

Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo: An Oromo Muslim Cultural Icon

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Abstract

Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo was a perceptive Oromo Muslim scholar who used traditional Oromo wisdom to make Islam intelligible to his people and part of their cultural heritage. A gifted poet who wrote in Arabic, Oromo, and Somali, he was persecuted by two successive Ethiopian regimes during the 1960s and 1970s. As an activist scholar, he sought to spread knowledge among the Oromo, who constitute about 40 percent of Ethiopia's population. Due to the government's tight control and distance, as well as the lack of modern communication and technology, his effort was limited mainly to the Oromo in Hararghe, eastern Ethiopia. For over six decades Shaykh Bakrii sought to uplift his people and secure respect for their language, culture, human dignity, and national identity.¹ Motivated by his desire to develop the Oromo language, which at that time was banned, he struggled to develop written literature in it. But despite all of these accomplishments, he has been largely forgotten.

Introduction

This paper is based on three sources: (1) extensive oral interviews conducted among the shaykh's former students and friends in Ethiopia and Somalia. I draw heavily on an article I published in 2003² and on a co-authored article published in 1981³; (2) the late Shaykh Mohammed Rashad, one of his stu-

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dents, related a great deal of information about his teacher's life⁴; (3) Dima Yonis who, on my behalf, interviewed several former students living in Somalia in 1980⁵; (4) Mohammed Abraham Waday (aka Shantam Subissa), a relative and a student of the shaykh, also supplied valuable information about his teacher's interest in politics and poetry⁶; (5) his grandson Mohammed Nur, who lives in Portland, OR, supplied reliable information and some of the shaykh's poems⁷; (6) Aliyi Khalifa's recent work⁸ on the shaykh's life and career, which is based on extensive oral interviews of the latter's former students; and (7) the collection of Oromo poems published in 1996,⁹ which includes eight of his poems and earned him the title of "The Father of Revolutionary Oromo Poetry."¹⁰

Brief Biography

Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo (1895-1980) was born twenty years after Egypt occupied Harar city (1875-85) and eight years after the Christian King Menelik's January 1887 conquest of the Hararghe region. The dates 1875 and 1887 were turning points Oromo history: 1875 was the first time part of the region's Oromo fell under Egyptian colonial occupation, and in 1887 all eastern Oromo fell under Menelik's colonial administration. His father Usman Oda was appointed a *garad* under the Egyptian colonial administration¹¹: "To be appointed *garad* invested a man with a limited authority in matters of tax collection and the maintenance of law and order at the village level."¹² After Menelik conquered Hararghe, Oda and hundreds of Egyptian appointees entered his administration. A famous orator and gifted poet, he probably felt comfortable in the universe of traditional Oromo religion and Islam, even though he does not appear to have received a good Muslim education. His wife Denaba Galmo¹³ seems to have been a popular figure in her village.

Of the couple's eight children, Oda had great affection for his young son who was already showing an unusual ability and a deep sense of concern for justice¹⁴ and was "listening to the living testimony of his father as he recounted the major historical developments"¹⁵ that transformed the Oromo from an independent proud people into despised and abused colonial subjects. The yearning for freedom that moved and dominated his son's (popularly known as Abubakar) life appears to have been planted early. Born in Saphalo village, "Bakrii", the root form of which is cognate with 'Abubakar,' came to inseparably linked with the name of his village. Thus he was generally known as Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo, and indeed, very few among his admirers ever knew of his real name."¹⁶

Bakrii received a basic Qur'anic education in Saphalo and then spent over two decades pursuing his studies throughout the region before returning home in 1927.¹⁷ Later on he was involved in long-distance learning with al-Azhar University,¹⁸ which may have introduced him to the 1950s and 1960s revolutions about which he wrote poems. Of his three brothers and four sisters, only Bakrii seems to have received an advanced Islamic education. He studied Islamic theology, science, mathematics, and philosophy. Returning home as a recognized scholar-teacher and gifted poet, he established his first teaching center at Saphalo. The next year he married Kadija Ahmad. Upon his father's death in 1930, Shaykh Bakrii "became the head of his family and assumed a number of responsibilities."¹⁹ The land and property he inherited allowed him to support some of his students and care for orphans and poor people, all of which earned him a local reputation for benevolence.²⁰ Well-versed in traditional Oromo law, he also distinguished himself by his honesty when mediating intra-Oromo conflict.

He supplemented his excellent command of Oromo, Arabic, and Somali with Amharic and Adare (Harari). He learned Italian during the Italian occupation (1936-41) and taught himself how to read English.²¹ According to Mohammed Nur,²² Ayela Mengasha taught the shaykh how to read and write Amharic. He later put his deep knowledge of written Amharic's strength and weakness to good use while devising a writing system for Oromo. In addition to teaching Islam, he worked hard to improve the Oromo's political status and cultural life, and, above all, to develop their language.

In addition to religious education and philosophy, his teaching ranged over geography, history, mathematics, astronomy, Arabic and the composition of writings in the Oromo language. Besides teaching all the subjects in a comprehensive Islamic education, he also began to attract considerable attention to himself as an outstanding Oromo poet, and it was through the widespread appreciation of his religious poetry that his name or at least a version of it came to be known over a very large area.²³

In 1940, Shaykh Bakrii started teaching at Adellee, "a place located to the west of Saphalo,"²⁴ where he married his second wife and began producing children and powerful poems. During his long life, he married several women²⁵ by whom he had eleven sons and fourteen daughters; three sons and six daughters are still alive.²⁶ A firm believer in educating women, all of his daughters received a good Islamic education. Ten of his sons became scholar-teachers; one was even sent to the government school in Dire Dawa to master Amharic and its writing system.²⁷ Fully able to support his large family, the shaykh was a loving husband and caring father.

In 1948 he started teaching at Ligibo, where he embarked on an intellectual journey that eventually culminated in his invention of an original Oromo writing system. In 1953 he started teaching at Kortu, located to the east of Dire Dawa. Besides the above-mentioned four centers, Shaykh Bakrii also established teaching centers “in the City of Dire Dhawa, in the town of Goota ... Qabanaawa and Bobbaasaa.²⁸ He supported these students by seeking donations from the surrounding population “to feed and provide them with other necessities.”²⁹ In addition, his centers were located near mosques so that his students and local people prayed together. He sought *waqf* land that was cultivated voluntarily by the local people for the benefit of his students, some of whom helped out with the planting, weeding, and harvesting.

Shaykh Bakrii’s method of teaching was based on a “horizontal relation among branches”³⁰ of the subjects taught. Thus his students studied several subjects simultaneously. Throughout his teaching career, the shaykh stressed the importance of learning how to write and speak either Arabic or Oromo fluently. This approach enabled him to train some of the best Muslim Oromo intellectuals who now teach throughout eastern Ethiopia and beyond, among them

Sheikh Mohammad Siraj [Bakrii’s son] at Qallicha³¹ near Dire Dhawa, Sheikh Nuradin Ahmad at Saphalo, Sheikh Abdusamed Ibrahim at Gaalee Gaadaa, Sheikh Mohammad Mansur (the son of Sheik Bakrii) at Bobbaasaa, Sheikh Yusuf Abdulle at Adelle, Sheikh Mohammad Sheikh Usman near Barooda town, Sheikh Yusuf Soqaa around Dader town, Sheikh Mohammad Tarce around Calanqo town, Sheikh Ibraahim Mullaata in Jarsoo, Sheikh Nibraas in Noole, Sheikh Mohammad Yusuuf in Wallo, Sheikh Mussa Hassan in Anniyya, Sheik Sharif Nuureea in Arsi, Sheikh Mohammad Rashad [who works] in Saudi Arabia, [and] Sheikh Abdurhaman Muda in Addis Ababa.³²

Scholarly Works

In his capacity as the nerve center of intellectual life among Hararghe’s Oromo, Shaykh Bakrii eventually gained the exalted status of a saint.³³ He articulated the importance of education for his people, educated those who would become distinguished scholars as well as a gifted poet (e.g., the late Shaykh Mohammad Rashad), and produced several works that shaped our understanding of the Oromo situation during Haile Selassie’s regency (1916-30) and subsequent imperial rule (1930-74). These Oromo recognized the shaykh as an authority in history, geography, Oromo law and tradition, the *gada* system, science, mathematics, and other fields. His extensive travels allowed him to meet and cultivate friendships with a wide cross-section of Muslim and Christian men and women and thrive in the company of his students,

scholars, and knowledgeable friends.³⁴ They flocked to his learning centers, regarded as “paradises of knowledge,” to become politically enlightened.³⁵ He displayed his intimate knowledge of the region’s geography in some of his poems. His knowledge of its peoples’ history, their customs and cultures, as well as their languages and way of life, was solid.³⁶ His knowledge of the smooth transfer of power under traditional Oromo democracy, especially the importance the *bokku*, was unrivaled.

According to the shaykh, the *bokku*, a multi-purpose emblem (scepter), was entrusted to the Abba Gada, the president of the democratically elected *chafee* assembly (Oromo parliament). Every Oromo public prayer started and ended with this revered emblem, as did all of the assembly’s law-making deliberations and declarations of war and peace. Correctly viewing it as a symbol of independence and an insignia of political power, Shaykh Bakrii stated that “nobody except the Abba Gada carried it. At the end of his tenure of office, the incoming leader took it directly from that of the outgoing leader.”³⁷

His teaching centers attracted students from far and near, while his literary efforts flowered in the forms of infectious poems that still move the Oromo to tears of joy. His mobile library, borne by beasts of burdens wherever he moved, included books on Islamic studies, science, mathematics, history, Arabic poetry, socialism, and world revolutions. An avid reader, he raised funds to purchase the latest Arabic-language books and soon enjoyed the reputation of having the largest private library among the region’s Muslim Oromo scholars. He loved mathematical treaties (some of which he translated into Oromo), great Arabic poetry, and good historical books.³⁸

He authored eight manuscripts on both secular as well as religious subjects, written mainly in Arabic and, to a lesser extent, in Oromo. Unfortunately, only two of them were published in Mogadishu, where they remained inaccessible for scholars in Ethiopia and beyond. Even more tragic, when Ethiopian soldiers attacked his main residence at Kortu in 1978, all of his scholarly works inside were burned³⁹; then military regime collected his manuscripts from Kortu’s residents and destroyed them.⁴⁰ Anyone “suspected of possessing” them was either detained or forced into exile. For instance, Shaykh Hassan of Ananno was detained for four years because his teacher’s most popular manuscript, *The History of the Oromo*, was found in his possession⁴¹; it was confiscated and destroyed. In 1978 alone, Hararghe’s Ethiopian military authorities destroyed the shaykh’s five-decade literary output because of its impact on the growing political consciousness – and danger – defined as “narrow nationalism,” among Muslim Oromo in eastern Ethiopia.

As far as I know, only his student the late Shaykh Mohammed Rashad possessed all of Shaykh Bakrii’s major works. When I interviewed him in Mo-

gadishu in July 1980, he was working on a biography of his teacher. I was unable to confirm whether it has been published.⁴² The shaykh's first major work, the approximately 200-page *Dirasah fi al-Mintiqah Harariyah Jugrafiyyan wa Bashariyyan*, deals with the region's geography and demography. Shaykh Bakrii devoted three manuscripts to Oromo history: *Janiyi Shammarkh min Hadayiz al-Tawarikh* (*A Collection of Unripe Dates from the Garden of History*⁴³), *Muqaddamat Taysir al-Zarriyah al-Tawarikh* (*A Simplified Introduction to Nuclear (Raw) History*⁴⁴), and *Kitaab Irsaal al-Sawarikh ila Sama al-Tawarikh* (*Guided Missile to the Sky [Exalted] History*⁴⁵).⁴⁶ According to Aliyi Khalifa, who produced an excellent work on the shaykh's life and career, Shaykh Mohammad Rashad⁴⁷ published some of the above-mentioned manuscripts in Mogadishu during 1979.⁴⁸ Of the above-mentioned manuscripts, I possess only the last one. This interesting nineteen-section manuscript "attempts to sketch an overall panorama of Oromo history, contrasting their earlier greatness with their later humiliation under Amhara domination."⁴⁹

Appalled by the deliberate and grotesque distortion of Oromo history in Ethiopian historiography, Shaykh Bakrii wanted to correct and use it as an ideological weapon to create political awareness and cultivate a pan-Oromo identity. To a large extent, his ideas and tireless efforts planted the idea among the region's Oromo that all Oromo were enduring the same crude and brutal system. In short, he believed that the Oromo could become free only if they united. If this had been the case, he stated, Emperor Menelik would have been unable to defeat them. He also condemned their disunity during the 1950s.⁵⁰

He also wrote on Islam – *Taysir al-Zamiya ela uclear fuqhaai fi al kam al Sharia* (*A Simplified [Guidance] to the Law of Shari'ah (Fiqh)*⁵¹) and *Al-Mawahib al-Admadiyyan fi al awl al-Addiyyan* – and biographies of his two main teachers entitled *Qala'id durar fi tarikh Sheikh Umar* (*A Pleasant and Pear Biography of Sheikh Umar [Aliyye Balbalatti]*)⁵² and *Anafa fi tankh Sheikh Yusuf* (*A Biography of Shaykh Yusuf [Adam]*),⁵³ both of whom had studied at Dawwee in Wollo, the highest center for Islamic learning in Ethiopia. His eight major works not only contain a wealth of information on Oromo society, but also reveal his intellectual maturity and profound knowledge of Arabic and Oromo. And above all, his works on history showcase his understanding of the Oromo's oppression since the days of Menelik.

His Developing Political Consciousness

Internal evidence seems to indicate that Shaykh Bakrii's interest in Oromo political subjugation, economic exploitation, and cultural dehumanization

probably started in 1934 and developed into political awakening during the Italian occupation. According to Mohammed Nur,⁵⁴ his earliest political poem deals with *Lej Iyyasu*, who inherited Emperor Menelik's throne (1913-16). His father Imam Muhammad Ali, a Muslim leader in the Wollo region (northern Ethiopia), was forced to adopt Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity in 1878. The young *Lej Iyyasu*, fully aware of the ongoing anti-Muslim policy, sought to create equality between indigenous Christians and Muslims. His attempt failed and, as a result, in 1916 *Ras Tafari* (the future Haile Selassie), with the help of British and French agents based in Addis Ababa, removed him from power through a coup. Probably during the 1920s or even later, Shaykh Bakrii wrote poems about this man. In at least two of them, he supported *Lej Iyyasu's* policy of creating equality among Ethiopia's people.⁵⁵

In 1934 Shaykh Bakrii was "imprisoned for his refusal to pay tribute. After he stayed in jail, under harsh punishment for about three weeks, his brother Adam Usman paid the tribute through mediators by delivering a calf to the *anftagna* [armed-settler] at Barooda town."⁵⁶ This punishment was meant to break his spirit so he would submit to the area's armed Christian settlers. Instead it made him aware of the imposed *gabar* (serfdom) system's exploitative nature, which rendered the Oromo landless and without rights. For instance, each Oromo

had to surrender a portion of the produce of the land to the landlord as tribute. The amount varied between a quarter and a third but it was usually more, as the legal ceiling was that it should not be more than three quarters! Besides, he paid a tenth of his total produce for the tithe. He was also expected to provide his landlord with honey, meat and firewood, dried grass and sundry other items. Labor service was an added burden, he had to grind the landlord's share of the grain, transport it to his residence ... build his house, maintain his fences, care for his animals, and act as a porter, an escort or a messenger. ... The multiple exactions imposed on the Oromo *gabars* meant the loss of a considerable portion of the [*gabar's*] production, onerous labor service and manifold other impositions.⁵⁷

Shaykh Bakrii's poems soon put him at the forefront of the ensuing ideological battle. Several of them⁵⁸ reveal how Christian Amhara landlords dominated the Oromo's economic resources while acting as masters and judges "who imprisoned or released [Oromo] *gabars*, and did everything including beating and torturing, short of killing."⁵⁹ During the Italian occupation, he wrote:

Xaliyaan tanki gangalche
 Gama ceekaa daraaraa
 Amaara galee fixee
 Akka hoolaa baraaraa
 Mosolooniin caccabsee
 Milaa siree Amaaraa
 Motichi dheefaa deemee
 Gogogaan fuula a'araa
 Motiin hiyeessa midhee
 Abadu numa qaaraa⁶⁰

The Italians drove their Tanks
 Towards the flowering
 Ceeka tree (short trees)
 They entered and finished
 The Amhara like a sheep for feast
 Mussolini destroyed them
 The legs of the Amhara throne
 The king fled into exile
 The skinny man with angry face
 The king who oppresses the poor
 will be overthrown⁶¹

Comparing the Ethiopian and Italian colonial administrations, the shaykh states that the former was harsher. In addition, Italy's anti-Amhara and pro-Oromo policies (e.g., Italy used Oromo for radio broadcasts, in the courts and the administration, and as a medium of instruction in school) impressed the shaykh⁶² and may have sparked his desire to write about Oromo history, culture, and language. After Ethiopia was liberated in 1941, Emperor Haile Selassie returned to power and reinstated his traditional anti-Oromo policies. This welcome development appears to have sparked Shaykh Bakrii's long search for an alternative mechanism for educating Oromo children.

Shaykh Bakrii's Poetry

Shaykh Bakrii also "stirred the imagination and captured the love of the Oromo masses by means of his poems, which were composed in their language and were short enough for the people to learn by heart."⁶³

The poetic content of Sheikh Bakrii not only have a wealth of information about the general conditions of the time but it also have a great contribution to the development of the language. Some of them expressed in simple and attractive language, whereas others expressed proverbially. He also used idiomatic and figurative speeches. [His poems that expressed his opposition to] '...the government took the form of cultural expression and revival.⁶⁴

The shaykh used his extraordinarily poetical talent⁶⁵ to sharpen his students' mental and verbal skills: "His school was the first outlet for his poems."⁶⁶ Reading poetry to them was an integral part of his teaching methodology and educational philosophy: to cultivate their interest in and appreciation for poetry, as well as to encourage to them to develop this vital skill. He also recited his poems at *wadaja* (traditional prayer ceremonies) and on *guza* (traditional collective public work events), not to mention on holidays, at public places, and on public occasions to educate members of the public.⁶⁷ His beautiful recitations

enabled him to direct his people's attention toward their plight. During the 1950s and 1960s they began to discuss important issues of the day.⁶⁸ He provided moral, spiritual, and intellectual support⁶⁹ and encouraged literate individuals to write down and recite his poems for others.⁷⁰ Despite being a deeply religious man, he wrote more secular than religious poems⁷¹ and recited them to educate the public about Oromo history.⁷²

Odoo ormii beekke odu nu dura
Hula itti cufaadhaa mara banama
Oduu dur dhageenyaan kale bilisaa
Sama maa gabra taata sodaa ilma namaa
Abbootuma keetii kalee nagasee
Taraan isin genyaan kunoo' aamaa⁷³

If people know their history
All closed doors are opened for them
from our history we know
That we were independent people yesterday
Why do you enslave yourself
For fear other human beings
Your fathers were kings yesterday
When your turn came you lost everything⁷⁴

He tirelessly encouraged the Oromo to take education seriously, for he saw it as a means to achieve freedom.

Odoo qar'ee baratee dalagee
Biyya ol tahee adawii buqisaa
Inni kun odoo biyya saaf qar'au
Oduu nadhoo balisee safisaa
Dubbi hayaa barachu hin hamillu
Achi kijibaan dubarti bakisaa⁷⁵

If one learns, acquires education and works
He gets the skill / means for elevating
his social status
and for uprooting the enemy
While others acquire education for
their country
[Oromo] waste their time gossiping
with women
[Oromo] are not enthusiastic learning
about useful things
They flatter women with their lies⁷⁶

Many of his poems show him to be a militant scholar-teacher committed to the Oromo cause.⁷⁷ To avoid harassment, imprisonment, and possible execution,⁷⁸ he created a fascinating metaphor to expose the Oromo's deplorable situation. Due to the emperor's anti-Oromo policies he taught them in secret, always hoping that one day Islam would be respected and that the Oromo would be able to teach, preach, write, and broadcast in their mother tongue.⁷⁹

During the 1950s his ideas, poems, and cultural nationalism captured the imagination of eastern Ethiopia's Oromo elite especially in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia's third major industrial center. Becoming known as the "storehouse of knowledge," the "fountain of poetry," and the "living encyclopedia of Oromo philosophy," his poems initiated the city's Oromo cultural nationalism. In 1960, he took the lead in forming its Afran Qallo Association cultural movement.⁸⁰ He raised funds for it and produced poems for its musical bands. Already a

pathfinder in the larger vision of a cultural renaissance, he now became the brightest star among eastern Ethiopia's Oromo intellectual and political elites.

His powerful Oromo-language poems engendered a generation of famous poets and singers, among them the late Abubakar Musa, the late Ayub Abubakar, the late Shaykh Mohammed Rashad, and Shantam Shubissa (who lives in Australia). His devotion to developing the Oromo language and cultural dances directly contributed⁸¹ to the establishment of two bands – the Biftu Ganama and Urjii Bakalcha⁸² – in 1960, which began to develop modern Oromo music, one of the greatest cultural achievements of the past five decades. Ali Birra, Ali Shaboo, Shantam Shubissa, Ture Leenco, and several others were their products. Birra, the most famous and now an internationally recognized singer, has become a legend in his own lifetime. Today, he is “the voice of the Oromo yearning for freedom, ... Oromo institution as well as their heritage.”⁸³

Shaykh Bakrii's abundant energy, creativity, vitality, and wisdom caused him to be viewed as “a man of indefatigable character.”⁸⁴ Amazingly, the Ethiopian officials ignored the contents of his Arabic-language religious poems and his Oromo-language political poems because they viewed him as no more than a popular teacher and respected scholar. But after his writing system was found among Oromo guerrilla fighters in the province of Bale⁸⁵ (southeastern Ethiopia) probably in 1964, they harassed and eventually sentenced him to ten years of house arrest.

During the 1950s, this politically conscious scholar worked secretly to raise his people's political awareness by shifting from cultural nationalism to focusing equally on cultural *and political* nationalism. The latter, which was based on developing the Oromo language and writing its history, brought about an ideological shift that transformed him into a revolutionary scholar-teacher whose new focus excited eastern Ethiopia's young Oromos. His poems and literary works, which questioned and challenged the legitimacy of Ethiopian rulers,⁸⁶ led to the appearance of a new Oromo literature that reflected his people's day-to-day realities. In short, this literary renaissance prepared the ideological battle background of the Oromo's demand for self-determination.

From 1941 to 1963, when the Macha and Tulama Association (1963-67) was formed in Addis Ababa, Shaykh Bakrii's ideas dominated the thinking of eastern Ethiopia's Oromo elite, especially in such urban areas as Dire Dawa. Widely considered the voice of his people and an inspiration for the future, he produced some of the most radical Oromo nationalists of the 1960s. One of them, Ayub Abubakar, fled to Somalia in 1963 to avoid execution and was instrumental in starting a Mogadishu-based Oromo-language radio program that played a crucial role in raising the Oromo's political awareness. He would read Shaykh Bakrii's advice and poems,⁸⁷ sent in secret, without mentioning the au-

thor's name. This program was so effective in mobilizing public opinion against Haile Selassie that the government paid a huge sum of money for a secret agent belonging to a Middle Eastern country to assassinate Abubakar. Murdered in Mogadishu during 1966, he became the first martyr of the shaykh's former students who would be killed by the emperor and the military junta that succeeded him.⁸⁸ The shaykh retained his contacts with the leaders of Macha and Tulama Association⁸⁹ even after the emperor banned it in 1967. This ban, as well as the subsequent killing and imprisonment of its leadership, demonstrated that the Oromo had "no power, no platform"⁹⁰ in Ethiopia even for their peaceful cultural activities. When General Tadesse Birru, one of the association's leaders, was detained in Galamso – he was eventually sentenced to life imprisonment during the late 1960s – Shaykh Bakrii, also under house arrest in Dire Dawa, managed to visit him twice in secret.⁹¹ This, more than anything else, reflects his interest in and commitment to pan-Oromo nationalism.

Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo's Writing System

The second source of his popularity derives from his unique Oromo writing system, the culmination of the long attempt by both the Christian and Muslim Oromo elites to develop written literature in their own language.⁹² This concern, which began in 1927 when he became a teacher, both inspired and ultimately dominated the shaykh's activities. The exact date of when he shouldered this historic responsibility is unknown; however, Aliyi Khalifa, who assembled the most accurate and most up-to-date information on the shaykh's life and career, opines that he completed this task while establishing his third teaching center at Ligibo (1948-53).

The Ligibo period was remembered by most of his students as the time when Sheikh Bakrii started active interaction with the villagers and the surrounding communities through his poetry. It was also said that Bakrii completed his invention of alphabet here at Ligibo and the new alphabet was given special attention in his Quranic schools.⁹³

There are reasons to believe that he inaugurated this quest in 1941, when the Italian occupation ended and the British restored the emperor to power. First and foremost, it reportedly took him ten to twelve years to complete his Oromo orthography.⁹⁴ In addition, Haile Selassie's post-restoration policy of banning Oromo may have caused him to act: From 1942 onwards, Amharic was promoted as the sole national language of the empire and all other national languages, particularly Afaan Oromo, were suppressed. The regime prohibited the use of Oromo literature for educational or religious purposes.⁹⁵

Shaykh Bakrii fought this policy on the grounds that the Oromo language was the richest and the deepest bond that united his people. He wanted Oromo children to learn in their mother tongue, just like the Christian Amhara children did. He also wanted the Oromo to have radio programs in their own language, just like the Amhara, Afar, Somali, Tigre, and Tigrinya did – all financed by the government.⁹⁶ In fact, he urged the Oromo to rise up and fight to open the doors of opportunity in every facet of life.

Afaan orma kaniii tolchee kabajaa
Ka isaatin wajji radiyoo naqamaa
Odoos ka’anii tolchaniii lolanii
Xalaatni cabe batatees dhabamaa
Hulaan cuccufaa martinuutu banamaa⁹⁷

He [Haile Selassie] respects the
languages of other people
[that is why] he has radio programs for them
along with his language [i.e., Amharic]
If they [Oromo] rise up and fight well
The enemy will be crushed, scattered
and disappear
Then all doors of opportunities will
open up [for Oromo]⁹⁸

Shaykh Bakrii “is reported to have said that a people such as the Oromo, possessing glorious historical traditions and a uniquely democratic society, was nevertheless condemned to obscurity without a means of writing.”⁹⁹ Moreover, he viewed the lack of a writing system as a mark of shame on the Oromo’s democratic heritage.¹⁰⁰ Available evidence, including his own works and extensive interviews with his students, indicates that the shaykh struggled to glorify Oromo with its own writing system during the 1940s. In addition, he appears to have secretly rejected the hegemony of Amharic, which buttressed the emperor’s twin policies of Amharization and Christianization in the conquered territories.

Boruun fi’amee nigangee moo sigaalaa
Ifii ml’ate maa Dasetaa Zigaalaa
Boruu kai wan sadii dhabuun sigeesse
Isii a’amuun yoo namaati gubaalaa
Afaan Oromo, dachi kan sadeesa diini
Azaabaa kamii bala sitti buutee caalaa.¹⁰¹

Boruu are you a mule or camel,
a beast of burden?
Why do you forget yourself while
serving Daesta?
Boruu awaken you are going to
lose three things
If losing these things burn you
(hurt your feelings)
They are the Oromo language,
your land and religion
What hell is worse than the danger
hanging over you?¹⁰²

In this poem and many others,¹⁰³ Shaykh Bakrii uses the Oromo name *Boruu* and the Amhara name *Dasetaa* as an imaginative metaphor to make his

message familiar to the Oromo but ambiguous to the Amhara.¹⁰⁴ “Occasionally a figure of speech is thought to encapsulate so thoroughly an idea or concept that it passes into the language as standard expression of that idea.”¹⁰⁵ For the Oromo, *Dasetta* “encapsulates so thoroughly” the privileged social status of Amhara landlord class that dominated *Boruu* (the Oromo serfs) while controlling “the military, judiciary, and political power, institutionalizing the monopoly of [the landlords’] advantages.”¹⁰⁶ Metaphor not only “may render the underlying idea more concise or concrete,” but also “may make it more striking or memorable by the drama of substitution.”¹⁰⁷

The contrast between the condition of [Amhara landlords] and that of ... Oromo *gabars* was striking: there were power, glory, pride, wealth, deeply seated feelings of superiority, pomp, arrogance and luxury on the side of [Amhara landlords] while powerlessness, landlessness, rightlessness, suffering, injustice, poverty, all manners of abuses and dehumanization were the lots of the Oromo *gabars*, who were physically victimized, socially and psychologically humiliated and devalued as human beings.¹⁰⁸

At another level, his “vivid metaphor”¹⁰⁹ encapsulates the Oromo’s exclusion from political power. Before 1975, the Christians of eastern Ethiopia who were known by the collective name of Amhara¹¹⁰

excluded the Oromo from participation in the government even at the lowest level. It was [Amhara] themselves who served as soldiers, policemen, judges, governors, government officials, tax collectors, prison officials, lawyers, priests, teachers, secretaries, secret agents and even as guards. In short, at least in Hararghe the entire colonial state machinery was stuffed from top to bottom by [Amhara].¹¹¹

According to several of his poems,¹¹² *Dasetaa* is a cruel and crude master, a parasite who feeds on *Boruu*’s labor and produce. The cruel *Dasetaa* fattened himself¹¹³ while *Boruu*’s children died of hunger; the crude *Dasetaa* despises and abuses *Boruu*, who lives in fear and terror.

One could say that Shaykh Bakrii invented his writing system to reduce his people’s illiteracy. “It is difficult to find words to express adequately’ the extent to which he wanted to educate his people. This ‘...was not simply a duty he imposed on himself. It was deliberate conscious” decision that grew out of his political awakening.¹¹⁴ His two major goals, apparently to teach people and reduce their illiteracy,¹¹⁵ launched him on the path of devising a suitable writing system. He spent over two decades trying to write Oromo in the Arabic script, but did not make much progress because of the problems in-

herent in Arabic orthography. According to Mahdi Hamid Muudde, author of the monumental *Oromo Dictionary*: “Arabic based orthography is very common among Moslem Oromo clerics in Wallo, Harar, Arsi, Bale and Jimma. ... the problem with Arabic-based Oromo orthography was its failure to represent the Oromo consonants (dh, g, c, ch, ph, ny).”¹¹⁶

Muslim Oromo scholars tried to overcome the problem of vowel length by adding a *maddah* and that of germination by adding a *shaddah*.¹¹⁷ But they could not overcome the problem of consonants, as “Arabic letters gave Oromo words [a] distorted meaning.”¹¹⁸ The Ethiopic script was also problematic, because it “has only seven vowels as opposed to [Oromo’s] ten vowels” and its vowels “do not have sound representation for”¹¹⁹ the Oromo language. Other problems were the differences in consonants and glottal stops as well as that of germination.¹²⁰ In short, the Ethiopic script “does not show the germination of consonants and it is ill-fitted to represent the vowel sound.”¹²¹ Since “vowel length and germination are common features of Oromo language” the Ethiopic script’s “failure to represent them made [it] very inadequate.”¹²² Shaykh Bakrii knew the Latin alphabet and its advantages (e.g., it has 26 letters, whereas the Ethiopic script has 182), but rejected its use because he wanted a writing system “in which all the major issues of Oromo phonology are properly provided for.”¹²³ While working on this task, he became “the uncontested literary figure,” a cultural hero whose achievement “was so profound as to dwarf”¹²⁴ all contemporary Muslim and Christian Oromo scholars.

Shaykh Bakrii was the first Oromo who saw clearly the problems inherent in attempting to write the Oromo language by means of orthographic systems which had been devised primarily for other languages.¹²⁵

He also anticipated the Oromo elite’s adoption of the Latin alphabet in the early 1970s. Those who hated his work started harassing Shaykh Bakrii as soon as they learned of his writing system. This started in 1953, when the Christian Amhara settlers around Ligibo, where his third teaching was located, tried to block his effort to teach this new writing system.¹²⁶ It is amazing to observe how these Christian Amhara settlers and officials were “adamantly opposed to the idea of Oromo being written in any form, let alone in a script other than Ethiopic.”¹²⁷ Their pressure finally forced him to move to Kortu, a semi-arid area beyond their reach. A 1953 poem commemorates this incident.

Nuu godaana irra kaanee naftagna
 Libigboo dha
 Gariin guddaan isaani hattu dhaa
 Kijiboodha. Takka hin agarree,
 hin dhageenyee
 Kan akka isaani dhiboodha
 Biyya diiniin xilaataa [Nyaapha]
 dinnee torba heboodha.¹²⁸

We were forced to migrate from Ligibo
 by the pressure of the *naftannyna*
 [i.e. Amhara settlers)
 Majorities of them were thieves
 We neither saw nor heard such liars
 They are trouble some people,
 Who are narrow minded
 It is a country, in which a religion is an
 enemy¹²⁹ We reject it seven¹³⁰
 times a puzzle.¹³¹

In Kortu, he continued to teach his new writing system in secret.

Having developed the alphabet, the Shaykh taught it to all his students and to others as well to a limited extent people began to exchange letters in the new alphabet. In addition to letters, Shaykh Bakrii himself employed his alphabet for writing his poems and other works.¹³²

Shaykh Bakrii's teaching and literary work gradually transformed him into the conscience of his time. By the 1950s, his already more than twenty-five years of serving his people had planted his name in the minds of those who read or heard his poems. He earned his people's love and admiration, as well as his accompanying popularity among them, by his tireless efforts to improve their social, political, economic, and spiritual life.¹³³ He remained at the forefront of his people's various causes until 1978, when he was forced into exile. His many significant accomplishments "all combined to ensure"¹³⁴ his lasting impact as the "best-known and most popular"¹³⁵ scholar and luminary of his time among eastern Ethiopia's Muslim population.

His literary work served as the road map for those who sought radical change. While his contemporaries were either indifferent to their people's suffering or even encouraged them to endure it as Allah's will, he immersed himself in raising Oromo political consciousness so that they could serve as the agents of their own liberation. A passionate advocate and worker for Oromo equality, freedom, and human dignity, he has been called a Muslim teacher by day and a revolutionary nationalist by night.¹³⁶

As scholar, Shaykh Bakrii had three outstanding characters. First, he was devoted to teaching and learning, for he regarded them simultaneously as a duty and a service.¹³⁷ Second, he generously put his knowledge at the service of Muslim education and the Oromo political cause and interest. No other Oromo intellectual, whether Muslim or Christian, articulated the Oromo cause with such perceptiveness and clarity before the formation of the Macha and Tulama Association in 1963. Third, he was a militant scholar who believed in

revolution and therefore shared what he learned of international events by listening to the BBC's Arabic-language radio program and Cairo's "Voice of the Arab" radio program, as well as reading *Al-Ahram*,¹³⁸ the Arab world's most famous newspaper. He read revolutionary books and wrote powerful poems on the 1952 Egyptian revolution, the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis, and the Algerian and Vietnamese revolutions.¹³⁹ He became interested in African independence movements during the 1950s and 1960s,¹⁴⁰ and seems to have been radicalized by Somalia's independence in 1960. By 1963 he was secretly raising funds to send young men to Somalia¹⁴¹ for military training. He also supported the Oromo and Somali armed struggles in the Bale region (southeastern Ethiopia) during the 1960s and the peaceful activities of the Macha and Tulama Association. In short, his life revolved around conversations related to Islam, Muslim education, and Oromo politics.¹⁴²

Even his religious poems contained political messages. He appealed directly to the Oromo to join hands against the oppressor¹⁴³ by urging them to join him in jihad and thereby liberate themselves. This call, coupled with the Oromo armed struggle and the above-mentioned discovery of his writing system among Oromo fighters in Bale,¹⁴⁴ so alarmed the authorities that, according to Shantam Shubissa,

Top Amhara officials in the city of Dire Dawa asked him why he did not use the Ethiopian writing system. "Is it to oppose our writing system that you invented your own writing system?" Shaykh Bakrii told the officials that he does not oppose the Ethiopian writing system, but added that it is not suitable for writing in the Oromo language. Shaykh Bakrii was asked why he was writing in the Oromo language.? He answered it by saying that he wanted to educate the Oromo about Islam in their own language. Since the Oromo do not know both Arabic and Amharic languages, he wanted to teach them in the language they understood.¹⁴⁵

Shaykh Bakrii reportedly wrote a nineteen-page letter explaining why he had invented and continued to use his own writing system.¹⁴⁶ Unsatisfied with his response, the government banned it on the grounds that he was using it to raise Oromo political consciousness, which they feared would endanger their empire, and sentenced him to house arrest for ten years.¹⁴⁷ According to Mahdi Hamid Muudde, this writing system "was used clandestinely in parts of [the provinces of Hararghe], Bale and Arsi."¹⁴⁸ Now that its use could be punished by imprisonment and torture, people began abandoning it and thus ensured that it would never become a familiar and workable writing system. In fact, its use thereafter remained limited to a narrow circle of Shaykh Bakrii's stu-

dents and friends, who continued to use it for secret correspondence. Five decades later, some of his former students are still using it.¹⁴⁹

But a new element soon came into play. By 1965 the emperor was forced to deal with several realities: a serious armed struggle in the northern province of Eritrea and an Oromo armed struggle in the southeastern region of Bale; the peaceful mass activities of the Macha and Tulama Association, which had spread throughout Oromoland; and the very effective Oromo-language radio program from Mogadishu. All of this made the emperor wary of further alienating the Oromo by imprisoning or executing Shaykh Bakrii.

In spite of the extreme gravity of this charge the authorities did not resort to execution, or even brutality. In fact the Shaykh was treated with great magnanimity, his punishment being nothing worse than “honourable confinement.” This was put into effect in 1965, when Shaykh Bakrii was confined to the city of Dire Dawa. Here he was actually permitted to continue teaching. In 1968 an even more generous concession was granted, which allowed him to visit [Kortu] two or three times a week. So it was that for the next ten years he was free to shuttle to and fro between these two places.¹⁵⁰

House arrest did not diminish his now-secret activism.¹⁵¹ In 1967 the government banned the Macha and Tulama Association, killed two of its leaders, sentenced eighteen others to long prison terms, and sentenced General Taddesse Birru to life imprisonment. Yet the shaykh managed to keep the spirit of peaceful struggle alive. As noted above, he visited the imprisoned general twice in Galmasso.¹⁵² He also wrote several poems and a twenty-page pamphlet “entitled ‘Shalda’ literally meaning ‘sharp knife’”¹⁵³ to shape Oromo political consciousness: “Making use of the new alphabet and purporting to be a work of religious instruction, this composition is from beginning to end a caustically worded indictment of Amhara colonial oppression and an account of the suffering of the Oromo under this regime.”¹⁵⁴

In one of his letters in his own orthography, Shaykh Bakrii indicted the administration and predicted the Oromo revolution’s eventual victory.

May this reach our children, the excellent, respected key-men of the revolution ... and the brave people who are in league with [you]. God be with you What I want to assure you of is that you and I are engaged in a jihad[ic struggle]. I am fighting with prayer, even as you are fighting with weapons of war. Have no doubts that the objects (for which you are fighting) are well known and widely accepted. It is apparent that many people are engaged in (this) jihad day and night. Moreover, God is my witness that I have been in a jihad of prayer every night for twelve years. Indeed for the last

twenty-three years I have been earnestly teaching the people about these things. God inspired me to speak about everything you are now engaged in, and He has shown me what will come hereafter We have no doubt that the [enemy] will be defeated.¹⁵⁵

Clearly influenced by the anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism socialist rhetoric that swept the Third World during the late 1950s and 1960s, his revolutionary nationalistic Arabic- and Oromo-language output covered religious as well as secular subjects. As a Muslim scholar he was far ahead of his time; as a militant scholar he struggled for uplifting his people's spirit.¹⁵⁶

Shaykh Bakrii greeted Ethiopia's 1974 revolution with great joy, for the new government overthrew the emperor in September, which ended his decade-long home arrest and brought a military regime to power (it collapsed in 1991). Due to this event Muslims finally became full citizens and their holidays were officially recognized. In addition, "Oromo" became the official name of the country's single largest nation; before then, they were officially called "Galla," a derogatory name that reduced them to the sub-human level. The radical land reform of March 1975 ended the system of serfdom for the majority of the Oromo and other conquered people in southern Ethiopia by destroying the ruling class' economic base and establishing (at least on paper) equality between Christians and Muslims.

Now aged seventy-nine, the shaykh rejected the path chosen by most of his fellow activists, who had abandoned activism long ago and settled for peaceful life of prayer at the mosque and blessing people, including government officials. Rather, he saw this as the beginning of a new opportunity to meet with many people, discuss political issues, and encourage Oromo self-determination.¹⁵⁷

For the next few months, a limited freedom of the press, which Ethiopia had never known before, created a lively atmosphere in which a barrage of criticism about the inequalities of Ethiopian peoples was written and openly discussed. The twists and turns of events which the future held were still unclear and, for the time being, the prevailing mood was one of euphoria it appeared that the dawn of a new era was about to begin. Those were days of undreamt of hopefulness for the equality of all Ethiopians.¹⁵⁸

Full of hope, he wrote a "twenty-one page letter to the [Ethiopian Military regime] urging them to create a country based on equality of the people, their culture, languages and religions, rather than Amharic and Christianity."¹⁵⁹ In effect, he was asking the new leaders to "right the old wrong, redress the old

injustice, heal old wounds, more importantly, ensure the genuine equality of all Ethiopians in every facet of life – political, economic, social, cultural, and religious.”¹⁶⁰

Perhaps inspired by this hopefulness, his new outpouring of poems earned him the title of “the father of revolutionary Oromo poems.”¹⁶¹ When the first Oromo-language weekly newspaper, *Barrissa*, appeared in 1975, he finally had “a public stage” from which to reach the Oromo elite throughout Oromoland. Now eighty years old, Shaykh Bakrii lived with the knowledge that his poems were reaching the public wherever *Barrissa* was sold and read. He used its pages of to widen the influence of his revolutionary poems, which served as the model for the other writers who soon flooded its pages with exhilarating revolutionary poems on the Oromo aspiration for freedom, equality, and democracy. Rarely had these aspirations and the terror against Muslim Oromo religious leaders been such close neighbors as they were during 1977-78 in eastern Ethiopia.

Following Ethiopia’s rapid victory in early 1978 over the Somali invasion of Ogaden (the Somali-inhabited region in eastern Ethiopia), the military government declared “narrow nationalism” to be the revolution’s main enemy. This term was a code word for Oromo nationalism, which remains the case today. Under the pretext of liquidating both it and “reactionary” religious leaders, the military regime wanted to execute Shaykh Bakrii, just as it had already done to so many of eastern Ethiopia’s prominent Muslim scholars. During that time, “Shaykh Bakrii saved fifty-six Christian Amhara nationals from execution by Somali guerrillas on the railway line to Djibouti.”¹⁶² When asked why he had done so, he reportedly said that “while we struggle for our own rights, we should not violate the rights of others, including that of Christian Amharas.”¹⁶³ His final act of humanity, in the face of the new regime’s terror, was to enable the Oromo to distinguish a system (viz., the oppressive Ethiopian colonial system) from the people (viz., the Christian population).

Soon thereafter, Shaykh Bakrii

and his wife succeeded in escaping to Somalia where they were admitted to the refugee camp in Hiran. He was now in his eighty-third year. He had hoped to be taken to Mogadishu and be free to work there, if possible, bringing to publication some of his many writings; but permission to proceed beyond Hiran was never forthcoming. The rigorous and deprivation of the camp proved too much for the old [scholar], and his health soon broke down. At the end of a prolonged bout of illness, Shaykh Bakrii died on 5 April 1980, aged eighty-five.¹⁶⁴

This major literary figure and hero among the Oromo was buried in an unmarked grave in a northern Somali refugee camp! Notwithstanding his sad end, Shaykh Bakrii still lives in the great heart of the Oromo nation.¹⁶⁵ Perhaps it is not out of place to conclude with an extract from the closing lines of Shaykh Mohammed Rashad's obituary poem:

Sha'abii biyya teenya lubbuun saanii Bakrii
 Dalagaa isaani qalbiin laalii barii
 Qadriin Sheykh Bakrii qalbii tee haataatu
 Akka zalaalamiif sii wajiin jiraatuu
 Diina [amantii]keetiif du'ee kan
 akkaan qabattu
 Biyya teetiif du'e kan akkaan jaalattu
 Namni biyyaaf du'e baraa hin duunee
 Qalbii saba saatii abadu waan bannee
 Yaa rabbi teessisi jannata kee keessaa
 uufissabrii[obsa] kenni waan nu
 qabbaneessa

Bakrii is the very life of our countrymen
 Consider his work and learn!
 Let his spiritual greatness be in your heart
 To be with you forever!
 He died for the faith you embrace
 He died for the country you love
 One who dies for his country does
 not ever die
 He is never lost from the heart
 of his people.¹⁶⁶

Conclusion

In this brief article, I have tried to document the life of this now largely unknown teacher-scholar, celebrated poet, and wonderful human being who devoted himself to teaching and developing Oromo-language literature. His most obvious achievements are his elegant poems and unique writing system, both of which earned him universal fame among eastern Ethiopia's Muslims. Most of his poems "deal with the political [issues] of the day and the oppression and exploitation under which the Oromo were living. [He] articulated [Oromo grievances] ... and tried to arouse popular awareness to stand for their rights, humanity and dignity."¹⁶⁷

Realizing that the Oromo had no power, unity, and organization to free themselves from Ethiopia's oppressive colonial misrule, he sought to overcome their weakness by heightening their political consciousness¹⁶⁸ through his beautiful and clear poems that called for unity and provided knowledge of how other colonized peoples had achieved their own independence. All of his efforts reflect his¹⁶⁹ commitment to spreading education and working for Oromo freedom. His writing system overcame the unsuitability of the Arabic and Ethiopic scripts and enabled him to expand and enrich Oromo-language literature. Even as a refugee in a northern Somali refugee camp he actively corresponded with an intellectual Oromo circle in Mogadishu in the hope of one day going there to facilitate the publication of his works. In sickness and

health, at home and in exile, his people remained uppermost in his mind. “In the final analysis ... the most important aspect” of Shaykh Bakrii’s life “was his self-sacrifice”¹⁷⁰ for his people, which gave him “the strength to do what he incredibly did”¹⁷¹ as a teacher, scholar, poet, inventor of a writing system, and a kind and generous human being.¹⁷² His efforts were not in vain, for he cultivated the soil and planted the tree of Oromo-language literature that is now flowering and holds great promise for the future.

Endnotes

1. Mahdi Hamid Muudde, *Walaloo Bariisaa (Bariisaa Poems)* (Atlanta: Sagalee Oromoo Publishing Co., 1996), 135-36.
2. Mohammed Hassen, “Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo (1895-1980): A Prolific Scholar and Great Oromo Nationalist,” *Journal of Oromo Studies* 10, nos. 1 & 2 (July 2003): 135-78.
3. R. J. Hayward and Mohammed Hassen, “The Oromo Orthography of Shaykh Bakri Sapalo,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* XLIV, part 3 (1981): 550-66.
4. Interview with Shaykh Mohammed Rashad (56) on July 15-17, 1980, in Mogadishu. I am deeply indebted to him for providing me with a fifty-six-page manuscript written by Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo and other useful information about him.
5. I am indebted to Dima Yonis for gathering, translating, and typing information on my behalf. I thank him for inspiring me to write a detailed article on Shaykh Bakrii’s contribution to the development of Oromo political consciousness.
6. Interview with Shontam Shubissa (50) on May 31 and June 1, 1998, in Atlanta. I am indebted to him for providing me with some of Shaykh Bakrii’s poems and inaccessible information about his life.
7. Interviewed with Mohammed Nur (37) on July 20-21, 1998, in Portland, OR. I am indebted to him for providing me with his grandfather’s family history and some of his poems.
8. Aliyi Khalifa, “The Life and Career of Sheik Bakrii Saphalo (1895-1980)” (BA thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2000).
9. Muudde, *Walaloo Bariisaa*, 135-47.
10. *Ibid.*, 139.
11. Garad was the governor of an administrative unit. It was also a very prestigious title in Harar during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
12. *Ibid.*, 551.
13. Khalifa, “Life and Career,” 48.
14. *Ibid.*, 9.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Hayward and Hassen, “Oromo Orthography,” 551.

17. According to Muudee, *Walaloo Bariisaa*, 135, Shaykh Bakrii spent thirty-three years acquiring Islamic education; he gives no source for this information.
18. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, May 31, 1998.
19. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 18.
20. Ibid., 21.
21. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
22. Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 20, 1998.
23. Hayward and Hassen, "Oromo Orthography," 551.
24. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 22.
25. Ibid., 26. According to this source, Shaykh Bakrii married six women; according to his grandson Mohammed Nur (interviewed on July 20, 1998), his grandfather married nine women. Both sources agree that the shaykh never had more than four wives at one time. He remarried only after the death of his wives.
26. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 26.
27. Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 20, 1998.
28. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 41.
29. Ibid., 24-25.
30. Ibid., 22.
31. Ibid., 28.
32. Ibid., 28.
33. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 32-33.
34. Ibid., 64.
35. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, May 31, 1998.
36. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 31.
37. Interview with Shantam Shubisa, May 31, 1998.
38. Abubaker ibn Usman, *Kitaab Irsaal Sawarikh Ila Sama al Tawarika*, ed. Shaykh Mohammed Rashad (Mogadishu: n.p., 1979), 44-45.
39. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, May 31, 1998.
40. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 39.
41. Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 20, 1998.
42. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 37, 39.
43. I believe that the Somali civil war (1980s) and the state's subsequent collapse (January 1991) may have disrupted Shaykh Mohammed Rashad scholarly productivity because he was forced to leave Somalia.
44. Translation by Khalifa, "Life and Career," 37.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Hayward and Hassen, "Oromo Orthography," 552.
48. During my July 1980 interview with Shaykh Mohammed Rashad in Mogadishu, he informed me that some of his teachers' manuscripts will be published soon. This probably took place either in late 1980 or in 1981.
49. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 38.
50. Hayward and Hassen, "Oromo Orthography," 552.

51. Khalifa, "Life and Career."
52. Ibid., 38.
53. Ibid.
54. Hayward and Hassen, "Oromo Orthography"; Khalifa, "Life and Career," 38-39.
55. Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.
56. Ibid.
57. My free translation; it differs from the one in Khalifa, "Life and Career," 50.
58. Abdul Mejid Hussen, "The Political Economy of the Ethiopian Famine," in *REHAB: Drought and Famine in Ethiopia*, ed. Abdul Mejid Hussen (London: International African Institute, 1976), 14.
59. Muudde, *Walaloo Bariisaa*, 139-47.
60. Mohammed Hassen and Richard Greenfield, "The Oromo Nation and Its Resistance to Amhara Colonial Administration," *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Somali Studies*, ed. Hussein M. Adam and Charles L. Gesheker (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 572.
61. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 51.
62. My free translation.
63. Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia under Mussolini: Fascism and Colonial Experience* (London: Zed Books, 1985), 160.
64. Hassen and Greenfield, "The Oromo Nation," 579.
65. Hayward and Hassen, "Oromo Orthography," 553.
66. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 55.
67. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
68. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 47.
69. Ibid., 47-49.
70. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
71. Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.
72. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
73. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 49.
74. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
75. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 50.
76. My free translation.
77. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
78. Khalifa, "Life and Career."
79. Muudde, *Walaloo Bariisaa*, 135-38.
80. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 54.
81. Ibid., 55.
82. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
83. Greg Gow, *The Oromo in Exile: From the Horn of Africa to the Suburbs of Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 58, 74.
84. I have drawn on Toyin Falola, *Yoruba Gurus: Indigenous Production of Knowledge in Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999), 76.

85. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 62.
86. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
87. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 56.
88. Ibid.
89. Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.
90. I have drawn on Edmund Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 148.
91. Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.
92. Mekuria Bulcha, 1994; Ibid., 93-96.
93. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 24.
94. Ibid., 42.
95. Bulcha, 1994; Ibid., 99.
96. The Afar-, Somali-, Tigrina-, and Tigre-language radio programs probably started during the late 1950s.
97. Mahdi Haamid Muudde, *Oromo Dictionary* (Atlanta: Sagalee Oromoo Publishing, 1995): 1:xxvi.
98. My free translation differs slightly from that of Mahdi.
99. Hayward and Hassen, "Oromo Orthography," 553.
100. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 42.
101. Ibid., 54.
102. My free translation.
103. Muudde, *Walaloo Bariisaa*, 139-47.
104. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 54.
105. I have drawn on Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation between Church and State* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2002), 2.
106. Mohammed Hassen, "The Militarization of the Ethiopian State and the Oromo," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on the Horn of Africa* (New York: Center for the Study for the Horn of Africa, 1991), 94.
107. I have drawn on Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson*, 111.
108. Ibid.
109. Ibid., 7.
110. For Hararghe's Oromo population, *Amhara* applied to all Christians.
111. Hassen, "Militarization."
112. Muudde, *Walaloo Bariisaa*, 139-47.
113. Ibid., 144.
114. I have drawn on Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin*, 30.
115. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 42.
116. Muudde, *Oromo Dictionary*, xix.
117. Ibid.
118. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 40.
119. Feyisa Densie, "Special Features in Oromiffa and Reasons for Adopting Latin Script for Developing Oromo Orthography," *Journal of Oromo Studies* 2, nos. 1 and 2 (1995): 25.

120. Mohammed Hassen, "Review Essay: Demystifying Political Thought, Power, and Economic Development by Tecola Hagos," *Journal of Oromo Studies* 9, nos. 1 and 2 (2002): 222.
121. B. W. Andrzejewski, "Some Observations on the Present Orthography of Oromo," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. J. Tubina (Rotterdam: A. A. Balkam, 1980), 127.
122. Muudde, *Oromo Dictionary*, xx.
123. Hayward and Hassen, "Oromo Orthography," 555.
124. *Ibid.*, 14. I have drawn on Falola, *Yoruba Gurus*.
125. Hayward and Hassen, "Oromo Orthography," 553.
126. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 24.
127. Hayward and Hassen, "Oromo Orthography."
128. Khalifa, "Life and Career."
129. The reference is to Islam, which was then regarded as the enemy's religion.
130. Rejecting something seven times is a powerful cultural expression among Hararghe's Oromo.
131. My free translation.
132. Hayward and Hassen, "Oromo Orthography," 553.
133. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
134. *Ibid.*, 95; I have drawn on Falola, *Yoruba Gurus*.
135. I have drawn on Falola, *Yoruba Gurus*.
136. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 61.
137. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
138. *Ibid.*
139. *Ibid.*
140. The independence of Sudan (1956) and Kenya (1963) did not appear to fascinate him as much as did the independence of Somalia (1960).
141. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 56.
142. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
143. Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.
144. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 62.
145. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
146. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 63.
147. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
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149. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 43-44.
150. Hayward and Hassen, "Oromo Orthography," 554.
151. Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.
152. *Ibid.*
153. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 65.
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155. *Ibid.*, 565.
156. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.

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158. Hassen and Greenfield, "The Oromo Nation," 584.
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162. Interview with Mohammed Nur, July 21, 1998.
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167. Khalifa, "Life and Career," 54.
168. Interview with Shantam Shubissa, June 1, 1998.
169. I have drawn on Morgan, Benjamin Franklin, 304.
170. I have drawn on Gordon Wood, review of *Benjamin Franklin*, by Edmond Morgan, *The New York Review of Books*, Volume 49, no. 14 (September 2002): 4.
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