep pockets, and deeper demands	*A closer look reveals the logos for several prominent institutions: Arts and Humanities Research Council, British Academy, the University of London School of Advanced Studies, the MOVES European Joint Doctorate, and the University of Kent*

The organization and planning of the event studied here came after the acquisition of a small grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and British Academy, as part of the Being Human Festival. The event, billed as the "United Kingdom's largest festival of the humanities," was advertised through the University of Kent server while I was working as a researcher there. I saw a chance, reached out to a comrade in the UK, a member of the Oromo Women's Association, and together we came up with a loose concept. The original title of the event was "Recipes for Oromo Liberation" with the subtitle "Billisumma haa bilcheesnu!" The latter phrase translates directly to "Let's cook up freedom!" a cheeky alteration. After initial approval, we received further feedback that we should depoliticize the title somewhat, with the event organizers expressing concern over potential provocations or controversy. The political upheaval which is taking place in Ethiopia was alluded to in their

message. The grant implementation, from the formal acquisitional announcement in June to the festival in November, coincided with yet another emergency in the Ethiopian state context, though this era was more of a general crisis than the specific urgency of a particular emergency.

Their concerns were not without merit, and we responded with a more neutral option: Cooking Up Oromo Culture. We did, however, opt to keep the subtitle, untranslated. This small defiance is a way of repoliticizing, or perhaps revealing the politicization that has always existed. All of the women involved, me included, understand the radical difference that a sum of 2000 GBP could make in the lives of an Oromo in Oromia, even for many Oromos in the diaspora. We would much rather have the cash in hand, to be sent directly to these communities. Such money is not easily come across though, so we sing for our supper, and for the suppers that could come. It feels a bit like minstrelsy from a more pessimistic viewpoint, a condition for organizing liberation in the neoliberal era of the non-profit industrial complex (INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2007). I am comforted, though, by the writing of Amiri Baraka, who encourages us to seek some sovereignty in these environments:

> The attempt to denigrate Pan-African people with the stereotypes of racialism by claiming that the only things Pan-Africans can do is sing and dance—O.K. with me—just let us be in charge of it.
>
> (1991:105)

The preparation process can be conceived of as a negotiation, a translation. If we cohere the goal into one specific aim, a refrain of *Oromia haa billisoomti* (Let Oromia be free), how can we negotiate for this goal within the supposedly depoliticized context of the academy and her connected funding bodies? Translation and negotiation.

13. This is Ancootee	*This food is a root, boiled and prepared in approximation of a food from home, a food we can't get here*

Ancootee is the specific food in question, a starchy root crop grown primarily in the

highlands of Wollega, in Western Ethiopia. It's a tuber, with the scientific name *Coccinea abyssinica*. This scientific designation, while a useful international standardization, also reveals its own imperial entanglement. It does not take any knowledge of Latin to decipher the traces of the former empire in the word *abyssinica*: Abyssinia. In addition to our first-hand source, the value and uses of Ancootee have been documented in a report by Girma Abera and Dereje Haile for the database of *Neglected and Underused Species* (2013), and a report for the *Journal of Medicinal Plants Research* by Abadi Birhanu and Shimels Ayalew (2018), among others.

14. British past and presence in the Horn of Africa	*There is this group of women, here, foods from another continent, the distance between these places, a question of how these roads were traversed, why this community was formed, why here, why now*

British excursions onto the African continent were not a clandestine affair. The most visible connection between the British Empire's past, the United Kingdom's present, and the sovereignty of the Oromo nation (despite this) comes from Britain's role in (b)ordering the Horn of Africa. In a previous chapter I discussed the British Expedition to Abyssinia of 1868, and the impact of British interference and presence in the rise of Abyssinian, and later Ethiopian, state formation. On the southern end of the would-be empire, the British had a longer lasting and more evident impact. The Kenyan nation-state, formed in the shadow of the British colonial occupation, helps to enforce a strict separation between the pastoral communities of Oromos and Somalis that live in the area. The road from Moyale, the southernmost city in Ethiopian-occupied Oromia, down to Kenya is a hub for human trafficking. Once people cross the border, they flee onward to South Africa if they can, seeking something more than the Ethiopian state will provide them.

While I would not reduce Kenya to what Britain has done to her (riffing on Moten's

"we are irreducible to what is done to us"), the materiality of the border has an undeniable impact on Oromo lives. This border renders Oromo people transnational within their own nation, offering two nation-states without a full sense of belonging. In very practical terms, the aftermath of Britain's heavy hand has also exacerbated resource scarcity and political conflict with neighboring Somali peoples, further worsened by the effects of climate change and drought (Reid 2011; World Bank 2020). This judgment does not dismiss or displace any other European powers and their influence at the Berlin Conference. Rather, by focusing on this particular entanglement of the British Empire in the Horn of Africa, I question, again, the logic of traditional geography and its imperialized spatiality in comprehending the Oromo experience anywhere. As the Ethiopian settler colonial and Kenyan post+colonial (after paperson (2010), indicative of a present colonialism not yet separated from the past) border regimes believe they are making a mockery of Oromo sovereignty, I would take a more soulful, guraacha approach. Sovereignty is a force that armed officers at checkpoints call into question when they examine a document, arbitrarily deny access, legitimize a line on a map and a brick wall as a way of defining community. This sovereignty disappears in decolonial darkness.

15. Well, we called it an Ulma Bahaa. But it was actually a bit more than that	*You are informed that an Ulma Bahaa will be performed*

Ulma Bahaa, a type of baby shower or baby welcoming, has not been widely studied as a cultural practice. The most visible practitioner is Martha Kuwee Kumsa, also one of the only published sources of information. She is cited in Greg Gow's work on Oromo women in Melbourne. The name Ulma Bahaa acknowledges the two most significant aspects of the post-birth procedure: the initial *Ulma*, a period of seclusion where the wife stays at home, and the *Bahaa* when she can finally exit. Technically, we have not performed an exact replica of

an Ulma Bahaa. The original plan put in place was met with some tweaks and edits the better to reflect the inter-Oromo diversity of the group of participants. Traditions for pre- and post-birthing and early motherhood from East and West Oromia were combined, drawing on the expert knowledge of the women involved. This hybrid form presented some of the basic points of each place. In the oral description we elaborated on a few of the major differences, some of which I will expand on here.

The first is a question of timing. While the general practice is for mothers to stay inside for the first few days following the birth of the baby, there is not a uniform number. This period of seclusion was not recreated in the performance. Another alteration or hybridization comes from the exact roles of the women participating. In the first edition, the description calls for five women to prepare the water, two for the marqaa, and an unnamed number to support the mother and baby. We lacked the labor power to perform this in full force, missing out also on the spatiality to convey the full process. The version performed conveyed a sense of Oromumma that maintained the key meanings and symbolisms even in a transnational alteration.

16. Also called an ulee, not just a branch off an ordinary tree	*The audience is invited to participate in part, stirring barley flour into the heated pot using a sanded wooden stick*

"Ulee is a collective term the Oromo used to refer to those sticks that are purposely cut and fashioned for specific social, cultural and religious functions, Different ulee are made of different trees which specialize in different functions" (Kumsa 1997:120). This stick was a wedding gift to one of the women from her own relatives on the evening of her wedding. It is smoothly sanded, rounded off on both edges, approximately 50cm long.

17. Marqaa from the inside out	*The dish you are helping prepare is a porridge called marqaa*

The process for preparing marqaa is a bit more intricate than this description would suggest, requiring expert knowledge on temperature and time. As an approximation, barley and boiling water are mixed together and stirred forcefully. As the mixture begins to thicken along the sides and bottom, butter is added in, instantly easing the process. The stirring continues again until the marqaa is almost impossibly thick, and then comes more butter, a smoothing out, and more stirring. The ulee caresses the marqaa as it moves through it, smoothing the grains into the thick porridge it should become. A westernized instinct would be to use a spatula, or perhaps some overly clever and modernized kitchen gadget that might make the mix smoother and slicker. The ulee does not separate the labor from the final product. You feel the marqaa forming as you use it, the stick pushing through and pushing together.

When the dish is finished it is placed in a bowl with a small hole scooped out of the top. This indentation is filled with butter, sometimes cheese, and a spicy sauce called *qocqocca*. You scoop a bit of the melted butter, drag it through the spicy sauce, and dig out a heaping spoon of the thick porridge. In the *Ulma Bahaa*, the *marqaa* is not sexualized as such. The preparation of the marqaa rather than the consumption is the focal point. In a traditional ceremony, the barley is added by the combined hands of the two families, a symbol of their togetherness.

18. Oromumma or something like it	*He keeps his eyes open, blinking up at his mother before slipping into slumber, but he is quite undeterred by the surrounding sound*

We joke, behind the scenes, that this is the baby's Oromumma at work. Oromumma is an intangible element of Oromo-ness that demarcates culture and delineates relationships, something enmeshed with histories and futures. Barely a few months old, able to do little more than blink, sleep, eat, babies of this age would seemingly be perturbed by the surrounding chaos, a cacophony to the untrained ear. This isn't to ascribe some sort of

supernatural abilities or mythical Oromumma to a child, rather to comment on the processes through which Oromumma and Oromo relationality are built. A comfort in such a boisterous environment, surrounded by songs and laughter, this is indicative of some of the intricacies of Oromo culture.

19. Gudda guddifachuu, growing Oromos	*As an outsider, audience member, observing without fully participating, you've also been caught up in this constructed kinship. As a non-relative you could still clap with the rhythm, celebrate the salt fight, struggle to stir the marqaa.*

The concept of *guddifachuu* has a multifaceted meaning in Oromo culture, another example of a term made legible only in its use. From the root word *gudda*, or large, comes the verb for *guddachuu*, to make large or grow. As a cultural concept, to grow or raise up someone is more significant than standard child-rearing. In Oromo culture, outsiders are adopted into Oromo families through a guddifachuu. Abebayehu Tsegaye Aredo and Dejene Gemechu Chala identify one variation of guddifachuu, what they name as "Harmahodhaa," as a form of "fictive kinship formation" (2019). Related processes are also discussed in Mohammed Hassen's text (1994), among others. In relation to this event, we may identify a smaller-scale version of how the adoption could unfold, as a thorough integration, deep insider knowledge of significant events and practices, but most importantly a sense of community and relationality, living together. More than what can be taught in books or studies, the feeling conveyed through this experience seems to be the crucial element.

20. In this author's opinion we have saved the best (most unique, remarkable, unconventional) event for last	*You might have checked your paper quickly before leaving your seat and surmised that this performance will be of the Aseenna*

The Asseenna represents an altogether different life stage for Oromo women, one that is disconnected from biology, unbound by social ties, and revelatory of women's

independence and autonomy within Oromo culture. In the simplest explanation, Aseenna is a ceremony whereby a woman selects a man to marry. There are some contested stories and different approaches to understanding the Aseennaa. Some report that this practice was primarily undertaken by the elderly, women who could not otherwise find a suitable partner. Others report that the Aseennaa was used by young women, a direct response of refusal to a proposed arranged marriage that the woman found unsuitable. It seems however that these narratives have been recounted primarily by male academics and male interview subjects. The potential for gender bias here cannot be certainly defined but is not out of the question. It is also not clear if the Aseennaa was geographically normative or concentrated to select regions. Muktar Ahmed, Sufyan Alo, Dalu Abbuni, and Issa Hasan (2000), drawing on the work of Hussein (2000) place Aseenna as primarily a practice used in the Bale and Arsi Zones in Eastern Oromia. Our inside expert, the woman who has suggested the Aseenna as an activity, comes from Wollega but spent her childhood and younger years moving around the nation. Her deep cultural knowledge is also nationalized, as she grew up in community with peoples from across Oromia. Connecting these divergences, it suffices to say that the Aseennaa offers a number of alterities to Oromo women across contexts.

From this rich description and detail, we were faced with a process of converting this scenario into a workable programmatic plan that could be described and acted out in a few minutes' time. In our collective editing and translation process, it was essential that we preserve the core values and meanings of each step of the Aseenna. With the fruit, for example, when we could not identify a clear cultural meaning behind the usage of the iddii, coupled with the inability to find an actual fruit, we made the decision to use a grape. The aesthetic similarity was paired with an oral description, which acknowledged the absence of the actual plant. This kind of substitution is a fact of diasporic life; accepting the processed alternatives to the indigenous wild food that you find at home. Some Oromos in the diaspora

use wholewheat bread when they can't obtain buddenna, choosing the similarity in taste rather than any similarity in structure. We eventually narrowed down the details into a neat set of English instructions, then narrowed them down further to make a cohesive reenactment of the process. The final version, still alive with edits in our shared document, reveals the complexity in the translational process.

We could not, within our budget and time scope, recreate an Oromo home; we settled for strategically arranged chairs, identical to those used by our audience. Initially we intended to borrow a lamp from elsewhere in the hall, thinking that this third element would convey enough of a "room" setting. In the final production no lamp could be found. We signified a home through the presence of two community elders in formation, a man and woman, both dressed in traditional Oromo garb. As the evening progressed and more people arrived, the "house" was dismantled and passed back to the participants. I will not drift too romantically into musings of home as a nonplace for the Black diaspora, rather I would ponder briefly the reverse; that the seeming interminability of nonplace and displacement has made everywhere a potential place for us. When home in a stagnant geographical sense has long been vague and out of reach, the homing instinct allows kinship connections to suffice, recognizes a home in a place where people sit together.

21. Green grapes are not indigenous to the United Kingdom	*A young woman walks in, stage left, and begins tossing green grapes around*

Grapes came to the area via networks of past imperial movements, and though enjoyed widely they have not reached the capital "i" Indigenous cultural value of the iddii. The grapes we buy are plump and juicy. They are sold in an unmarked cardboard carton, no labels indicating their source. We can presume they were greenhouse grown given the season (grapes are typically harvested earlier in the year). We may also presume that they have been imported, like many other kinds of produce, relying on cheap labor forces made up of

exploited peoples elsewhere. According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, grapes in the UK are primarily imported from Turkey, and as of 2020 the United Kingdom was the 4th largest importer of grapes in the world (OEC 2020). While grapes as a crop are not mentioned specifically, there is widespread reporting of the use of refugees and precarious migrants during the produce harvest in Turkey (Support to Life 2014; Yılmaz, Karatepe, and Tören 2019). Turkey has in more recent years become a hub for refugees and displaced peoples fleeing from the Horn of Africa, the same precarious people who are subject to conscription into this type of labor. The post-imperial circulation of capital continues on. We had little hope of finding our fruit of choice, no one reported seeing it in stores, and any optimistic expectation we had for stumbling across it in an Indian store in Edmonton or Pakistani store in the next neighborhood proved unsuccessful. We settled for the closest item aesthetically, electing to divorce ourselves from the cultural context in order to impart better the overarching message of the Aseennaa process, and walking away with a tray of plump green grapes.

22. Iddii is indigenous to the Horn of Africa	*As she moves through the space and scatters the fruit she repeats a few lines of song to herself*

In order to complete the Aseenna we needed iddii (also spelled *hiddii)*, known in scientific terms as a *Solanum incanum*. During our planning meetings, no one knew the English name. We had no dearth of adjectives, bringing ourselves to a close approximation of what we wanted: small, round, green. After trying a few different spellings, compensating for dialectical differences and the non-standard nature of Oromo spelling in light of these differences, we eventually found our way to a document compiled by Alemayehu Kefalew, Ensermu Kelbessa, and Zemede Asfaw describing the "ethnobotany of medicinal plants" in the Eastern Shewa Zone (2015). This scientific paper offered us the missing link: the plant's internationally recognized Latin name. This brought us to a Wikipedia page, a list of

comparisons, and the exact description of the little bulb.

The small nightshade is Indigenous to Sub-Saharan Africa. It is not widely cultivated for consumption in Ethiopia, but quite popular in places such as Bhutan and Nepal. The plant can be identified in the wild by its purple and gold flowers. There is not a clear historical history of the plant and its ceremonial usage, but a fair amount of documentation reports its medicinal uses for both humans and animals (Kefalew, Kelbessa, and Zemede 2015; Doyo 2016; Jima and Megersa 2018; Abdisa 2019; Eshete, Kelbessa, Dalle 2019). As a purely speculative exercise, I would posit that the kind of poesis between a beautiful blossom and fulfilling food could be a metaphor for the kind of relationship that the fruit provokes (in this case a marriage ceremony, described at length above). The sturdy vines, rooting themselves within a community of plants, may be a symbol of the relationships enacted through the joining of two families and a larger network of friends and relatives to which they are similarly bound. "The scattered iddii implies that she wishes more wealth to the family she has joined" (Beyene and Tolera 2006:251).

23. The word ululation is almost an onomatopoeia for the "elelelee" sound.	*With a flourish she finally points him out, and the parents rejoice, clapping and ululating in response*

The ululation is sonically similar, if not identical to the "iyya Siinqee" or "Siinqee holler" described by Kumsa (2020:126). This sound and its celebratory meanings are not exclusive to Oromo people but found commonly across the Horn. Its meanings alter according to circumstances, as childbirth, for example calls for certain numbers of ululations, with a gendered distinction. Abreham Alemu, writing on Jimma Oromos, calls the sound an iliilchaa, something "culturally understood as an expression of joy, victory, and thankfulness" (2007:59). Other causes for ululation include lightning strikes (Mitiku, Edae, Wako 2019), Thanksgiving celebrations (Fiqruu 2018), or a general alert about forthcoming community

events (Qashu 2016).

24. The political meanings of the cultural may not be immediately clear	*This was a cultural celebration; clearly*

The representation of Oromo women within and beyond Ethiopia is a dangerous project. As Stuart Hall points out, "cultural politics and questions of culture, of discourse, and of metaphor are absolutely deadly political questions" (Hall 2021:330). At the same time this event was being organized, Ethiopia was operating under a state of emergency. Academic events and cultural events alike risked cancellation, espionage, labelling of participants as threats and violent cadres. Oromo culture is inherently politicized in Ethiopia; this othering is fundamental to the construction of the nation-state itself. In these conditions, "questions of culture are not superstructural to the problems of economic and political change; they are constitutive of them" (Hall 2021:330)

25. Transnational gestures of resistance	*This was meant to teach you in some ways about Oromo culture as shared by Oromo women in the UK diaspora; clearly*

Linking practices of resistance to performance, and the larger way performed resistance is read and understood, is a rich tradition across the Black diaspora and in communities of oppressed peoples globally. Performance is a way of expressing deep frustrations as well as a move toward liberation with deep roots in the long afterlives of slavery. Conveying these sometimes-subtle acts of refusal involves a "reliance on masquerade, subterfuge, and indirection" practices that "also obscured the small acts of resistance conducted by the enslaved" (Hartman 1997:8). Under the structural constraints of the plantation and the transatlantic slave trade, Hartman identifies two types of simulated performance: the "grins and gesticulations" of the minstrel, "indicating the repressive

construction of contented subjection," and the "simulation of compliance for covert aims" (Hartman 1997:8). In appearance they "differed little," but in their effect one "aimed to reproduce and secure the relations of domination" while the other sought to "manipulate appearances in order to challenge these relations and create a space for action not generally available" (ibid.).

The performance of Aseenna specifically, and the general performance of Oromo culture in the UK more generally, I argue, fall into this latter category. Where the relationship of domination with the more intimate oppressors, Abyssinia, has been given a physical and legal separation, the dominance of white supremacy remains in place. To perform Oromumma and evoke Oromo women as arbiters of this culture (despite the myriad of interwoven oppressions) is a generative act. The space it creates and action it allows for is a sovereign geography, one imbued with aesthetics that dominate the message, but do not foreclose its legibility. Through resistant artistic creations rooted in deep cultural values, the Oromo women simulate a content compliance, gesticulating and grinning while expressing their cultural artifact. This expression however is a simulation, a performance that manipulates this image in order to work for a larger liberatory goal. Regardless of their specific form, "acts of resistance exist within the context of relations of domination and are not external to them" (Hartman 1997:8).

26. The State of Emergency in Ethiopia, 2021	*That place, there, Ethiopia, has declared a State of Emergency*

The most comprehensive reporting of political violence in the Horn of Africa is conducted by the Armed Conflict Location Event Data group. Their 2021 report includes hundreds of events spread out across perpetrators including federal, police, and "rebel" forces. Other reports from this time period include the damning conclusions by international human rights bodies like Amnesty International or the reporting and documentation by

survivors of this violence.

27. The state of emergency is Ethiopia, long before this	*They are approximating this event in this way because for so long they were not even allowed an approximation*

Citations including but certainly not limited to:

- Mekuria Bulcha, "The Politics of Linguistic Homogenization in Ethiopia and the Conflict over the Status of 'Afaan Oromoo'" (1997)
- Mohammed Hassan, "Conquest, Tyranny, and Ethnocide against the Oromo: A Historical Assessment of Human Rights Conditions in Ethiopia, ca. 1880s-2002" (2002)
- Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia* (1990)
- Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-2004* (2005)
- Gadaa Melba, *Oromia: Introduction* (1988)
- Richard Reid, *Frontiers of Violence in North-East Africa: Genealogies of Conflict since c.1800* (2011)

28. If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution (Goldman 1934) *or* Hard Times Require Furious Dancing (Walker 2010)	*They are still laughing and smiling in their small groups, hugging each other goodbye*

"Held in the forms and content of the black aesthetic, in any of its cultural or historical elements, there is the will, the desire, the evoked **'**name' of *freedom*" (Baraka 1991:108)

"I am interested in ways of seeing and imagining responses to the terror visited on Black life and the ways we inhabit it, are inhabited by it, and refuse it. I am interested in the ways we live in and despite that terror" (Sharpe 2014:116)

"no need for geography/ now that we're safe everywhere/ point to whatever you please/ & call it church, home, or sweet love" (Danez Smith 2016)

"these pedestrian practices illuminate inchoate and utopian expressions of freedom that are not and perhaps cannot be actualised elsewhere" (Hartman 1997:13)

CONCLUSION

This analysis has sought to demonstrate the entanglements and complexities that come with attempting to read, know, and participate in spaces. The initial narrative of a single event connects back to hundreds of years of history, ecological knowledge, and artistic practices. Furthermore, the event program unveils a sovereign set of meanings that have grown out of the British dis/place. By reading the story from multiple levels, from the imperial to the guraacha, transnational geographies are solidified in their power. Black geographic methods reiterate the power of Oromumma and its myriad moves towards guraacha liberation.

CHAPTER XV: HIRIIRA SPATIOTEMPORALITIES: BLACK GEOGRAPHIES IN POST-IMPERIAL GERMANY[20]

The diasporic Oromo community of Germany is in active solidarity with its counterparts in Oromia. Cities across Germany, and Berlin in particular, have been sites of prolific organizing and resistance against the Ethiopian state, as seen in archival documents from the 1970s that declare "Freiheit für Oromiya" (Oromo Horn von Afrika Zentrum Archive). Many of these activists are now elders in the Oromo community, still fighting for their liberation today. Learning from this tradition, this chapter uses an Oromo women's protest in Berlin as a case study through which to identify forms of resistance within, despite, and against empire.

The Afan Oromo word for a protest march is *hiriira,* also translated as a parade, demonstration, or queue. Throughout this chapter I will refer to the Oromo women's protest that happened on 3 September 2020 as "the Hiriira." This particular Hiriira was planned by Oromos across Germany, best represented by the organization the *Hawaasa Oromo Jarmani* and the *Dhubartoota Oromo Jarmani*, the Oromo Community of Germany and Oromo Women of Germany. The women's event was scheduled to take place on a Thursday, described on the posters and notices sent out as a "Hiriira Dhubartoota" (Women's March), to be followed by a Hiriira (unqualified, for everyone) the next day.[21] Drawing upon a Black geographic lens, as developed by Katherine McKittrick, I use Berlin to identify the presence of a *geography guraacha*, a Black presence that exceeds (in)visibility. Focusing on this protest, I map out transparent spatial relationships of Berlin as a post-imperial city by exploring how an active Oromo women's presence has influenced space and place. Through centering the Hiriira, I aim to unpack the entangled dynamics of violence related to

[20] A version of this chapter has been published by *Antipode:* **https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12891**
[21] I name the event a Hiriira Dhubartoota following its in-person description and advertising materials. Oromo women's assemblages in response to societal violations are also called "Goodansa Siiqqee" or Siiqqee trek (Kumsa 1997:129)

race, gender, state, and citizenship and how the heavy weight of each of these histories has gained new life across borders.

Oromo people are members of the African diaspora, the participants of the march all self-identified or affiliated with women (presumed based on their partaking in a women's march), and though not all the individuals were im/migrants, their transnational engagement with Ethiopia makes questions of citizenship and migration part of the broader conversation. The layers of these interlocking structures, uncovered along the route of the Hiriira, show how Germany as a nation-state struggles still to not only reckon with its own first-hand involvement in imperial violence, but also acts as an implicit facilitator of other forms of harm through its foreign policy. To address these entanglements, I think alongside theoretical and epistemological frames that emerge from Black diasporic and Oromo scholarship and lifeways.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE HIRIIRA

In this chapter I utilize space-making to unpack the processes that build up to, and exceed, the women's Hiriira of 2020 in Berlin. The discussion is engaged through the notions of *imperial spatializing* as it works in dialect with and undermines *Black geography*, and *geography guraacha* as the Oromo epistemological framing. I will review these concepts briefly here. Imperial spatializing draws on the work of Mishuana Goeman, calling attention to the relations between people in place, addressing the tendency to read space and ethnicity with colonial grammars and ideologies, and the use of imperialist knowledge to make truth claims about a population (2009:184). McKittrick identifies this process as the formation of "transparent space," generating a vision of place that is intelligible through and evidence of an imperial vision, presuming "that the external world is readily knowable and not in need of evaluation, and that what we see is true" (2006:xv). Trusting in the transparency of a space, is a way of suggesting that "some bodies belong, some bodies do not belong, and some bodies

are out of place" (McKittrick 2006:xv). When these bodies, the bodies of Black women, are tied up in imperial spatial narratives, domination and control are reinforced, and Black geographic knowledge is seen as out of place. Through a transparent lens, the hegemonic power maintains hierarchies between the (national, white) self and the (im/migrant, Black) other.

Black geography, coming from the work of McKittrick (as well as a 2007 text written with Clyde Woods), elucidates Black women's spatializing and finds "critical sites of nation" amidst the "absence and elsewhere" of the imperially produced space (2006:103). Bringing these ideas of space-making to an Oromo diasporic standpoint leads to the notion of geography guraacha. Guraacha refers to "absolute origin," "the source of all things," and that which is "not yet revealed;" symbolic beyond connotations of the color (Megerssa 1993:96). Waaqa, the black god, creates everything and "weaves them into an intricately interrelated, interdependent, and well-balanced cosmic order" (Kumsa 2013:72). The Oromo worldview recognizes the interrelation of the seen and unseen, known and hidden, finding cycles and connections between the past and present. The Blackness of the Oromo people and the symbolism of the color black are both expressed in geography guraacha. In its originary framing and as a form of "geography," guraacha allows for "the various layers of knowing and not knowing" that relationality to Waaqa makes possible (Kumsa 2013:85). The Oromo epistemology that Waaqa and guraacha emerge from is linked to the natural world and skies above, as much as the bonds between people. Oromos gathering to express their autonomy and sense of self is inextricably bound to these cultural practices.

Through integrating and building on these concepts, I conduct a Black/ guraacha mapping of the Hiriira demonstration, identifying the post-imperial entanglements, unbounded by nation-state borders, that both produce and reveal relationships between cultural, institutional, and economic structures. In order to link these rich theoretical

understandings to the Hiriira, I trace the physical route of the march, analyzing certain stopping points, slogans, usage and interactions within space, and the lingering shadow of the empire (Ethiopia's and Germany's) as it follows the protest.

The path of the Hiriira is complicated by the sociopolitical culture of Berlin itself, where tensions between acknowledgement and erasure of Germany's history are ongoing. The city is both an emblem of international conflicts, and a site of significance for Black German women's organizing (Florvil 2020). In each contemporary era, from Prussian rule, the Weimar Republic, Nazi regime, post-war occupation, and in its current positionality as a global power, Berlin's uses and understanding of its space has shifted. What is "transparent," therefore, is really what has been made legible or intelligible through space-making practices and language that is state-sanctioned and stuck in the imperial. Through a Black geographic analysis of Berlin, we may unpeel some layers of the empire, foregrounding an alternate existence. By positioning the analysis alongside, embedded, and in motion with the perspective of Oromo women, the guraacha map is made visible.

FINDINGS

Alexanderplatz

Alexanderplatz is located on the Western side of formerly East Berlin, a short distance from the city's old border and "Checkpoint Charlie." Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Alexanderplatz has undergone several transformations. In a post-GDR world, Alexanderplatz became known as an "unruly open-air market," dominated by shady foreign figures, losing its shiny socialist luster as the nation struggled to reconcile itself with the past and reintegrate the infrastructure into a new state vision (Weszkalnys 2007:211). It was not until the 2000s that Alexanderplatz was renovated to fit the "narrative of the German past as characterised by the struggle of the working classes and their own particular culture" (Standley 2013:686). Renewal efforts sought to cleanse

Berlin's violent history and pave the way for a brighter future. Fatima El-Tayeb describes this as the drive to form a "singular linear narrative of the past" into a contrived idea of the nation-state (2020:79). German imperialism has shown its ugly face to the world, and its current imperial occupants sought to put their own stamp on the city.

On a sunny day, the expansive streets and sidewalks of Alexanderplatz are inviting, with people walking together through the open spaces. If you turn left on the street Karl Marx Allee (a road near Alexanderplatz), you'll see engravings on the side of buildings in the Socialist Realist style of art, showing country women with headscarves on, going from farmer to scientist (presumably with support of the faithful leadership of the USSR). In the evenings, the rows and rows of rectangular buildings seem to take on a darker life, the staunch structures that line the city blocks stretching beyond the line of sight (Sonne 2007). As a part of the modern German state, they are a tangible reminder of a history unwritten and rewritten with different imperial tongues.

The Hiriira starts in Alexanderplatz, but the square is just one section of an area with larger significance. In the context of this chapter, we may understand Alexanderplatz's shifting symbolism though multiple layers, the "transparency" of the space reflecting its former tension with increasing globalization (Dushkova and Kasatkina 2015), as well as retaining its radical roots (Arandelovic 2014). The convergences and conflicts between Alexanderplatz's "socialist" past, hyper-capitalist future, and the anti-colonial spirit in the spatiotemporality of the Hiriira make themselves known even if they are not the focal point. Though there were attempts at the construction of a "new history" for a "new Berlin and a new Germany, in which a line can be drawn under the past and a guilt-free future constructed," it seems the success in creating something new was not able to rid the area of some shadowy sense of guilt (Cochrane and Jonas 1999:153; see also El-Tayeb 2020).

The Oromo women protesting chose the *Weltzeituhr*, the World Time Clock, as their

meeting point. The sculptural clock was constructed in 1969 alongside other major public buildings, intended to convey to citizens and visitors alike that the GDR was on the path to a bigger, bolder, and more global future, and has been an important gathering place for demonstrations throughout the 20th and 21st centuries (Arandelovic 2014; Standley 2013). The *Weltzeituhr* is made to look like a planet with revolving rings and numbers, a different view from every angle. In addition to the clock's unique shape, it also has a peculiar way of showing time. Rather than naming time zones, temporal geographies are represented by renowned cities: Amsterdam, New York, Paris, and all the way from Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. Though Oromo people gather to fight for freedom in Germany, Ethiopian imperialism follows.

The Ethiopian post-empire that shadows the Hiriira is asserted through such spatiotemporalities, what Mark Rifkin describes as "settler time" (2017). While maps and borders are modes of making space, temporality has its own role in upholding imperial systems and enforcing control. Conversely, Gadaa time keeping, part of Indigenous Oromo culture, is one way of writing geography guraacha. Under Gadaa governance, Oromo people understood and counted time in relation to the world around and the movement of stars, rather than a linear, standardized model (Legesse 1973). The intricate temporality of the Oromo refuses easy incorporation into settler temporal frames that seek to construct a "shared present" for Indigenous people "defined by settler institutions, interests, and imperatives" (Rifkin 2017:viii). In the context of Black Germany, Nicola Lauré al-Samarai recounts the ways in which the "skeleton of a dismembered colonial experience" both "continues to inflect multilayered cultural cartographies" and "inseparably intertwines Black and white German pasts and presents" (2016:48). This temporality is still embedded in the imperialized past, generating the conditions for the imperial now.

Working against imperial time, Rifkin argues instead for the presence of "temporal

multiplicity" that opens possibilities for engaging with time as a "narrative," "experience," and "immanent materiality of continuity and change" (2017:ix-x). McKittrick also points to the way disruptions to normative (imperial) time-space progressions are geographic acts, moves to contextualize the past and present of Black lives (2006:2). For Black German organizers in Berlin, presenting narratives of Blackness outside of a linear time is part of unsettling "racist notions of a blackness fixed in time and place" (Florvil 2020:145). Connecting Black and Indigenous temporalities opens our understanding to the liberatory intent of geography guraacha as an expression of Oromo transnational resistance. With the understanding that time is its own mechanism of control, it is fitting that the Weltzeituhr is such a visible physical reminder of imperialized space-making.

When the Hiriira begins we are facing and faced by the side of the clock that covers the edge of Eastern Europe, Asia, and Australia. Cities on this side range from New Delhi and Karachi in the West to Melbourne and Magadan in the East. Settler colonial spaces on display (Melbourne), careful attention paid to the demarcations of the former empire (the former Soviets in this context), and a 24-hour block that measures the days as they pass for the local population; though some of the city names were changed after its creation (e.g., Leningrad to Saint Petersburg) and alterations were made to some of the time measurements (an extra 30 minutes given to New Delhi), Addis Ababa stands stubbornly over our heads.

Start of Hiriira

The morning of 3 September was chilly, evidence that Berlin's seemingly unrelenting winter gray was coming soon. The women assembled near the mouth of the underground station, greeting each other in turn and showing off their traditional styles. Most, if not all, of the women wore some items of Oromo cultural garb, distinct to different regions of Oromia. Some had Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) flags emblazoned on their Covid-19 face masks or

clothing, an evocation of the politicized nature of Oromo identity as much as a recognition of the significance of the flag itself, with its Odaa tree brightly in the center. As the group waited for more people to arrive, a few women pulled out thermoses of coffee and tea, a plastic wrapped loaf of homemade bread was revealed, plates and cups passed around, and breakfast was served. It is clear that the Hiriira was conducted and led by members of a community; beyond their political agreements there was a sense of kinship and responsibility that emerged in this shared sustenance, breaking bread, gathering together in friendship as they gather together to fight.

Before the walking began, there was a blessing, with each of the major religions of the Oromo people represented: Waqqeeffanna, Islam, and both Protestant and Orthodox Christianity. The first voice reached out to Waqaa, the black god, asking for support in their undertaking. She closed the prayer "…*Oromia billisomsiitu. Kan hafe Waqqayyo, itti nuuf haa gutu. Jabbadhaa, hin jabbana*." In direct translation, the phrase reads as "Let Oromia be free. All the rest God will fulfill. Be strong, we'll be strong." The phrasing of the last sentence reflects the relationship between the speaker, Waqaa, the Oromo people at large, and the Oromo women listening. The Oromo verb *jabbachuu* means to be strong. The root, jabb-, can be given the suffix -eenya, to mean strength (*jabbeenya*). Rather than a conveyance of physical strength, the command form *jabbadhu* (singular), or *jabbadhaa* (plural/ formal, as used by the speaker), is meant to convey to the recipient the need to utilize or build the resources of an internal strength. In trying times, a friend will say *jabbadhu* as a form of encouragement, a recognition of that around you which seeks to weaken you, and an acknowledgment that the strength to overcome this is within you.

In this Waqqeeffanna blessing, the speaker follows the formal/ plural command (*jabbadhaa)* with the first-person plural statement *hin jabbana*, we are strong, or we will be strong (there are no common linguistic indicators for future tense in Afan Oromo). The

speaker thus addresses Waqaa (through the formality in the command form *jabbadhaa*), Oromo people in other contexts (through the plurality within the command form *jabbadhaa*), and the sisters that surround her in the square (through the first-person plural form *jabbana)*. While she works and waits for Oromia to be free, asking for Waqaa's support in this pursuit, she acknowledges the community strength that will make this possible, a strength she knows the women already have. Bringing Waqaa to Alexanderplatz is a spatial act, a way of positioning guraacha sensibility as a primary way of knowing. When there are disruptions to *safuu,* the cosmic law and order that guides Oromo epistemologies, women gather and work to repair this harm. From their "spaces of liminality," through their organization, and in conversation with Waqaa, Oromo women engage in a transnational feminist praxis that is unbound by imperial spatiotemporalities (Kumsa 2020:127). While the temporality of the empire, Addis Ababa standing overhead, is a transparent way of attempting to know the space, the geography is made guraacha through the prayers of these Oromo women.

Rotes Rathaus

After exiting Alexanderplatz, the Hiriira crosses in front of Berlin's City Hall, known as the Rotes Rathaus, or Red Townhall for its imposing brick façade. Although the building is generally open for visitors, the city tourism office warns that due to "political events and safety reasons temporary closures of the town hall may occur" (Berlin Tourism Bureau). It is unclear if the Hiriira would qualify as such an interruption, but no one is seen entering or exiting from it during our passage. As the morning ends the day stays brisk but not too cold, and a few clouds dot the otherwise blue skies. The wind shudders across the street as the march moves forward, with some unseen force seeming to direct its irregular route. In the videos I take, the row of flags in front of the Hall appears to be flapping in slow motion, stilted when compared to the fluidity of the movement on the street. The decision behind the

display of these emblems appears to convey that the state, nation-state, and the European Union as its own post-imperial force are all inter-connected. Though this is merely a city hall, its jurisdiction is seemingly granted legitimacy by the relationship it has with these supranational bodies, each of their emblems waving slowly, heavily in the wind.

In a mapping of this area's "transparent space," the casual witness may be preoccupied by the power of this city government, the solemn brick glowering its disapproval (McKittrick 2006:xv). Focused on this transparency, we read the Rotes Rathaus only through its formal description, see it on a digital map with a copywritten image of orderly flags, a thoroughly German building in the German state. Reviews of the Rotes Rathaus on Google Maps describe it as "beautiful building that surprisingly survived a very hard history," noting that its "square red shape give [sic] an imposing, yet agile impression," and making sure to add that "this solidity does not look like just a tasteless piece of stone."

In transparent terms the Rotes Rathaus is a solid German landmark, an emblem of state order (despite its hard history), ongoing governance (with a type of agility), poise (beautiful, tasteful), and somewhere easily accessed by the people (the tunnel of the newly constructed underground station leading directly to its doors). Other than one commentator's mention of a "hard history," there is no connection between the Rotes Rathaus and the historical struggle that surrounds it, nor to the ongoing struggles taking place on the streets below it. In a city comprised of imperial space the Rathaus can be only red, strong, solid. There is no room in this spatializing for attention to elsewheres and otherwises. Conversely, a Black geographic reading, embedded in the spatiotemporality of the Hiriira, allows the Oromo diaspora to stake its claim alongside the alternate histories of Black Berlin. The Oromo Liberation Front flags come to the forefront at this moment, and the eye of the camera takes this image up with it (Figure 1). Stepping back across the street, the vision is even more overwhelmingly Oromo, with this flag of liberation carried, displayed, and pasted on the side

of the lead car.

An easy denial of the validity of this rendering is that the Oromo presence is somehow temporary, that the march continues on, but the Rotes Rathaus remains red and ready to rule. I prefer to follow the thinking of Berlin's Dekoloniale, located just a few kilometers down the road, whose organizers urge an attention to "how the invisible can be experienced and the visible can be irritated."[22] This connects to McKittrick, who suggests that the nation-state's refusal to name Black diasporic presence as local and connected intimately to the nation-state body in an attempt to erase it results in "surprise" when it asserts itself (2006:91). We are "surprised" to learn the Blackness of Berlin if our geographic knowledge is stagnated by the image available on Google Maps, in the transparent white social space. If we bring a Blackened geographic sensibility to the forefront then we are forced to acknowledge that the vision of the Hiriira is not only a legitimate framing of the Rotes Rathaus, but that it is integral to the existence of the Rathaus itself, and the city it governs. What would Berlin be without its imperial past, and the imperial entanglements it shared across Africa with its European counterparts? (El-Tayeb 2020). The transnational connections between the "omnipresent" colonial past and the colonial now are a central focus of the Dekoloniale, who call for the creation of a "memory culture" as a form of redress. A Black geography forces us to think through and with these ideas, irritating the transparency of the space and making the post-imperial legacy one that is intimately in conversation with both present and future. The temporality of the Hiriira and its guraacha lens recognizes Oromo women as "viable geographic subjects who live and negotiate the world around them" thus "offering a different sense of how geography is and might be lived" (McKittrick 2006:92). For a few minutes, the Rotes Rathaus is an active Oromo diasporic space. Captured on film and camera, it is immortalized as such, impossible to deny.

[22] https://www.dekoloniale.de/en/about

As the Hiriira passes the Rotes Rathaus, the city's leadership is called to task. The women demand that these politicians answer for Germany's contribution to foreign state-sponsored violence which has direct effects on its local citizens, however far away that nation-state may be. The Hiriira condemns the city's leadership, targeting the then-Bürgermeister Herr Michael Müller specifically, asking the government to stop their financial and political support of Abiy Ahmed, the Ethiopian Prime Minister, and address the ongoing harm against Oromo people that is taking place in Ethiopia. The chorus of Hiriira voices denounces dictatorship and demands freedom, voices echoing off the brick walls, penetrating the few windows that have been left open. In the soundspace of the Hiriira, for each of the curious onlookers, this city hall is in tune with the fight for Oromo liberation. Soon, though, the moment passes, the walk goes onward, and the struggle continues.

Singing Under the Lindens

The singing begins on the stretch of road that leads up to the Brandenburg Gate. This broad street is flanked on both sides by prestigious government buildings: the embassies for France, the USA, and the Russian Federation, as well as the ambassador for the European Union. The street is named for trees that line either side of it: *Unter den Linden* translates directly to Under the Lindens. The Linden trees are shy, preparing for winter it seems. They peek out over the road but don't seem to give the feeling of really being "over" the path we walk. Whether this is the efforts of careful urban tree trimming or the result of the trees choking back the polluted gas that usually blows among their leaves is not clear. Over and above the Linden trees on this street are the seats of individuals with an extraordinary influence on global relations and politics. We walk under them in name, according to the imperial map, but their impact is not felt; the shadows of other trees still hold more influence here.

Any mapping of Oromia would be remiss without identification of Oromo people's key cultural and religious sites, places like Abba Muda or Bishooftu, characterized by a body of water and a stately Odaa (Sycamore) tree. Specific to Oromo women, the Oak tree or *qilxxu* was a site essential to enacting sociolegal frameworks. As Asafa Jalata describes, "When there were violations of their rights, women left their homes, children, and resources and traveled to a place where there was a big tree called qilxxu and assembled there until the problems were solved through negotiation by elders, both men and women" (2001:67). The qilxxu was connected to balance and justice; the frail Lindens are moved under during the Hiriira, but their meaning is only a shadow of the proud qilxxu (Kumsa 2013:63). For Oromo women in the diaspora, in a mapping of Berlin that addresses these transnational experiences, the Sycamore and Oak by the local lake are substituted for a manmade canal and a row of thin Lindens. The seats of governance and decision makers are tucked away above and beyond the trees, rather than gathered together underneath them as they would within the Siinqee Gadaa governance.

The songs performed during this protest are part of a rich tradition of Oromo musical performance including forms such as *geerarsa* (Holcomb and Klemm 2018; Tolesa 1990), *kadhata,* and *dalaga;* the latter two are discussed at-length, among others, in Martha Kuwee Kumsa's *Songs of Exile* (2013). Geerarsas have a well-documented significance in the culture and lifeways of Oromo people, particularly as a form of anti-colonial expression. The songs expressed during this Hiriira are *wallisa*[23]. These wallisa have a few distinct parts: the call

[23] This same form of song is described by Kuwee Kumsa as an "iyyaa siiqqee" or Siiqqee scream (2015). I reach for *wallisa* as this was how the songs were named by members of the community. This differentiation in label may reflect the formality of the Sinqqee institution in contrast to Oromo women's organization of other forms; the latter groups are guided by their Oromumma or Oromo-ness, but operate with their own adaptations. It may also be that other members of the Hiriira would call the music an Iyyaa Siiqqee, or simply a *sirbaa* or song. My attempts at labelling or defining are limited by my own positionality and way of coming to knowledge.

and response or communal aspect, the lyrics, the rhythm and flow, and the circumstances of singing. These may be re-phrased as the individual, the community, and the world around. The leader of the song sets the tone and designs the lyrical content. The rest of the group places their faith in this leader, trusts that that the message is one worth repeating and giving support to.

The songs have a joyful feel, even if their lyrical content is darker. "*Abiy muratee dhageesse, oddu sii geesse*," one chant leads: I heard Abiy is mentally ill, spread the word. The major repetition comes with the end of each line; whatever news (*oddu*) you have heard (*dhageesse*) is then shared and passed along to others to arrive in their ears (*sii geesse*). In Gadaa times, women would gather and sing for a number of reasons, in celebration as much as in protest. The songs are a moment of power, unmatched by speeches or ordinary chants. The meanings of the wallisa and their performance are their own geography guraacha, connecting the spirit of Waaqa with the participants in the Hiriira, and calling back to Oromia. In this diasporic space, under the German Lindens, the singing is evidence of an undeniable Oromo presence, and the harsh truths of the lyrics are made melodic.

A song performed under an Odaa tree would have signified a monumental event, something worth gathering the entire community for: public justice, a holiday, life or death. Under the Linden trees it is some variation on all these things, even if the onlookers are unable to understand. The voices raised in song draw more attention to the march, bystanders taking videos in addition to photographs, children whispering questions into the ears of parents who seem uncertain. Approaching the shadow of the *Brandenburger Tor* (Brandenburg Gate), the march stops so the speakers can lead another round of chants, repeating again the key demands, listing one more time the grave injustices that they are rallying against. When the Hiriira begins to move forward again, the singing picks back up.

Bundeskanzleramt

The Hiriira ends in front of the German *Bundeskanzleramt*, or Chancellery building, the seat of then-Chancellor Angela Merkel. From the side where we gather, the full image of the building is hidden. We are greeted instead by a metal fence and row of flagpoles, with the rusted copper shape of an abstract statue visible in the near distance. While the building seems to be open and facing us, with long glass walls showing glimpses of government bureaucrats walking back and forth inside, the sharp metal fence and line of police officers make it clear that it is truly closed. The Hiriira arriving at the Bundeskanzleramt is a significant political moment; presenting their grievances directly to the head of the German state is a primary intention of this march, and their presence at the foot of the great hall should not be taken lightly.

The Bundeskanzleramt is a site loaded with meaning and another indication of the challenges of German reunification. It stands directly across from the Reichstag, the home of the German parliament, a spatial relationship with symbolic weight. In preparing for its redesign, the former Minster of Regional Planning, Building, and Urban Development called for a building that stood "in dialogue with the Reichstag building without calling into question" its dominance as the seat of parliament (Töpfer, quoted in Sonne 2007:301). The geographic conversation built into these brick and glass formations is in the shadow of the empire, a sign of imperial space-making even as it sought to write a new force into power. In both iterations, Germany maintains its hegemonic whiteness and strengthens its "colonial amnesia" (El-Tayeb 2020). The dialogue taking place is reflexive of global conversations that began in the colonial era and remain unresolved, leaving a "residue of denied truths and unresolved conflicts" that continue to haunt dominant discourse (El-Tayeb 2020:74). In the temporality of the Hiriira, I am further struck by the role of representation, the intangible control over space and place that echoes around us.

The Oromo, like other colonized peoples, have too often been required to be satisfied with a smiling face or census demography that seems to align with their own, rendering any protests as hypercritical. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is the face and voice of much of the Ethiopian empire, and Sahle-Work Zewde, an ethnic Amhara, sits in the seat of the Presidency and has a high involvement in the day-to-day operations of the state. She is the first woman to hold the position, and at the time of the Hiriira the only woman head of state in Africa. Ethiopia is thus on paper led by an Oromo and a woman. Western observers, the public, the Nobel Prize Committee, they all see this as progress, justice, and success. However, Abiy's Oromo identity is more notable for the way it facilitated his eventual betrayal of the Oromo youth whose protests brought him to power.

Abiy became Prime Minister in the aftermath of years of organized protests by Oromo youth called the Qaree/ Qeerroo movement. This hope-filled transition was soon abandoned, and Abiy's government has since unleashed a violence against Oromos even worse than that of the former rulers (Burke and Zelalem 2020; Gemechu 2022; Jalata 2019). Although ethnically Oromo, Abiy's rule is premised on the desire for a system that keeps all ethnic peoples subjugated as a "nameless geography for state extraction" (Tibeso and Abdurahman 2021:45). A panel convened during the Oromo Studies Association Mid-Year Conference 2022 described Abiy's turn to violence as a "once-in-a-generation revolution highjacked" (2022).[24] The Ethiopian nation-state is a demonstration of the fragility or perhaps impossibility of claiming kinship and citizenship to colonial formations. Kenyan scholar K'eguro Macharia, writing on former President Barack Obama identifies such experiences as "moments in which Obama is both 'brother' and 'stranger,' the face of U.S. imperialism and the smile of racial fraternity" (2012:214). The Oromo women in the Hiriira avoid the trap of

[24] The full title read "Anatomy of the Nonviolent Pro-Democracy Oromo Youth Movement" and was moderated by Asebe Regassa, featuring input from Bonnie Holcomb, Ezekiel Gebissa, and Milkessa Midega Gemechu (27 March 2022)

representation politics that has enraptured so many American citizens through their disillusionment with the Ethiopian nation-state, which has revealed that shared identities are political fodder that lack real relationality. While these Oromo women have exchanged the settler colony for the post-empire, Germany's complicity in Ethiopian state violence troubles the possibility of embracing a nation outside of Oromia.

The nature of the Hiriira discourse demonstrates an intimate knowledge shared by Black women who have experience organizing "against their own abandonment" (Gilmore 2017:47). The Oromo women leading the march are not impressed by Merkel's gender, and do not imagine any solidarity between this rich white imperialist and themselves. In this sense, the marchers in the Hiriira join a long tradition of Black and Afrodiasporic women organizing in Berlin, movements born of the knowledge that the German state sought to render them out of place, and white German feminists' racism (Florvil 2020; Lennox 1995). Black German social movements, led by Black women, demonstrate the agency and power that comes from this distinct positionality, one in which they "claim their color and their voices" (Lorde 1991:xiv). There are no special protest chants designed for Merkel or addressing her womanhood. The Oromo women speak to her the same way they did the Bürgermeister, and the message is consistent: stop supporting the Ethiopian dictator, freedom for Oromia. This message and the women delivering it do not care for the identities of those it is directed at. They want freedom, unconditionally.

RACE, CITIZENSHIP, AND GENDER ON THE ROAD

The implications of Oromo women's race, citizenship status, and gender as they function in relation to the onlookers and larger societal space shadow the Hiriira route. These identities are both generated from the simultaneity of their Blackness and Oromo-ness and

tempered by the larger context of Black Europe[25] and its histories of Black feminism and struggles for intersectional justice. In the Hiriira, race, citizenship, and gender all come into play as distinct forces, indicative of the complexity of the spatiotemporality.

Along the Hiriira route, the race of the protest participants stands in opposition to those outside of it. The police force is majority white or white passing, as are the politicians at whom the chants are directed and the onlookers at each of the stopping points. In the context of the Hiriira, visibility is an expected or encouraged aspect. Taking a protest to the streets is a way of drawing attention from those who may be otherwise uninformed or uninterested. But, for Black women, visibility is a constant in any aspect of life, a reflection of the legacy of racialization and race-making under slavery (Ayim 1991:141). Blackness lived and Blackness announced both encompass the expansive presence of Black life, rendered out of place in the Northern post-empire. Black people in Germany are seen as "always arriving, considered to be from somewhere else, nonexistent as Germans" (Florvil 2020:180) while Germanness is conflated with whiteness (El-Tayeb 1999; Lukate 2019). Black women in Germany and Black German women have worked tirelessly over the last half-century to make legible and express their struggles within the nation-state, turning this in/visibility into a liberatory Black space-making practice.

Class positionality in the Hiriira is clarified with attention to citizenship. This follows the German state's notion of migration, and the economic facets embedded within it. Oromo women are forced to define their personhood in the terms of the Ethiopian state to make their claims legible in Germany. As citizenship is regulated with economic intentions, it is presumed that individuals who are German by birth have an inherently higher economic worth which they need not articulate. Migrant status is inferior to the local, creating a

[25] Akwugo Emejulu and Francesca Sobande's collection *To Exist is to Resist: Black Feminism in Europe* (2019) is a rich accounting of these experiences

hierarchy with an economic tint that is further impacted by colonial legacies of racialization (Monforte 2020; Piesche 2016). The role of race as a determinant in migration control has been well-documented (see also Walia 2013; Black Mediterranean Collective 2021; Isakjee, Davies, Obradović-Wochnik, and Augustová 2020). In Germany the potential economic power of Oromo people is linked to the economics of the Global South. They are thus simultaneously restricted from fully participating in the German state while Ethiopian state relations are a stigmatizing former citizenship that institutionalizes further oppression.

Gender is an influential factor in the Hiriira from the start: this is a women's march, a separate occurrence from the community march that occurred the day after. In the decision to host the march on these terms, some characteristics of womanhood and women's experiences are made visible. Oromo women are leaders in their religious communities (seen by their prayers), vocal in their political demands, and they move with a deep connection to Oromo culture. Viewing the Hiriira's songs as a conversation amongst sisters is an affirmation of women's distinct political power, and sisterhood as its own institution. Resonating with local histories of Black German activism, while the Oromo women demonstrate solidarity within their own community, they do not extend this relationality to Merkel (Lennox 1995). Some combination of her race and class differences, both of which enhance her hierarchal positionality, separate her from this community.

CONCLUSION

While the Hiriira ends at Merkel's front door, the political struggle is far from over. Many of the participants headed directly from the Chancellery to the Ethiopian Embassy across town, joining their comrades with more songs, shared meals, community care, and resistance. By reading and rewriting Berlin through a Black and guraacha geographic lens, I have sought to add to theorizing which challenges the spatializing that has written the city in

imperial terms. Building a concept of space and space-making that prioritizes Black resistance and liberation reveals a layer of significance that is otherwise in danger of being erased.

Despite Germany's humanitarian obligations, role as a "migrant magnet" (Rietig and Müller: web), and self-proclaimed culture of welcome or *Willkommenskultur* (El-Tayeb 2020:74), it fails to leave real discursive space for inclusion of individuals beyond their nation-state positionality. Peggy Piesche describes challenges for recognition within and beyond the role of citizenship in the GDR, for example, as generating "Black (step)children)" (2016). El-Tayeb offers more comprehensive examples, connecting German colonial activities to racialization and citizenship over time (1999). In this sense, the German migrant is "left nowhere and everywhere," even as the empire "orients, imagines, and critiques itself" through this ghostly body (Byrd 2011:xix). Shifts in Germany's governance, alongside changing geopolitical relationships, have allowed German narratives to differentially place the im/migrant into the discourse in ways that diminish individual agency and the overwhelming (necro)power of the nation-state. Necropower, as a means of understanding structural violence and North-South relations, has been discussed in work such as Thom Davies, Arshad Isakjee, and Surindar Dhesi's piece on refugee experiences in Europe (2017). Not unique to Germany, necropolitics allows for political abandonment of refugees through the bind of in/action; in both Ethiopian and diaspora state politics, Oromo people are excluded from access to rights and included when their death can be actualized. Imperial spaces render Indigenous peoples "nowhere and everywhere" (Byrd 2011:xix), colonial subjects "born anywhere, anyhow" in a "world with no space" (Fanon 1963:63), and these forces build an entire "nation on no map" (Brooks 1987, cited and further elaborated in Anderson 2021). Imperial space-making seeks to strip away relationality, making a diaspora of anywhere, everywhere, and elsewhere.

Colonization and the lingering governance of the empire push the Oromo as a diasporic migrant outside of nation-state discourse, rendering the Oromo people ungeographic, despite their decades of (documented) relationality and space-making practices in the German state. Through a geography guraacha, and the mapping practice attempted here, I reiterate and reinforce the stability of Oromo transnational presence, the refusal of Oromo people to be displaced without building back a *place/meant* (following Fred Moten's 2017 riff of Amiri Baraka 1969); even in a diasporic space the Oromo are creating new meanings, imbuing the diaspora with their presence. While the failures of the nation-state to leave political or discursive space for Oromo communities are reflected in practices of othering, citizenship forms that are outside of imperial temporalities are more inclusive of the full Oromo experience. Neither a faded Ethiopian state residence card or a German passport is sufficiently able to grasp or contain Oromo transnational movements. Through a geography guraacha, Oromo experiences are intimately connected with the German nation-state, and this diasporic sensibility is part of the global project for Oromo liberation.

CHAPTER XVI: CONCLUSION

The data that has made up this thesis was collected to explore space-making and resistance across the Oromo diaspora, with attention to Oromo women. In this closing chapter it is cohered and analyzed to understand the ways in which these spatial formations are theoretically linked even in non-spatial ways. Black geography and geography guraacha display the tensions and complexities of liberation as a complex and highly nuanced tapestry. Two threads are most visible in connecting the data and the networks: afterlives of slavery and empire, and the liberatory power of geography guraacha. With more nuance, the empirical data offers a series of examples of the way place and space are generated, revealing the entanglements between oppression and obfuscated sovereignties. The data collected and presented here could be organized and analyzed on a number of different scales and with any number of common themes. I will prioritize just a few of them here.

At the start of the thesis, I posed a series of questions, not indicative of the core research, but a conversation that overlaps in harmony with my discussion here. I return to these questions, with the empirical data in mind, to connect the data sources and turn towards future research. I asked in the initial chapter, and continue to wonder: What is freedom for the settler colonial subject? How does freedom look from within the cage, a metaphorical cage or a literal cage like those built on top of the Oromo homelands? In Oromo terms and in Oromo lives, from the beginnings of an empire, the fall of the emperor, the rise of fascism, the coming of a new regime: do these instances have their own delayed moment of reckoning, as people wait carefully in the interval between death and freedom? Did the nightmares they sustained have their own life and afterlives? The answers to these questions float and move through the dissertation data. Freedom and liberation reject the bordering and caging practices of empire, spilling out in the streets of Berlin and event halls in London. The nightmare is politically sustained as the Ethiopian post-empire remains in crisis, and as

narrative erasure becomes a part of the international bureaucratic system. But, more abstractly, freedom is dreamed and thus sustained in ways that imperial knowledge systems cannot comprehend. Sustaining a dream of freedom expresses the moves towards liberation that remain possible, even if yet unclarified. By way of conclusion I will proceed with a discussion of a few frameworks that unify and clarify the threads across the data. I use this discussion both as a summary of the data and as a turn towards future research in some sense. Hinting at the edge of each of these analyses is a rich research project, one that moves with the Oromo people to new and more liberatory geographic knowledges.

MULTITUDINAL MOVEMENTS FROM OROMIA TO OUTSIDE

This thesis has been a semi-geographic project, beginning with Oromo indigeneity and both running towards and exiled in Europe, with winks towards North America. I think of this as a semi-geography, because the physical map and routes traversed are not the main concern, rather the spatiality and space-making has been prioritized. However, these secondary geographic forms still result in a linked network of places that have gained spatial meanings through their relationality.

I conducted an explorative mapping of the Being Human event during the research process, and this one night is illustrative of the transnational geographies of the Oromo diaspora. This map would link Turkish farm workers to the mountains of Oromia, jumping back to Ghanaian activist and organizer Akyaaba Addai-Sebo, who is then associated with Black America. Within Western Europe, the single London evening used Dutch artwork from a German archive. This German archive connected back to the Pacific Northwest, in Chapter 13's Field Note III, remembering a name and remembering a city, turning to Oromia again. From this city, in the deep South of Oromia, close to the Kenyan border, we could look North to Finfinnee, recalling her "muddy sovereignty," or down to Kenya and the shadows of British rule. The temporalities of Oromumma are in constant conversation with Oromia.

These type of geographic twists and turns offer one way of connecting the data, one that prioritizes physical movements. In sum, from a (semi)transparent geographic lens, I would clarify that Oromo people in the diaspora maintain close links to Oromia across discursive, relational, and territorial journeys.

THE TERRAIN OF THE STRUGGLE

Looking to Katherine McKittrick, I could address the multitudinal levels that this thesis explored of the "terrain of the struggle." Such terrains, as McKittrick describes,

> make clear how the livability of the world is bound up with a human geography story that is not presently just, yet geography discloses a workable terrain through which respatialization can be and is imagined and achieved.
>
> (2006:xxxi)

This "terrain" is worked on and studied throughout the thesis. The struggle is made multifaceted and fluid through creative, dreamy movements like poetry. The terrain of the struggle may also be thought of as mapping the tools for success that the Oromo people employ. The potential power of the liberation fight is always in motion, always resisting new forces of violence. The terrain of the struggle would thus include the power of Oromo Indigenous narratives and the way that the symbols of Siinqee/ Gadaa can convey a thousand words and hundreds of years of struggle in a simple image. The struggle moves forward through the celebration and song in the streets of Berlin, as Oromo woman refuse the genocidal power of the empire with a melodious defiance. The physical land where fighting took place, during the era of early imperialism, and where fighting continues to take place, in resistance to settler coloniality, is its own terrain of possibility. In material and abstract ways, across these terrains, *qabsoo itti fufaa* (the struggle continues).

LIVES AND AFTERLIVES

Saidiya Hartman's work was fundamental to uncovering the lives and afterlives (2007) of the slave trade and the empire as they reinvent themselves and maintain relevance

across the Oromo diaspora. The Abyssinian Empire lives on in its afterlife as Ethiopia, the slave trade replaced by a treacherous migration route. In both temporalities an elite hierarchy operates to dictate who can move and how, in cases when such movement is tied inextricably to access to rights. Further cementing the afterlives and livingness of the empire are the borders of the Horn and the bureaucratic bordering practices of Europe. With Hartman's critique of the long violence of slavery at the forefront, these experiences of Black diasporic peoples are linked to processes initiated on another coast and ocean, far from Oromo shores. Violence lives, not as a ghostly haunting, but with the cocky shout of an imperial power not-yet-dethroned.

ANALYTICS OF SPACE AND PLACE: REVISITING CHAPTER SEVEN

In order to perform a more calculated analysis and synopsis of the empirical data, I turn to the analytical model discussed in Chapter Seven, activating the terminology to sum up some key themes and networks of ideas. The data may be separated as such into Economic, Institutional, and Sociocultural realms, and the three domains are comprised of sub-themes that move from limiting or oppressive practices, across liminalities, and into transformative or liberatory moves. This section's analysis offers the most formal, scientific evaluation of data.

Institutional

Assessing the data using the ideas of necropower, bureaucratic terror, and other notions of institutionality which comprise the analytical model reveals a thematic relation. Institutions are generated and maintained in order to normalize and reify exclusion. This exclusion reveals itself in spatial forms, as with borders and immigration laws, but also transfers itself into social realms. Two sub-themes support this claim: the role of post-imperial collaborations on one hand, and alternative organizations on the other.

First is the assertion that post-imperial collaborations sustain operations of violence. These are the relationships, knowledges, institutions, laws, and state practices that are made possible because of multiple imperial forces working together. The volatility which the Global North produces and encourages in the Global South has generated refugee and diasporic flight, as Saaro Umar's own family dynamic demonstrates. Umar's father was subjected to Abyssinian imperialism, displaced, and then subjected further to Australia's settler government. Languages were juridically forbidden and thus hidden in cheeks. Bureaucratic terror is enacted through blockades in migration processing and more insidiously through the way bureaucracies claim to know and through knowledge suppress peoples. Suppressive power is spearheaded by Ethiopia and Abyssinia, but it is made necropowerful in Goree through imperial collaborations. The African Union has its own complex history in the global entanglement of empire and nation-state, but in the Oromo context it reveals the way institutions of violence hold each other up.

As a transformative or liberatory theme, the data also showed the ways in which alternative organizations disrupt such imperialized institutions and logics. This theme encapsulates a way of organizing and judicating that is beyond imperialized knowledges and practices. These organizational forms cohere either in the margins or beyond the boundaries of the state. *Oromtitti's* symbolic value is matched by its significance as an alterity to oppressive governance, a diasporic re-imagining of the Siinqee system. The Oromo Liberation Front literacy guide battles against the bureaucratic terror regimes of the nation-state that demand homogeneity through Amharic. Amharic is missing the "certification" of the marginalized, as described by Nikki Giovanni, the intimate knowledge of the margin. Oromiffa is certified on entry, acknowledged and legitimized at every scale; in its institutionalized form it transforms the structures of imperialism.

Sociocultural

At the sociocultural domain, the data showed the Blackness of geography, how space cannot be disentangled from culture. In some ways this seems to be a simplistic reiteration of a theme that has sustained much of the thesis, pushing against the "transparency" of space and geography. As an analytical expression, however, these examples cohere around a theme which I describe as the socioculture of geography. Underlying the overall theme are three subthemes: gender delineates access, global white supremacy lingers on, and Oromumma is in/tangible.

Gendered access as a sociocultural thematic ranges from oppressive to transformative. In some examples, imperialized gender formations restrict and remove access potential and in others these genders were used as organizing points to gain access. The manipulation of femininity through the digital construction of Ethiopia's borders demonstrates the way genders as grammars (after Spillers 1987) remain linked to imperialism. Women are embedded only as an acceptable Other; a tool of the state. Ecosovereignty uncovers how the denigration of the land takes place through and with the original shift away from land-as-kin, and by relying on the gendering processes of the land. Further underwriting this process is that the land is gendered in the process of extraction and exploitation.

The gender (and perhaps age in a more subtle way) of the young girl chosen to symbolize the Oromo Liberation Front's Qubee literacy guides shows a sort of liminality how access can/not be granted. The rates of actual literacy among young women and complaints about limited representation of women among OLF leadership shared by Oromo scholars (Kumsa 1994) indicate that access to rights remains linked to gender. Women's autonomy is demonstrated and reclaimed simultaneously through the evocation of the Oromo woman as warrior and leader in the image of *Oromtitti*. Through this declarative artwork, access to power and revolutionary struggle is altered through a gendered (re)claiming.

Global white supremacist grammars make up the second common theme in the domain of the sociocultural. This is visible via an insidious but unified cultural reckoning of hegemonic elitism that does not allow full personhood of Indigenous and Black(ened) others. Global white supremacy as a sociocultural form and grammar that outweighs juridical structures is exemplified by Baker's travels with Barraké. Slavery's formal end in the British Empire and Baker's reputation as some sort of abolitionist disappear in his insistence on viewing people as property. The terms of his purchase are irrelevant, I argue, as the very existence of the contract itself reflects the fungibility of Black people. These grammars also come to the forefront through relations between the public and Hiriira, and in Abyssinian imperial practices.

Oromumma as a sociocultural force that is in/tangible unites data across the thesis. Elements of Oromo culture are carried and traverse across physical spaces. As a project concerned with Oromo people, Oromo culture is somehow a stable identifier, adding a layer of socioculture to each of the examples. The nature of Oromo dispersal also means that Oromumma need not be physically tied to Oromia in order to act as a form of resistance. This reflects the nature of survivance, as Oromumma survives and in its resilient survival it also resists the ongoing structures that have sought to erase it. Saaro Umar's imagining of Odaa Nabee in a doctor's office a continent away is an emblem of such in/tangibility. While Odaa Nabee is a real, physical location, its meanings still have an intangible power. The "mapping" of Oromo names in a European refugee center is another in/tangible form of Oromumma. They can be read through bureaucratic language but their deeper meanings require a knowledge of Oromo-ness. Oromumma shines with the Urjii, blooms with the Odaa, and is braided in as a Shurrubbee. Across these in/tangibilities, Oromumma demonstrates its power as an entanglement between spatiality and sociocultural structures.

Economic

The forces of exploitation (subjection for better extraction) and marginalization (exploitation to the point of death) are discernable, underpinning each of the primary economic themes. The need for an alternating dead Oromo or exploited Oromo was consistent across the data. Where Oromo homelands and peoples could not be subjugated into submission for extraction, the two were isolated and separated by way of displacement. The ownership over the productive capacity of another living being, the case study for exploitation, was Samuel Baker's purchase of Barraké, a decision that led to her eventual (unmourned) death. The more nuanced asymmetries of economic power were instrumental to the aid washing and industrial complex. The themes in the economic domain move from oppressive to transformative.

The first theme was visible in the ways that extraction-as-displacement spatializes exploitation and marginalization. This theme was expressed through spatial practices wherein populations are moved in order for certain elites to maintain their socioeconomic status. Heineken's commodification of local beer cultures is an exploitative process, for example, taking and making use of the land for financial gains. The links between displacement and extraction come to the forefront with Goree's plantation history. The commodification of land and subsequent transformation from land-as-kin to land-as-property opened up uses of the land that absented any humanity or relationality. Plantations uproot indigenous foodways to produce cash crops, displacing Indigenous peoples in the process and then re-interring them as laborers.

A second common economic theme across the data was the establishment of class hierarchies and a commodification of social life. The establishment and upholding of asymmetric and hierarchal class systems were present across the empirical examples. The most concrete and violent enaction of hierarchy was through the labor management and

exploitation of Barraké. Classes demonstrate their collective consciousness, according to Wright, through central tendencies, ideas, and practices (1997: 383). With elite classes, through the idea that your collective wealth and property supersedes the needs of others, asymmetries are strengthened to the point of normalization. These "normal" hierarchies grow over generations, as the originary hoarders of wealth have the ability to pass on this consciousness and expand their collective thinking. This idea brings us from Baker and British imperialism to British elite institutions today.

A third thread of Economic discussion is an assessment of the way liminal economics are critical to elites in and beyond the empire. The "visitation" to Goree that I described was facilitated by the type of progressive economics and humanitarian industrial model that characterize liminal economic spaces. Peace Corps prides itself on its local integration; salaries are paid on local scales, housing matches local norms, and efforts are made to assimilate its "Volunteers" culturally and socially. Alongside this progressive economics, American Peace Corps staff make salaries that place them into the American upper-middle class, and at the level of extreme elite wealth in their host countries. Taking away then this idea of somehow altruistic aid, we may identify the way that Ethiopian-American relationships, aided as such by the Peace Corps, offer economic benefits that further support these elite classes. In a similar expression, the grant funding received for the Being Human event did not transform the distribution process of the institutions who funded us, though we did direct the money towards non-oppressive practices.

Activating this liminal economic space is both an accusation and recusal of the institutions that I have worked with. In a critical sense, these institutions facilitated my entry and support of certain communities resulting in concrete economic and material gains. But it cannot be denied that these benefits were in fact limited in their transformative potential. The reality of minimal economic advantages planting a seed that could grow into a richly

decommodified and disruptive economic system is valid, but too idealistic to offer an immediate benefit. Accepting a liminal label, or viewing these institutional economic practices as a negotiation between raw marginalization and a disalienated economic system, offers at the very least a critique of the class system and wealth hoarding that make such charity both possible and necessary (by the U.S. government and elite British institutions).

A concluding thematic, one which points in a more hopeful direction, is evident in the small scales of decommodification. Decommodification remains challenging to explicate. It seems perhaps to lurk in the background of many other institutional and social practices, moments wherein peoples have organized against extraction and reduced its economic power. Despite the obfuscation, the analysis of Finfinnee's triadic suffering (colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy) also elicited an image of anti-capitalism in the margins. The river, in the image of the city, resisted the trash and pollution that attacked it. The lifeblood and force of the water were feeding lush green trees and other plants. While water is commodified for its use in urban infrastructure, roads built to allow its passage through the city, it is also (always) beyond such co-option.

CLOSING NOTES

Inside settler colonial systems and across the Black and African diaspora, notions of land, space, dis/place/meant, and geography have complex meanings, steeped in imperialism and obfuscating liberation. For the Oromo as Indigenous peoples, the fundamental disruption to their land relations during conquest is as salient as the political settler colonial form of the nation-state. The ideological positioning of Africa, and narrative tropes used similarly by European and Abyssinian rulers, demonstrate the inability of geographic borders to conceptualize marginalized lives. Put another way, though Ethiopia has finite, defendable, mapped, and legitimated borders, these limitations fail to encapsulate Oromo lives and Oromo resistance. This is also true of Oromo diaspora communities in the Global North.

While nation-states often calculate, name, list, organize, and understand Oromo immigrants as Ethiopian, this language and way of knowing fail to understand their experience in a meaningful way.

Governmental and juridical structures are rooted in values, ideas, and ways of being and relating that can be linked deeply to the imperial. Alongside this imperialism, settler colonial systems relied on slave capital to engage in trade and international diplomacy. This capital was only acquirable through the continued exploitation of Black and African diasporic peoples. Weakening or eliminating the thinking and conditions presented through anti-Blackness would result in a subsequent demolishing of economic conditions, and also the institutional forms which make decisions and promote hierarchies along these lines.

This demolishing, an extraordinary action against extraordinary harm, is difficult to grasp or make sense of. But imagining the world as it could be, a space-making project that prioritizes relationality and care over control and exploitation, helps make this otherwise more concrete. To comprehend the ordinary and extraordinary transnational experiences of Oromo women in the long afterlives of slavery and empire, the conditions of the known and unknown must be sought out. Herein lies the transformative power of geography guraacha; the knowledges of futurity and alterity that guraacha contains, rooted in deep landed histories of Oromia as well as in stars and imaginaries far beyond. With feet planted in dis/places and margins, the work of imagining new meanings is an investment in the collective struggle for our shared liberation.

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