Recommitting to the Project of Decolonization in Africa: Questions of Economy, Governance and Knowledge

Joint Call for Papers – Midyear and Annual Conferences
Midyear: April 24-25, 2021 and Annual: July/August 2021

Introduction

In 2021, OSA combines the theme for its midyear and annual conferences to highlight what the Oromo and southern peoples in Ethiopia have in common with other massive populations in Africa – all suffer lasting legacies of colonialism on the continent. The theme reflects not only the shared experience but also a shared interest in building lasting solutions on African foundations. We call on presenters to contribute to a comprehensive mapping of the parameters of self-determination focusing on major pillars of economy, governance and knowledge as well as power and security.

These twin OSA conferences, the midyear and the annual, are thus set up for long-overdue conversations among Oromo scholars and their African counterparts across the continent. We are pleased to welcome African colleagues to this forum for a robust exchange about the future.

OSA has been formed through engaged scholarship, representing the experience of a generation of intellectuals and specialists who have collaborated for over 35 years. Scholars of OSA contend that long term solutions found in Oromia and Ethiopia can apply across Africa, and vice versa. There is a shared project in critiquing the nation state imposed on Africa during the colonial era, identifying the components of self-determination, restructuring the economy to provide opportunities for a burgeoning generation of youth who demand change, creating new forms of inclusive and sustainable development, drawing on indigenous principles to construct public institutions that support democracy and grounding security in sophisticated mechanisms of collaborative peacebuilding.

Background for Conference Theme

The circumstances of Oromia’s incorporation into Ethiopia are not well known in the broader African discourse. The Oromo people and other peoples indigenous to regions in the current south, were brought into the Ethiopian state primarily through military conquest in the late 19th century. Military control was consolidated by a series of coercive measures of incorporation into an Ethiopian nation state. Our project here is to compare the Oromo experience to that of the colonization of other parts of Africa, most of whom were colonized by European powers.

Oromia’s natural resources, environmental factors, location and large population originally attracted invaders to Oromia who extracted commodities on a massive scale. Economic losses borne by Oromia have continued through a series of Ethiopian regimes due to structural continuities. Reclaiming economic security will require correctly assessing and reconfiguring these arrangements that perpetuate the subjugation of Oromia just as similar reconfiguration is required to reverse legacies of colonialism elsewhere in Africa. For example, based on the wealth of nations calculation methodology Oromia has lost the equivalent of $3.5 trillion USD in the years between 1950-2020. Such kind of loss does not include the cultural, social, and indirect economic costs that Oromia has incurred since its incorporation into Ethiopia. Although Oromia officially accounts for around 40 percent of the
Ethiopian population, it contributes around 60 percent of the country’s economy. Despite this disproportionately high economic contribution, Oromia has long lagged far behind other regions of Ethiopia in terms of key human development indicators. Oromia's economic resources have not been translated into its overall development. There is persuasive evidence that the citizens of Oromia have been thrust into poverty as a consequence of structural arrangements that resulted from the direct subjugation that followed conquest.

This challenge of decolonization which lies at the heart of Oromia’s struggle to attain economic well-being is shared with many African groups who face the same challenges. Due to a pervasive false narrative about Ethiopian exceptionalism, the condition of the Oromo and other southern nations has been obscured. Consequently, most Africans have not recognized their kinship with Oromo and other peoples in Ethiopia who face the challenges of decolonization.

The conference calls for presenters to contribute to the mapping of several key issues, which highlight the relation between economic and political factors. There is an urgent need to think creatively about many areas of social and political life that will benefit from innovative reconfiguration. It is also important to shed light on the political and socio-economic challenges of the Oromo and other southern peoples by including discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of the different forms of governance that are currently pursued: that Ethiopia devolve into number of independent states, form a multi-national federal republic or a highly centralized state model. Lessons from other parts of Africa are particularly welcome.

In addition, to the overall theme above, OSA wishes to invite special attention to the unusual events that characterized 2020–2021. First is the global health pandemic, and second is the pervasive two-year state of emergency imposed on four of seventeen zones of Oromia. The combined population of those four is 6 million. These areas experienced blanket network disruption and extensive negative impact on economic conditions, particularly impacting the health and education of women and children. It is likely that the socio-economic impact of both Command Post and Pandemic shocks could be long-lasting in the four affected zones. The conferences encourage research that assesses the socio-economic impact of these events.

Conference Parameters

OSA invites submissions from interested researchers on the following areas:

1) **Pursuing economic self-determination.** Papers are sought that highlight the economic dimensions of governance challenges in Ethiopia, that address the natural resources paradox in Oromia and southern nations measured in the massive outflow of assets disproportional to benefits received into the region as a case study comparable to other regions of Africa.

2) **Rethinking the nation state in Africa.** Papers are invited that build on the commonalities of Oromo and other African experience of a forcibly-imposed colonial state and the challenges in overcoming inflicted historical legacies.

3) **Decolonizing indigenous knowledge.** Papers are sought that focus on the contribution of indigenous knowledge to particular forms of socio-economic development and conflict resolution and also that trace the role of arts culture and social power in revitalizing indigenous values.

4) **Acknowledging new configurations of global power.** explore the sources of power among the technology giants in shaping domestic and global political life, seeking, for example, an understanding of how a minority elite manages to wield such power over massive majority populations.

5) **Ensuring human-centered security.** explore community-centered security approaches, for example rebuilding solidarities among neighboring peoples as new forms of regional security.
And, as mentioned above, the particular issues arising in 2020-2021: Assessing the socio-economic impact of long-term state of emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic in affected zones of Oromia and propose policy solutions that improve prospects for a faster recovery.

Other areas of research will be accepted, but priority will be given to the above topics.

Guidelines

OSA accepts both individual papers and panel proposals. Specific instructions for submissions for both categories follow.

Please indicate for which conference you wish to have your paper considered and placed.

Guidelines for individual conference papers: Those interested in presenting their research papers at the mid-year and annual conferences are invited to submit a short paragraph outlining the topic, its contribution to the conference theme, supportive data/materials, methodology, and policy implications. The selection committee will prioritize articles that have Africa-wide relevance within the six areas listed above and place papers with related topics into panels.

Guidelines for panel proposals: OSA welcomes submissions for panels in which the presenters have agreed to collaborate with their presentations. Roundtable discussions on issues related to the theme are welcome. OSA does encourage broader reflection and engagement on other topics relevant to the Horn of Africa with the proviso that priority will be given to those that are relevant to major topics listed.

- A Panel is a collection of papers presented on a similar theme organized by a chair and often presented with the review of a discussant. To submit a panel proposal, include the 1) titles of each presentation, 2) the bio of the researcher, and 3) a brief summary/abstract of each presentation. Please identify a chair and a discussant if desired, the discussant’s name.

- A Roundtable is a group of experts on a topic who offer their analyses in a shared platform usually presided over by a moderator who manages a question-and-answer session. For a Roundtable, OSA invites submission of a one-page summary of the group proposal which provides 1) name of the moderator, 2) the importance and relevance of the topic, 3) names and details of the speakers, including their short bios.

Timetable and Deadlines:

Mid-term virtual Conference (April 24-25, 2021): The deadline for submitting paper proposals is March 31, 2021, and selected applicants will be informed by April 15, 2021.

Annual Conference (July/August): The deadline for submitting paper proposals is May 31, 2021, and selected applicants will be informed by June 30, 2021. The venue or modality of the conference will be determined based on the evolution of the COVID-19 situation.

Papers and panels submitted for the mid-term conference but not selected can be considered for the Annual Conference. Please do not submit the same paper for both conferences.

Contact:

For further Information or questions, feel free to contact coordinating committee:

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