

Preface

This book was borne of an invitation from the Union of Oromo Students in Europe (UOSE) to participate in a conference celebrating their 25th anniversary in July 1999 in Berlin, Germany. The organisers asked me to speak on the history of the Union (more commonly known by its Oromo name, Tokkummaa Bartoota Oromo Awropa [TBOA]). As I contemplated the contents of such a speech, it occurred to me that the history of a contemporary Oromo organisation in the diaspora would make more sense if inserted into the broader historical context of forced Oromo migration. The year 1999 was also the centenary of an outstanding episode in the history of the Oromo diaspora: the establishment of an Oromo literature, most notably Onesimos Nasib's translation of the Bible published in St. Chrischona, Switzerland. Also in 1899, Onesimos and his Oromo language team—men and women freed from slavery living in the diaspora and assisted in their work by Swedish missionaries—translated and published several other works. The works of these cultural pioneers played a crucial role in the religious, linguistic, and educational life of the Oromo people. I therefore decided that my speech at the TBOA anniversary should address the historical context of forced Oromo migration and connect the creation and fates of the various Oromo diasporas that developed over the years to the history of northeast Africa in general and that of the Oromo people in particular. That paper became the foundation of this volume.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The information used to write this book comes from two main sources: written sources and my own observations. The latter were guided partly by structured and partly by unstructured queries. The written sources vary in age: some were written before 1900 and many of them afterwards. First, a study of travel literature on northeast Africa from the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth have yielded historical and sociological data which inform this study. The information on slavery in Ethiopia and on the Red Sea slave trade is gleaned from books, memoirs, and research reports published in scientific journals

written by missionaries, fortune seekers, and adventurers; envoys in the service of European states; and scholars. The quality and reliability of information obtained from such sources varied depending upon the purpose of the writers' sojourn in the places they described, the motives for writing about the issues in focus, and the sources they used to obtain information.

The sources deal with different times, places, and aspects of slavery and the slave trade: some of the observations are about slave caravans, others on slave markets, the treatment of slaves by owners, and so on. Often, information provided by one or two sources is used to draw conclusions when discussing a certain point. Although most of the nineteenth-century travellers cited here were not schooled in anthropological or sociological methods, their writings contain interesting data which can be used to recast and discuss the experiences and lives of captives. A good example is Charles Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (vols. I & II, 1888 [1926]), which I have used to discuss the situation of Oromo slaves and freemen in the Arabian Peninsula.⁹⁴ Although his work did not focus directly on slavery, Doughty mentioned the Oromo often, and described the lives of individuals he met, some of whom he was closely acquainted with. He also described their attitudes towards their homeland and the level of integration into the host society. Doughty's observations are useful not only for his descriptions of concrete situations and individuals, but for the reliability and relevance of his narratives and anecdotes, as he gathered his information in different parts of Arabia directly from bondsmen, ex-bondsmen, and free-born persons of African or Afro-Arab descent.

Second, I have referred to the works of scores of indigenous and expatriate scholars. Most of these works are from the second half of the twentieth century. I will mention just two examples. The first are the excellent works of the Swedish missionary and historian, the late Gustav Arén, on the history of the Mekane Yesus Church (1978, 1999). Gustav Arén's two books do not deal with slavery as such, but provide useful information on the role of former slaves in the development of the Lutheran missionary work in Oromoland. The writings of Richard Pankhurst on slavery in Ethiopia have also been very useful. He has assembled a large body of relevant information in a chapter in his book, *Economic History of Ethiopia* (1968), as well as in a number of articles since then. I have scanned and critically analysed his information on slavery. Although Richard Pankhurst did not discuss the connections between slave export and the importation of firearms, his writings on the history of firearms in Ethiopia and other topics were also useful. Much of the information used in writing the last three chapters was collected while

I was conducting research on forced migration in the 1980s and 1990s. During the same period, I also met many Oromo refugees in the Horn of Africa, Europe and North America. The information I have been able to collect during those encounters are reflected in several of the chapters of this volume.

Finally I should mention that I have benefited in writing some of the chapters of the present work from papers which I have presented at conferences in Europe and North America over the last ten years. Some of the papers were published in conference proceedings and international journals.

STRUCTURE

This book is divided into three parts and has nine chapters. Part one is concerned with the slave trade and the migration that it stimulated from Oromoland. Chapter two briefly describes the history of slavery in Abyssinia. It explores and analyses the values, norms, and economic interests which underpinned not only domestic slave-holding but also the Red Sea slave trade. Based on historical data, it also argues that the Red Sea slave trade was a joint Christian and Muslim enterprise and that the Muslims were therefore not the only culprits, as is often suggested.

Chapter three describes the links between the slave trade and firearms in northeast Africa. It analyses the regional political consequences of the enormous stockpile of firearms imported by the Shewan King (1865-1889) and Ethiopian Emperor (1889-1913) Menelik II, in terms of the regional balance of power, human security, and the endemic state-sponsored mass killings which characterise the Ethiopian context. Part two deals with the bygone Oromo diaspora: Chapter four is concerned with the fate of the slaves in the societies into which they were imported. It provides a brief description of the demographic characteristics of the enslaved and the treatment they received from their owners. Suggesting that the fate of the enslaved was not always life-long degradation and social obscurity, chapter five discusses short biographies of men and women who were captured while still in childhood or as adolescents and sold into slavery but who, among others, made significant contributions to Oromo studies abroad and consequently achieved renown.

Chapter six explores the contributions made by former slaves in creating Oromo literature in the diaspora during the latter part of the nineteenth century and their role in the expansion of literacy and modern education in Western Oromoland in the twentieth century.

Part three discusses forced Oromo migration generated by Abyssinian conquest and the socio-political structure that has characterised the Ethiopian state ever since.

Chapter seven deals with the internal and external migration caused by the war of conquest as well as the decades of Oromo resistance. The chapter also attempts to lay bare the nostalgic feelings about homeland felt in exile, using poetry and songs composed by refugees themselves.

Chapter eight describes and discusses the various Oromo organisations—political, humanitarian, cultural, and so on—that are engaged in a struggle to change the situations they perceive as detrimental to the survival of the Oromo as individuals and a nation.

Chapter nine provides a short conclusion.